

= 2003 Food City 500 =

The 2003 Food City 500 was the sixth stock car race of the 2003 NASCAR Winston Cup Series . It was held on March 23 , 2003 , before a crowd of 160 @, @ 000 , in Bristol , Tennessee , at Bristol Motor Speedway , one of five short tracks to hold NASCAR races . The 500 @-@ lap race was won by Kurt Busch of the Roush Racing team after starting from ninth position . Matt Kenseth finished in second and Bobby Labonte came in third .

Although Ryan Newman won the pole position , he was immediately passed by Jeff Gordon at the start of the race . Twenty @-@ eight laps later Rusty Wallace became the leader of the race . Gordon reclaimed the lead on lap 34 and led the most laps with 174 . Jimmy Spencer passed Gordon for the lead on lap 161 , and kept the position for a total of 139 laps . After the final pit stops , Busch became the leader of the race and maintained the position to lead a total of 116 laps , and to win his first race of the season . There were seventeen cautions and eleven lead changes among seven different drivers during the course of the race .

The race was Busch 's first win in the 2003 season , as well as fifth of his career . The result advanced Busch to second in the Drivers ' Championship , one hundred and thirty @-@ eight points behind Kenseth , and nine ahead of Tony Stewart . Ford maintained its lead in the Manufacturers ' Championship , eight ahead of Chevrolet , and eighteen ahead of Pontiac , who bumped Dodge to fourth place , with thirty races of the season remaining .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

The Food City 500 was the sixth scheduled stock car race of the 2003 NASCAR Winston Cup Series , out of 36 . It was held on March 23 , 2003 in Bristol , Tennessee , at Bristol Motor Speedway , one of five short tracks to hold NASCAR races ; the others are Richmond International Raceway , Dover International Speedway , Martinsville Speedway , and Phoenix International Raceway . Its standard track at Bristol Motor Speedway is a four @-@ turn short track oval that is 0 @. @ 533 miles (0 @. @ 858 km) long . The track 's turns are banked from twenty @-@ four to thirty degrees , while both the front stretch (the location of the finish line) and the back stretch are banked from six to ten degrees .

Before the race , Matt Kenseth led the Drivers ' Championship with 760 points , with Tony Stewart in second place with 703 points . Michael Waltrip and Dale Earnhardt Jr. were third and fourth with 698 and 634 points respectively , with Kurt Busch and Ricky Craven were tied for fifth place with 617 points . Dave Blaney , Jimmie Johnson , Joe Nemechek and Johnny Benson Jr. rounded out the top ten . In the Manufacturers ' Championship , Ford was leading with 36 points , five points ahead of their rivals Chevrolet . Pontiac , with 24 points , was five points ahead of Dodge in the battle for third place . Busch was the race 's defending champion .

Ahead of the event , Speedway Motorsports unveiled an extended backstretch grandstand which added 43 @, @ 826 to the track 's capacity . Spectators at the track also planned a " patriotic rally " which showed support to troops serving in the Iraq War . This caused Speedway Motorsports to employ extra security during the event . NASCAR subsequently announced that a contingency plan was being prepared that included arrangements for travel and extra security for the next three races in the season . The United States Government gave its consent to NASCAR and the other professional sporting associations to resume with their normal schedules .

= = = Practice and qualifying = = =

Three practice sessions were held before the Sunday race ? one on Friday and two on Saturday . The first session lasted 120 minutes , while the second and final sessions ran for 45 minutes . Jeff Gordon was fastest in the first practice session with a time of 15 @. @ 149 seconds , ahead of

Sterling Marlin in second and Ryan Newman in third . Ken Schrader (with a lap of 15 @. @ 178) was fourth fastest , and Mike Skinner placed fifth . Busch , Kenny Wallace , Earnhardt , Jimmy Spencer and Nemechek rounded out the session 's top @- @ ten drivers . During the session , Jeff Green and Jamie McMurray both made contact with the wall , and both were required to switch to back @- @ up cars for qualifying . Robby Gordon also hit the wall , after spinning sideways .

Although forty @- @ five drivers were entered in the qualifier ; according to NASCAR 's qualifying procedure , only forty @- @ three could race . Ryan Newman clinched his second pole position of the season , with a time of 14 @. @ 908 . The time made a new track record , and became the first lap set under 15 seconds in the Winston Cup Series . He was joined on the grid 's front row by Jeff Gordon . Schrader qualified third , Rusty Wallace took fourth , and Bill Elliott started fifth . Skinner , Spencer , Earnhardt , Busch and Stewart completed the top ten positions . The two drivers who failed to qualify for the race were Larry Foyt and Hermie Sadler . After the qualifier Newman said , " That 's the most amazed I 've ever been after a qualifying run to go that fast and not anticipate it . We picked up over a quarter of a second from practice , and that 's just unheard of at Bristol . "

On Saturday morning , Kenseth was fastest in the second practice session with a lap of 15 @. @ 683 seconds , ahead of Newman in second and Ward Burton in third . Busch was fourth quickest , and Rusty Wallace took fifth . Jeff Burton managed sixth . Kyle Petty , Mark Martin , Jack Sprague and Nemechek followed in the top ten . During the final practice session , Busch was fastest with a time of 15 @. @ 701 . Stewart and Jeff Gordon followed in second and third with times of 15 @. @ 722 and 15 @. @ 723 . Dave Blaney was fourth fastest , ahead of Earnhardt and Craven . Kenseth was seventh fastest , Martin eighth , Jerry Nadeau ninth , and Ward Burton tenth . The session was temporarily suspended when Marlin spun on the track , but managed to not to collide with the barriers .

= = = Race = = =

The race , the sixth of a total of thirty @- @ six in the 2003 season , and the 2,000th in the Winston Cup Series , began at 1 : 00pm EST and was televised live in the United States on Fox . At the start of the race , weather conditions were sunny . Reverend Mike Rife , of the Vansant Church of Christ in Vansant , Virginia , began pre @- @ race ceremonies with an invocation . Country music singer Rebecca Lynn Howard performed the national anthem , and representatives of the United States Armed Forces commanded the drivers to start their engines . During the pace laps , McMurray had to move to the rear of the grid because of him changing his engine .

Jeff Gordon accelerated faster than Newman off the line , getting ahead of him by the first turn . Rusty Wallace passed Newman for the second position one lap later . On lap three , the first caution was given when Robby Gordon made contact with Petty , forcing him to spin sideways . Kenny Wallace also made contact with Ricky Rudd , but escaped with minor damage . None of the drivers made pit stops during the caution . Jeff Gordon led the field back up to speed at the restart . Jeremy Mayfield made contact with the wall on lap nine , and suffered a flat front right tire . Five laps later , a collision involving Dave Blaney , Michael Waltrip and Dale Jarrett prompted the second caution . Waltrip 's car suffered heavy damage to the rear end of his car .

Almost immediately after the lap 20 restart , a collision between Casey Mears and John Andretti which collected Todd Bodine caused the third caution . Andretti 's car sustained major damage to the front end . The race restarted on lap 29 , with Rusty Wallace claiming the lead . One lap later , Busch and Stewart passed Schrader for seventh and eighth respectively . Earnhardt moved into third after passing Skinner on lap 33 . One lap later , Jeff Gordon reclaimed the first position . On the 42nd lap , Earnhardt passed Rusty Wallace for second . Twelve laps later , Tony Raines stopped on track due to an engine failure , and the fourth caution was given as a result . All of the leaders elected to make pit stops during the caution .

Jeff Gordon maintained his lead at the restart , followed by Terry Labonte and Green . Stewart made contact with Newman , and collected Craven which prompted the fifth caution on lap 68 . Behind the trio , Steve Park hit the rear of Johnson , causing the latter to spin sideways . Most drivers stayed on track during the caution , allowing Jeff Gordon to remain the leader on the restart .

Skinner fell to eighth after being passed by Busch and Earnhardt on the 75th lap . Five laps later , Earnhardt passed Busch to claim sixth . On lap 85 , Skinner fell from eighth to twelfth position . Kenseth , who started the race in thirty @-@ seventh , had moved up thirty @-@ four positions to third by lap 91 . By the 111th lap , Jeff Gordon had maintained a half second lead over Terry Labonte . Thirteen laps later , Spencer and Stewart passed Kenseth for fourth and fifth respectively .

The pace car came out for the sixth caution on lap 136 , after Skinner collided with the wall and his car caught fire . During the caution , all of the leaders elected to make pit stops . Jeff Gordon led on the restart , followed by Nemechek and Spencer . On the 150th lap , the seventh caution came out , after Sprague spun 180 degrees when he attempted to pass Benson and the two made contact . Jeff Gordon led on the restart , although he was passed by Skinner on lap 161 . After starting the race in twenty @-@ eighth , Kevin Harvick moved to sixth position by lap 169 . Eleven laps later , Sprague spun sideways , prompting the eighth caution . During the caution , some of the leaders chose to make pit stops . Jeff Gordon led on the restart .

On the 198th lap , Jeff Burton made contact with Earnhardt , collecting Johnson , with all three cars escaping with minor damage . The ninth caution was prompted on the next lap , after Martin was sent spinning sideways from contact with Bill Elliott . Mears spun sideways before the caution was given . During the caution , some of the leaders elected to make pit stops . Harvick was the leader at the restart , followed by Spencer and Terry Labonte . Robby Gordon collided with the wall on lap 210 , damaging his car and fell to twelfth position . Four laps later , Sadler passed Marlin for eighth . Spencer passed Harvick to reclaim the lead on the 217th lap . Nadeau spun sideways , prompting the tenth caution one lap later . Spencer maintained his lead at the lap 224 restart . On lap 226 , Rudd and Bobby Labonte spun sideways , causing the eleventh caution .

The race restarted on lap 241 . Two laps later , a multi @-@ car collision occurred at turn one when Brett Bodine made contact with Terry Labonte , collecting Kenny Wallace , Robby Gordon , Petty and Schrader , prompting the twelfth caution . Spencer remained the leader at the restart . On lap 256 , McMurray spun sideways after contact with Robby Gordon and Ward Burton , causing the thirteenth caution . Stewart also made contact with Rudd , while Bobby Labonte spun sideways and managed to keep off the barriers . The race restarted on lap 263 . On lap 265 , Earnhardt lost two positions after being passed by Johnson , Jeff Gordon and Kenseth . Eighteen laps later , Kenseth passed Jeff Gordon for the fifth position . By the 300th lap , Kenseth passed Johnson for third . On lap 315 , Busch moved into the fifth position after passing Jeff Gordon .

Green flag pit stops began on lap 327 when Harvick made a pit stop . Kenseth passed Spencer to claim the first position on the 341st lap . Spencer lost another position to Busch four laps later . On lap 348 , Bobby Labonte moved into fifth position after passing Johnson . Eleven laps later , Busch passed Kenseth to claim the lead . On the 367th lap , Earnhardt began to run out of fuel and made a pit stop one lap later . Bobby Labonte claimed the first position off Busch eleven laps later . On lap 390 , the fourteenth caution was prompted , after Jarrett collided with the wall . Schrader spun before the caution came out and damaged the front end of his car . The race restarted on lap 404 , with Busch reclaiming the first position . On lap 407 , the fifteenth caution was given , after Petty spun sideways . Busch remained the leader at the restart , ahead of Bobby Labonte and Rudd . Kenseth passed Biffle for fifth on lap 420 .

Five laps later , the sixteenth caution was prompted , when Ward Burton made contact with Robby Gordon coming off turn four and collected Petty who spun into the barriers at turn one . Busch led the field back up to speed on the lap 439 restart . On the 456th lap , Kenseth passed Rudd to claim third position . Nine laps later , Biffle passed Rudd for fourth position . Martin was spun in front of the race leaders on lap 470 , but managed to continue . Three laps later , the pace car came out for the seventeenth and final caution , which was caused by Nemechek making contact with Stewart , (who just before made contact with Andretti) because of reduced visibility as Martin spun on track . Busch remained the leader at the lap 482 restart . Two laps later , Bobby Labonte was passed by Kenseth for second . On the 488th lap , Rudd reclaimed fourth position off Biffle . Busch crossed the finish line on lap 500 to win his first race of the 2003 season . Kenseth finished second , ahead of Bobby Labonte in third , Rudd in fourth , and Biffle in fifth .

== Post @-@ race ==

Busch appeared in victory lane to celebrate his first win of the season in front of 160,000 people who attended the race . Busch also earned \$ 162,790 in race winnings . Afterward , his crew chief Jimmy Fennig praised his performance , " Kurt Busch is awesome , so awesome . He gets up on the wheel and drives the hell out of that race car , and he made a call today that won him the race . " Kenseth was happy with his second @-@ place finish , commenting , " I feel lucky . Started provisional here at Bristol and coming home second . So , it was a great race . Me and Bobby had to go there a little at the end , and I got my fender knocked in there a little . I was hoping I could make a run at Kurt before that happened . But , it was a good race . It 's always physical out there , and we didn 't have a scratch on the car there until right at the end , so it was pretty good . "

Bobby Labonte was happy with finishing third , commenting , " I got spun out twice and finished third . " It 's a great day . How much greater could you want it to get ? " Spencer , who led 139 laps of the race , was candid about his performance , " It should have been a first , but the Sirius Dodge boys are doing a good job . I wouldn 't trade ' em . We made some mistakes , but we 'll get better . " Mears , who was involved in the lap 20 collision with Andretti and Todd Bodine , commented , " I don 't know what happened . I was just going through the gears taking my time and it looked like somebody up front may have missed a shift or somebody may have got into somebody else . " Terry Labonte , who was part of the race 's biggest crash when Bodine made contact with him on lap 243 , said that , " Any time you 're in a race with a Bodine , you 're liable to get in a wreck , and I did . "

During the race , Jerry Nadeau and Ryan Newman were involved in a battle for position that resulted in the two colliding on the 219th lap . Once Nadeau returned to pit road , he was talking out of anger to Newman 's team personnel about the incident . Once the argument ended , Nadeau commented , " It 's a shame . It was a great car for us , the U.S. Army Pontiac . Damn lapped @-@ car can 't use his head . I don 't know what Ryan (Newman) was thinking . He just kept coming down , kept coming down . " Newman argued , " It looked to me like the 11 (Bodine) got into the back of the 01 (Nadeau) on that one deal . " Kyle Petty , who was involved in the crash on lap 425 , was taken to the circuit 's infield medical center , and later taken for a precautionary visit at the Bristol Regional Medical Center to undergo medical evaluations . Petty 's crash was measured at 80G , and he suffered injuries to his ribs and abdomen . Petty was replaced by former CART driver Christian Fittipaldi for the next round , the Samsung / Radio Shack 500 at the Texas Motor Speedway .

The race result left Kenseth leading the Drivers ' Championship with 935 points . Busch , who finished first , moved to second on 797 , nine points ahead of Stewart and eleven ahead of Waltrip . Earnhardt Jr. fell to fifth with 749 points . In the Manufacturers ' Championship , Ford maintained the lead with 45 points . Chevrolet remained second on 37 points . Pontiac followed with 27 points , four points ahead of Dodge in fourth . Having increased his points lead , Kenseth said that he was happy and he would not change his driving style because of this change . He also added that his team would " have another six to eight months " before they would start to worry about their rivals making a challenge for the championship . The race took three hours , twenty @-@ five minutes and twenty @-@ two seconds to complete , and the margin of victory was .39th of a second .

== Results ==

== Qualifying ==

== Race ==

== Standings after the race ==

