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The GEICO Racing Team Battles Back from Three Laps Down at The Lady In Black

DARLINGTON, S.C. (March 13, 2011) – Known as the track that's 'Too Tough To Tame', Darlington Raceway proves to be a challenge for most teams that take on the historic asphalt track. Max Papis and the No. 9 GEICO Toyota Tundra team relished the opportunity to face 'The Lady In Black' as the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series rolled into town for the third stop of the 2011 season.

Another one day show for the Truck Series saw Papis and his Germain Racing team practice, qualify, and race all in a jam-packed schedule. After two and half hours of practice under the morning sun, Papis was confident in the set-up package in his GEICO Toyota. Without 2010 championship points to guarantee a spot in the 36-truck field, the Como, Italy native once again had to solidify his place in the Too Tough To Tame 200 with his qualifying attempt. With the temperature rising, Papis clocked a solid lap time of 28.798 seconds, placing the Gecko in the 18th starting position.

The green flag waved on the 147-lap race and immediately 'The Lady' struck, as a multi-truck accident collected Papis in turns one and two on the first lap. The No. 9 GEICO Toyota was hit on both the left and right sides of the truck, causing a lack of sideforce for the remainder of the event. Crew chief Randy Goss called his driver to pit road numerous times to repair the

damage, change four tires, add Sunoco fuel, and make adjustments. The field restarted on lap five, with Papis scored in the 34th position. Three quick cautions were displayed over the next 35 circuits, as Mad Max had driven his way up to 26th-place.

On the lap 41 restart, the field checked up in front of the GEICO Tundra forcing Papis to pass trucks in front of him prior to crossing the start-finish line. Despite his attempt to avoid a wreck, a 'pass-through' penalty was assessed to the driver for this action. Having to drive down pit road under green flag conditions on lap 45, Papis lost three laps to the leaders and became mired back in the 33rd position. A caution for debris slowed the field on lap 59, allowing Papis to stay out and take the wave around to get one of the laps back.

Restarting on lap 63, Papis, two laps down, continued to remain optimistic while running in 32nd-place and unable to gain positions on the track. Clocking consistent lap times, another yellow flag was brought out on lap 74. Goss brought Papis back down pit road for four fresh tires, an air pressure adjustment to help the tight handling condition, and fuel. The Italian took the green flag on lap 79 from the 30th position. A short 10 laps later, the seventh caution slowed the pace, allowing Papis to take the wave around once again to receive another lap back. Running in the 28th position, Mad Max was the only truck one lap down to the leaders and in position for the Lucky Dog Award on the next caution.

That timely caution came just two laps later for a major wreck on the frontstretch, which caused a red flag period for clean up to take place. Once the red flag was lifted, Goss radioed for Papis to come back to the attention of his GEICO crew for four tires, fuel, and additional air pressure adjustments. The resilient nature of the Gecko was shown as the team retained their position back on the lead lap. Mad Max was on a mission to make up lost ground with 40 laps remaining in the race. By lap 107, Papis had battled his way into the 21st position.

Another debris caution was brought out on lap 119 and Papis returned to pit road for the final time of the evening for two right side tires and a wedge bolt adjustment as the GEICO Toyota was still fighting a tight condition. On lap 123, Papis restarted from 20th-place and drove his way into the top-15 in a 10-lap period. The final yellow flag came on lap 141, setting the stage for a three-lap shootout to the checkered flag. Unfortunately on the restart, the field stacked up again and drivers passed Papis in order to avoid an accident. This caused Mad Max three spots and left the GEICO team with an 18th-place finish.

“It was a tough night for the GEICO Racing team, but we came back to get a top-20 finish in the end,” said Papis, after the race. “Darlington is a very demanding track for the driver and we got caught up in that wreck on lap one. The guys kept working on it and we got back on the lead lap, which we wanted to do from the beginning when we got behind. We also had that penalty in the middle of the race for passing before the start-finish line. That was very frustrating because I was just dodging trucks to not cause a big pile-up. We will take another good finish though and head to Martinsville in a couple weeks. I think we will have a very strong Toyota Tundra when we hit the track.”

The tremendous effort shown by the entire No. 9 team has allowed Papis to remain inside the top-10 in the Truck Series Driver Championship Point Standings. Papis sits in the ninth position, only five points behind eighth-place Austin Dillon. The NASCAR Camping World Truck Series will take a three-week break before returning to action at Martinsville (Va.) Speedway on Saturday, April 2nd.

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