

NASCAR

Kenseth suspended for wrecking Logano

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — NASCAR suspended Matt Kenseth for two races on Tuesday for intentionally wrecking Joey Logano in an act of retaliation that carried heavy championship consequences.

The penalty levied against Kenseth is fairly unprecedented. Drivers have been suspended before for on-track actions, but typically only for one race and the policy has not been uniform.

NASCAR said it punished Kenseth because he had no chance at winning and intentionally altered the outcome of the race. NASCAR also said it factored aspects of safety in penalizing Kenseth as well as “the fact that the new Chase elimination format puts a premium on each and every race. These actions have no place in NASCAR.”

NASCAR chairman Brian France earlier indicated a tough penalty was in works because the series can’t allow a driver to think the way to “pay back somebody for something that happened is take matters into their own hands.”

In addition, Danica Patrick was fined \$50,000 and docked 25 points for intentionally wrecking David Gilliland earlier in the race.

Kenseth was nine laps down Sunday at Martinsville Speedway



FILE - In this Nov. 1, 2015, file photo, Joey Logano (22) and Matt Kenseth (20) tangle in Turn 1 during the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series at Martinsville Speedway in Martinsville, Va.

when he deliberately drove Logano into the wall. The crash was payback for Logano wrecking Kenseth three races ago in an incident that ultimately led to Kenseth’s elimination from NASCAR’s playoffs.

Kenseth fumed about the Kansas Speedway incident for two weeks and exacted his revenge as Logano was dominating at Martinsville. A victory would have earned Logano a spot in the Nov. 22 title-deciding final race, but he is now last in the eight-driver field with two races remaining as he tries to advance.

Logano had won three straight races before Sunday’s on-track showdown with Kenseth. He had said earlier in the weekend at Martinsville that he wasn’t worried about retribution, even though most of the industry believed Kenseth would not let the issue fade.

Kenseth, the 2003 NASCAR champion and a two-time Daytona 500 winner, has always followed a driver code and believed Logano had wronged him at Kansas. Kenseth was racing for a victory he needed to advance in the Chase

for the Sprint Cup championship, but Logano chased him down even though he had already advanced to the next round.

Kenseth blocked Logano several times in an effort to stave off a pass for the win, and Logano finally just moved Kenseth out of his way. The contact caused Kenseth to crash.

Logano shrugged it off as hard racing and denied deliberately wrecking the Joe Gibbs Racing driver.

Kenseth had a high level of support through the garage after wrecking Logano on purpose.

“I ain’t going to argue with what Matt did, Matt felt like he was justified with how Joey wrecked him at Kansas and then was arrogant about it afterward,” said Dale Earnhardt Jr. “That was really what got under Matt’s skin more than anything, about how Joey was arrogant about it. When you damn wreck a guy, admit it, you know? Don’t wreck Matt Kenseth, I’ll tell you that right now. Do not wreck that boy.”

Kenseth’s peers consider him a fair racer who follows old-school beliefs about on-track etiquette. Logano, the reigning Daytona 500 champion, has struggled with some of his fellow competitors over the years. At just 25 years old and in his seventh full season, Kenseth has rankled some veterans with a

perceived lack of respect to the way things have always been done.

Logano certainly wasn’t backing down to Kenseth, and called Sunday’s wreck “a complete coward move, especially for a championship race car driver and race team.”

The incident raised questions over what is acceptable given the heightened stakes of the Chase elimination format.

Kevin Harvick didn’t get out of the way two weeks ago at Talladega when his engine was failing because he knew a poor finish would knock him from the Chase. But by holding his position, he caused a race-ending crash that had consequences for other drivers.

After Kenseth wrecked Logano on Sunday, Kenseth teammates Kyle Busch and Denny Hamlin had pointed views on the current climate. Busch alleged there are different rules for different drivers, while Hamlin said NASCAR leadership had allowed the drivers to become the “wild, wild West.”

France told Sirius XM NASCAR radio the sanctioning body will correct the current climate.

“We will have rules of the road that are clear to understand, we’ll get it right,” he said. “What happened on Sunday, that’s not quite the way that we would have liked to see that turn out.”

College Football

Freshman linebacker leaving mark with Oregon State

By KEVIN HAMPTON
Albany Democrat-Herald

CORVALLIS — They call him Old Man Willis.

Of course, Oregon State linebacker Jonathan Willis is anything but old. He’s a redshirt freshman from Tulsa, Oklahoma.

And he’s got plenty of speed and athletic ability. Willis was all over the field at Utah, running down ball carriers consistently throughout the game.

Nevertheless, there’s the nickname.

“Off the field I do everything slower. I like to conserve my energy,” Willis said. “I get ready

slow. That’s the main reason.”

Willis wasted little time in getting to the point where he could start.

He had played all seven games going into the Salt Lake City trip and had 21 total tackles with two for loss and a sack.

At Utah, Willis got his first start and led the team with 11 stops.

“I feel like I did good,” Willis said. “I just did what the coaches told me to do. Just came out and did what I learned and it all worked out for me.”

Coach Gary Andersen was impressed with Willis’ physical play as a 6-foot-1, 216-pounder.

“He was physical out there and

I don’t know how physical he can be as he moves forward. Once he gets himself into the weight room for another year it’s going to be fun to watch that kid continually grow and develop,” Andersen said.

“He likes to tackle physically, he likes to get after people. He’s a good athlete and his best days are ahead of him, but he’s proved himself to be in that rotation to say the least at this point of those linebackers. Those guys better hold on tight because Jonathan Willis is coming very quickly.”

Defensive coordinator Kalani Sitake said he, along with Andersen and linebackers coach Ilaisa Tuiaki, had been watching

Willis develop through the season and were impressed with his improvement.

That resulted in the decision to give Willis the start.

“Coach Tuiaki felt really comfortable with him being the starter and we started him and the result is what it is,” Sitake said. “The guy got a bunch of tackles and he had an opportunity to make some more, but he played a really good game and we needed that to happen for him. But it wouldn’t have happened if he didn’t keep continuing to work hard on the fundamentals and technique.”

“I think if you watch his footwork and his hands, it’s just

improved so much from week 1 to now and it just shows that if you work hard you’re going to get on the field.”

Said Andersen: “Jonathan came in very even with a whole bunch of young freshmen in this class and as you’ve seen this class go through the year, Jonathan has elevated his play and he’s left a lot of those guys, quite frankly, in the dust.”

Willis can build off his performance and the comments from his coaches.

“It makes me feel better,” Willis said. “It gives me more confidence to come out and get better and helps me know what I can actually achieve.”

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