

KM's Buddy Smith in movie about Earnhardt

By GARY STEWART
Editor of The Herald

It was probably "in the car(d)s" that Kings Mountain's Buddy Smith should appear in the upcoming movie 3 - The Dale Earnhardt Story.

The Earnhardts of Kannapolis and Smiths of Kings Mountain crossed paths many times over the years as both families were involved in racing for decades.

When Smith heard that local people were being asked to answer the casting call in Concord, it was only natural that he would attend.

"We raced with Dale's daddy, Ralph, for many years and when Dale was growing up he was always at the tracks," Smith noted.

When Smith walked up to the sign-up desk in Concord, his application was "red flagged" because he had pit crew experience.

Several weeks after return-

ing home, he was contacted and asked if he would come to North Carolina Motor Speedway in Rockingham for a day of shooting. He was chosen for pit crew scenes, and was one of just four men to act as NASCAR officials.

The scenes that Smith will appear in in the made for TV movie, which is scheduled to premier on ESPN in December, are scenes of the Daytona 500 in which Earnhardt lost his life on the final lap.

Friends have asked Smith if he will have a speaking part in the movie, and he answers "yes and no."

"I had some speaking parts but they won't be heard," he said. "We had to speak in the background."

In one such scene, Smith said he is having an argument with the Pennzoil Team which was brought back into the pits after leaving a lug nut off a wheel.

"They were arguing with

me in the background while they were shooting Dale's pit stop," Smith noted.

Smith is also in scenes that were shot in the VIP booth. He said he told directors he would not appear in any scenes that showed reflections of sex or drinking, and they obliged.

He also recalled one scene in the VIP booth that he hopes does not offend people in Earnhardt's hometown of Kannapolis.

"They were showing the early stage of Dale's career when he was coming into NASCAR type racing," Smith noted. "One of the actors playing Humpy Wheeler was asked, 'Who is that car number 98 down there?' and Humpy said, 'That's Dale Earnhardt. He's young and been on a tear around dirt tracks. He's won 17 in a row and he's over here getting some asphalt experience.' The other guy said 'I've never

heard of him,' and Humpy said, 'He comes from a little town called Kannapolis. They make towels. We call them lint heads. The only way out of that town is to be involved with racing.'

"I thought, they should edit that out; nobody from Kannapolis wants to be called a lint head," Smith said.

Smith said the film will be edited between now and the release date, and he isn't sure how many scenes he will be involved in, or how lengthy they will be. But he feels like he will be in the fatal wreck scene.

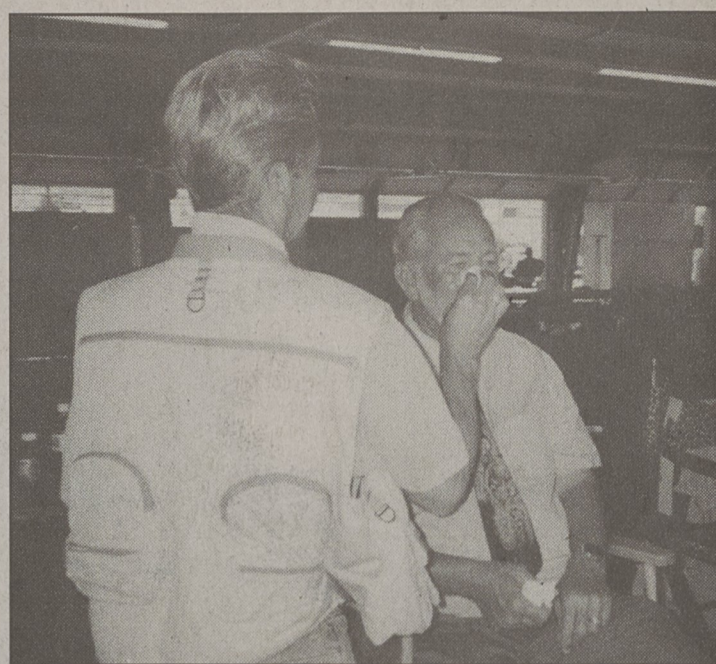
"There was a scene when another man and I were moving our mouths like we were talking, and all of a sudden there is a crash up between turns 3 and 4," Smith said. "Someone yells 'crash' and we jump up and look and act like we're talking about the wreck. I don't know if that's the wreck where Dale gets killed or not. They didn't tell us what the scene was going to be about. It may very well be that it's the scene where he was killed."

While reactions to wrecks were shot live at Rockingham, Smith said he is sure the fatal scene will be computer-generated.

This isn't Smith's first movie part. Several years ago, he, his brother Freddy, and their father Clarence "Grassy" Smith, were in the Last American Hero, the story of racing great Junior Johnson.

"They used two of our cars," Smith noted. "That movie was made on a dirt track. That was a good experience and I felt like this would be too."

Smith said he has "always had good feelings in my heart" about the Earnhardt family.



Buddy Smith, right, gets his makeup on.

"When Ralph Earnhardt lived in Kannapolis he still lived in a small mill village house," Smith said. "We'd go see them a lot. When he died they had to issue invitations for the visitation. People had to go at certain times. They called us and we went over there. That's how much they thought of us and we thought of them."

Smith, who now works for the U.S. Postal Service, built the assembly and was the pit crew chief for his brother, dirt track legend Freddy Smith, for many years and their father built the engines. The family also built engines for other drivers they didn't compete against.

"Daddy more or less owned the entire operation," Smith noted. "Fred drove and I was over anybody doing work on cars. When daddy had his heart attack there was a period of time that he couldn't go with us; it was just me and

Freddy and whoever could go."

Smith recalled that when Dale Earnhardt Sr. started DEI, he needed someone to drive his research and development car and Freddy was the first person he called. But by that time Freddy was living in Louisiana and scoring big wins in dirt track racing. He now lives in Tennessee and owns his own team.

Buddy Smith said he got out of racing in 1983 because the strain of trying to work a full-time job, travel three or four days a week to races and build the cars at night was too much to handle.

"I had to make a decision to either stay with racing or the postal service, and I decided it was time to give up racing," he said.

His father got out several years later.

By that time, the Smiths had sold their operation to Beedy Lynch of South Carolina, but continued to run it like it was their own.

"Beedy had a good car and a good driver, Jack Pennington," Smith recalled, "but anytime they came to a race we were in they always finished second to Freddy. He said he wasn't going to have a second place car. One night he told us if we beat him he was going to buy us. We beat him and he called and asked what we wanted for the racing outfit. We told him it wasn't for sale because it was our livelihood. He said he'd buy it, and put us all on salary. He built us a new shop and paid us but we ran it just like it was still ours."



Smith, second from left, was one of four men playing NASCAR pit officials.

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