

Hill wins NASCAR Xfinity opener in overtime photo finish at Daytona

By Reid Spencer, NASCAR Wire Service

After Sam Mayer spun on the roof of his Chevrolet on the backstretch at Daytona International Speedway, trailing a shower of sparks, Austin Hill, Justin Allgaier and John Hunter Nemechek sat in their cars and waited.

And after what must have seemed an eternity to the drivers, NASCAR reviewed video of the final lap of overtime and declared Hill the winner of his second straight season opener at the World Center of Racing in front of the largest crowd to witness an Xfinity Series race at Daytona since the \$400-million renovation of the facility in 2016.

A consummate superspeedway racer, Hill led a race-high 38 laps in Saturday's Beef. It's What's for Dinner. 300 and was narrowly ahead of surging John Hunter Nemechek when the sanctioning body called the caution for Mayer's spectacular accident on Lap 125—five circuits beyond the scheduled distance.

"As soon as the caution lights came on, I thought I had it, but it was so close," Hill said. "To get back-to-back here at Daytona, it's really special. That's three wins for me now, two in the Xfinity, one in the truck here. We came from the back two different times.

"I hope everyone enjoyed it. It was such a blast. I had so much fun. We won at Daytona! Let's go!"

Hill's first thought, however, was for Mayer. Contact between Hill's No. 21 Camaro and Mayer's No. 1 Chevrolet sent Mayer spinning and then flipping upside down until his car hit the infield grass and landed upright.

Mayer was treated and released from the infield care center.

"When I saw the 1 (Mayer) and the 7 (Allgaier) get together, I just went to go squeeze them, and the 1 came down, he started getting loose, and then you can't lift—it's last lap," Hill said. "I hope Sam is OK, man. That was a heck of a flip there."

Allgaier, who was credited with a third-place finish, had another close call in the race that has eluded him.

"I've been short my whole life, so I guess it's just fitting," quipped the 5-foot-6-inch driver. "But really proud of everybody



at JR Motorsports. Our Chevy Camaros tonight were absolutely blazing fast.

"Obviously, I'm glad Sam is OK. He had a heck of a run there at the end."

Rookie Parker Retzlaff finished a career-best fourth, followed by Myatt Snider. Riley Herbst, Joe Graf Jr., Ryan Sieg, Cole Custer and Justin Haley completed the top 10.

Hill won the first stage, but only through Allgaier's benevolence. On the final lap of the stage, Hill steered down the track to block Allgaier's Chevrolet. Allgaier backed out of the throttle to give Hill room, as the rear bumper of Hill's Camaro slid uncomfortably close to the nose of Allgaier's car.

"If I don't lift, I wreck the whole field," Allgaier said on his radio. "It's stupid racing."

"Justin really cut me a break," Hill ac-

knowledged. "I really appreciate that from him."

Allgaier must have gotten some karmic benefit from his magnanimity. When Parker Kligerman turned Sheldon Creed's Chevrolet while bump-drafting near the entrance to Turn 1 on Lap 40, Allgaier's Chevrolet spun sideways onto the apron behind the initial wreck.

After a tape job to the left rear of his car, Allgaier returned to the track, started at the rear of the field and quickly charged back into the lead on Lap 54. Allgaier went on to win the second stage, with Mayer close behind him.

"To go to the back and have that spin and just battle our way through, it's crazy how fast our car was tonight and how good we were in traffic," Allgaier said.

Unfortunately for the veteran driver, speed, maneuverability and good karma

could carry him only so far.

NASCAR Xfinity Series Race – Beef. It's What's For Dinner. 300 Daytona International Speedway Daytona Beach, Florida Saturday, February 18, 2023

1. (1) Austin Hill, Chevrolet, 125.
2. (7) John Hunter Nemechek, Toyota, 125.
3. (5) Justin Allgaier, Chevrolet, 125.
4. (16) Parker Retzlaff #, Chevrolet, 125.
5. (13) Myatt Snider, Toyota, 125.
6. (9) Riley Herbst, Ford, 125.
7. (29) Joe Graf Jr, Ford, 125.
8. (22) Ryan Sieg, Ford, 125.
9. (3) Cole Custer, Ford, 125.
10. (19) Justin Haley(i), Chevrolet, 125.

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