

SPORTS

CLAIMS

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for good shortly after the halfway point of the race.

Trailing Hamlin across the finish line was pole winner Jamie McMurray, who ran with the leaders most of the night. Another strong contender, Kurt Busch, finished third, and Gordon charged back through the field to finish fourth, just ahead of Juan Pablo Montoya.

Kevin Harvick was sixth ahead of Kyle Busch, Burton, Ryan Newman and Brian Vickers.

Eleven cautions slowed the field from time to time as drivers slid against the wall, earning the famous Darlington Stripe.

Popular Dale Earnhardt, Jr., never challenged for the lead although he ran as high as the top 10 at times before winding up 18th.

Gordon, one of the few drivers who enjoy the challenges of Darlington, jumped out front on the opening lap and put some distance between himself and Red Bull's Vickers.

Vickers, however, took the lead on Lap 39 with Gordon and Kasey Kahne behind him. Meanwhile, Johnson, the four-time champion, was struggling back in 14th spot after getting sideways between Turns 1 and 2, tapping the wall with his right rear quarter panel.

The first caution fell on Lap 45 when Michael McDowell hit the wall in Turn 2.

When the race restarted on Lap 51, McMurray led after beating Vickers and Gordon out of the pits, but it was only a few laps before both Bobby Labonte and Joey Logano scraped the wall and spun, bringing the caution out again on Lap 53.

This time, McMurray again took the lead when racing resumed at Lap 60. It didn't last long because Paul Menard was tapped in the rear by Stewart when cars stacked up out of Turn 2.

Menard spun but fortunately failed to hit anything.

Once again, the race restarted with McMurray out front on Lap 66. He was trailed by Gordon, Hamlin, Vickers, Burton, Kahne, Kurt Busch, Newman, Montoya and Kenseth. Johnson was running 29th after his team worked to repair the damage sustained when he scraped the wall.

Another caution came out on lap 84 after Greg Biffle triggered a three-car accident that also involved Martin Truex and Jimmie Johnson. Biffle's car broke loose and slid sideways in front of Truex, who turned his car sideways to avoid Biffle. Johnson did the same thing but slid into Truex's Toyota.

Stewart was leading on the Lap 89 restart after not pitting. He was trailed by Gordon and Hamlin but Gordon took the lead again on Lap 92. Hamlin moved into second and McMurray held down the third spot. Rounding out the top 10 were Kurt Busch, Kahne, Burton, Stewart, Montoya, Kyle Busch and Harvick.

A round of green flag pit stops took place between Laps 141 and 145 and Hamlin came out in the lead with Gordon right behind him. Kyle Busch was third. McMurray was next followed by Kurt Busch, Montoya, Kahne, Harvick, Vickers and Earnhardt. Stewart was 11th at the time. Another caution fell on Lap 171 when Sam Hornish, Jr., slammed the outside wall.

On the restart, the field barely made a lap before the caution came out again when Kevin Conway hit the wall. Another accident under the caution knocked Johnson and Allmendinger out of the race. Allmendinger was trying to catch up to the field under caution and lost his brakes. He dove low on the track trying to miss everyone and lost control. His car spun backwards up the track and crashed hard into the driver's door of Johnson's car. The impact trashed both cars.

The race was restarted at Lap 190 with McMurray, Kyle Busch and Gordon out front.

we put a deal together.

"The thing that I really liked was the direction of the team — Yates motors under the hood, plans to expand to more than one car, then Ford coming on board. There are some challenges and disadvantages, but there are a lot of things I really like. I've been around the sport for a long time, and I feel like I have a lot to bring to the table, and with this being a smaller team, I feel like my voice is heard."

As for Darlington Raceway, she made her voice heard, as well. With a Saturday night event, tremendous fan support and the added benefit of being, well, Darlington, the track "Too Tough To Tame" proved she was exactly that. The Showtime Southern 500 weekend in May has quickly become one of the most popular and highly anticipated annual stops on the Sprint Cup Series circuit.

Over at Front Row Motorsports, the building process continues. It isn't easy, but as we see so often in NASCAR, steady can win the race.

"I feel like nobody really expects much out of this team," Kvapil says. "All the guys have been with bigger teams, teams with budgets and hundreds of people on staff. We're very small. We don't have all the resources of everyone else, and I feel like nobody really expects much out of us, but we're working very hard and we feel like when we make it through and the economy turns around and sponsors want to start spending money in the sport, they will look at us."

"Then, we can really elevate this team."

The story of that famous train that simply refused to quit has become a classic for a

reason. It is a tale not of adversity, but of triumph. Because lest we forget, the Little Engine That Could ... did.

Contact Cathy Elliott at cathyelliott@hotmail.com.

KVAPIL

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to Yates Racing, where he stayed for the entire season and the first five races of the following year, before the team was forced to shut down due to lack of funding.

When NASCAR was in the very early stages of its mainstream explosion a couple of decades ago, there was perhaps no better-known speedway in America than Darlington Raceway. RJR, sponsor of the Cup Series at the time, gave the track the designation of one of NASCAR's "crown jewels" by naming it part of the Winston Million bonus promotion, along with Daytona, Talladega and Charlotte.

But Darlington eventually fell victim to NASCAR's geographic expansion, losing one of its two Sprint Cup Series weekends entirely. And, in what was considered by many to be even worse, after more than five decades of racing on Labor Day weekend, it was announced that Darlington's one Cup race would move to May, on Mother's Day weekend.

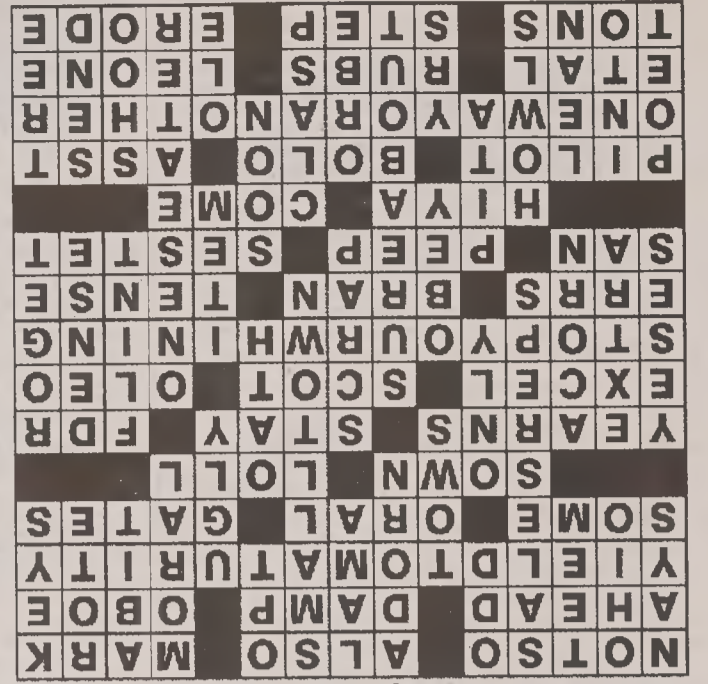
Last year, John Andretti piloted the No. 34 for still-young Front Row Motorsports. During the summer, when Andretti headed out to compete in the Indianapolis 500, the team's manager approached Kvapil about driving the car while he was gone.

"That didn't work out, but we kind of stayed in touch throughout the summer and I felt like we were all heading in the direction of putting this team together for this year," Kvapil says.

"We did a few races together — at Charlotte, Homestead, Martinsville — and everyone got to know one another, and

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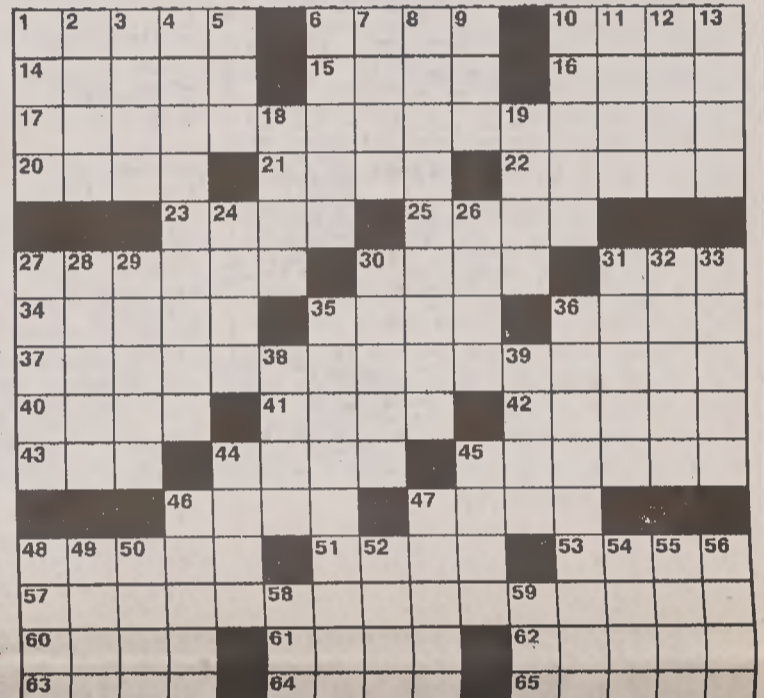
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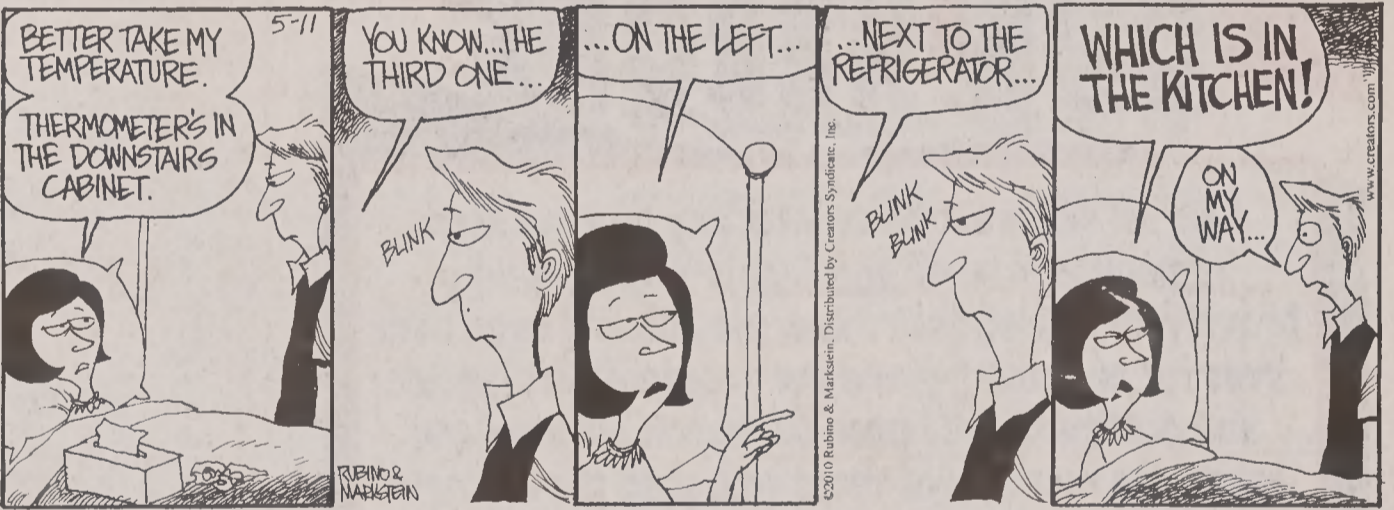
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|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| ACROSS | 61 Messages | 11 Slightly | 36 Small airplane |
| 1 Untrue | 62 Sierra ___
(African nation) | 12 Learning method | 38 Follow instructions |
| 6 In addition | 63 Large quantity | 13 Door openers | 39 News story |
| 10 Exam grade | 64 Stairway part | 18 Pulls along behind | 44 Bread with a pocket |
| 14 In the lead | 65 Wear away | 19 The ___ Duckling
(Andersen story) | 45 Any day now |
| 15 Slightly moist | | 24 Merely | 46 Coyote calls |
| 16 Woodwind instrument | DOWN | 26 Courtroom ritual | 47 Necklace part |
| 17 Bond investor's statistic | 1 Thumbs-down votes | 27 Thumbs-up votes | 48 Verse writer |
| 20 A few | 2 Where Cincinnati is | 28 Something additional | 49 A big fan of |
| 21 Vocal | 3 Be abundant | 29 Squirrel meal | 50 Tilt |
| 22 Iron entryways | 4 Employees on commission | 30 Throw out | 52 Eat ___ eaten
(law of the jungle) |
| 23 Scattered, as seeds | 5 Peculiar | 31 Spark producer | 54 "Get away from here!" |
| 25 Lounge around | 6 Deck out | 32 Thickly packed | 55 Ship out |
| 27 Longs (for) | 7 The Dalai ___ | 33 Thesaurus author | 56 Cedar or sycamore |
| 30 Don't leave | 8 Tiny dot on a state map | 35 Convinced of | 58 Many mos. |
| 31 WWII-era president | 9 Make a choice | | 59 Spanish cheer |
| 34 Perform very well | 10 End of a fable | | |
| 35 Kilt wearer | | | |
| 36 Margarine | | | |
| 37 Order to a complainer | | | |
| 40 Makes a mistake | | | |
| 41 High-fiber cereal | | | |
| 42 Feeling nervous | | | |
| 43 ___ Francisco, CA | | | |
| 44 Chick's chirp | | | |
| 45 Six-person band | | | |
| 46 Informal greeting | | | |
| 47 Attend | | | |
| 48 Airline employee | | | |
| 51 Southwestern necktie | | | |
| 53 Aide: Abbr. | | | |
| 57 Somehow | | | |
| 60 And others: Abbr. | | | |



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