

The Racing Reporter

By Gerald Hodges

Robby Gordon gets first win at New Hampshire

LOUDON, N.H. — Robby Gordon won his first Winston Cup victory in last Friday's New Hampshire 300. Two bumping incidents with Jeff Gordon, this year's champion, left fans with plenty to talk about over the sport's off-season break.

Robby Gordon bumped Jeff Gordon from behind in traffic on Lap 285, knocking Jeff Gordon's car into the No. 12 driven by Mike Wallace, who was one lap down.

As Jeff Gordon tried to regain control, Robby Gordon passed him for the lead. As the cars slowed under the ensuing caution, however, Jeff Gordon sped past all of those who'd gone by him and ran into the rear bumper of Robby Gordon's No. 31.

Jeff Gordon was given a black flag and assessed a one-lap penalty that sent the 2001 Winston Cup champion, who led 257 of 300 laps to a 15th-place finish.

Robby Gordon, meanwhile, kept the lead and scored his first career Winston Cup victory, becoming the fifth first-time winner on the circuit this year and the 19th different winner overall. Sterling Marlin was second and Bobby Labonte finished third.

"That's what they call racing," Robby Gordon said. "I got into him a little bit, but I didn't spin him. I just moved him up the race track a little bit. I had to go. I didn't mean to get into him. I think the 12 car got sideways and then he got on the brakes. I got into him but I didn't hit him hard."

Understandably, Jeff Gordon saw it different. "I didn't expect anybody to take me out," he said. "That's just a shame. We had an awesome car today. He and I had the best cars out there at the end. It was going to be a heck of a battle, but you don't need to do that with 15 laps to go. You have to hit somebody. I just wish he would have passed me fair and square like I did a few laps before."

Tires were a problem for most of

the teams. Goodyear, expecting cold track temperatures, brought a soft tire to the track for use. But when it heated up to over 50 degrees during the race, the compound was all wrong and the rubber began blistering.

Gil Martin, crew chief on Robby Gordon's car had saved a batch of the same tire code Goodyear had made for a race at Martinsville in October.

"We started bolting those on the last three stops," Martin said. "Those tires didn't really blister like everyone else's did and I think that was the difference in the day."

Indeed, many teams battled blistered tires — with pieces of rubber pulling away from the surface of the tire as they ran — on a day that turned out much warmer than Goodyear had planned when it decided to bring the softer Martinsville tires here for this race. As the tires Martin had saved sat around for several weeks, they got slightly harder and stood up slightly better on a sunny day when the race-time temperature was 46 degrees and the high crept into the 50s.

Finishing order: 1. Robby Gordon, 2. Sterling Marlin, 3. Bobby Labonte, 4. Matt Kenseth, 5. Tony Stewart, 6. Jerry Nadeau, 7. Mark Pressley, 8. Brett Bodine, 9. Robert Martin, 10. Dale Jarrett, 11. Dave Blaney, 12. Johnny Benson, 13. Ricky Rudd, 14. Jimmy Spencer, 15. Jeff Gordon, 16. Casey Atwood, 17. Jeff Burton, 18. Rusty Wallace, 19. Elliott Sadler, 20. Joe Nemechek, 21. Kurt Busch, 22. Bill Elliott, 23. Kyle Petty, 24. Dale Earnhardt Jr., 25. Kenny Wallace, 26. Kevin Harvick, 27. Terry Labonte, 28. Rick Mast, 29. Bobby Hamilton, 30. Jason Leffler, 31. Todd Bodine, 32. Ron Hornaday, 33. Mike Wallace, 34. Stacy Compton, 35. Kevin LePage, 36. John Andretti, 37. Bobby Hamilton Jr., 38. Ricky Craven, 39. Ken Schrader, 40. Michael Waltrip, 41. Buckshot Jones, 42. Ward Burton.

Final top-10 Winston Cup points leaders: 1. J. Gordon 5112, 2. Stewart 4763, 3. Marlin 4741, 4. Rudd 4706, 5. Jarrett 4612, 6. B. Labonte 4561, 7. Wallace 4488, 8. Earnhardt Jr. 4460, 9. Harvick 4406, 10. J. Burton 4394.

No decision on 12 car

LOUDON, N.H. — Peter Sospenzo, crew chief for the No. 12 Ford now being driven by Mike Wallace, said he hopes to hear about the future of the team next week.

Sospenzo said Walt Czarnicki, president of Penske Racing, is expected to notify the team of his plans when he visits the shop in Mooresville, N.C., on Tuesday.

"I really believe that (owner) Roger (Penske) will look at doing the right thing, and that's keep everything just as it is," Sospenzo said. "It really hasn't been easy. But we all know we've got a job to do and we have to focus on the job at hand."

Since driver Jeremy Mayfield's departure in October, there has been considerable talk at Penske about consolidating the organization and fielding just two next season, the No. 2 of Rusty Wallace and No. 02 of Ryan Newman.

Hornaday is gone

A.J. Foyt Racing and driver Ron Hornaday parted ways after Friday's New Hampshire 300 at New Hampshire International Speedway.

Hornaday, a two-champion of NASCAR's Truck series and rookie in the Grand National series last season, struggled much of 2001 in Winston Cup. He has failed to make the field three times and his best start was third at the second Bristol race. His best finish was ninth at Las Vegas in March.

Team spokesman Michael Rompf said no driver decision has yet been made.

Winston Cup Banquet

This year's Winston Cup Series Banquet will be held Friday, Nov. 30 in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. It will be televised at 8 p.m. (EST) on TNT.

Answer To Last Week's Question: Sterling Marlin was the first Winston Cup driver to win a race this season in a Dodge.

Editorial: Hodges/the Racing Reporter is a syndicated NASCAR columnist. If you have a racing question that you would like answered send it to The Racing Reporter, P.O. Box 160711, Mobile, AL, 36616, or e-mail it to:

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"Rockets are state bound" from front

That's when junior Marty Reagan took the ball and ran 43 yards to pay dirt.

The Rockets had fallen behind in the score — but not in spirit.

"I told Aaron (Anderson) as soon as they scored it wasn't over — just focus on what we had to do and our kids were able to do it," Larkey said.

Offensively the Rockets had only 213 yards.

Anderson was 10 for 16 passing and one touchdown. He also had 31 yards rushing on five carries. He was sacked three times.

Hale caught four passes for 33 yards and he rushed four times for 16 yards. He had one touchdown.

Reagan carried the ball 19 times for 13 yards and scored once.

Senior Clay Dooley, who stepped up big on defense, caught one pass for four yards and ran the ball once for four yards.

Senior Josh Taylor also rushed four times for 22 yards and junior Michael Hayes caught one pass for 11 yards, which was also for a first down. Defensively the Rockets were hit a lot harder in the air than on the ground.

All total the Rockets gave up 315 yards, 281 through the air and 34 on the ground.

Reagan had nine tackles and assistants and junior James Michael Bussell had 10. Both corners played extremely well.

Sophomore Jason Leger also showed up to play on Saturday with nine tackles and assists.

Dooley had a great defensive game with seven tackles and assists. P.J. Rowe, Tanner Abney, and Leger all recorded sacks.

Rowe and Abney each had five tackles and assists as did middle linebacker William Blair and Boring.

Adam Childress had four tackles and assists. Steve Blair had three. Hale had one. Devon Bussell had one and senior Matt McClure had one.

"I can't say enough good things about this team, a lot of people have talked about our schedule and talked down our chances at a state title, but we as a team have stayed focused," Larkey said.

The Rockets will play at Cardinal Stadium, which is located at the Kentucky Fair and Expo Center on Saturday at 12 noon.

Advance tickets are on sale at RCHS for \$6.00 each.

A community pep rally will be held on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the new barn in Renfro Valley and Rockcastle Judge-Executive Buzz Carlifotis has proclaimed Friday as a day of special recognition for the Rockets.

Through 14 games the Rockets have scored 689 points and allowed just 57.

They have rushed for 2,703 yards and passed for 2,703 yards.

"Fillings" from front

Delno McClure had filed for re-election as constable in district two. The only democrat to file as of Wednesday was John Holbrook, magistrate in district one.

Filing deadline for May's primary is January 29, 2002.



Fred Mullins Jr., has filed for re-election as magistrate in district four.

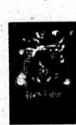


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