

## Newman replaces Truex in NASCAR chase

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**By JENNA FRYER**

**Associated Press**

CONCORD, N.C. — While Clint Bowyer's spin got all the attention at Richmond, a few questions from a puzzled Brian Vickers and the promise of a post-race kiss led to one hefty punishment from NASCAR.

Ryan Newman replaced Martin Truex Jr. in the Chase for the Sprint Cup Championship on Monday night when NASCAR penalized Michael Waltrip Racing for manipulating the outcome of last weekend's race.

Michael Waltrip Racing was fined \$300,000 and general manager Ty Norris received an indefinite suspension. Truex, Bowyer and Vickers were docked 50 points apiece — but Bowyer's deduction does not affect his position in the Chase, which begins Sunday at Chicago.

"We penalize to not have this happen again," NASCAR President Mike Helton said. "It's a message from the league saying 'You can't do this'."

Newman was leading with seven laps remaining Saturday night at Richmond, where a victory would have given him the final spot in the 12-driver Chase field. But Bowyer spun to bring out a caution, setting in motion a chain of events that ultimately led to Newman losing the race and Bowyer teammate Truex earning the final Chase berth.

While examining the situation, NASCAR reviewed communication between Bowyer and his Michael Waltrip Racing crew that seemed to indicate the spin was deliberate, as well as

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additional evidence that suggested MWR had Bowyer and Vickers take a dive over the final three laps so Joey Logano would knock Jeff Gordon out of Chase contention in yet another attempt to help Truex.

NASCAR did not adjust the standings to put Gordon into the Chase — he was in before Bowyer's spin — because Helton said it was impossible to address all the scenarios.

"We know from experience, if you try to look at ripple effect, you can't cover all bases that's equitable and credible across board," explained Helton, who added NASCAR was unable to prove Bowyer spun intentionally. "There's a lot of chatter but we didn't see any conclusive evidence."

The AP reviewed team communications for Bowyer and Vickers on Sunday and Vickers was told by Norris to pit because "We need that one point."

"We're probably going to pit here on green," Norris says.

"Are you talking to me?" a surprised Vickers asks.

Vickers continued to question the call, at one point asking, "I don't understand, pit right now?"

"You've got to pit this time. We need that one point," Norris replies.

"10-4. Do I got a tire going down?" Vickers asked.

Vickers then pitted as the field went green. When he asked after if his crew found anything with the tire, Norris replied, "I'll see you after the race, Brian; I owe you a kiss."

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Helton indicated Monday that conversation between Norris and Vickers, with Vickers' confusion over the directives he was given, was the smoking gun against MWR.

"Ty Norris confirmed the conversation most everyone has heard with the 55 driver," Helton said.

Waltrip also mentioned the sequence when he apologized in a statement on Monday night.

"What occurred on the No. 55 radio at the end of Saturday night's race in Richmond was a split-second decision made by team spotter Ty Norris to bring the No. 55 to pit lane and help a teammate earn a place in the Chase," he said. "We regret the decision and its impact."

Gordon's reaction to NASCAR's ruling focused on Truex, who did nothing to land in his teammates' mess, and Bowyer, who escaped unscathed.

"Feel bad for Truex. He got in under controversy, now out due to it. But the guy who started all of this not effected at all??? Don't agree!" Gordon posted on Twitter.

Bowyer denied Saturday night he intentionally spun and Truex was an unwitting participant. Waltrip said the team will learn from what happened and move on.

"As general manager, Ty Norris has been an integral part of Michael Waltrip Racing since its founding and has my and (co-owner) Rob Kauffman's full support," Waltrip added.

The controversy surrounding Saturday's race put a damper on Newman's Monday announcement that he had reached a deal with Richard Childress Racing to replace Jeff Burton next season in the No. 31 Chevrolet.

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“What happened to me Saturday night is the toughest thing that I’ve ever gone through in any kind of racing in my 30 years of driving because of the way everything went down,” Newman said.

Now Newman gets the chance to compete for the title in his final races with Stewart-Haas Racing. He won the Brickyard this year and has 17 career victories overall.

“Obviously, we’re very pleased with NASCAR’s decision to provide Ryan Newman’s rightful place in this year’s Chase,” SHR co-owner Tony Stewart wrote in a statement. “NASCAR was put in a very difficult position Saturday night at Richmond and we commend the sanctioning body for taking the time to do the necessary due diligence to ensure that the right call was made.”

MWR can appeal the penalties, which included placing crew chiefs Brian Pattie (Bowyer), Scott Miller (Vickers) and Chad Johnston (Truex) on probation through the end of the year. While Norris can work through the appeal process if MWR chooses to appeal, it won’t change Truex’s status in the Chase.

In-car audio from Saturday night’s race framed the situation as Bowyer’s crew goading him into spinning his car to bring out the yellow in an effort to prevent Newman from winning. Also, it became apparent early Sunday morning that Bowyer and Vickers further aided Truex by taking a dive over the final three laps.

When the race resumed with three laps to go, Gordon was poised to claim the 10th spot in the Chase and Logano was ahead of Truex in position to claim the second wild card.

But Bowyer and Vickers both made pit stops in the final three laps that allowed Logano to improve his position and move ahead of Gordon. That bumped Gordon from contention and freed the wild card for Truex. Gordon was not eligible for the wild card.