

"Boys, Have At It" Could End Up Hurting Someone



Believe it or not I had a completely different beginning to this column written and ready to go and then I made the mistake of tuning in to the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race at Texas Motor Speedway. What I saw happen made me feel very strongly that the sport is getting out of hand and turning into more of a WWE type event rather than an auto racing event.

NASCAR, ESPN, SPEED, the promoters, media and the public relations people with help from a variety of sponsors has helped to create a Frankenstein or at least a monster over which they seem to have lost control.

What Kyle Busch did on Friday night at Texas in the truck race was inexcusable. Ron Hornaday, a contender for the truck title, and Busch were involved in a racing incident, an accident, on the track. It all happened as a result of Hornaday making a move to get around a slower truck and Busch, as often happens, not thinking clearly about the situation. They made contact. However it looked like both were going to be able to continue.

Busch then decided to retaliate by purposely pushing Hornaday down the track and into the wall destroying Hornaday chances of winning the championship and crumpling up his own truck.

It was the actions of someone, perhaps in need of psychiatric help.

Busch decided to serve as the judge and jury and found Hornaday guilty of something that definitely was not his fault. It was not something he did on purpose.

In an interview with SPEED's Ray Dunlap, as the race continued, Busch, looking through eyes that looked as if they were recovering from a three day bender, accepted no blame. And he was not apologetic about probably costing Hornaday a chance at the truck title. When the race was over Hornaday was 48 points behind, he started just 15 points behind in the battle for the title.

NASCAR, TV, promoters, sponsors, media and PR people have created the monster and now they need to fix it.

NASCAR did act quickly as Busch was not allowed to race in the Nationwide or Cup race at Texas. Apparently they figured their "Boys, have at it" routine had gotten out of hand, at least with Kyle. It is a good start but there should be something much more severe in the way of penalties for the young driver. Perhaps they could sit him down for the remainder of the season. Put him on probation for the entire 2012 season. And have him foot the bill at least to repair the Kevin Harvick owned truck that was being driven by Hornaday. And an apology could be tossed in.

And how about this, Joe Gibbs should have put Ron Hornaday in the Busch rides for the weekend.

By the way we are told that it is possible that the team owner Joe Gibbs could extend the ban with Busch not getting to run any of the final events. Come to think of it this would be a good time to give Hornaday an opportunity to take over for Busch for a couple of events. What a great way to teach Busch a lesson, if it is possible for him to learn.

If you wonder why local short track racers seem to be trying more on track antics it could very well be traced to what they see happening with the so called "professionals" on television. And when they are allowed to get away with it, with no serious penalties, often just a slap on the wrist or one of the famous mean nothing NASCAR probations, they figure they can get away with it too.

If this is what NASCAR feels they need to create interest and sell tickets I am disappointed in the leadership. This is one of the many reasons that long time fans tell me they have lost interest in the sport.

Is this why there is so much being done to make the sport safer? Is it done so that someone like Kyle Busch can test all the safety features in place by stuffing someone like Hornaday into the wall on purpose.

He had no regard for anyone when he raced through the streets in a small town near Charlotte back in the early summer and was arrested.

He had no regard for the safety of Hornaday or himself when he crashed into the back of him and pushed him into the wall. He thinks he is bullet-



SWIRLING IN CONTROVERSY, Kyle Busch addresses media members at Texas Motor Speedway on Friday night after taking Ron Hornaday Jr. out of the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series event. Ernie Saxton shares his thoughts on Busch's behavior. (Photo by Mike Hanson)

proof and since he seems to be allowed to do what he pleases with no real penalties being given him he will continue.

What really made Harvick mad was the retaliation that was involved. He said Friday that retaliation had to be curbed under NASCAR's "Boys, have at it" policy where drivers are encouraged not to shy away from contact on the track.

"There has to be an end to the retaliation piece of it, whether it's Kyle Busch or anybody else," Harvick said. "This is not Late Model racing. This is professional stock-car racing. We all make mistakes and we all do things out of character, but if things continue to progress, we're going to hurt somebody."

It was nice to see NASCAR act quickly. However there is a lot more that needs to be done. The "Boys, have at it" could end up hurting someone or even worse if all the racers decided to race with the same attitude as Kyle Busch.

TALK ABOUT A WASTED EFFORT. At Texas Motor Speedway there were a number of press conferences. Michael Waltrip announced that Mark Martin was in and David Reutimann was out. Most everyone knew that several days before the press conference. Waltrip told Reutimann on the telephone, not in person, a few days before.

Danica Patrick will drive for Tony Stewart in about 12 events and it will kick off with the Daytona 500. Anyone that did not know that before Texas must be living in a cave.

"WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSES, ANOTHER OPENS; but we often looks so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us."

- Alexander Graham Bell

ROGER PENSKE WILL HAVE ANOTHER STRONG INDYCAR EFFORT IN 2012. Team Penske will keep its three-car lineup in place next season as the most successful team in the history of North American open-wheel racing will return to the track to compete for the 2012 IZOD IndyCar Series championship.

Helio Castroneves, Ryan Briscoe and Will Power will all return to Team Penske next season, keeping in place the same driver lineup that the team has fielded since 2009. Next season will mark the third consecutive year that Team Penske will compete with three full-season IndyCar entries. Since 2009, Team Penske has generated an impressive 21 wins and 28 poles in IZOD IndyCar Series competition between the three drivers.

"We are excited to return with a three-car team in 2012," said Tim Cindric, President of Penske Racing. "The combination of Helio, Ryan and Will has been a formidable one on the track and they work very well together as teammates. Our goal all along has been to continue running three cars and thanks to our terrific partners, we have been able to make everything work from the business side. Now, all of our focus will be on developing the new Chevrolet IndyCar and getting ready for a strong return to the track in 2012."

Team Penske expects to make several sponsorship announcements in the next few months it prepares for the 2012 season.

Penske Racing is one of the most successful teams in the history of professional sports. Competing in a variety of disciplines, cars owned and prepared by

Penske Racing have produced 348 major race wins — including a record 15 Indianapolis 500 victories, 411 pole positions and 23 National Championships. For more information about Penske Racing, please visit www.penskeracing.com.

Despite a couple of serious problems, the race at New Hampshire (now off the schedule for 2012) and Las Vegas (possibly off the schedule), I think IndyCar is going to have a great schedule for 2012. And the interest in IndyCar racing is on the upswing.

A MAJOR RACING FACILITY REOPENS. After a year of closure, Gateway International Raceway outside St. Louis is set to reopen for the 2012 season. Madison, Ill.-based KSKD TV reports a group of investors led by real estate developer and one time Indy Lights driver Curtis Francois have come to terms on bringing the track back to use.

An NHRA event will run in October 2012 as the highlighted event of Gateway reopening. Francois said a "full season" would kick off in March, and whether that would include either a NASCAR or IndyCar return was not specified.

"With the 2012 racing season fast approaching, we had to move quickly and negotiate a lease for the facility," Francois said. "We were excited to reach an agreement with the NHRA to return in October 2012 with the NHRA Midwest Nationals. This event is very important for the future viability of the track and illustrates the interest the industry has in revitalizing this wonderful entertainment venue."

Gateway's previous operator Dover Motorsports, Inc. announced the track's closing a little over one year ago.

IF JIMMIE JOHNSON did not believe in the *Sports Illustrated* cover shot curse he might now. Johnson was featured on the cover of the October 17 issue of *Sports Illustrated* and since then his luck has not been the best. He probably will miss out on his sixth straight NASCAR Sprint Cup title.

Over the years many sports figures that were featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* have suffered streaks of bad luck and misfortune.

Many drivers probably will want to quietly thank *Sports Illustrated* for costing Johnson his sixth title. None will say it out loud but there are many that probably stick pins in voodoo dolls hoping to keep Johnson away from the title.

FLORIDA'S OFFICIAL STATE SPORT? There is a move being made by politicians seeking to gain favor with the voters with elections coming up in 2012 so they are talking about, perhaps, making auto racing the state sport. They do have a state reptile, pie and bird so it does make sense to have a state sport. Actually to me it seems like a huge waste or time.

Senate Bill 266 designates "automobile racing" as the official state sport. If the Legislature votes to make auto racing the state sport on January 10, during their sessions, it would take effect on July 1. That would be just in time for a big celebration at the Firecracker 400 (or whatever the official name is these days) at Daytona International Speedway.

Seeing that North Carolina made auto racing their official sport earlier this year it seems only right that a state that has such a great history in the sport and has such an impact on the business of motorsports should have auto racing as the state sport.

However it is not a sure thing. The *Daytona Beach News Journal* pointed out that the effort to make the barking tree frog the official state am-

phibian failed. Imagine that!

In a recent poll of readers of the *News Journal* most were in agreement that auto racing should be the state sport beating out football, fishing and other sports. However the largest number of votes came from people saying "Who cares?"

LAST CALL. Grandview Speedway banquet tickets are still available at \$35 each. The 49th annual awards banquet is set for November 19th at the Gilbertsville, PA Fire Hall. Always a great time. Call Vicki Gehris at (610)-367-2776.

VETERAN RACER Denny Gross called to order a subscription to our *Motorsports Sponsorship Marketing News* newsletter and tells us that he is looking for pit help for his race team. He plans to be at Williams Grove Speedway for the 2012 season and also include Lincoln in his plans for some events. We are hearing more and more about teams having a struggle to find pit help.

LONG TIME NASCAR MOTORSPORTS writer Monte Dutton has been having some health issues and that has forced him to cut back on some of his motorsports coverage work. It has allowed him to finish his first novel and you can find the first two chapters at neverlandpublishing.com/titles. The book is titled "Audacity of Dope" and you can order it at the same site. It is also available through Amazon and will be available for the Kindle.

I actually read the first two chapters and they held my interest. Well written.

THINGS JUST KEEP GETTING WORSE FOR JEREMY. And the fact that things get worse seem to be by his own doing. Authorities say NASCAR driver Jeremy Mayfield was arrested Tuesday night on drug charges. Mayfield was arrested in his home in the town of Catawba on possession of methamphetamine charges, according to the Catawba County Sheriff's Office. Deputies had gone to Mayfield's home to execute a search warrant on a tip there were stolen goods in the house.

During the search, deputies found the methamphetamine. They also found items that may be stolen but deputies have not verified the items taken are in fact stolen property. Mayfield has a scheduled court appearance Wednesday morning. His is out of jail on a \$3,000 bond.

Of course Jeremy claims that none of this is true. He continues his battle in court against NASCAR. In my opinion it is time for Jeremy to just give it up and face the music, get himself straightened out and get on with his life. Such a talented racer, winner in Cup events, and now he seems to have thrown it all away.

THE END OF LOVE BUG RACING? NASCAR has been looking for ways to break up the two-car tandem drafts that have become the norm at Daytona and Talladega, where the series requires the use of restrictor plates to limit speeds. Using a different restrictor plate, a smaller spoiler and a different cooling system are among the options being considered by NASCAR.

OUTLAW BEING PENALIZED FOR BEING AN OUTLAW? Jason Sides is apparently suing the World of Outlaws ownership group, World Racing Group. Sides is not happy that he apparently went off to race in a non-sanctioned Sprint Car event and the Outlaws are penalizing him and that is going to cost him a lot of point money at the end of the season.

Sides claims he called to ask permission to run in the event and no one called him back so he decided to go race. According to him there were two other Outlaw teams at the same event and they were not being penalized.

This should prove to be a very interesting case should it get to the courtroom. I think it will be settled before it gets that far.

AS A PUBLIC SERVICE N.J.'s Bridgeport Speedway has announced that wristbands from the rained out Super Late Model Spectacular in August retain their value (general admission wristbands are worth \$25 and pit wristbands \$35) towards admission for the "Charlie Bray Memorial Weekend", November 19 and 20.

However there were a number of fans asking about the wristbands from the George Wingate Classic which had some weather problems and those wristbands have no value.

Looks like a great weekend of racing at Bridgeport for the Charlie Bray Memorial with big-blocks, Bridgeport Modifieds, TRSR Sprints and more.

A good weather day on November 20 just may find this old writer making his way over to catch some of the excitement.

"DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE? Education is when you read the fine print; experience is what you get when you don't."