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TONY STEWART

No More of “Them Racin’ Deals” at Bristol

KANNAPOLIS, N.C. (March 17, 2009) – The term, “Just one of them racin’ deals,” is sure to be uttered by more than one driver this weekend at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway. The tight and fast .533-mile bullring plays host to Sunday’s Food City 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race, and it’s also home to one of Tony Stewart’s 33 career Sprint Cup victories.

But it’s been a long eight years and 14 races since that lone Bristol win on Aug. 25, 2001. Buoyed by only two top-fives among nine finishes of 15th or worse during that span, Stewart has seen more than his fair share of “racin’ deals” at Bristol, especially of late.

In the past three Food City 500s – NASCAR’s spring visit to Volunteer Country – the driver of the No. 14 Office Depot/Old Spice Chevrolet Impala SS for Stewart-Haas Racing has seen victory snatched away from him. In fact, “Domination Derailed” would be the most appropriate title for Stewart’s recent fortunes at Bristol.

Stewart has led a whopping 769 laps of the 1,510 laps available (50.9 percent). Yet, all the two-time Sprint Cup champion has to show for his efforts are finishes of 12th, 35th and 14th.

How can this be? Here’s how Stewart’s “racin’ deals” at Bristol unfolded:

- **Domination Derailed, Part I:** Stewart led eight times for a race-high 245 laps in the 2006 Food City 500 and appeared ready to log his second career win at Bristol. But with 25 laps to go, his car’s handling went away, dropping Stewart to 12th when the checkered flag waved. “I am really disappointed,” said Stewart after the race. “We had an awesome car all day. **I felt like I ran the most patient race I have ever run at Bristol.** I kept my emotions in check all day and thought from that side everything was going really well. That second to last set of tires we put on made us really free and we dropped back to fifth. Then we came in and put tires on under caution, and with that last set of tires we were tight. I couldn’t turn it through the center (of the corner) at all. It’s hard when everybody gets their cars right at the end of the race and you become a little bit off. It was hard to hold those guys back. So we just tried to race smart there and bring our car home in one piece.”
- **Domination Derailed, Part II** – For the first half and then some of the 2007 Food City 500, Stewart was performing his own rendition of the Bristol Stomp. He had led four times for a race-high 257 laps, with his nearest pursuers resigned to the fact they were running for second. But misfortune struck Stewart on lap 289 when his car’s fuel pump cable broke. With no fuel pressure, the engine shut off, forcing Stewart to come to pit road. Crew members were able to replace the cable, but the process was lengthy. Stewart returned to the 504-lap race, albeit 25 laps down. After dominating the race, Stewart was forced to simply ride around to the finish, where he posted a gut-wrenching 35th-place result.
- **Domination Derailed, Part III** – Stewart led six times for a race-high 267 laps in last year’s Food City 500, but a late-race accident with Kevin Harvick relegated Stewart to a disappointing 14th-place finish. The unfortunate chain of events began when Brian Vickers crashed on lap 491. Stewart was leading with less than 10 laps to go, and a critical decision had to be made: pit and take four tires to ensure more grip and a faster car, as the tires had over 100 laps on them, or stay out on the racetrack and keep the lead.

Stewart stayed out, as did second-place Denny Hamlin and third-place Dale Earnhardt Jr. When the race restarted, Hamlin got by Stewart on lap 496 while Richard Childress Racing teammates Harvick and Jeff Burton, who had pitted for new tires, were fast approaching. As Harvick and Stewart battled for second, Harvick’s Chevrolet slid up into Stewart’s machine on lap 499 as they raced into turn one. Contact was made and Stewart spun backward into the SAFER Barrier on the outside retaining wall. The rear of his car was badly damaged, but after some quick service on pit road, Stewart was able to stay on the lead lap and remain in the race to finish 14th.

Currently sixth in points with three top-10 finishes in the season’s first four races, Stewart doesn’t want to jump the tracks when he stops in Bristol. In his first year as a driver/owner with Stewart-Haas Racing, the 11-year Sprint Cup veteran wants to, in the immortal words of FOX broadcaster and former crew chief Larry McReynolds, “Keep on keepin’ on.”

That’s because, as discovered by *The Charlotte Observer*’s David Poole, of the 54 drivers who’ve made the Chase for the Championship in its first five years, 50 have been in the top-20 after four races, 44 have been in the top-15, and 72 percent, 39 of 54, were in Chase position after four races (the top-10 in 2004-2006 or the top-12 the past two years).

Those statistics bode well for Stewart now, but continued strength in the 22 remaining races before the Chase field is set after the Sept. 12 race at Richmond (Va.) International Raceway will ensure Stewart a spot at the 12-man table. Stewart and his No. 14 Office Depot/Old Spice team have proven themselves admirably so far this season, but another performance review awaits them at Bristol.

TONY STEWART, Driver of the No. 14 Office Depot/Old Spice Chevrolet Impala SS for Stewart-Haas Racing:

You’ve said in the past that Bristol is your favorite track, but your five top-fives are offset by 11 finishes of 15th or worse, two of which were DNFs (Did Not Finish). That being said, is Bristol still your favorite track?

“It’s one of my favorites, but Bristol is a track that’s feast or famine. If you have a really good day, it’s a lot of fun. But if you have one little problem, it normally makes for a very long day. We’ve had more long days than good days.”

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Racers like Bristol's new surface, while fans don't like it as much because there seems to be less action. What do you think?

"Bristol is awesome. You can go from the bottom to the top, and with the old surface, you just couldn't do that. If you got hung on the outside, you were stuck, and if you tried to force your way back into line, that's when trouble would typically start. I don't know what it's like to watch, but from where I sit, racing at Bristol is pretty fun. You can run all over the racetrack, which is what's so fun about it. You can race. Guys aren't running over each other to pass each other. You can work the outside, you can work the inside, you can go and race people instead of the normal, just-bump-people-out-of-the-way-and-go-on-by style we used to have. You aren't having to root guys out of the way. We should thank everybody at Bristol Motor Speedway for doing what they did. It worked, and it worked well. I can't give it a better grade than A-plus."

Three top-10s in your first four races as a driver/owner – are you surprised by how quickly everything has come together, or is this what you expected?

"I think from the physical pieces and parts standpoint, we knew we had what we needed. It was just a matter of how long was it going to take for the package to gel. I think we're all pleasantly surprised at how quick that's come. We went from a superspeedway to a 2-mile track and a 1.5-mile track and we've been good at all three, or at least solid at all three. I think that gives us a lot to look forward to, and that's definitely keeping the team morale and spirits up. Looking at the big picture, those are the things that keep these guys excited from week to week.

"We felt like we could be competitive, but I think it was unrealistic to think that we would go four weeks and be that competitive week in and week out and solid every session. I haven't qualified outside the top-14 all year, and that in itself should tell you that the sky is falling. I mean I've never qualified well. From that side, I think it's kind of exceeded my expectations because I've never qualified that well before. Sure, we expected to have results, but I'm not sure we expected to be this consistent right off the bat. Granted, it's only been four weeks and we could fall on our face this week, but for four weeks to go to a superspeedway and a 2-mile track and a 1.5-mile track and have good results and good performance each of those weeks, it's something to be proud of."

TONY STEWART'S BRISTOL PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2008	×Food City 500	6	14	Running, 506/506	267	\$139,911
	Sharpie 500	28	8	Running, 500/500	0	\$152,261
2007	×Food City 500	4	35	Running, 479/504	257	\$133,911
	Sharpie 500	23	4	Running, 500/500	0	\$178,386
2006	†Food City 500	1	12	Running, 500/500	245	\$168,886
	Sharpie 500	5	22	Running, 498/500	0	\$140,761
2005	Food City 500	11	3	Running, 500/500	0	\$151,986
	Sharpie 500	17	8	Running, 500/500	0	\$146,086
2004	Food City 500	12	24	Running, 498/500	25	\$115,518
	Sharpie 500	6	19	Running, 497/500	0	\$121,528
2003	Food City 500	10	26	Accident, 487/500	0	\$111,518
	Sharpie 500	18	23	Running, 494/500	0	\$119,138
2002	■ Food City 500	13	15	Running, 500/500	74	\$103,043
	Sharpie 500	26	24	Running, 497/500	0	\$103,788
2001	Food City 500	37	25	Running, 500/500	0	\$64,820
	Sharpie 500	18	1	Running, 500/500	71	\$189,415
2000	Food City 500	19	42	Overheating, 73/500	0	\$45,525
	goracing.com 500	6	2	Running, 500/500	133	\$92,540
1999	Food City 500	4	15	Running, 498/500	55	\$48,505
	Goody's Headache Powder 500	1	5	Running, 500/500	225	\$64,915

× Race length extended due to green-white-checker finish.

† Qualifying canceled due to weather, starting position set via car owner points.

■ Race was finished by Todd Bodine, who took over for Stewart in a relief role on lap 367.

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