



Gordon Continues to Lead Point Standings Following Third-Place Finish at Martinsville

"Everybody's going to step up their game during the Chase, so we've got to step up our game, too," said points leader Jeff Gordon prior to Sunday's Subway 500 at Martinsville Speedway. "If they've stepped it up more than us during one particular weekend, we have to keep them in our sights.

"If they finish first or second, we need to finish third or fourth."

Although he started from the pole and led a race-high 168 laps, Gordon knew the fastest car at the 0.526-mile track was built in the 24/48 shop at Hendrick Motorsports. Unfortunately for him, it had a No. 48 decal on the side and was driven by Jimmie Johnson, Gordon's teammate and closest competitor in the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup standings.

Johnson held off a late challenge by Ryan Newman to post his third consecutive victory at the Virginia short track while Gordon crossed the line third. Gordon now leads Johnson by 53 markers with only four races remaining in the 2007 season.

Gordon, who led the first 108 laps, had to overcome adversity to post his 20th top-five finish of the year. During a lap 171 four-tire pit stop, the left rear lug nuts were not completely tightened. Gordon was forced to make an unscheduled stop on lap 171 to tighten the lug nuts and surrendered 27 positions making the additional stop.

"We were pretty good at the beginning," Gordon explained to the media after the race. "But, as more rubber was laid down, the track's handling began to change. We tried making some adjustments, but we just couldn't get the car to work on the short runs.

"It was good on long runs, but we didn't seem to get any long runs at the end of the race.

"I think Jimmie's car was a little bit better than the DuPont Chevrolet today. But we've got to feel fortunate to come back from that pit road miscue and all that lost track position to finish third. Like I said, we're not going to win every week.

"When we don't, we need to keep them in our sights like we did today.

"We could have gotten down when that pit road mistake occurred. But Steve did a great job of keeping the spirits of the team high, and keeping me pumped up, as well.

"And then he made some great calls to regain that track position.

"We were hoping for a win, but we are happy to come away with a third."

Next Sunday, the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series visits Atlanta Motor Speedway for the Pep Boys Auto 500. ABC and MRN Radio will broadcast the race live beginning at 1 p.m. EDT.

Subway 500 results (unofficial)

1. Jimmie Johnson
2. Ryan Newman
- 3. Jeff Gordon**
4. Kyle Busch
5. Matt Kenseth
6. Denny Hamlin
7. Greg Biffle
8. Juan Pablo Montoya
9. Clint Bowyer
10. Kevin Harvick

Point standings (unofficial)

- 1. Jeff Gordon**
2. Jimmie Johnson (-53)
3. Clint Bowyer (-115)
4. Tony Stewart (-249)
5. Carl Edwards (-288)
6. Kyle Busch (-290)
7. Kevin Harvick (-369)
8. Denny Hamlin (-374)
9. Jeff Burton (-406)
10. Kurt Busch (-420)
11. Martin Truex, Jr. (-447)
12. Matt Kenseth (-462)