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Misfortune Rears Its Ugly Head at VIR

Angelelli, No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Spun Off Track Three Laps from Finish To Spoil Possible Podium, Seemingly Certain Top-Five Finish

(Alton, VA) 25 April 2009 - It's amazing how "unlucky" and "13" always seem to find their way into the same sentence, like into the storyline that describes the outcome of Saturday's Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series Bosch Engineering 250 at Virginia International Raceway (VIR) in Alton for Max Angelelli and the rest of the No. 10 SunTrust Ford Dallara team of Wayne Taylor Racing.

Angelelli and the SunTrust Racing machine were just three laps from a solid, top-five finish when they found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time heading into turn one on a restart, got punted off the track as the result of contact between two other cars, and were left in the grass, unable to continue due to heavy rear-end damage to the car.

So, rather than a potential podium run, Angelelli, co-driver Brian Frisselle and the SunTrust team leave VIR with 13th place and a good bit of repair work to do before taking to the track again in less than a week's time.

Angelelli was sitting in fifth place on the lap-78 restart and had a good run on the inside of the fourth-place No. 58 Brumos Porsche of David Donohue. As they approached the sharp, right-hand turn one, Donohue then made heavy contact into the back of the No. 01 Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates Lexus of Scott Pruett, spinning the No. 01 into the rear of Angelelli in the SunTrust Ford and sent the No. 10 off the track.

While Angelelli remained stuck in the grass for rest of the final three laps, Pruett was only able to limp his car back to the pits, where it retired in 12th place. Donohue and the No. 58 Brumos Porsche went on to finish third when the checkered flag flew on lap 81, right behind the race-winning No. 99 Gainsco/Bob Stallings Racing Pontiac Riley of Alex Gurney and Jon Fogarty, and the runner-up No. 6 Michael Shank Racing Ford Riley of Michael Valiante and John Pew. Both the Ganassi and Wayne Taylor Racing teams questioned why Donohue and the No. 58 team were not penalized for avoidable contact during the incident.

"It's very disappointing to walk back to the paddock and see a driver, who took two cars out of the race, greeting people on the podium and celebrating," said Angelelli, whose team suffered a similar fate at VIR last year when it was punted off the track by the No. 01 car en route to a 17th-place finish. "This is not fair. What I'm asking for

is justice. That team took out three cars in the race today. No penalty. They must be penalized for what they did. This must be addressed. We were good. I was saving fuel, sacrificing myself, playing it safe. Losing the race because of stupidity is not good."

"I am angry," added team owner Wayne Taylor, who co-drove with Angelelli to victory in SunTrust's first visit to VIR in 2004, a runner-up finish with Angelelli in 2006, and celebrated his first victory as a team owner at VIR in 2007 when Angelelli and Jan Magnussen triumphed. "The 58 took out two cars at the end. No penalties, nothing. And we've got a crashed car, again. There needs to be more consistency in the way rules are enforced because we can't afford to keep racing like this with no repercussions."

At various points in Saturday's 2-hour, 45-minute race on the 3.27-mile, 17-turn VIR layout, the SunTrust team flirted with its 35th Grand-Am podium finish early in its sixth season, and possibly even its 13th victory (there's that number again).

Frisselle had a solid opening stint from the eighth starting position, moving into the top-five by the fifth tour of the circuit, and ever-so-briefly into the race lead on lap 18 when the No. 12 Penske Racing Porsche pitted for the first time while Frisselle was running second. Frisselle pitted on lap 20 for the SunTrust team's first fuel-and-tire stop of the day and handed the car over to Angelelli in second place.

Angelelli, who resumed in 10th place, then began a steady march back toward the front. He cracked the top-five on lap 31, crept up to second just two laps later behind the No. 01 Ganassi car, and stayed there until getting called into the pits a final time on lap 44. Angelelli was approaching the entrance to pit road when an off-course excursion by the No. 13 Beyer Racing entry sent that car into the tire barrier.

The team hurriedly called Angelelli into the pits in anticipation of a yellow flag for the Beyer car's incident, as did a number of other teams that were on track behind the SunTrust car. Angelelli resumed with fuel enough to make it to the end of the race, but only if he drove in fuel conservation mode most of the rest of the way. Such was the case for the other teams who stopped on lap 44.

A final caution flag on lap 74, with Angelelli in fifth place, eliminated the need for the lead-pack cars to conserve fuel and set up a final, three-lap dash to the finish. For the SunTrust and Ganassi teams, their top-five runs were not to be.

"I'm disappointed," Taylor said. "The team did an outstanding job today. We got out in front of everybody on the last pit stop. There was a miscommunication about whether the yellow flag was out or not, and the (No.) 99 and the (No.) 6 got in front of us. And then, on that last restart, Max was in the right place. Donohue just drove straight into the back of Pruett. Pruett spun, hit us and took us out of the race. And they let the race carry on when, historically, they would have issued a penalty. And

in the beginning of the race, the same (No. 58) car punted the (No.) 76 car out for good. That's not right."

Frisselle, the 25-year-old from Aspen, Colo., who scored his first career Rolex Series victories on back-to-back weekends in Montreal and Watkins Glen, N.Y., last August while driving for the AIM Autosport Ford Riley team, found a measure of consolation in his opening stint during the race after being disappointed with his first qualifying outing for the SunTrust team on Friday.

"The first stint went really well," Frisselle said. "We were saving tires. Everything went well. I felt terrible yesterday. I knew this car belonged further up the grid than that. I didn't deliver what I needed to deliver in qualifying. So, coming out of it today and handing the car off to Max in second felt really good. Max did a great job. The team did a phenomenal job. I think we had the best strategy out there. There was a bit of a communication error on the final pit stop and we gave up a couple of positions. Had that not happened, we just might have come out first. But the SunTrust car was really solid. We have some things to improve. It was a good run, but an unfortunate ending for what we did today."

The Rolex Series competitors will be back on track next Sunday (May 3) for the Verizon Wireless 250 at New Jersey Motorsports Park in Millville. The second-ever Rolex Series race at the 2.25-mile road circuit will be carried live on SPEED-TV at 1 p.m. EDT.

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