

## EARNHARDT, JR., WINS THE RACE, RIPKEN, JR. WAVES THE FLAG, 140,000 RACE FANS CHEER THE RETURN OF RACING AT DOVER DOWNS

DOVER, Delaware - If ever there was a day when America and its race fans needed something to feel good about, it was Sunday. If ever there was a place where Americans needed to gather to celebrate their freedom and have a chance to cheer for their race heroes, it was at Dover Downs International Speedway. If ever a day needed to be magical, it was Sunday, September 23rd.

Wave the magic wand. Dale Earnhardt, Jr., a driver with a flair for dramatic timing, stepped forward to win a thrilling MBNA Cal Ripken, Jr. 400. Cal Ripken made the entire pre-race ceremony memorable by his very presence. And 140,000 flag-waving fans had a chance to witness something they love while cheering lustily for the country they love. Throw in a Lee Greenwood and Tanya Tucker and you can see there was no shortage of magic at Dover Downs on Sunday.

It all started with Ripken, the great Baltimore Oriole who is only two weeks away from retiring from baseball. MBNA had worked magic of its own to make sure Ripken would be on hand and the Oriole great did not disappoint. He did a special press conference at the Dover Downs Infield Media Center, shook hands with every Winston Cup driver as they were introduced in the pre-race ceremony, took a ride with his family in a convertible around the Monster Mile and waved the green flag to start the 400-mile excitement. And while everyone on hand was impressed with Ripken, he too, was impressed with the entire scene.

"There are a lot of things going on in a lot of ballparks where I'm playing for the last time, and that's neat," said Ripken. "But this is probably the coolest thing that's happened to me."

Had Ripken been able to stay the whole day (he had to get back to Baltimore to play in the Orioles-Yankees game where, by the way, he hit a home run), he might have been even more impressed...this time by the talented young Earnhardt. Driving the No.8 Budweiser Chevrolet, he appeared to be a man on a mission from the race's early stages. The son of the late Dale Earnhardt, who won three times at Dover Downs, took the lead on lap three and was clearly the car to beat in the early goings. But mid-race found he and his crew working through tire and setup problems. After a late spin-out by leader Ricky Rudd forced a caution with 55 laps to go, Earnhardt, Jr., moved up from third to first within 12 laps and cruised to a 1.576-second win over a very impressive run by Jerry Nadeau (who had started in the 41<sup>st</sup> position). That set off a post-race drive around the track that saw Earnhardt, Jr., celebrating his first Winston Cup win at Dover (he had posted two Busch Series wins previously at the Monster Mile) holding a large American flag. It just made a crowd crazy with excitement even more thrilled.

"It was neat to see the fans' reaction," said Earnhardt, Jr. "I mean, we've all been sad the past couple of weeks and it was neat to see the NASCAR fans show their spirit and their patriotism just like the baseball fans or football fans have done. It does make me proud that I'm American, and I feel honored that I was the one to win on a day like today. The fans presented me - and all us drivers - with some real inspiration out there."

No more than Dale Earnhardt, Jr. or Cal Ripken, Jr. presented to them. The magic was in the air.