

Late-Race Gamble Pays Dividends for Bowyer, No. 33 Team

Race/Date: Shelby 427 – March 1
Location: Las Vegas Motor Speedway
Start Position: 37th
Finish Position: Second
Points Position: Second

Las Vegas, NV – Clint Bowyer and the Cheerios/Hamburger Helper team gambled in the closing stages of Sunday's Shelby 427 and came up big. The Emporia, Kansas, native finished second behind winner Kyle Busch, recording his first top-five finish in his fourth race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Bowyer and the No. 33 team advanced to second in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series point standings, 18 markers behind point leader Jeff Gordon. Bowyer has recorded two top-five finishes in three starts to kick off the 2009 season.

Bowyer took the green flag from the 37th position but quickly advanced to 28th by just the second lap of the 285-lap race. As the laps clicked off, Bowyer's Chevrolet Impala SS developed a loose handling condition that resulted in him slowly falling back in the field. When green flag pit stops began at lap 51, crew chief Shane Wilson wasted little time in calling Bowyer to the attention of the Helping Hands pit crew to change four tires, add fuel and make a wedge adjustment. When the cycle of stops completed, Bowyer was scored in the 33rd position, one lap down to the race leaders.

Happier with the handling of his Cheerios/Hamburger Helper Chevrolet, Bowyer slowly began working his way into position for the free pass should the caution flag wave. Just as the two-time Sprint Cup Series winner passed John Andretti for the spot, the engine of David Ragan's No. 6 car expired, forcing NASCAR to throw the caution flag. Bowyer was able to pass the pace car and rejoin the leaders in the 25th position for the lap 82 restart.

Bowyer continued his climb toward the front, only slowing when the caution flag was displayed at lap 94 for an incident involving David Stremme's No. 12 car. Things got interesting on the ensuing restart for Bowyer when Juan Pablo Montoya made a daring move entering turn one that resulted in contact with the Cheerios/Hamburger Helper Chevrolet. Bowyer struggled with the handling of his wounded Impala SS but was able to come to the attention of the Helping Hands pit crew for repairs after Mark Martin brought out the caution flag when his engine expired at lap 122.

Bowyer restarted 22nd and, once again, began his climb toward the front of the field. The fourth-year NSCS driver found himself in the seventh position in the latter stage of the race and, when the caution flag was displayed for debris at lap 258, Bowyer and Wilson agreed to stay on the race track when the rest of the leaders came to pit road for fuel. The gutsy move gave Bowyer the race lead at lap 263. He held the position until Busch made slight contact with his rear bumper at lap 269, opening the door for the No. 18 to inherit the race lead. Bowyer and Richard Childress Racing teammate Jeff Burton battled for the second position in the closing laps of the event, with Bowyer holding on to the position at the checkered flag.

Bowyer's fellow RCR teammates Kevin Harvick and Casey Mears finished 12th and 30th, respectively.

Next weekend, the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series heads back to the East Coast for the Kobalt Tools 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. The race will be televised live on FOX Sunday, March 8, beginning at 1:30 p.m. ET. The Performance Racing Network and Sirius/XM Satellite Radio will also provide live lap-by-lap coverage. Qualifying for round four of the 36-race Sprint Cup Series season will be televised live on SPEED Friday, March 6, at 6:30 p.m. ET.