

## THE ART OF RACING

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LARSON



## Busch breaks through

The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series race in Texas was marred by numerous wrecks that had many of the favorites exit the race early with extensive damage to their cars. Texas Motor Speedway was repaved last year, plus the cold weather, helped make the track very fast, contributing to the many wrecks.

Kyle Busch finally got the second-place monkey off his back as he held off Kevin Harvick for the victory. Last season, it took 21 races before Kyle Busch won a race and then won four others that year. It took seven races this year for him to win a Cup race. As strong as he has been, he might easily surpass the five wins in 2017. Harvick may have a lot to say about it, as he has been very competitive this year, winning three times already.

Harvick and Kyle Busch were the dominant cars at Texas. Harvick led 87 laps and won the first stage while Busch led 116 laps, winning stage 2 and the race. Harvick probably should have won the race but his pit stops were full of miscues. Harvick and several other teams had NASCAR air gun problems again resulting in loose wheels. Another incident saw a lug nut fly into the jack, preventing it from operating properly resulting in a long pit stop. Harvick did get lucky when his pit crew let a tire get loose which should have resulted in a penalty, but NASCAR, for whatever reason, let it slide. After the race NASCAR admitted it made a mistake on the call. Despite all the pit road miscues that resulted in lost track positions, Harvick still had the fastest car which enabled him to keep moving back into contention.

Harvick's crew chief Rodney Childers spoke up on live TV about the air guns, part of a tire epidemic that plagued the Texas race. Over a quarter of the field pitted under green for loose wheels while several tire failures led to spectacular crashes.

There were eight caution flags. Seven were for incidents on the track. The last six drivers could easily have won the race and normally run in the top 10 in most races. These drivers included Martin Truex, Jr., Kyle Larson, Jimmy Johnson, Denny Hamlin, Brad Keselowski and Aric Almorola.

Kyle Busch maintained his points lead with Joey Logano, Ryan Blaney, Harvick and Truex rounding out the top five.

Sundays race will be in Bristol.

# Calm in the clutch



Dylan Ward rolls a double play during the first inning of Tuesday's game. The Pioneers downed Cookeville 4-3, putting them a game behind in the District 6AAA standings.

Jeffery Simmons photo

## Pioneers prevail in nail-biter

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS  
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard  
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

Brooks Helton wouldn't wilt while facing mounting pressure.

Tasked to protect a perilous 4-3 lead in the sixth inning, the Pioneer junior pulled his best Houdini impression to push Warren County to a huge victory over Cookeville.

Helton escaped a bases-loaded, no-out jam in the sixth to keep the Pioneers up one, then struck out the side in the seventh as the Pioneers swept a two-game series with the district-leading Cavaliers.

"When we won Monday, I think some people thought we had just snuck up on them," said Pioneer coach Trice Powers. "Winning again, I think it legitimizes our spot in the district."

"It was a great win for us. We have to continue to improve as the season goes along."

Warren County (11-8) led 4-1 entering the sixth inning, but the Cavaliers began to mount a comeback.

Ben Baugh opened the inning with a double, followed by a Joshua South single. By the time Blaine Espinoza roped a shot into right to score Baugh, coach Powers decided to make a switch on the bump.

Jack Keele, who earned the win for his stellar start, gave way to Helton. It didn't start smoothly.

Helton walked the bases loaded, then had an error on a comebacker to help Cookeville draw within one at 4-3.

On the brink of a collapse, Helton buckled down. He sat down Dylan Sparks in three pitches, then got a groundball back to the mound on the next pitch. He fielded and fired home, beating Espinoza to the plate for out two.

The roar from Patrick Ramsey Field grew louder when Helton forced another grounder back to the mound, fielding and running toward first before shoveling the ball for the final out. The entire Pioneer bench met Helton at the line, celebrating the huge escape.

There was still work left to be done though.

Continued on 4B

# Lady Pioneers get district win

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS  
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard  
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The Lady Pioneers have proven they can win pitcher's duels. It seems the Warren County High School softball team is equally adept in slugfests.

Warren County won for the fourth straight time Tuesday, downing Rhea County 9-7 on its home field.

"We got the bats going and turned it on," said coach Gooby Martin. "It wasn't our sharpest night pitching or defensively, so we have some things where we can improve. Hitting really carried us through, which is big in district games."

Hailey Wood set the tone, with the junior lead-off hitter leading the team with three hits. She started the game by slapping a shot down the left-field line, easily cruising in for a stand-up double.

Wood swiped third, then scored on Hope Mullican's sacrifice fly to third base to make it 1-0 early.

The lead-off hitter's blazing speed has made a difference all year, with her scoring 25 times in 17 games. Her coach knows she's a constant threat.

"Hailey's speed makes her dangerous. She's always alert and looking for ways to make plays," said Martin.



Hailey Wood goes in head first while swiping third during Tuesday's game. Wood had three hits for the Lady Pioneers in a 9-7 victory over Rhea County.

Jeffery Simmons photo

Continued on 4B



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PARK**



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