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CUP: NASCAR's Air Titan Delivers At Talladega

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Last Saturday and Sunday, May 4-5 at Talladega Superspeedway, a strong spring storm deposited more than an inch of rain on the grounds around the largest venue in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series. Despite some breaks in the clouds both days, the 2.66-mile track was soaked at the most inopportune times – just before the start of the NASCAR Nationwide Series (May 4) and NASCAR Sprint Cup Series (May 5) races.

However the innovative first phase of the NASCAR-developed Air Titan track-drying system was on site at Talladega and was dispatched for both events. That deployment was the official beginning of a stretch goal charged by NASCAR Chairman Brian France less than a year ago: Significantly reduce the time it takes to dry the track to benefit the fans in the stands and those watching on television.

Until this year, scenarios like these would have led to protracted drying time with jet dryers and vacuum trucks, shortened races due to long track-drying time or postponement of the events altogether.

"We're pleased with the Air Titan's first official on-track results," said Steve O'Donnell, NASCAR senior vice president of racing operations. "This was a great collaboration between NASCAR, our top-tier vendors and the Talladega track services staff." Ring Power supplied 16 large Sullair air compressors to power the Air Titans. Those, in addition to the jets and vacuums, were the components of this system.

"Both days, we saved at least an hour if not more in drying time," O'Donnell said. "We ran the system while it was still raining to stay ahead of the weather and also ran it twice each day, successfully drying the track only to see more rain after we'd gotten it dry. We were able to minimize the drying time for both races so that our fans saw exciting finishes on the scheduled days of the events instead of being forced to alter their plans due to postponements."

O'Donnell also noted that the Air Titan still was able to enhance drying time despite the conditions at Talladega (colder temperatures, dampness and ongoing mist). With sunshine following a rain shower, drying time should improve significantly.

O'Donnell said the NASCAR Air Titan team also took away operational learnings specific to a track the size of Talladega and believes it will be even more effective the next time the technology is used. "We've still got some work to do with the power units (air compressors). We've already prepared mock-ups and have assembled more research to prepare for tests very soon on the next phases of development, cost containment and logistics," he said.

France originally challenged NASCAR's R&D Center to have the Air Titan ready for use for if needed for the 2013 Daytona 500. That goal was met and the system was in place at Daytona International Speedway for the sports' biggest event. The technology also was on

site this year at Martinsville Speedway (where it was successfully used prior to a NASCAR Sprint Cup practice) and Kansas Speedway before its first race-day assignment at Talladega. Discussions are ongoing between NASCAR and its track partners on use of the Air Titan at their venues as the season progresses.

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