

NASCAR

Martin Truex Jr. grabs first win of season at Fontana

By GREG BEACHAM
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FONTANA, Calif. — Martin Truex Jr. saw nothing but clean air and green flags down the stretch in his first victory of the new NASCAR Cup season.

Truex didn't get much of a look at Kevin Harvick, whose bid for four straight wins was ruined by an early crash at Fontana.

So even while Truex's Furniture Row Racing Toyota team celebrated, it was a wee bit disappointed not to get a duel with the early-season king.

"I think we would have had something for him today," team owner Barney Visser said.

Truex roared to victory at Fontana on Sunday, beating Kyle Larson by 11 seconds to claim the first win of the season for last year's series champion.

Truex won both stages before rolling to the checkered flag on his 16th career victory and his first since that glorious championship day at Homestead last November. His first career victory at Fontana even moved Truex into the overall points lead, thanks to Harvick's woes.

Harvick dragged his damaged car to a 35th-place finish after early contact with Larson ruined his day.



AP Photo/Will Lester

Martin Truex Jr. celebrates after winning the NASCAR 400 mile auto race Sunday at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif.

But after dominating at Auto Club Speedway, Truex's team was no longer certain Harvick has the fastest ride in the field.

"It just feels good to win," said Truex, who became the third driver to win from the pole at Fontana. "I don't really worry about who else is fast. Obviously (Harvick) has been quick. They've got a great team, and Kevin is an awesome driver. But as we've seen today, we can put together a run as well."

Truex took the lead for good with 32 laps left by getting past Kyle Busch, who finished third. Brad Keselowski was fourth.

"People kept asking, 'When are you going to win again?'" said Truex, who led 125 laps overall. "When are you going to win any stages? Well, here you go."

When Truex got a series of post-race questions about Harvick, the defending champ suggested that Furniture Row proved early on

that it can hang with Stewart-Haas Racing.

"That first pit stop was under green, and he came in pretty close (to me)," Truex said. "We left pit road, and I drove away from him. That was the only gauge I really had of that. ... I'm sure we'll have plenty of chances to race each other throughout the rest of the season."

Here are more things to know about the race at Fontana:

KEVIN'S SMACK: Harvick's bid to become the 14th driver ever to win four straight races ended when he hit the wall after side-to-side contact with Larson on the 37th lap. Harvick's flapping bumper was the most obvious problem, but he made a nice save down the track to avoid an interior wall.

Harvick took the blame for the mistake.

"I went down to side-draft and (Larson) was coming up and we touched, and it just knocked the thing to the right and spun out," Harvick said. "I don't know that it's his fault. I think that's my fault for coming down the racetrack right there and trying to side-draft, and then as we touch, it just came back up the racetrack. I was just trying to get a little too much right there."

Harvick's car was repaired, and

he managed to earn two standings points. Harvick had won in Atlanta, Las Vegas and Phoenix before arriving in his home state for an attempt to become the second driver in this century to win four straight.

CLEAN SWEEP: Truex won both stages and a race for the third time in his career. He also accomplished the feat at Las Vegas and Chicagoland during his championship 2017 season. "I would have liked to be one spot better, but I couldn't even see Martin," said Larson, the race's defending champion.

JJ IN 9TH: Six-time Fontana champ Jimmie Johnson finished ninth for his first top-10 finish of the season, ending a 10-race skid outside the top 10 — the worst such stretch of his career. Johnson's winless streak reached 28 races, also his longest in a career that began in 2001.

BACK AND FORTH: Truex and Busch traded the lead during the final stage, but Busch had a problematic pit stop that left his car handling poorly. Truex passed Busch for good with 32 laps to go. Busch was less than pleased afterward.

UP NEXT: Martinsville on March 25.

BEAVERS: Will take on No. 2 Baylor on Saturday in Lexington, Kentucky

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Tennessee's swarming pressure defense flustered OSU early, forcing turnovers and contested shots. The national leader in 3-point field goal percentage, OSU started 1 for 7 from behind the 3-point line in the first half.

The Lady Vols went on an 11-2 run in the first quarter, punctuated by a Jaime Nared 3-pointer, to take a 17-7 lead. But OSU switched to a zone defense in the second quarter that slowed UT's offense and began hitting shots on the other end to claw back.

The Beavers embarked on a 13-2 run to take their first lead on two free throws by Kat Tudor with 2:44 remaining in the half. Rennia Davis hit a deep 3-pointer to send Tennessee into halftime with a 26-24 advantage.

"I think it just made us stagnate," UT senior Mercedes Russell said of OSU's zone defense. "We were standing around on the perimeter a lot, not really passing and cutting and moving the defense, which we should have. We didn't really make them work defensively."

The teams battled through a physical third quarter, with OSU

attacking the basket and drawing fouls to end the quarter on an 11-2 run for a 44-39 advantage.

OSU grabbed two offensive rebounds to keep a possession alive to start the final quarter, and Mikayla Pivec capitalized with a 3-pointer to set the tone.

The Beavers gradually built their lead to as large as 13 points. Tennessee made a desperate attempt to rally in the final minutes, but OSU managed to keep the Lady Vols at bay and beat Tennessee for the first time in five attempts.

After the final buzzer, the Beavers celebrated on the court as their small contingent of fans behind the bench cheered.

Senior Mercedes Russell finished with 21 points and 14 rebounds in the final game of her Tennessee career. Fellow senior Nared scored nine points on 3 of 14 shooting.

Having started the season as a young team in rebuilding mode, OSU has matured into another Sweet 16 squad ready to carry on the legacy.

"It's amazing to see this program grow. I've been a Beaver fan since I was a little girl, and



Oregon State guard Kat Tudor (22) drives to the basket as Tennessee's Jaime Nared (31) defends during the first half of a second-round game in the NCAA college basketball tournament on Sunday in Knoxville, Tenn.

AP Photo/Wade Payne

once Scott got here it just got better and better," said McWilliams, a

junior. "I am so happy to be able to play for this team and that we are

making this Sweet 16 run again."

BIG PICTURE
Tennessee: Although second-round exits won't satisfy the Tennessee fan base, the future should be bright. The Lady Vols lose senior cornerstones Russell and Nared, but they started two freshmen (Davis and Evina Westbrook), had a freshman named SEC Sixth Woman of the Year (Anastasia Hayes) and have signed the No. 3 recruiting class in the nation. The only other time the Lady Vols failed to reach the Sweet 16 was 2009.

Oregon State: The Beavers were not an average No. 6 seed, and proved it. The switch to a zone defense in the second quarter changed the game for the Beavers and contained a Tennessee team that thrives on uttempo offense.

TESTS KEEP COMING
Oregon State hasn't just been studying its NCAA opponents this weekend. The Beavers are scheduled to take finals next week before heading to Lexington.

UP NEXT
OSU advances to the Sweet 16 to play No. 2 Baylor in Lexington, Kentucky on Friday. Tipoff is set for 4 p.m. PT on ESPN.

OREGON: Will next play No. 11 Central Michigan on Saturday in Spokane

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them. They had more wins than they had in 13 years in our program, and made tremendous progress. So I couldn't be more proud of them for that. Oregon is a tremendous team. I would be shocked if they're not playing in the Final Four and playing for a championship."

The Ducks, who won both the Pac-12 regular season and tournament titles, were coming off an 88-45 first-round victory over No. 15 seed Seattle. Ionescu finished with 19 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds in that game.

Minnesota beat No. 7 Green Bay 89-77 on Friday. Kenisha Bell had 24 of her 26 points in the second half as the Gophers rallied from 10 points down at halftime.

Minnesota came into the tournament with an average of 85.2 points per game to lead the Big Ten and ranked third nationally — behind only UConn and Baylor. The Golden Gophers were making their first tournament appearance since 2015.

Oregon jumped to a 21-13 lead after Ionescu's corner 3-pointer. She got a layup as the shot clock expired and a free throw to put the Ducks up 30-22 at the end of the first quarter. Ionescu led all scorers in the period with 13 points.

Hebard's layup gave the Ducks a 41-31 lead. Ionescu fell to the floor but somehow nailed a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Ducks a 51-36 lead at the break. She went into the half with 22 points.



Oregon's Satou Sabally, left, Minnesota's Kenisha Bell, center left, Oregon's Ruthy Hebard and Minnesota's Destiny Pitts, right, scramble for a loose ball during their second-round game in the NCAA women's college basketball tournament in Eugene on Sunday.

But even after the game she was mad about that free

throw. "I knew it was a foul, but

it wasn't an and-one because I missed the free throw, so I'm still bummed about that," she said.

Lexi Bando's 3-pointer pushed the Ducks' lead to 39-62 in the third quarter.

Ionescu's 29 points were a record for an Oregon player in an NCAA Tournament game.

"She's special," Stollings said about Ionescu. "She's the kind of player that doesn't come along very often in a coaching career."

BIG PICTURE
Oregon: The Ducks pushed their total wins this season to 32, a record for coach Kelly Graves. ... Oregon was making its second straight tournament appearance and 14th overall. ... Bando played her last game at Matthew Knight

Arena. ... Oregon governor Kate Brown was at the game.

LOOKING AHEAD: "I think it's pretty awesome and I think our coaches saw that we were going to be able to accomplish this when they recruited us, but now it's another two-game tournament that we're going to in Spokane," Ionescu said. "We're going to play like we've been playing and hopefully get two wins there."

UP NEXT
The Ducks will travel north to Spokane to face No. 11 Central Michigan at 3 p.m. Central Michigan upset No. 6 LSU 78-69 in the first round and then upset No. 3 Ohio State 95-78 in the second round on Monday. The game will be broadcast on ESPN.

PREP ROUNDUP: Pendleton baseball wins over Curtis (WA), falls to Hanford (WA)

Continued from 1B

PENDLETON 7, CURTIS (WA) 3 — At Richland, Washington, the Pendleton Buckaroos kicked off their weekend action with a 7-3 win over Curtis High, a school out of University Place, Washington.

The Buckaroos (1-2) trailed 1-0 when they came to bat in the bottom of the fourth inning, and then exploded for seven runs as 11 batters stepped to the plate. Shaw Jerome had a two-RBI single to start the scoring, and both Gabe Umbarger and Ryan Russell had two-RBI singles as well.

Russell started on the mound for Pendleton and allowed one unearned run in three innings, throwing 31 pitches. Chris Large tossed the last four innings, striking out five while allowing two hits and two runs to earn the win.

HANFORD (WA) 12, PENDLETON 8 — At Richland, Washington, the Buckaroos finished up their weekend action with a 12-8 loss to Hanford.

The Buckaroos (1-3) showed plenty of offense in the game, with five of their nine hits of the extra-base variety while also drawing four walks. Gabe Umbarger, Avery Deutz and Shaw Jerome each had two hits apiece, and Jerome had a team-best two RBI. Brett Swanson also had a solo home run in the sixth inning.

Daniel Naughton got the start on the mound and struck out eight in four innings, but also allowed eight hits and seven runs, though only two of those were earned.

TRI-CITIES PREP 4-15, STANFIELD 3-10 — At Pasco, Washington, the Stanfield Tigers played their first doubleheader

of the season on Saturday and dropped both games to Tri-Cities Prep by scores of 4-3 and 15-10.

Game 1 was a pitchers duel as Stanfield (1-2) ace Brody Woods and TCP ace Logan Mercado were both lights out on the mound and kept the offenses quiet. Woods threw 81 pitches in four innings, allowing only a walk with no hits, no runs and nine strikeouts. Mercado struck out 13 Tigers in six innings, allowing just one hit and one run.

TCP got on the board after Woods was lifted in the fifth and scored once in the fifth and three times in the sixth. Stanfield made a comeback in the seventh. Woods led off the inning with a single — the team's first hit of the game — followed by TJ Smith doubling and Shayne Keltz reaching on a dropped third strike to load the bases

with no outs trailing 4-0.

Damian Curriel then hit into an RBI groundout to bring home Woods, and Makiah Blankenship brought in a pair on a single to right field. And with the tying run on third with one out, Dillon Dunlap hit into a game-ending double play.

The second game was all offense, no pitching with a combined 25 runs and 19 hits between the teams.

Stanfield led 9-7 as TCP went to bat in the bottom of the third, but then TCP scored a whopping eight runs in the frame to grab hold of the lead at 15-9 and didn't look back.

In that game, Justin Keeney, Woods, and Curriel each had two hits to lead the Tigers. Hunter McCanch also had a triple.

SOFTBALL
IRRIGON 6-4, PILOT

ROCK 4-14 — At Irrigon, the Pilot Rock Rockets and Irrigon Knights split a doubleheader on Saturday. Irrigon won the opener 6-4 and then the Rockets (1-1) thumped the Knights (1-2) 14-4 in Game 2.

TRACK & FIELD
LEWISTON, Idaho — The Mac-Hi Pioneers and Weston-McEwen TigerScots track and field teams got their seasons started on Saturday at the Sweeney Invitational. The TigerScot boys team finished tied for 10th place with 20 points and the girls team was also in 10th place with 24 points. Mac-Hi boys team finished 13th with one point, while Walla Walla won the boys team title and Timberline (ID) won the girls.

For the TigerScot girls, Ellie Scheibner had the best day as she won the long jump

with a new personal-best of 15-feet, 7½-inches and then finished 10th in the 400 meters (1:05.90). Bryce Thul was fourth in long jump (14-10.50) and was 10th in the 300 meter hurdles (55.31).

Also notable was Katie Vescio, who finished fourth in pole vault by clearing eight feet, and then finished 11th in the 1600 meters with a new personal record time of 5:53.65.

On the boys side, Jacob Speed finished second in the 400 meters (52.37) and fourth in the 200 meters (23.98). The 4x200 relay team of Hadden Ball, McHai Robertson, Kelen McGill and Speed was fourth with a time of 1:38.92.

Mac-Hi's best finisher was Isael Ibarra in the pole vault as he finished tied for ninth after clearing 9-feet, 6-inches.