

Kyle Larson's late-race luck earns him Xfinity Series win at Watkins Glen

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By HOLLY CAIN, NASCAR Wire Service

In the moments after claiming the checkered flag for the Sunoco Go Rewards 200 at the Glen Saturday afternoon, Kyle Larson smiled and conceded he was a bit fortunate.

"I got lucky," he told the USA Network television audience.

Or perhaps more accurately, he was in the right place at the right time. Running third on a restart with five laps remaining in the NASCAR Xfinity Series race at historic Watkins Glen (N.Y.) International, he shot to the front when his Hendrick Motorsports teammate – and race polesitter - William Byron and Joe Gibbs Racing's Ty Gibbs spun out at the front of the field while dicing it up for the race lead.

Byron, who set a track record in qualifying earlier in the day and led a race best 36 of the 82 laps, and Gibbs, who led the second most laps (25) collided in a door-to-door battle in the famed "bus stop" portion of the 3.366-mile road course. And Larson bolted through to take the lead.

Still, the reigning NASCAR Cup Series champion had to hold off the sport's all-time best on road courses, A.J. Allmendinger in the remaining laps to claim the day's trophy - ultimately taking his 11th series win by a slight .273-seconds in the No. 88 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet.

"I think my only shot was if the 17 and 54 – Willy and Ty got really racing," conceded Larson, who spent much of the race just behind his Hendrick Motorsports teammate Byron and Gibbs.

"The seas parted and I was able to get through but then I had A.J. (Allmendinger) behind me so just trying to hit my marks best I could. He definitely made me nervous with me being out in front of him.

"So cool to get a win here and Rick Hendrick is here too. Wish William and I could have fought for the win there though."

Rookie Sammy Smith, an 18-year old from Iowa in only his fourth NASCAR Xfinity Series start finished a career best third place in the No. 18 JGR Toyota and led an impressive – also career high – seven laps midway through the race.

JR Motorsports' driver Noah Gragson finished fourth, followed by Kaz Grala. Sam Mayer, Riley Herbst, Sheldon Creed, who was the highest finishing rookie, Josh Berry and Jeremy Clements rounded out the top 10.

Byron and Gibbs, who had contact again farther back in the field during the final laps, ultimately finished 25th and 27th, respectively.

On the cool down lap after the race Byron told his crew, "Sorry guys, I wish we could have won that one. We were in position and got wrecked."

Allmendinger's runner-up showing, combined with Gibbs rough day and an early exit by Justin Allgaier – who wrecked



LOCAL DRIVER-AUSTIN HILL FINISHED 30TH

Photo: MSA Staff

only four laps into the race – really boosted Allmendinger's lead atop the Xfinity Series standings. With four races remaining to set the 12-driver 2022 Playoff field, he now holds a 61-point advantage over five-race winner Gibbs and is 70-points up on fellow three-race winner Allgaier.

The NASCAR Xfinity Series returns to action next week at Daytona International Speedway with the WaWa 250 Powered by Coca-Cola on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET, USA Network, MRN, SiriusXM NASCAR Radio). Kaulig Racing's Justin Haley is the defending race winner.

1. (3) Kyle Larson(i), Chevrolet, 82.
2. (4) AJ Allmendinger, Chevrolet, 82.
3. (19) Sammy Smith, Toyota, 82.
4. (16) Noah Gragson, Chevrolet, 82.
5. (14) Kaz Grala(i), Chevrolet, 82.
6. (7) Sam Mayer, Chevrolet, 82.
7. (6) Riley Herbst, Ford, 82.
8. (11) Sheldon Creed #, Chevrolet, 82.

9. (17) Josh Berry, Chevrolet, 82.
10. (22) Jeremy Clements, Chevrolet, 82.
11. (5) Cole Custer(i), Ford, 82.
12. (23) Stefan Parsons(i), Chevrolet, 82.
13. (34) Ryan Sieg, Ford, 82.
14. (35) Timmy Hill(i), Chevrolet, 82.
15. (13) Connor Mosack(i), Toyota, 82.
16. (20) Landon Cassill, Chevrolet, 82.
17. (21) Josh Bilicki(i), Chevrolet, 82.
18. (26) Anthony Alfredo, Chevrolet, 82.
19. (33) Andy Lally, Ford, 82.
20. (27) Brad Perez(i), Toyota, 82.
21. (31) Preston Pardus, Chevrolet, 82.
22. (25) Kyle Weatherman, Chevrolet, 82.
23. (32) Scott Heckert, Chevrolet, 82.
24. (12) Brandon Jones, Toyota, 82.
25. (1) William Byron(i), Chevrolet, 82.

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