Beat: Sports

JOEY LOGANO WINS HIS FIRST DAYTONA 500

SPECTACULAR SEASON-OPENING

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USPA NEWS - Logano held off a fast-approaching Kevin Harvick in a green-white-checkered finish to conquer NASCAR's season-opening spectacle, all but claim a place in the Chase for the Sprint Cup and take another step toward validating the promise and expectation that have defined and sometimes dogged his career

A multi-car wreck erupted behind Logano on the backstretch as his No. 22 Ford blazed toward Turn 3, prompting a caution that froze the running order. He was almost unbelieving in the race car moments afterward. He had advanced to giddy by the time he reached his news media obligations. It was evident early that Logano's race car was among the class of the field in a concise and relatively civil race that featured just eight cautions and far less calamity than expected at the conclusion of a bizarre and costly Daytona Speedweeks.

A caution and then a red flag with five laps left in the scheduled 200 set up the decisive sequence. Logano led when Justin Allgaier spun on the frontstretch, eliciting the sixth caution, followed by Denny Hamlin and Jimmie Johnson, a two-time winner of the race. Defending series champion and 2007 Daytona 500-winner Kevin Harvick burst from fourth through several cars at the restart to immediately contend, but he ran out of time as Penske won its second Daytona 500. Ryan Newman claimed Penske's first Harley J. Earl Trophy in 2008.

"We're going to have fun for 25 weeks," team owner Roger Penske said of the remainder of a now-pressure-reduced regular season for Logano.
Starting fifth, Logano led six times for 31 laps. Defending Daytona 500-winner Dale Earnhardt Jr. was third, followed by Hamlin and Johnson.
The race had distilled to a battle among Logano, Earnhardt, Johnson and Hamlin in the final 20 laps, with the cars trading spots at the front and blocking furiously to maintain position, often without drafting help. Earnhardt fell from that pack, he said, with a poor decision on an attempt to pass on lap 189 but had recovered to eighth at the resumption.

Logano last season established himself as a title contender, finishing a career-best fourth in the winner-take-all finale with Harvick, Newman and Hamlin and justifying the praise retired driver Mark Martin had heaped upon him as a prospect. Martin had said of a 15-year-old Logano, "(He could) be one of the greatest that ever raced in NASCAR."

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