

Third Consecutive Rolex 24 Podium Tastes Bittersweet

Konica Minolta Corvette DP Trio Leads Race-High 264 of 740 Laps But Never Gets the Chance to Cash In its Late-Race ‘Golden Ticket’

Date: Jan. 24-25, 2015

Event: 53rd Annual Rolex 24 at Daytona (Round 1 of 10)

Series: Prototype division of the Tudor United SportsCar Championship

Location: Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway (3.56-mile, 11-turn road course)

Start/Finish: 7th / 3rd (Running, completed 740 of 740 laps)

Point Standing: 3rd (31 points, five out of first)

Winner: Scott Dixon, Tony Kanaan, Jamie McMurray and Kyle Larson (Ford Riley)

For those who think they’ve seen everything, just visit the annual Rolex 24 At Daytona sports car endurance marathon, where each year a season’s worth of drama of every kind imaginable manages to unfold in just 24 hours, seemingly without fail.

Such was the case for the No. 10 Konica Minolta Corvette DP for Wayne Taylor Racing (WTR) trio of brothers Ricky and Jordan Taylor and their veteran Italian co-driver Max “The Ax” Angelelli.

The Taylors opened the 2015 Tudor United SportsCar Championship season this weekend with high hopes of scoring a long-overdue victory in America’s most iconic sports car race, 10 years after Angelelli and their father and team owner Wayne Taylor scored a dominating victory in the 43rd annual Rolex 24 en route to that year’s series championship.

They crossed the finish line in third place – not far short of their goal – when the dust settled Sunday afternoon on the 3.56-mile, 11-turn Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway road circuit after 24 hours, 740 laps and more than 2,600 miles of ultrafast-paced racing. But after leading 16 times for 264 laps and waging a thrilling, race-long battle down to the final hour against the all-star cast of drivers in the eventual race-winning No. 02 Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates Ford Riley, a solid third-place finish turned out to be a devastating development, even though it was the team’s third consecutive podium finish at the Rolex 24.

It was the manner in which the Taylor brothers and Angelelli saw their victory bid slip away that was particularly excruciating after swapping leads back and forth with the No. 02 Ganassi team – featuring IndyCar stars Scott Dixon and Tony Kanaan, and NASCAR regulars Jamie McMurray and Kyle Larson – for the final 12 hours Sunday.

Angelelli and Jordan Taylor and the No. 10 Konica Minolta Corvette DP had a firm grasp on the lead as the closing hours ticked away and gave it up only temporarily during pit stops. But Dixon and his No. 02 team used fuel strategy to sneak into the lead on their final full fuel-and-tire stop with one hour remaining. For the first time since the earlier stages of the race, Dixon was able to open up a comfortable gap on Taylor during the final hour, and he was able to stay ahead of Taylor after both made stops for a final splash of fuel with some 40 minutes left to go. The No. 10 team was all but resigned to accepting its third consecutive runner-up finish at the Rolex 24.

Then came an unexpected but much-welcomed full-course caution with 19 minutes remaining, which would provide the No. 10 Corvette DP a bonafide chance to get by the No. 02 machine for the race win on the ensuing restart.

It sparked incredible anticipation in the WTR camp, but the enthusiasm was quickly dampened when it was revealed that Jordan Taylor was close to violating a rule that limited drivers to four hours behind the wheel during any consecutive six-hour stretch of the race. The team had no choice but to hastily call him into the pits and replace him with Ricky Taylor for the final 10-minute sprint to the finish. Having to restart at the back of the Prototype-class field, plus the enforcement of a stop-and-go penalty for the team’s pitting out of sequence, Ricky Taylor could do no better than to cross the finish line more than a minute behind Dixon. And it allowed the 2014 Rolex 24-winning Action Express Corvette DP to leapfrog past to an improbable runner-up finish.

“It was an unfortunate turn of events because we were right where we wanted to be – second place on the restart having a stronger car on cold tires, so it was a perfect opportunity to make something happen,” Jordan Taylor said. “I

knew that with track position we could race with the 02 car, and that late yellow flag was our golden ticket and we just weren't able to cash it in."

The Konica Minolta Corvette DP team arrived at Daytona for this weekend's festivities expecting great things after laying down the fast lap at the annual Roar Before the 24 test days earlier this month. But gremlin after gremlin reared its ugly head during practice and qualifying Thursday, and through Friday's final practice session. A chronic rear wheel-speed sensor issue never let the driving trio to benefit from the racecar's traction control system Thursday or Friday. The team's relentless troubleshooting efforts and a couple of sleepless nights Thursday and Friday led to breakthrough fixes that were expected to – but not guaranteed to – allow the traction control system to work when the race commenced Saturday.

Ricky Taylor, who was able to qualify seventh in the field of 53 competitors despite the wheel-speed sensor issue, noted a slight improvement during his opening stint of the race Saturday afternoon. But another issue reared its ugly head in the way of a throttle pedal setting that caused the engine to cut out repeatedly each lap during the opening 90 minutes of the race.

Taylor was able to maintain his position in the top-five despite the maladies and, during the team's first pit stop, a software update managed to clear things up. From that point forward, Taylor, his brother and Angelelli were the fiercest of competitors in the 53-car field and became fixtures at the front of the pack, until that fateful sequence of events in the final minutes of the race.

"First of all, I'm happy to be here in the top-three, especially since as late as Friday we weren't even sure we would make the race with all sorts of problems," Angelelli said. "Our guys, our team worked all night and solved the problems and gave us a super, ultra-competitive car both Saturday and Sunday, in the heat and the cold. The car was good and we were competitive, all three of us. We fought like lions and we are now just looking forward to the next challenge, the next race."

"The result was pretty good, but the way it came about was a little bit disappointing," Ricky Taylor said. "We had such a strong car, the guys deserved to win this weekend. Coming back and fixing our issues and working through the night – more than one night – is just an incredible effort by all the guys. I just feel bad for them for all that work and, leading so many laps and running up front for so long, to come away with the last car on the lead lap is very disappointing. It was really disappointing, actually. If we had known we could get a podium when the race started with all of the issues, we would have been thrilled. Then again, after running so strong after 24 hours, anything short of a win is a little bit disappointing."

Despite the disappointment, the No. 10 Konica Minolta Corvette DP team essentially leaves Daytona trailing by just two points in the season-long championship as the race-winning No. 02 Ganassi entry competes in just selected events each year. The No. 02 team leads the initial standings with 36 points while the runner-up Action Express Corvette DP team, with full-time co-drivers Christian Fittipaldi and Joao Barbosa and added endurance-race driver Sebastien Bourdais, is second with 33 points. The No. 10 team is third with 31 points.

Next up is round two of the 2015 Tudor Championship schedule – the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring at Sebring (Fla.) International Raceway Saturday, March 21. Television broadcast information is yet to be announced.