

News

I'm not just whistling Dixie, NASCAR is gooder than grits

BY PASHA CARROLL
SUN REPORTER

On my favorite day of the week, Sunday, I discovered the Daytona 500.

Fast cars, good-looking men, tag-team action, fights, celebrities, crashes, shameless sponsor name dropping, a death plot ... it had all the makings of a "Goodfellas" drama.

Except, like the 6 o'clock news, this was real life.

Initially, I had no intentions of watching rednecks race their tacky, overly decorated cars. But once I settled in and heard some NASCAR history, I was hooked.

I listened as my Southern consiliere told the tale of two Earnhardts.

Dale Earnhardt is a name I have come accustomed to hearing, after all, when he died it was national news. And my sister's husband is a Northern redneck who watches NASCAR religiously, so I was never ignorant to it.

Earnhardt's dark horse image was also no secret.

He was intimidating, fearless and had a loyal following. We New Yorkers could respect him. After all, his signature color was black.

He was the exact image people love to hate, love to watch and love to dig dirt on.

During the season opener, which I learned is the Daytona 500 (how NASCAR am I now!) in 2001, Dale Earnhardt Sr. crashed and died in the last half-mile of the race.

His death, however, is not what makes the stew thick and chunky.

The intriguing part is Earnhardt had won his first Daytona 500 in 1998. Some say it was time for him to say goodbye to the profession and let the younger racers have a go at it.

Maybe he raced one too many times and speed demons finally took him over.

From what I heard, retirement wasn't an option for a man said to be

Can't Get There From Here



By Pasha Carroll

pompous and who built a racing empire. He was invincible until that fatal day. Since then, NASCAR hasn't exactly gone down in his flames.

In fact, one might argue Earnhardt's death did as much for the sport as the days he spent racing. I am sure his son, his teammates, heck, every single NASCAR fan hurt when it happened.

But oh, what better way to catapult a sport than the death of a legend?

When he died, Earnhardt was setting up the Dale Earnhardt Incorporated pack, including his son Dale Earnhardt Jr. and teammate Michael Waltrip to come in first and second

place.

I didn't know there were teams in NASCAR and they worked together so at least one member of the team wins.

And what they do in their little teams is pretty cool. They bump for positions and block other cars. It's all the exciting violence of hockey, but they beat each other using steel instead of fists.

They are like a team of mobsters. A hit for your team is good for the bunch.

And like Hollywood horror flicks, NASCAR has spooky elements. It must be eerie for Earnhardt Jr. to be where his father died in Daytona, lap after lap after lap.

Speaking of being Hollywood, two of my favorite hotties, Ashton Kutcher and Matthew McConaughey, made appearances at the 2005 season opener.

RAAARRRRR. Surely women everywhere would have tuned in to hear Matthew McConaughey say, with

that fine Southern accent of his, "Alright, alright, alright - gentlemen start your engines."

I closed my eyes today and still hear the twang.

But there was one specific budding racer who held my enthusiasm through Sunday's race.

Stock car racer Kasey Kahne had me from first grin.

Endorsements galore for this kid, simply because he is hot, young and on the brink of being great. After all, he was in the front of the pack at the 500 until some idiot got in his way on Pit Road.

So, as long as they race their cars fast, keep their men sexy and drama ensues in NASCAR racing, I will forever be a fan.

Pasha Carroll is a staff reporter at The Walton Sun. Her column appears the fourth Saturday of each month. She can be reached at 267-4555 or pasha_carroll@link.freedom.com

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