

# Hamlin sees Chase lead cut at Phoenix

By Jenna Fryer  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Carl Edwards marked the end of a 70-race losing streak by climbing into the grandstands at Phoenix International Raceway for a raucous celebration with the fans.

Roughly 50 feet away, Denny Hamlin sat in silence on the pit road wall, wondering how his iron-clad grip on the Sprint Cup had been pried apart by fuel strategy.

"It's tough to not be happy having the point lead going into the last race. But we were sitting pretty," Hamlin said.

He was in prime position to take a comfortable lead into next week's season finale by dominating Sunday's race at Phoenix. He led a race-high 190 laps and had four-time defending champion Jimmie Johnson in trouble for much of the afternoon.

And when third-place driver Kevin Harvick was penalized for a loose lug nut on a late stop, nothing seemed to be in the way of Hamlin's first career NASCAR title.

Then cautions didn't fall as they

should have. Edwards chased him down and Hamlin had to burn a ton of fuel trying to preserve the win. His Joe Gibbs Racing crew knew he was going to be at least a dozen laps short of making it to the finish on his last tank of gas, and crew chief Mike Ford called in the No. 11 Toyota for gas with 14 laps remaining.

Hamlin was in second place when he headed to pit road, with a nearly 60-point lead over Johnson. The pit stop dropped him to 19th, and he had to drive like a madman through the field trying to salvage the day.

His crew watched and waited for Johnson to make his fuel stop — Harvick's penalty had given him the opportunity to make an extra stop for gas — but Johnson never ducked onto pit road. Crew chief Chad Knaus coaxed his driver around the track, urging him to conserve every final drop.

It played out perfectly for everyone but Hamlin, whose rally still left him 12th. Johnson wound up fifth, Harvick was sixth and Hamlin's lead going into Homestead-Miami Speedway is a mere 15 points over Johnson. Harvick is a manageable 46 points out.

## Defense

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defense surrendered a season high in rushing yards, and much like the Oct. 9 loss to Illinois — when Mauti sat out because of a high ankle sprain — the defense couldn't find an identity. Getting beaten by the ground game, as well as missing tackles and having lapses in coverage all took their toll during both games.

But what the defense missed from a performance standpoint,

it also struggled with the emotional loss of one of the leaders.

"He brings a lot of attitude and a lot of passion to the game," Stupar said. "He's a great player and last week and previous weeks he's shown that. I'm sure a lot of people were disappointed that he got hurt and missed the second half, but there's always somebody else to step in."

Stupar finished the game second on the team with seven tackles, and while he said he felt his performance went well, he

was quick to add he was part of the unit that as a whole struggled.

The passion the unit lost when Mauti left the game is something the rest of the defense will have to work on if he is out any longer, linebacker Chris Colasanti said.

"I think every guy on the field brings a little something," Colasanti said. "But yeah, his excitement and intensity definitely was missed in the second half."

E-mail reporter: aas5220@psu.edu

## Mink

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Ohio State countered.

In a big way.

It shut out Penn State in the second half, giving up just 60 yards of offense. Keying in on the run, Ohio State forced the Nittany Lions into mucky 3rd-and-longs, buttoned up its intermediate pass coverage and baited Matt McGloin to throw the deep ball, something he has no problem doing.

"I think they knew what we were gonna do," said McGloin, whose second half stat line of 2-for-12 for 18 yards and two interceptions was most certainly the result of his offensive coaches not having a Plan B.

Trouble ensued. Devon

Torrence stuck with his man, then bolted to jump the route underneath to fullback Michael Zordich, batting it around for a few strides en route to a 34-yard touchdown, ending a streak of 91-straight pass attempts by McGloin without an interception.

That gave Ohio State its first lead since 3-0, saddled McGloin to respond to adversity for the first time, and turned the game.

"Turned the game? You're dragging behind, Tressel says."

"Turning point means you're starting to head in the right direction, and then you have to do things like, I don't know, we rushed for 314 yards and they had two defensive touchdowns and did a little bit better on third down, but you've got to get the momentum flipped and then come up with those plays

like [Torrence] did."

Penn State knows the feeling all too well, blitzing Northwestern for 35 straight points last week in Joe Paterno's 400th win. Tressel got his 238th win Saturday night, tying him with Woody Hayes. Three feet may have put that on hold.

"We talked about at halftime about the fact that the turning point in the game was when we stopped them on fourth down in the second quarter and that all the stories were going to be written as that being a turning point," Tressel said. "So don't make me a liar."

This is one of those stories.

E-mail reporter: aas5220@psu.edu

## McGloin

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taking responsibility for his interceptions at his postgame interview. He said he didn't change his demeanor in the huddle at all from one half to the next, and quarterbacks coach Jay Paterno saw the same thing.

"He was pretty poised," Paterno said. "He was fine the whole game. He didn't get too high, didn't get too low. He did a good job managing that part of it. The ball really bounced their way."

Both Joe and Jay Paterno said they hadn't even given thought to the notion of who will start next week's game or even if there is a competition for the spot. McGloin has played the majority of the last four games after Bolden started the first six.

McGloin finished the day going 15-for-30 for 159 yards with a pair of touchdowns.

But he threw as many completions in the second half as he did interceptions, going 2-for-12, while consistently rushing throws.

The most important stat on McGloin's line was the two picks.

Both came as a result of disguised coverages and second-half adjustments by Ohio State, he said.

"The first half, I was able to just look at the coverage and bang, I knew where I was going," McGloin said. "In the second half, they did a great job of mixing things up."

Jay Paterno took some of the blame for the Nittany Lions' second-half struggles. He said the offensive coaches didn't do a good enough job adjusting to the changes in Ohio State's coverage.

"They changed it up enough

coverage-wise to take away some of the easy stuff," Paterno said. "We [the coaches] could probably have done a better job."

Senior wide receiver Brett Brackett also didn't put the blame on McGloin's shoulders. He noted a pair of crucial drops as well as the receivers' inability to make a play on either of the two interceptions.

"You really can't knock him at all," Brackett said. "He played a great game. He made some throws for us that really got us into good position to win the game, and it was just unfortunate some things didn't turn out our

way." In the first half, it appeared the game would turn out Penn State's way. No Penn State quarterback had thrown a touchdown in Ohio Stadium under Joe Paterno. McGloin had two before the game was 20 minutes old.

More importantly, however, he had none after that point.

"It's a 60-minute game," McGloin said.

"We won the first half. They came out and beat us big in the second half."

E-mail reporter: ajc5238@psu.edu

## Last word

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Even after safety Malcolm Willis intercepted a Terrelle Pryor pass to halt the Buckeyes' drive after the Smith drop, the Lions' next offensive series stalled at the 6-yard line when Moyer dropped a 3rd-and-6 pass on a slant route.

Moyer said the ball got to him faster than he expected. He came out of his break and said before he knew it, the ball already was on his chest and he "just dropped it."

The ensuing Buckeye drive started in Penn State territory and led to the tipped touchdown that made it a 24-14 game.

"Smith has gotta make that catch and Moyer has gotta make that catch," quarterbacks coach Jay Paterno said. "That's a big play right there because it's a

three point game in the third quarter."

### Day to remember

**Offense:** Wide receiver Justin Brown

The Lions first touchdown pass in the Horseshoe during Paterno's tenure landed in the arms of the sophomore. Brown's 23-yard touchdown catch put the Lions on the board and was his third catch of the drive. He hauled in five passes for a career high 64 yards and was the game's top receiver in both catches and yardage.

**Defense:** Linebacker Nate Stupar

When Mike Mauti left the game in the second half with a shoulder injury, Stupar was forced to step in. Though the defense was gashed by the Buckeyes' ground game, Stupar finished the game with seven tackles, which ranked second on

the team, and had nice pressure on a 3rd and 5 in the second quarter that allowed Jack Crawford to record a sack.

### Day to forget

**Offense:** Quarterback Matt McGloin

McGloin's second-career start started off well but quickly became memorable for all the wrong reasons. The redshirt sophomore went 15-for-30 for 159 yards, but his gunslinger mentality proved costly in the second half.

McGloin fired two interceptions that were both returned for 30-plus yard touchdowns, which allowed Ohio State to regain a lead it hadn't had since the first quarter.

**Defense:** Defensive line

The entire defense, aside from Willis' fourth-quarter interception, didn't make plays. The Buckeyes continued to plow

through the interior of the Lions' defensive line, and missed tackles were once again a problem. Even with a rotation of linemen, the Lions were out played in the trenches.

### Did you notice?

The warm reception Buckeyes fans gave Joe Paterno before the game when the school paid tribute to his 400th career win. The flyover before the game was part of a post Veterans Day celebration. Jordan Hill moved back inside and played defensive tackle.

### Extra point

The Lions completed their first big road test, and much like what happened at Alabama and Iowa, Penn State was unable to stay competitive for the entire game.

The Lions were the first team to play three BCS winners from the previous season on the road

in 2010. They were outscored by their opponents 60-20. Though Saturday's loss was the closest Penn State came to hanging with one of the three elite teams for at least the first half, it didn't make the loss hurt any less, co-captain Ollie Ogbu said.

"You don't have to bounce back, you have to want to have a good finish to the season," Ogbu said. "There is no bouncing back. We took it on the chin and have to go on and fight for the last two games."

### Quotable

Right guard Stefan Wisniewski on competing with the Buckeyes in the first half: "I don't think anyone feels good. I'd be shocked. Actually, I'd like to talk to that person and ask them why. There's no reason to feel good about that."

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