

NASCAR

Q: Who is the winningest car owner at New Hampshire International Speedway?
A: Jack Roush (six victories).

NASCAR INSIDER

THIS WEEK

Race: Lenox Industrial Tools 300
Where: New Hampshire International Speedway
When: 1:30 p.m. Sunday ET
Television: TNT



Track manners getting ... bumped aside

Competitive pressures eroding some drivers' belief in racing etiquette

By RICK MINTER
Cox News Service

The only things changing more often than the NASCAR rulebook, it seems, are the unwritten laws of the sport — the on-track etiquette that drives decision-making.

Drivers say the thin line between respect for others and trying to win races is being erased by pressures to qualify for NASCAR's new playoff format and by young drivers who don't know any better.

For years the sport relied on gentlemen's agreements not to race back to the finish line when the caution flag was displayed. But two summers ago, drivers were not too gentlemanly, so new rules were put in place to freeze the field during cautions.

In restrictor-plate races at Daytona and Talladega, drivers began bumping each other so hard in an attempt to gain positions that NASCAR in February created "no bump" zones on the track and instituted new requirements to weaken front bumpers.

Another unwritten rule called for slower drivers to yield to faster cars, particularly if that faster car belonged to the race leader.

But as Matt Kenseth found out while trying to lap Dale Jarrett at Bristol in March, the old protocol doesn't always apply. Jarrett didn't move over for Kenseth, and Kenseth blamed that decision for his loss of the lead and, possibly, the victory.

Veteran driver Mark Martin, known for his racing etiquette, said that pressures, especially the emphasis on the 10 drivers who make the Chase for the Nextel Cup, have changed the sport.

"Dale Jarrett just missed the chase two years ago, so that answers your question as to why he stayed where he was [at Bristol]," Martin told reporters after the incident. "He didn't block the leader; he just stayed where he was. ... I would have to say I was in that situation, I might have handled it differently, but I didn't miss the chase the last two years."

Kenseth was involved in the latest chapter in driver misbehavior during Sunday's USG Sheetrock 400. Jeff Gordon spun Kenseth out of the lead with four laps to go in the race.

NEW HAMPSHIRE INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

Track length: 1.058 mile
Race length: 300 laps/317.4 miles
Banking in corners: 12 degrees
Banking on straights: 2 degrees
Frontstretch: 1,500 feet
Backstretch: 1,500 feet
Grandstand seating: 91,000
Qualifying record: Ryan Newman, Dodge, 133.357 mph; Sept. 12, 2003
Race record: Jeff Burton, Ford; 117.134 mph; July 13, 1997

Kenseth accused Gordon of wrecking him intentionally in revenge for an incident earlier this year at Bristol.

"He should have expected if I could get to his bumper, there was going to be some action," Gordon replied.

Defending Nextel Cup champion Tony Stewart said many drivers still obey the unwritten rules, but others — particularly the newcomers — do not.

"There aren't as many people exercising [etiquette]," Stewart said. "I think the veterans and the guys who are used to winning a lot of races are still using that, [but] there are a lot of young drivers in the series who don't have that respect for the series and for the veterans of the series."

Stewart explained that acceptable behavior doesn't mean giving in every time.

"Having respect for [veteran drivers] doesn't mean you have to lay over and give them the wins," he said.

"Realizing that a 500-mile race is a 500-mile race, not a 200-mile race like a truck or Busch race, there's a difference in how we race in Cup vs. how those guys race when they come through the Busch and truck series."

"I think those guys need to learn how we race. For them to think they're going to come in and change how we race is ludicrous."

Jeff Burton said he has seen

big changes during the years, on-track and off.

"It used to be if someone wrecked you, they'd come over and say they were sorry," he said. "Nowadays, it's like they don't even care."

Jimmie Johnson said it's hard to find drivers — veterans or rookies — who will return favors granted on the track.

"I think some of the give and take I'll let you go now and you'll be my friend and let me back by later" — is out the window," he said, explaining that the pressures of the sport no longer allow it.

"You have to race as hard as you can," he said. "Track position is so important. You even see it with teammates."

He said he was surprised at Phoenix in April when Greg Biffle wouldn't let Roush Racing teammate Martin go by without a fight, even though Martin's car appeared to be faster.

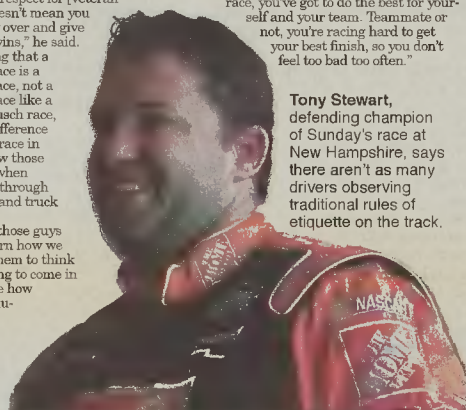
"I really expected to see [Biffle] let [Martin] roll on by, but [Biffle] was ready to race," Johnson said. "You can't afford, even in the middle of the race, to let guys go by at will."

Johnson said he sometimes finds himself in similar scenarios with his Hendrick Motorsports teammates.

"When you're racing hard to stay ahead of them and once they get by they drive off and leave you, you think, 'Man I should have conceded a little bit earlier,'" he said.

"But in most cases, when it is time to race, you've got to do the best for yourself and your team. Teammate or not, you're racing hard to get your best finish, so you don't feel too bad too often."

Tony Stewart, defending champion of Sunday's race at New Hampshire, says there aren't as many drivers observing traditional rules of etiquette on the track.



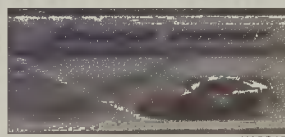
NASCAR

Jeff Hood's OBSERVATIONS

Here are some storylines this week heading to New Hampshire:

Running hot

Written off by some critics as recently as four weeks ago, four-time Nextel Cup champion Jeff Gordon has captured two victories in three starts. Gordon's victory at Chicagoland Speedway moved him into 10th place in the championship standings with eight races remaining until the 10-driver lineup is set for this year's Chase for the Nextel Cup. Gordon's next victory will be the 76th of his career and will tie him with the late Dale Earnhardt for sixth on the all-time victories list.



Jeff Gordon crosses the finish line to win Sunday's USG Sheetrock 400.

NASCAR

Running on empty

Tony Stewart, the defending Nextel Cup champion and winner of last season's July race at New Hampshire, has experienced a whirlwind of emotions during the past two weeks. Eight days after celebrating with fans beneath the flagstand following his victory in the Pepsi 400 at Daytona, Stewart finished 32nd in Chicago on Sunday when he ran out of gas with four laps remaining. "A tough way to end a race," Stewart told reporters. "We worked all the way from 34th to third, and then to have it end like that, it's pretty hard to take." Stewart dropped from fifth to seventh in the championship standings.

Running into contention

An eighth-place finish Sunday kept 2004 Nextel Cup champion Kurt Busch in contention for a spot in this year's Chase. Busch, who has had five consecutive top-10 finishes heading into this weekend's race in Loudon, N.H., is 13th in the championship standings, 132 points behind 10th-place Gordon. "We're getting better and better on these mile and half-mile tracks, and we'll eventually get it figured out," Busch told reporters at Chicagoland Speedway. "We're going to Loudon this week and then back to Pocono. Those have been really good tracks for us. We're just hoping to keep the momentum going."

Running out of time

With his championship hopes fading quickly following a 36th-place finish at Chicagoland, Ryan Newman is facing a must-win scenario in Sunday's Lenox Industrial Tools 300. A victory at Loudon is not out of the question for the 28-year-old Newman, who edged Stewart by .292 seconds to win the Sylvania 300 in September on the 1.058-mile track. There can be no margin of error over the next eight races for Newman, who is 18th in the points standings. He has been a participant in the Chase since its inception in 2004.

Running with the big boys

Chip Ganassi shocked the racing community by announcing on Sunday that Formula One driver Juan Pablo Montoya will assume the driving duties of the No. 42 Dodge, which is being vacated by Casey Mears, in 2007. Gordon, who practiced in Montoya's open-wheel car at Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 2003, said he welcomes the Formula One driver to the stock-car circuit. "I think it's extremely exciting," Gordon said following his victory at Chicago. "I think it's great for the sport."



MONTOKA

Catching up with ... David Starr

David Starr has been a mainstay in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series since 2002. Following his dismissal from Spears Motorsports at the conclusion of the 2005 season, Starr found a home with Red Horse Racing, a team that fields Toyota Tundras and is co-owned by former Nextel Cup crew chief Jeff Hammond. The 38-year-old Starr made a quick impression by winning in his fourth start of 2006. He talked with Cox News Service reporter Jeff Hood recently about life in the fast lane.

Q: How would you rate your season in the Craftsman Truck Series?

A: "I think we've lived up to our expectations. We won at Martinsville in our fourth race out. We've struggled a bit on the bigger, fast tracks.

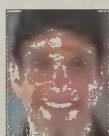
That's where I've kind of shined over the years. We're getting back on top of that. We're top 10 in points right now. Everything's good, but we want it to get better. We want to be in the chase for the championship come the last four or five races. I think everything is going good right now."

Q: How do you compare your win at Martinsville in April to your three other career victories in a truck?

A: "I eat, live and sleep this sport. This is all I think about and all I do. And when you work with people who have the same passion and desires that I have, it's incredible. To win for a group of guys who want to win as bad as you do, it's very emotional. It was hard to sleep at night last year through the winter-time because we didn't win a race [in 2005]. My other wins were big, but I'd have to rate the win at Martinsville as No. 1."

Q: What's your outlook for the remainder of the season?

A: "On the 1.5-mile tracks, like Atlanta, the places where over the years I've run the best at, it seems like we are just so-so. We won Martinsville, we ran third at Mansfield [Ohio] and could have won that race, but I didn't want to knock people out of the way I'm looking forward to Indianapolis Raceway Park, Memphis and back to Martinsville. But I would hope to think we can win on these bigger tracks because that's where we've been strong over the years."



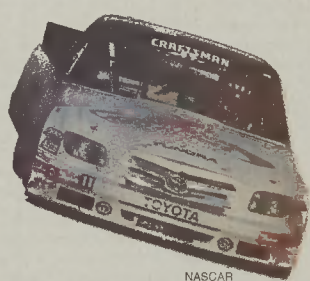
STARR

Q: What are your thoughts on the Truck Series making its debut at Talladega Superspeedway in October?

A: "When we went to Daytona, that was big because when you think of NASCAR, you think of Daytona International Speedway. When we went to Charlotte, that was big. But the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series is grown up. Now, we're going to Talladega. That's going to be a big event for me personally, my team and the whole series. I'm really excited about that race."

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NASCAR

David Starr maintained the lead through eight restarts over the final 121 laps to win the Kroger 250 at Martinsville Speedway on April 1.

STANDINGS

NEXTEL CUP

Following the USG Sheetrock 400

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Jimmie Johnson
2,651; previous: 1 | 2. Matt Kenseth
2,603; previous: 2 | 3. Dale Earnhardt Jr.
2,394; previous: 3 | 4. Jeff Burton
2,327; previous: 7 | 5. Kasey Kahne
2,303; previous: 4 | 6. Mark Martin
2,291; previous: 6 | 7. Tony Stewart
2,274; previous: 5 | 8. Kyle Busch
2,265; previous: 8 | 9. Kevin Harvick
2,253; previous: 9 | 10. Jeff Gordon
2,219; previous: |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|



Jeff Burton climbed to fourth in the standings.

BUSCH SERIES

- | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Kevin Harvick
2,922; previous: 1 | 2. Carl Edwards
2,599; previous: 2 | 3. Clint Bowyer
2,540; previous: 3 | 4. Denny Hamlin
2,502; previous: 4 | 5. J.J. Yeley
2,494; previous: 5 |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|

TRUCK SERIES

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Todd Bodine
2,043; previous: 1 | 2. Johnny Benson
1,931; previous: 3 | 3. David Reutemann
1,899; previous: 2 | 4. Ted Musgrave
1,807; previous: 4 | 5. Rick Crawford
1,806; previous: 5 |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|

What ever happened to ...

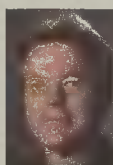
Phil Parsons

Phil Parsons won one Cup race in 2002 starts during a career that began in 1983 and concluded in 1997.

The younger brother of 1973 Cup champion and NBC commentator Benny Parsons, Phil Parsons captured two checkered flags in 285 starts in the NASCAR Busch Series. The 49-year-old Parsons retired from racing in 2001 after making his final start in the Busch Series at Kentucky Speedway.

Today, Parsons is best known as one of the voices of the Craftsman Truck Series on Speed Channel. Parsons spoke with Cox News Service writer Jeff Hood about his career.

On his most satisfying accomplishments in racing: "Obviously, winning a [Cup] race at Talladega back in 1988 was certainly the culmination of a lifelong



PARSONS

dream and pursuit. And then, after my career took a bit of a downturn when I was running the Busch Series part time with just one full-time employee, we went to Charlotte and won a big Busch race. That was awfully rewarding also."

On recovering from the worst crash of his career, when he barrel-rolled a car at Talladega in 1983: "At that time, there wasn't anything that was going to stop me from trying to achieve my dream. Certainly, a bad accident did knock me out for about six weeks because I broke my shoulder. But other than that, it was just one of those things. Everybody has gone through it."

On initially getting involved in broadcasting: "Over the years, people would ask me to do some [broadcasting] when I wasn't driving, maybe the day before a race or the day after a race when I was running in the Busch Series. I've been doing it on an on-and-off basis over the years and always felt like that was what I would want to do when I finally quit. I had a good opportunity with ESPN when they pursued me to do the Craftsman Truck Series in 2001. I said maybe the timing is right now to maybe change directions in my career. So I've been doing it full time since 2001."

On his 2007 plans: "Truthfully, I don't really know exactly what I'm going to do next year. But I certainly hope to keep involved with racing in some way, shape or form on the TV side of it."

NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

\$5,697,845

Jimmie Johnson's 2006 winnings through 18 races



300

Most laps led by a race winner at New Hampshire International Speedway (Jeff Burton; Sept. 17, 2000).

30

Most drivers on the lead lap at the end of a Cup race at New Hampshire International Speedway (July 21, 2002).

10

Most Cup wins by a manufacturer (Ford) at New Hampshire International Speedway.

4

Most Cup wins by a driver at New Hampshire International Speedway (Jeff Burton).