

Number 48 is Always Numero Uno at LMS

By Jenny McGuinness
NASCAR PRESS

NEW YORK, NY – Number 48 Jimmie Johnson and his team will have the home-field advantage in this weekend's Coca-Cola 600 at Lowe's Motor Speedway. Johnson has the honor of being welcomed with a home visit by Victory Lane at the 2001 inaugural NASCAR Busch Series race at Chicagoland Speedway. This week started his career racing in the Short Course Off-Road Drivers Association (SODA), the Short Course Off-Road Enthusiasts (SCORE) and the Mickey Thompson Entertainment Group Stadium Series (MTSEG) throughout the early 1990s. During this time

he nabbed more than 25 wins, more than 100 top-three finishes and Raybestos Rookie of the Year honors in all three series. He took fourth in the 1998 ASA series standings, again garnering a Raybestos Rookie of the Year award. Then in 1999, Johnson nabbed two ASA wins and moved to third in the season's standings. He also made his NASCAR Busch Series debut that year, finishing seventh in his very first NASCAR Busch Series start at the Milwaukee Mile. Jimmie drove away with 10th place in 2000's NASCAR Busch Series and finished in the top 10 six times, finishing third in his rookie season. Each year, he has progressed impressively from



Jimmie Johnson

preceding year. In 2001, he added four top-five and eight top-10 finishes and finished eighth in series points. These stats, along with his finish at Chicagoland Speedway, catapulted him to a Cup debut in 2002. When Jeff Gordon made the foray into team ownership that same year, he chose Jimmie as his driver. Prior to this in 2001, Johnson made three Winston Cup starts for Hendrick Motorsports, finishing 35th. He delivered a solid performance in 2002 beginning with a pole position win in the Daytona 500. That year he won the Raybestos Rookie of the Year award to Ryan Newman in 2002. Jimmie made history

by becoming the first rookie ever to lead the Cup standings on the way to a fifth-place point finish. Johnson is much better on track than his record indicates. He led laps in the four place races of the 2003 season. And for the last two seasons Johnson has been the only driver in the top 10 points after each race. This 70 race streak only recently came to an end. The true turning point in Johnson's career came at Dover last June. He had a great car and a solid shot at winning, but tagged the wall late in the race. To his credit Jimmie took the blame, showing the makings of a true champion. All insider sources indicate that Jimmie and his team are the ones to beat for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series in 2004.

It Came From Behind

A solid strategy in racing

By Meg Sewell
NASCAR PRESS

CONCORD, NC – It's probable that the thousands who flock to Lowe's Motor Speedway this weekend for the Coca-Cola 600 will be unaware that they're standing on a former battleground of sorts. In the past, the speedway, stock car racing's home track, nearly failed before it got off the starting line. But a lot of love was waged and two visionaries made LMS what it is today. When Lowe's Motor Speedway was built by O. Bruton Smith in 1995, stock car racing was still in its infancy. Designed by Smith and his business partner, Curtis Turner, it was destined for a life fraught with highs and lows. Smith and Turner were a dream team. A native North Carolinian, Smith got his start at the short-track as a promoter at Concord Motor Speedway and the Charlotte Fairgrounds. The late Turner hailed from the Virginia lumber industry. After NASCAR debuted in 1949, he went on to become one of the first NASCAR Series drivers. The two built their fantasy: a 1.5-mile superspeedway in the Queen City. And on June 19, 1960, the first World 600 was run there. The newly paved road would yield a smooth ride that preceded the track's first speed bump. Like many superspeedways of the era, it went bankrupt due to lagging ticket sales and filed for Chapter 11 in 1961. A short time later, it emerged once more for good. Smith took a hiatus from the track in 1962 and went to Texas and Illinois to pursue other business prospects. He then began buying shares of Lowe's Motor Speedway, putting him in pole position to be its majority stockholder by 1975. He became its head of operations that same year.

In the endeavor to improve and expand the track, he brought in current president H.A. "Humpty" Wheeler as general manager and the two began to put plans in place. In the years that followed, Smith and Wheeler committed themselves to customer satisfaction and built a track facility that perpetually raised the bar on industry standards. Grandstands, several luxury suites were built, along with food concessions and restroom facilities.

In 1984, turn one became prime real estate for spectators when Smith and Wheeler erected forty grandstands. Another seven were added in 1991. The track became the first and only superspeedway to have grandstands around racing in 1992 when special lighting was installed. And a new, 20,000 square-foot garage area was added in 1994. Sprinkled throughout the Speedway complex are 1,000 planters and a 1.2-mile road course and a six-tenth-mile karting layout in the infield. This feature is a quarter-mile oval made of asphalt that uses the track's front end stretch and pit road. Finally, a one-fifth-mile oval is bordered outside the third turn.

On a yearly basis, three NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series events, two NASCAR Busch Series races, an Automobile Racing Club of America event, an American Speed Association race and a NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series event are held at Lowe's.

The Fair Track, High Performance Driving School and the Richard Petty Driving Experience at the track extremely throughout the year. In 1995, 10,000 seats were added, along with 20 new VIP suites and 40 special grandstand boxes. In May 1997, the Diamond Tower Terrace grandstand opened along the track's backstretch. This feature encompasses an additional 26,000 fans for the Winston and Coca-Cola 600.

In May of 2000, a state-of-the-art four-tenth-mile clay oval was built across Highway 29, called the Dirt Track at Lowe's Motor Speedway. It houses 10,000 seats. The Dirt Track is home of the NASCAR Southern All Star, the Advance Auto Club spring race, Freeway Showcross and Mountain Drifts.

Between 1998 and 2000, the speedway's total seating capacity was brought to 167,000 when three rounds of additions were completed along the fourth Turn Terrace and the Ford grandstand.

Additional facilities are part of the measures taken to please Smith and Wheeler's commitment to spectator satisfaction.

In the four decades since its inception, Lowe's Motor Speedway has been a continuous money pit. One who has taken a week-long journey on that's yielded one of America's most beloved race tracks.

Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup

NASCAR modifies how premier series champion is determined

By Dan Cronin
NASCAR PRESS

DAYTONA BEACH, FL – In January, NASCAR announced a modification in how the champion of its premier series is determined, creating a "Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup" covering the last 10 races of the 36-race NASCAR NEXTEL Cup season.

"The Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup will provide a better opportunity for more drivers to win the championship, creating excitement and drama throughout the entire season," NASCAR President Mike Helton said. "In addition, the Chase will showcase our drivers' talents, increasing the value for all teams and their sponsors."

After the first 26 races of the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series season, all drivers in the NASCAR Top 10 and any others within 400 points of the leader will earn a berth in the "Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup." No driver outside the top 10 with 10 races remaining has come back to win the championship of NASCAR's premier series under the current point system.

All drivers in the "Chase" will have their point totals adjusted. The first-place driver in the standings will begin the chase with 5,050 points; the second-place driver will start with 5,045, etc. Interseasonal five-point drops will continue through the line of title contenders.

NASCAR is making a change to the current point system for the first time since the system's 1978 inception, awarding 180 points to a race winner, compared to the previous system of 175 points. Five-point bonuses for leading a lap and leading a short race will be awarded.

The 180-point award will ensure that a race winner gets more points than a race runner-up. This change will be in effect starting this season for NASCAR's three national series – NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series, the NASCAR Busch Series and the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series.

At season's end, every driver who finishes in the NASCAR NEXTEL Top 10 will receive a point-fund payout of at least \$1 million, with the champion receiving more than \$5 million. In addition, the 11th-place driver in the final standings will receive a \$250,000 bonus.

"This new approach to determining our champion has both the drivers and the fans in mind," Helton said. "The Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup will be a continuation of our season, with heightened drama. It will increase the spotlight on all competitors and the value of being in the series for all teams."

"This will be exciting – and fair. Since 1975, using the current point system, no driver has ever been outside the NASCAR Top 10 with 10 races remaining and come back to win the championship of our premier series. We added the 400-point cutoff to allow drivers outside the top 10 after 26 races to be included in the Chase for the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup."

The last time the point system for NASCAR's premier series was altered was in 1975 when the current system, designed to reward consistency, was introduced. This marks the 11th time since 1949 that the point system has been changed.

The system introduced in 1975 remains virtually intact for NASCAR's three national series – aside from the five additional points for race winners.

In a safety-related move designed to limit the number of damaged cars remaining on-track, NASCAR will increase minimum speed requirements, in lieu of altering the point breakdown for lowering race times.

In addition, NASCAR is making a change to the current point system for the first time since the system's 1978 inception, awarding 180 points to a race winner, compared to the previous system of 175 points. Five-point bonuses for leading a lap and leading a short race will be awarded.

Don't Try This at Home

Engine
8 cylinders and 730 horses are packed in the biggest difference between stock cars and consumer models.

Root Hops
If a car travels backwards at a high speed, two pieces of metal flip up to keep it from becoming airborne.

Spooler
When mounted correctly, this metal blade manipulates airflow to keep cars on track.

Steering wheel
The steering wheel is shock cars is removable to allow easier access to drivers.

Tires
Wider than commercial tires, the Goodyear tires used on all stock cars are treadless for the best traction on a clean track.

Headlights
Headlights and brake lights are replaced with stickers.

New Racecar Phones Get Pole Position

By Jason Lucas
NASCAR PRESS

MIAMI, FL – Nextel's first season as the official sponsor of NASCAR is already in high gear. When the company considered its user base they realized that some of their most loyal consumers were also passionate about stock car racing. And when they examined the similarities between their cell phones and NASCAR's racers, the "speed" and "efficiency" attributes the two have in common were as clear as a checkered flag. In June of 2003, Nextel and NASCAR announced their ten-year, \$700 million partnership. As of the

2004 season, Nextel has replaced Winston as the sport's title sponsor. While the ink was still wet on the contracts, Nextel quickly got to work making some changes in order to accommodate its new role as a sponsor. Nextel immediately ramped up its new infrastructure, expanding its already extensive and robust coverage throughout the country. Its popular Direct Connect feature became available coast-to-coast. In addition, it's making a foray into international markets later this year when Direct Connect becomes available overseas. Nextel and Nextel are also working together to make their technology available to the drivers and teams, much in the way Motorola's NFL sponsorship

has translated to the use of the company's headsets for in-game communication. There's even talk of fans being able to listen in on pit crew communication with drivers from their Nextel phones. "We know how passionate NASCAR fans are about their sport, and that instant and to-the-minute access to information is key to that connection," said Mark Schweitzer, senior vice president of marketing for Nextel. Most recently, Nextel unveiled new racecar phones modeled after ten specific drivers. Each phone is colored and designed to look like a different team car. They all come pre-loaded with the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series logo and photos of cars on the track. Additionally, the driver phones have wallpaper

with their car's number and a photo of the driver. All their phones feature a variety of ring tones such as a revving car engine, or familiar tunes like the national anthem. One of the most popular features is the wireless web; consumers can access in order to get stats. Subscribers can receive breaking news and features from NASCAR.COM's reporters, driver updates, as well as NASCAR.COM's live timing, scoring, and leaderboard service. Nextel users can proudly display their new NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series driver phones this weekend at Lowe's Motor Speedway at the Coca-Cola 600. Look to the right for all phone models.



The 2004 NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series™ phones are here.

Race in and choose from 10 unique driver phones featuring driver colors, numbers and signatures, or the inaugural NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series™ phone.

Each phone comes fully loaded with a built-in walkie-talkie that connects coast-to-coast in under a second. They're all GPS-enabled and have a fast link to real-time race information on the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series wireless website.

Trade up to Nextel. Bring your number. Call 800-NEXTEL9, go to nextel.com or visit a Nextel store near you.

NEXTEL. Done.