Auto Racing: Best in worst luck

by Jane Miller

Goody's Headache Powder sponsors a post-race award each week during the NASCAR season that "honors" the driver with the worst luck in each event.

In three of the five Nextel Cup races this season, the winner has been Tony Stewart.

Stewart took the dubious honor first at the Daytona 500, where he was hit from behind by Kurt Busch while leading and finished 43rd. He also won for finishing second at Atlanta after a late yellow and rough pass by eventual race winner Jimmie Johnson. He led 121 laps in that race.

Then last Sunday, Stewart led 257 laps - decisively - before his car suffered a broken fuel pump cable. He finished 35th and dropped from seventh in the points to 12th.

Good omens for Stewart abound in Sunday's race at Martinsville, however.

The name of the event is the Goody's Cool Orange 500. Stewart is the spokesman for the pain-relief product and is the defending champion of the race.

"We'll go to Martinsville and try to have a better race," said Stewart.

COT PART II

Martinsville also is a Car of Tomorrow race and while Bristol winner Kyle Busch turned in a harsh critique of the car, Denny Hamlin was fine with it.

"We have 15 more races in this car so we feel pretty confident about our package. I am not concerned," he said. "It would be one thing if we had come here (Bristol) and struggled all day and had to look ahead to those races not knowing what to expect but we were good all day and only a (fuel) pump problem kept us from possibly winning this one."

HOT SEAT

Toyota driver Brian Vickers suffered first and second-degree burns on his feet and buttocks when a piece of tail pipe came off halfway through the Bristol race.

He also suffered problems from toxic fumes but still finished 15th.

WHO KNEW?

Dale Jarrett was unhappy with Matt Kenseth after crashing Sunday at Bristol.

"This is not the first time that he's done something like this," Jarrett said in response to an interviewer's question about the incident. "Everybody has this great vision that Matt Kenseth is this nice guy on the race track - he is a nice guy away from the track - but he's a rough driver on the race track when he doesn't have to be. We'll have a discussion."

BRONZE BADGE

Again this year, fans may purchase a bronze badge for the events leading up to the Indianapolis 500 on May 27.

Cost of the badge is $100. It provides gate and garage admission from May 6-26.

It is not valid on Race Day.

Purchasers must sign a consent and liability release when picking up the badge. Call 317-492-6500 for more information.

TOBLER RESIGNS

Rahn Tobler has resigned, effective immediately, as crew chief for Doug Kalitta's Top Fuel dragster.

The NHRA competes this weekend at the O'Reilly Spring Nationals at Baytown, Texas.

Crew chiefs of the Kalitta team's other three cars will combine to work on Kalitta's car until a replacement is chosen.

Kalitta, who finished a heartbreaking second in the Top Fuel standings a year ago - falling out of the top spot on the final run of the season - is ninth in points this season after three races.

MOVING ON

Eric Medlen, who died Friday of injuries suffered in a test session crash on March 19, will be on many minds this weekend at Houston Raceway Park.

Top Fuel driver J.R. Todd was especially close to Medlen and was at the track at the time of the accident. "I don't think any of us are going to quit because of what happened, but the danger is here," Todd said. "Once you're in the car, though, and it starts up, that's the last thing going through your mind. "But we'll never forget about Eric."

CAT ON A DRAGSTER

Top Fuel points leader Rod Fuller will sport a Caterpillar/Mustang Cat paint scheme this weekend.

The promotion is part of a pilot program to increase technician recruiting.

MEDICAL UPDATE

Indy Pro Series driver Pablo Perez, injured in a crash during Saturday's race at Homestead-Miami Speedway, underwent surgery for leg injuries on Sunday.

He was listed in stable condition.

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