



A final boost before Busch

EASLEY, S.C. (May 9, 1992) — A generation ago the upper levels of NASCAR had a number of owner-drivers among its ranks of contenders. The same season in which the ultimate do-it-yourselfer, Alan Kulwicki, won the championship in what was then called Winston Cup, there was one standout short-tracker from upstate South Carolina who made his plans to compete regularly in the Busch Series.

That was Jason Keller, who was coming off of a 1991 campaign in which he won four times and placed third in points in the first year of the NASCAR All Pro circuit. He made his Busch debut that year at Lanier Raceway and then ran again at Lanier the following April. A five-race Busch deal followed with chassis builder Laughlin Racing Products. That set up a 1993 rookie-of-the-year attempt for the team called Kel Racing, named after his dad Joe Keller's business Kel Chemicals.

Keller, from Greenville, S.C., still had his family-owned Late Model. His

final victory in that type of car came in the All Pro show at Greenville-Pickens Speedway, 32 years ago today.

"I remember qualifying 14th, and I remember racing Hal Goodson at the end of the race," he said about race runner-up and polesitter Goodson. "I see Hal every now and then. I saw him in a March car show at Myrtle Beach and we reminisced, and he told me about Bobby Gill (who placed third that day) not doing well now."

Keller's five All Pro wins came at five different racetracks. That same motif continued in his Busch career, as his 10 triumphs came at nine facilities, with Indianapolis Raceway Park as the only repeat site. That was a theme throughout his three-odd decades in the sport.

"I started on dirt tracks, but only for about two and a half years," he said. "When we started winning or doing well, we always wanted to go to the next step. I never got my name on a wall for winning a track championship (a



Jeff Sandt

Jason Keller is shown at the 1992 All American 400 at Nashville, Tenn. Six months earlier – 32 years ago today, in fact – Keller drove this machine to his fifth and final NASCAR All Pro Series victory just west of Greenville, S.C.

trademark of Greenville-Pickens). My dad always wanted to travel. He said that if you can't win on different sized racetracks, you're not gonna be successful."

"When I first got the Budget Gourmet sponsorship in '94, my dad handed me the keys to the shop and said, 'OK, everything's yours. If you make it, fine; if not, I'm not gonna do it any more.' I asked if I could at least put a couple of people on the payroll at the office, and he said he'd do that 'til the end of the year."

Keller did it largely on his own until the turn of the century, winning once. He also endured some infamy after a collision with Dale Earnhardt Jr. in Junior's Busch debut in 1996 at Myrtle Beach Speedway. Then in 2000 came a merger of sorts with team owner Greg Pollex, and he reeled off seven wins in the following four years.

He hung on for another seven Busch seasons. Two years after hanging up his helmet, he bought Kel Chemicals from his dad. He's there every weekday and turns 54 later this month; Joe's still kicking at 82 and is a "continued paid consultant." Neither Keller appears at racetracks very often.

"It just seems like it'd get me pulled

back into it a little bit, and there really aren't any options around here," Jason said, referring specifically to the closure of the historic Greenville half-mile. "We still talk about racing some. I'm kinda restoring my very first go-kart, or at least building one just like it. And I'd give anything if I had one of my old Late Model cars, dirt or asphalt."

"In the go-kart, there's a pack of Winston cigarettes in the seat. As a 10-year-old kid, that's one thing that I remember; I never got in the seat of that kart without having to pick a pack of cigarettes out of the seat. At that time everybody smoked."

Kent Gault Mobile Home Sales 200:

1. Jason Keller; 2. Hal Goodson; 3. Bobby Gill; 4. Jody Ridley; 5. Donnie Bishop; 6. Kevin Cywinski; 7. Billy Bigley Jr.; 8. Gary Bradberry; 9. Rick Crawford; 10. Marty Ward; 11. Mike Garvey; 12. Mike Cope; 13. Wayne Niedecken Jr.; 14. Duane Burrows; 15. Greg Hendrix; 16. Joe Manning; 17. Bubba Gale; 18. Eddie Hanks; 19. Sidney Minton; 20. George Ingole; 21. Granger Howell; 22. Sammy Pegram; 23. Robin Hayes; 24. Rick Roller; 25. Charlie Stokes; 26. Raddy Day; 27. Joe Frasson; 28. David Probst; 29. Scotty Lovelady; 30. Randy Porter; 31. Richard Starkey; 32. Ron Young; 33. Doug Noe; 34. David Russell; 35. Jeff Purvis.

Lap leaders: Porter 1-35, Goodson 36-133, Keller 134-145, Bishop 146-159, Keller 160, Bishop 161-162, Keller 163-207 • Cautions: 4 for 26 laps • Fast qualifier: Goodson, 20.121 seconds



Getty Images/Kel Racing collection
Jason Keller shows off the plaque for his 500th career NASCAR Busch Series start in 2010 at Bristol, Tenn.

Keller ranks third all-time in appearances in the now-Xfinity tour with 520 (just behind Kenny Wallace and Jeff Green) and won 10 times in the national series.