

Atlanta Cup Race • continued from page 8

Logano pulled down to the inside lane through the final two corners and crossed the finish line .193 seconds ahead of Keselowski and .194 seconds ahead of third-place Bell.

“Yeah, first off so special to win Atlanta for me,” said Logano, a Connecticut native who began to refine his talent racing Legends cars at Atlanta. “So many memories of me and my dad racing right here on the quarter mile. This is the full circle for us. So many memories gritting over there with the Legends car, racing, having a big time.

“Dreaming of going straight at the quarter mile and going onto the big track. That was always the dream to do it. To finally win here means so much to me here personally, but the team.

“The Auto Trader Mustang—this thing was an animal. Very, very fast. Able to lead a ton of laps, race really hard there at the end, get a good push from the 20 (Bell) to clear myself. Huge victory. Nice to get one early in the season. Always feels better, but what a great day for us.”

Logano’s first victory of the season and first at Atlanta was no surprise. On Saturday, the reigning series champion led eight Ford drivers into the top eight starting positions for Sunday’s race.

Logano won the first stage wire-to-wire, leading the first 63 laps. In Stage 2, he finished second to Team Penske teammate Austin Cindric. All told, Logano led 140 of the 260 laps. Keselowski was second with 47 laps led.

The victory was Ford’s first of the season after Chevrolet drivers claimed trophies in the first four events. Logano is the second straight driver to win from the pole at Atlanta, following Chase Elliott last summer.

Disappointed with second place, Keselowski was nevertheless elated with the quality of racing in the closing laps.

“The coolest thing about this race is two

veterans showed you can run a race here side-by-side, bump-drafting, and not wreck the field,” Keselowski said. “It can happen if you race respectfully. I thought everybody did a great job.

“We were right there. Proud of my team and the effort. Nothing much we could do there at the end.”

Not that there wasn’t plenty of action before the final laps ended with Logano’s 32nd career victory.

After two relatively placid stages where single-file racing predominated, the intensity increased exponentially as the end of the race approached.

On Lap 190, one lap after Kevin Harvick had taken the lead for the first time, Chastain pulled up close behind Harvick in the draft. Harvick’s No. 4 Ford broke loose and triggered a massive wreck on the backstretch that involved 14 cars.

Harvick was eliminated, along with William Byron, Chris Buescher, Harrison Burton and BJ McLeod. The defending race winner, Byron was seeking his third straight Cup victory of the season.

“It looked like the No. 1 (Chastain) and the No. 4 just got connected there into Turn 1 and got the No. 4 loose,” Byron said after a mandatory visit to the infield care center. “It’s just part of racing. That’s the way it goes—not really in our control. We were up there running in the top-five and doing what we needed to do.”

Harvick’s assessment of the wreck was essentially the same.

“I think he just caught me so quick right there in the middle of the corner, and then he kind of was up on the right rear part of the (car) and he came back down, and when he came back down it just spun the thing out,” Harvick said. “I don’t think he actually even hit me, but it started chattering the rear tires, and then I was just along for the ride.”



Nineteen laps later, a five-car accident off Turn 4—triggered when one of then-leader Aric Almirola’s tires went flat—knocked Almirola, Kyle Larson and Daniel Suárez out of the race.

“There was nowhere to go,” Larson said ruefully. “Nobody had been having tire issues, so I wasn’t even expecting the No. 10 (Almirola) to have a tire issue in front of me. Even if I did, I didn’t have time to react.

“It’s a bummer. Just frustrating.. I was

finally up front on this style of race track and still end up with a DNF (did not finish). I don’t know—just frustrating.”

Corey LaJoie finished a career-best fourth, followed by Tyler Reddick, Denny Hamlin, Ryan Blaney, Erik Jones, Ty Gibbs and Kyle Busch. LaJoie also gave Logano a push as the winner worked his way back to the front.

“I hope he gives me a shout-out for pushing him,” LaJoie said. “Gave him a good shot there at the end.”




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