

Justin Lofton celebrated his 25th birthday on Friday at the Daytona International Speedway, coinciding with the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series' season opener, the NextEra Energy Resources 250.

"Friday was a lot of fun. It's always cool to celebrate my birthday the week of Daytona, but it was really special this year to have the race fall on my birthday," Lofton said.

After months of anticipation, the event marked the debut for the 2009 ARCA Racing Series champion with his new team Germain Racing. Lofton and crew chief Ryan Fugle showed instant chemistry, as the duo had no problem securing a starting spot for the 100-lap Friday night race after Lofton grabbed the 17th starting position in his No. 77 Lofton Cattle Toyota Tundra.

Once the green flag fell Lofton needed only six laps to move into the top-10. By lap 20 however, Lofton radioed Fugle that his Tundra was running a bit hot, causing him to have to move around in the draft in order to get more air into the nose of his machine in order to cool down the rising temperatures.

Under green on lap 28, Lofton drove the No. 77 Toyota down pit road for his first pit stop of the night. The crew got to work, changing right side tires and adding fuel.

10 laps later, the first caution flag of the event waved, allowing Lofton to make another stop. This time the crew swapped out all four tires, added fuel, and made an adjustment under the rear end of the No. 77. The additional work cost Lofton a lap, but by the next caution on lap 55, Lofton was given the free pass, putting him back on the lead lap.

Fugle then made the call on lap 56 and again on lap 67 to bring Lofton down pit road in order to top off on fuel. With 33 laps remaining, he informed his driver, "Use long gears. We're good to lap 101, but save all you can for a green-white-checkered."

Just 10 laps later however, a multi-truck wreck broke out in turn 1. Over a dozen trucks were involved, including Lofton. With damage to the Lofton Cattle machine, the newly 25-year-old drove to pit road for repairs.

Lofton returned to the track, but a bent truck arm left Lofton with a challenge behind the wheel. On lap 85, the truck broke loose, sending Lofton spinning through the tri-oval. After additional repairs, Lofton rejoined the race.

With just two laps remaining, the caution fell following a 10-truck accident across the front stretch. Luckily, Lofton missed the melee.

After waiting out a 10-minute red flag for clean-up, Lofton took the restart from the 24th position for a race-extending green-white-checkered finish.

With the help of spotter Mark Green, Lofton maneuvered his way through the draft on the 2.5-mile superspeedway, wheeling his way to a solid 18th place finish.

"We had a tough race but the guys did a great job working on the truck and we pulled out a solid result. We have a great group of guys here and it feels good to get our first race together under our belts. I'm real excited about heading to Phoenix next. It is one of my favorite tracks," Lofton added.

Lofton and the No. 77 Toyota Tundra team will next hit the track on Friday, February 25th at the Phoenix International Raceway for the Lucas Oil 150.

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