

MARCH NASCAR HIGHLIGHTS

AT PHOENIX INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY • PHOTOS BY RANDALL BOHL

Kevin Harvick has won 13 major professional races at Phoenix International Raceway, but it is safe to say he never worked harder for a victory than he did on Sunday, March 13, when he held off fast-closing challenger Carl Edwards to win the Good Sam 500 by the closest margin of any race in the 53-year history of the track—0.010 of a second.

Coming in, Harvick was the favorite to win. The 40-year-old from Bakersfield, California had won five of the last six NASCAR Sprint Cup races at the one-mile PIR oval, and he finished second in the one race he lost, despite leading for a race-high 143 laps, when the contest was shortened by rain.

Harvick only qualified 18th fastest in the No. 4 Jimmy John's Chevrolet, but he quickly began to climb through the field, advancing to 12th by Lap 22. He took the lead for the first

time on Lap 169 and looked set to score another comfortable win when Kasey Kahne blew a tire with four laps to go, bringing out the yellow caution flag. Harvick and second place Dale Earnhardt Jr, driver of the No. 88 AXALTA Chevrolet, elected to stay out and keep track position, while their pursuers came in for new rubber and a splash of fuel.

When the green flag came out on Lap 312, Harvick was able to maintain his advantage, but Edwards, driver of the No. 19 Stanley Toyota, used the better grip from his new tires to get below Earnhardt Jr. and take second going into Turn 3. As they took the white flag to begin the final lap, Edwards closed to the tail of Harvick's car as they circulated through Turns 1 and 2, but Edwards got below Harvick in Turn 3 and bumped him up the race track. The two cars were nearly even as they bumped again exiting Turn 4, and they

bumped a third time just before crossing the start/finish line. Edwards had tried his best to take the win, but it wasn't to be. It took a review of photo evidence to show Harvick had won by about three inches.

In leading 139 laps Sunday, Harvick joined Kyle Busch, driver of the No. 18 Skittles Toyota Camry, as the only two drivers to lead more than 2,000 laps at Phoenix.

Joe Gibbs Racing may have not gotten the win, but they continued their impressive weekend by placing all four cars in the top seven. No. 11 Denny Hamlin came home third, Kyle Busch, who led 75 laps early on, finished fourth, and No. 20 Matt Kenseth ended up seventh. No. 88 Dale Earnhardt Jr. came in fifth, and No. 24 Chase Elliott was the highest-finishing rookie in eighth.

The race was slowed by five caution periods for 30 laps, all caused by blown tires. No. 31 Ryan Newman, No. 27 Paul Menard, No. 17 Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and No. 2 Brad Keselowski all suffered damage after losing a tire before Kahne set up the final trophy dash. ■



NASCAR FALL RACE WEEKEND

NOVEMBER 11-13, 2016
TICKETS ON SALE JUNE 3

NASCAR Fall Race Weekend at Phoenix International Raceway takes place in mid-November, with practice, qualifying and race events on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, November 11-13, 2016.

Friday, November 11, 2016
LUCAS OIL 150 +
NASCAR SPRINT CUP
SERIES QUALIFYING

The weekend starts on Friday with Can-Am 500 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Qualifying Sessions, followed by the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series battle under the lights in their annual visit to PIR in the Lucas Oil 150 at 6:30 pm.

Saturday, November 12, 2016
NASCAR XFINITY SERIES 200

Saturday at 1:30 pm, you won't want to miss an exciting battle of NASCAR veterans and rookies in the NASCAR XFINITY Series 200, NASCAR XFINITY Series race.

Sunday, November 13, 2016
CAN-AM 500

The weekend caps off on Sunday at 12:30 pm, with the Semi-Final Race in the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup, when we find out which four drivers will enter the Championship as the Eliminator Round's final four.

As always, there will be driver fan sessions, live entertainment and fun on the midway. Tickets go on sale June 3 at PhoenixRaceway.com or by calling 866-408-RACE (7223). ■