

## **Great 2016 Start for Cunningham Motorsports' Rookies at Daytona International Speedway**

Daytona Beach, FL – February 15, 2016 – With two rookies piloting the Cunningham Motorsports Dodges at the World Center of Racing for the season opener, the team had high hopes for their results. But, the team was realistic enough to know that at the famed 2.5-mile speedway anything can happen. Chase Briscoe, making his speedway debut with a fourth place finish and Kevin Thomas Jr. (KTJ), making his ARCA Series debut, with a seventh, made their pavement transition appear seamless. It was anything but easy for them.

**Chase Briscoe** – Briscoe made his third ARCA Series start..only his sixth pavement race. After testing at Daytona with his No. 77 team in January, Briscoe picked up right where the team left off from the test when they unloaded the Dodges Thursday. Throughout the entire two hour practice, Briscoe took the top spot on the speed chart. During the final practice Friday, he posted the third quickest speed, right behind teammate KTJ.

Groups for the qualifying runs were set based on best times from both practices, with Briscoe posting the quickest time and KTJ the third fastest. Briscoe took the third spot during Menards Pole Qualifying, giving him a starting spot behind the pole winner.

As the field rolled off of the starting grid, Briscoe slowed to work on his radio connection, ARCA Series officials sent him to the back of the field, giving him an extra challenging start. Briscoe avoided “the Big One” on lap three with nine cars involved, which caused the red flag to fly. After pitting for four fresh General Tires and fuel, green flew as Briscoe set sail for the front from the 22<sup>nd</sup> spot. In three laps he was 14<sup>th</sup>. When yellow flew on lap 17, Briscoe had to take to the apron to avoid the wreck, damaging his left side valence and right front fender. This damage affected the handling for the remainder of the event.

On the final lap before the green, crew chief Chad Bryant brought Briscoe into the pits for fuel and to check over the Dodge. Again he restarted 22<sup>nd</sup> and broke into the top-10 by lap 32. As is the nature of the beast known as Daytona, drafting creates a lot of changes in positions throughout each lap. With 30 laps remaining, Briscoe grabbed the fourth spot, but quickly dropped to sixth as the lead twelve cars fell into single file. In the final three laps, Briscoe picked up two spots to earn his first top-5 finish of the 2016 season.

After the checkered flag dropped, Briscoe commented, “Obviously we wanted to win and felt like we had the car to do it. Things just didn’t fall our way. Overall, we had a really good weekend. These guys at Cunningham, who work on these cars, bring incredible pieces to the track. Thanks to Briggs Cunningham and Kerry Scherer I get this amazing opportunity to drive them.”

**Kevin Thomas, Jr.** – KTJ was not only making his ARCA Series debut, but he was making his superspeedway debut. In addition he has run only a few pavement races. He joined his team for the first time at the open test in January, where he got limited laps because he was also running the Chili Bowl Nationals. During the first practice session, KTJ posted the eighth quickest speed. In Friday’s final practice, he hooked up in the draft with Will Kimmel and teammate, Chase Briscoe to post the second fastest time.

With qualifying in a unique group format, KTJ posted the 16<sup>th</sup> time. Starting in mid-pack can be dangerous....as KTJ found out on lap 3, when the first caution flag flew. As multiple cars started spinning, KTJ

got tagged and sent spinning. With minor front end and right rear damage, crew chief Paul Andrews called his rookie into the pits four times to repair the damage. When the green flew, Thomas found himself back in the 32<sup>nd</sup> spot. After the yellow flew again on lap 17, Andrews brought the Dodge to the pits to continue repairs. With one lap to go before green, on lap 25, Andrews called Thomas back in to fill up with Sunoco fuel.

Throughout the next twenty laps, KTJ continued to pick up spots, all the while gaining valuable experience for the final laps. With 25 laps remaining Thomas had worked his way to ninth. As the final laps wound down, the top-12 cars broke away from the pack. During the final few laps, KTJ hooked up with Frank Kimmel to try the outside lane. As a result of this move, Thomas took the checkered flag in seventh.

After his top-7 finish, the 24 year old rookie said, "We were involved in an early accident, which was definitely not the start that we planned. The crew did an amazing job patching the 22 back together, so we would be competitive. That last lap we finally got the right cars lined up and we got a great finish. We were very fortunate for how the day started."

**Next Race** – The ARCA Series' teams have a long break before their next race at Fairgrounds Speedway Nashville on April 9. During that time, the Cunningham drivers and teams will do some testing, while their drivers will compete at various events outside of ARCA. KTJ is competing in the 2016 World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing at New Smyrna Speedway all this week during Speedweeks. Both drivers plan to race the indoor USAC Midget race on March 19 at Du Quoin State Fairgrounds.

~ **Cunningham Motorsports Press Release** ~