DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (February 19, 2011) – The 2011 NASCAR Camping World Truck Series season kicked off Friday night, under the lights of Daytona International Speedway. Max Papis and the No. 9 GEICO Toyota team prepared for battle as 36 competitors eyed the prestigious trophy at the track that is known for hard racing and big wrecks.

On Thursday evening under cool temperatures, Papis completed his two-lap qualifying attempt and placed his GEICO Tundra in the 36th starting position for the 100-lap race. The buzz around the 2.5-mile superspeedway on Friday night, prior to the green flag waving, was electric as the Truck Series began one of the most competitive seasons in its history of existence. Mad Max pulled the belts tight in his Germain Racing truck and was ready to draft to the front of the field.

The first lap of the race saw Papis gain 13 positions, to 23rd-place on the grid. The field settled in a single-file draft, while remaining caution-free. Crew chief Randy Goss called Papis to pit road under green flag conditions on lap 30 for right-side tires and fuel. Unfortunately, the Toyota didn't get full of fuel, sending the No. 9 GEICO truck off sequence with the rest of their fellow competitors. A much-needed break for the team came when the first caution was brought out on lap 39. Papis returned to pit road to top off with fuel and restarted on lap 43 from the 25th position.

Papis patiently completed laps, keeping up with the draft but working to stay out of looming trouble. A second caution slowed the field on lap 55 as the Italian was scored in 24th-place.

Goss once again brought Papis to the attention of his GEICO crew for Sunoco racing fuel. When the race went back to green on lap 58, Papis was inside the top-20 and the action started to heat up. By lap 65, the Gecko broke into the top-10 on the track.

The third caution came out on lap 67 and Papis returned to pit road for one additional can of fuel. A small issue on pit road with the new fueling system pushed Papis back to the 21st position for the restart on lap 70. The first “big one” happened a short six laps later and the GEICO Tundra received some damage to the right-rear quarter panel. A series of pit stops over the next few laps allowed the team to repair the damage, change four tires, and top off with fuel.

Restarting from 18th-place on lap 82, Papis only had three short laps before the yellow flag was waved for the fifth time. Remaining on the track and keeping his position, Mad Max was lined up in the draft with fellow Germain Racing teammate Todd Bodine. The two Toyotas hooked up nose to tail and worked their way back into the top-10 by lap 90. The drafting dance continued to shuffle with the laps quickly counting down.

The final caution and the second “big one” took place on lap 98, which collected Bodine and Papis. Bodine was unable to continue but Papis came to pit road for repairs and four fresh Goodyear tires. Once the debris and wrecked trucks were cleared from the track, the stage was set for a green-white-checkered finish on lap 102. In the final two laps, Papis gained four spots to bring home a 12th-place finish in the season opener.

“I’m very proud of everyone who works on this GEICO Toyota,” said Papis after the race. “All the guys never gave up and kept working on the truck when we would get some damage from the wrecks. We kept going and I’m very happy with a 12th-place finish, when you consider what type of finish we could have had. I feel very confident that we will contend for a win before this season is over.”

Papis and the No. 9 GEICO team will head to Phoenix International Raceway for the second race of the 2011 Camping World Truck Series season. The race can be seen live on SPEED, Friday, February 25, at 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

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