

Auto Racing: The mind of Montoya

by Jane Miller

It was so funny to hear the television commentators during Sunday's Busch Series race go on about how sorry Juan Pablo Montoya certainly must have been for spinning his teammate, Scott Pruett, on the way to winning at Mexico.

Did anyone think Montoya looked sorry?

Didn't think so.

This is the Juan Pablo Montoya that fans of CART, the Indianapolis 500 and Formula One have known and loved since 1999.

This is the driver who was never cowed by Michael Schumacher, never in awe of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, never believed rookies can't win championships.

All that "yeah it's great, we're just having fun, trying to learn about the cars, taking our time" goes out the window when Montoya smells victory.

Should Montoya have been more patient? Of course. Taking out one's teammate is the ultimate no-no, though Montoya saw it happen time and again in CART and F1.

Would Montoya have won the race without it? I think I'd have to say yes. The driving display he put on to get

back to the front, after having to make an extra pit stop because of a fueling problem, was vintage Montoya.

He also had fresher tires than Pruett and had a faster car earlier in the race.

Throw in the fact that Montoya had been mobbed by fans all weekend, including many from Colombia, and really wanted to win in Mexico and you have a driver who didn't want to wait another lap to get to the front. Pruett was angry, and rightly so. A fierce and competitive racer, he also is the ultimate gentleman. And he desperately wants a NASCAR victory on his otherwise very complete resume.

The two drivers have spoken since the accident and Pruett said he has put the incident behind him.

"Although I am still upset that I did not win the race in Mexico City or finish 1-2, I do feel a lot better," he said. "I spoke to Juan Pablo and he apologized and I do know that what happened was not intentional on Juan's part. ... I have moved on and now just look forward to getting back to racing."

VEGAS CHANGES

David Stremme finished third twice in Busch Series races on the old Las Vegas Motor Speedway configuration, so he wasn't real excited when he heard the track was being remodeled.

Testing at the facility, site of this weekend's NASCAR events, changed his mind.

"There are some bumps in it and that gives it character," Stremme said, "but what amazes me is a second lane has already worked in. I think you'll see the track widen out even more than what we anticipate for a newly paved racetrack. The end result, in a couple of years it'll be really good because you'll be able to run up against the wall and you'll be able to run the bottom."

Stremme is a teammate to Montoya and Pruett and watched the Mexico race on television.

"My take on it is both guys were running hard and they both take fault at it," he said. "I don't think any of it was intentional at all." But Stremme had to admit to being impressed with Montoya's charge to the front.

"The thing I saw on Sunday was that (Montoya) is bad to the bone on road-course racing," Stremme said. "I think Scott Pruett is a really good driver, too, but I see Juan doing some stuff that I thought was really impressive. To come from 19th and overcome the problems they had ... it says a lot."

BALDWIN ON BOARD

Jeremy Mayfield has yet to qualify for a race with his new Bill Davis Racing Toyota, so the team brought Tommy Baldwin in as interim crew chief to try to help Mayfield's team step up.

Baldwin's main job is competition director for BDR. Derrick Finley was Mayfield's crew chief for the first two races.

A search is being conducted for a permanent replacement.

APPEALS DENIED

Penalties levied against the teams of Kasey Kahne and Matt Kenseth for infractions at Daytona were upheld Monday by an appeals committee.

The committee has not yet ruled on the appeals of penalties to the teams of Scott Riggs and Elliott Sadler.

HOT PASS DRIVERS

Kurt Busch, Kasey Kahne, Denny Hamlin, Dale Jarrett and Carl Edwards will be this week's featured drivers on DIRECTV's NASCAR HotPass.

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