

## **JGR roars back on track after rocky 2 weeks**

Written by Nancy Spencer

Monday, May 13, 2013 10:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 13, 2013 10:11 PM

---

**By JENNA FRYER**

**The Associated Press**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — When Joe Gibbs publicly addressed the illegal part found in Matt Kenseth's engine, the team owner was respectful of NASCAR's inspection process but adamant about the importance of not sullyng Joe Gibbs Racing's reputation over an infraction he insisted was not intentional.

When an appeals board last week reduced most of the penalties NASCAR levied against JGR, Gibbs did not celebrate winning his case. His reaction was reserved, almost subdued, and nothing close to the celebration one might have expected over an issue that was so important to him.

Perhaps it's because JGR chose to do its celebrating on the race track.

JGR came roaring back from two rocky weeks fighting NASCAR by blowing the doors off the competition at Darlington Raceway, where it swept last weekend's races. Kenseth won the Sprint Cup race on Saturday night, Kyle Busch won the Nationwide Series race on Friday night and nobody came close to challenging the organization.

Busch routed the field in the Nationwide race and led JGR drivers Elliott Sadler and Brian Vickers across the finish line. Kenseth wound up fifth to give JGR first, second, third and fifth in the first race of the weekend.

In the Cup race, it looked like it was going to be Busch again as he led a race-high 265 laps. But

## JGR roars back on track after rocky 2 weeks

Written by Nancy Spencer

Monday, May 13, 2013 10:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 13, 2013 10:11 PM

---

a flat tire in the homestretch caused Busch to fade to a sixth-place finish. Sailing past him was Kenseth for his series-leading third win of the season and teammate Denny Hamlin, who made it a 1-2 JGR finish in Hamlin's first full race since suffering a compression fracture of a vertebra in his lower back.

When asked to explain JGR's performance at Darlington, team President J.D. Gibbs downplayed any magic formula.

"I just think our whole team — we've just got a great team from top to bottom, drivers, crew chiefs, guys that travel, guys back at the shop," Gibbs replied. "I think that really pays off on the weekend. It pays off in Nationwide. That's kind of our training ground for our guys to move up to Cup. Then it pays off in Cup. We have guys that work hard, long hours. They enjoy it; they enjoy winning races, too."

The weekend sweep came on the heels of a trying two weeks for the Gibbs organization.

One of the connecting rods in Kenseth's race-winning engine from Kansas did not meet the minimum weight requirements and NASCAR punished the organization with one of the toughest penalties in recent history. Joe Gibbs didn't dispute the part was illegal and manufacturer Toyota accepted full blame.

What was important to Gibbs was proving that there was no intent to deceive on the part of JGR or Toyota and that the part did not provide any competitive advantage. So the team went through the appeals process for the first time in its history and won a rare victory at the first level in getting most of the penalties reduced.

Kenseth still had to go to Darlington without crew chief Jason Ratcliff, who had his suspension reduced from six races to one.

It made no difference, though, as Kenseth was steady all weekend behind fill-in crew chief Wally Brown and found himself in position to pounce as Busch began to fade for the first Southern 500 win of Kenseth's career.

## JGR roars back on track after rocky 2 weeks

Written by Nancy Spencer

Monday, May 13, 2013 10:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 13, 2013 10:11 PM

---

In some regards, it's the addition of Kenseth that has pushed JGR to what seems to be a higher level this year. The 2003 champion is the consummate professional on and off the track. He rides out the highs and lows with an even keel and brings a steadiness the organization hasn't had since Bobby Labonte departed at the end of 2005.

JGR still had a veteran after Labonte left in Tony Stewart but the temperamental driver was never the role model Hamlin needed. Busch only spent one season with Stewart at JGR and when Stewart left in 2009, Hamlin became the most senior driver in the shop — a quiet leader with proven on-track credentials that demand respect from Busch and Hamlin.

"I think Denny and Kyle really like having him, hearing what he has to say," J.D. Gibbs said. "On the race track, he just has a gift. So I think it's really been a blessing for Joe Gibbs Racing to have him join our team. We look forward to a great future."

Behind the scenes, JGR has also worked extremely hard to overcome shortcomings.

The move this year by NASCAR to the new Gen-6 race car was a clean slate for everyone and JGR seized the opportunity to get out front in development. Employees at the shop studied the new specifications and built new cars around the new weight rules, while the crews worked hard to understand the new rear camber rules and how it affected the rear tires.

It's been clear all season that JGR did its homework: The team has won five out of 11 Cup races between Kenseth and Busch, who both rank inside the top eight in the Sprint Cup standings. Hamlin missed four races with his injury but still ranks 27th, one spot behind Talladega winner David Ragan, and ahead of Danica Patrick and Labonte.

In the Nationwide Series, Busch has won five of the eight races he's entered and Sadler and Vickers are both inside the top five in points.

It's been seven years since Stewart gave JGR its last Cup title and the team has gone down

## **JGR roars back on track after rocky 2 weeks**

Written by Nancy Spencer

Monday, May 13, 2013 10:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 13, 2013 10:11 PM

---

swinging several times since with both Busch and Hamlin.

It's too early to tell if this year will be the season JGR puts together a full season but the performance is high right now.

"I think we have been strong in the past but I think what we've learned over all these years is you have to be consistent," J.D. Gibbs added. "You can't start off too strong. To me, it's just that consistency. I think our guys really get that at the shop."