

NASCAR to watch for bump drafting

By MIKE HARRIS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

Two days after Nextel Cup champion Tony Stewart said the bumping and banging at Daytona International Speedway must stop before somebody gets hurt or killed, NASCAR decided to begin policing what drivers call bump drafting.

The practice, slamming into the rear of another car to maintain momentum, is common at Daytona and Talladega, the only two NASCAR tracks that require carburetor restrictor-plates to choke horsepower and limit speeds.

Although it has been going on for years, Stewart thinks it's out of control. NASCAR apparently agrees.

Nextel Cup officials said Tuesday that spotters in zones in the turns on the 2.5-mile Daytona track will feed information to NASCAR, which will then determine whether to penalize cars in Sunday's season-opening race.

The decision came in the wake of Stewart's criticism of bump drafting in superspeedway racing following a particularly wild ride in Sunday's Budweiser Shootout exhibition.

Robin Pemberton, vice president of competition, and Nextel Cup director John Darby outlined a plan to begin policing the bump drafting in Thursday's two 150-mile qualifying races for Sunday's Daytona 500.

"As we go forward in attempting to control bump drafting in those

areas, there's going to be some very subjective calls being made," Darby said. "That's the reason we'd like to get this under way as quickly as possible.

"Hopefully we don't have to make a call. But if we do make a call in the twins, it wouldn't be quite as painful as having to make it in the Daytona 500."

Pemberton said penalties for overzealous bumping could range from driving through the pit lane at the pit-road speed limit to being parked for repeat offenses.

He said it will be up to the drivers to keep from getting into trouble on track.

"It's a serious matter," Pemberton said. "To leave it in our hands when we're not out there, they may

get a call they didn't bargain for."

Two-time Daytona 500 winner Michael Waltrip said the new policy could be a problem.

"That's going to be really arbitrary to police because even the most sublime bump drafts at a time when a guy's getting ready to make a move in another direction can result in sending a guy out of control," Waltrip said. "It seems to me it would have to result in a crash before (NASCAR) could react.

"If you bump draft going straight really hard, that's OK. You have to know the other guy is going to continue in a straight line."

Darby said NASCAR is going to try to work with the competitors on the situation.

"Every bump draft will not cre-

ate a penalty," Darby said. "Every time a car touches another car will not create a penalty. Unless it becomes very apparent to us that there is an unnecessary hit, specifically in one of the no zones, we will not issue a penalty."

Darby noted that bump drafting in and of itself is not an offense.

"It can enhance the excitement of the race," he said. "As it transfers to stockcars, and particularly applies to Daytona and Talladega, with the cars running closer together, a bump draft at the right time in the right place is not the worst thing in the world.

"But it has been turning bump drafting into slam drafting because the hits just keep getting harder and harder and harder."

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Michael Waltrip
NASCAR Nextel Cup driver

BASKETBALL

VILLANOVA, Pa.

Coach signs contract extension with Villanova

Jay Wright received one heck of a reward for knocking off the No. 1 team in the country.

One day after his fourth-ranked Wildcats beat Connecticut, Villanova on Tuesday gave Wright a seven-year contract extension through the 2012-13 season that gives him many more chances to beat a No. 1 and maybe take his team to the top spot himself.

"The timing of this is incredible," Wright said, smiling. "I know it looks like we really planned this well."

It was an incredible 24 hours for Wright after the Wildcats (20-2, 10-1 Big East) beat the Huskies 69-64 Monday night, their first victory against a top-ranked team in nearly 11 years.

Wright and Villanova athletic director Vince Nicastro had talked about an extension since spring after the Wildcats returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1999.

COLUMBIA, Mo.

Missouri investigating handling of departure

The University of Missouri will investigate the circumstances that led to Quin Snyder's sudden resignation as men's basketball coach last week.

Snyder stepped down Friday, a day after vowing to finish his seventh season with the Tigers. A report in the Kansas City Star said athletic director Mike Alden sent his special assistant, Gary Link, to inform Snyder that he would not be retained.

Link has had no comment about his role in Snyder's resignation. Alden has said he asked Link to "gauge how he's doing," but not to inform Snyder that he was a lame duck. Link did not return phone calls Tuesday.

SEATTLE

Sonics send Radmanovic to Clippers for Wilcox

The Seattle SuperSonics traded Vladimir Radmanovic to the Los Angeles Clippers for Chris Wilcox on Tuesday in a swap of 6-foot-10 forwards.

Radmanovic and Wilcox will be free agents at season's end, and both had fallen out of favor with their previous teams.

Radmanovic has struggled for the past month despite being put in the starting lineup after new coach Bob Hill took over Jan. 3. Since Jan. 11, Radmanovic has scored in double figures only four times in 13 games and recently was benched in favor of forward Nick Collison.

HOCKEY

NEW YORK

Lawyer: No connection to mob in gambling ring

A New Jersey-based gambling ring linked to Wayne Gretzky had no ties to organized crime, a defense lawyer involved in the case said Tuesday, contradicting the claims of state officials.

Officials have said investigators are looking into how deep mob involvement might have been in the sports-betting ring allegedly run by former hockey star Rick Tocchet, currently Gretzky's top assistant with the Phoenix Coyotes, and two other men.

"If they come up with a Bruno Scarfo crime family connection, I'll pay their salaries for a year," said Charles A. Peruto Jr., the lawyer for James Ulmer, who is charged with promoting gambling, money laundering and conspiracy.

Peruto's comments referred to the La Casa Nostra family that has long dominated organized crime in the Philadelphia area.

"Lawyers' comments don't concern us," said New Jersey State Police Capt. Al Della Fave.

• Grizzlies

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Transylvania (18-4, 10-2). Franklin's final regular-season game is at 3 p.m. Saturday against visiting Hanover.

The Grizzlies are on a five-game winning streak and have won nine of their past 11 games. They are getting solid play from Redman and Marshall. Since the two players entered the Grizzlies' starting lineup in mid-December, they haven't left.

Marshall, a shooting guard, is second on the team in scoring at 10.7 points per game. He has made 45 of 91 3-point attempts (49.5 percent) and leads the conference in 3-point field-goal percentage.

Redman, a point guard, is averaging almost nine points per game and leads the team in assists (2.9).

But they're not concerned with statistics or points. They're just hungry for wins and bringing home a conference championship.

"The bottom line is this team is looking to win," Redman said. "We're not so worried about stats and who scores and all that."

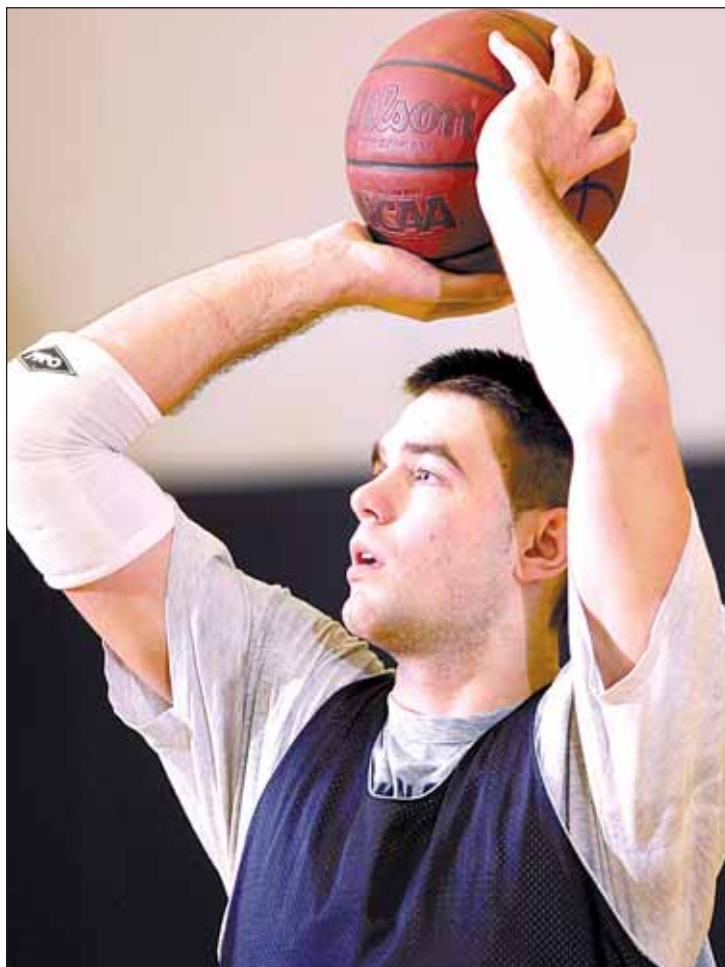
Franklin's offense revolves around Nick Kane. The senior leads the Grizzlies in scoring (18.6), rebounding (8.3) and blocks (2.6).

In Saturday's 81-70 win at conference rival Mount St. Joseph, Kane scored 26 points, grabbed 11 rebounds and tied his own school record with eight blocked shots. But Prather was more impressed by another statistic. The 6-foot-7 Kane had a team-high six assists. Overall, Franklin recorded 21 assists on 27 baskets.

"I thought of his entire stat line, the one that jumped off the page was his six assists," Prather said. "You don't ever think of a post player as leading in assists."

But when Kane's not at full strength, the Grizzlies have struggled. During a three-game stretch at the end of December and into early January, he battled sickness and injuries. Franklin lost all three games to North Central, Wabash and Hanover.

"Nick's play has been the anchor around which all of the other pieces have been able to get their bearings," Prather said. "By and large, our play has been a reflection of his play. In every



Franklin College senior Nick Kane, the men's basketball team's leading scorer, takes a shot during the Grizzlies' practice Tuesday.

aspect — offense, defense and rebounding — he's a huge part of our team's identity."

Kane's presence forces opponents to double-team inside, leaving outside shooters like Redman and Marshall open.

Redman sets up plays and makes sure the Grizzlies are getting the ball inside first to players like Kane and senior forward Josh Finke. If they're not open, they kick the ball out, and that leads to more open looks.

"We're very disciplined on offense," Finke said. "Everybody just trusts everybody to make a play."

"We have complete confidence in the other players out on the court. If a guy is a little bit more open than someone else, nobody has a problem giving up their shot for a better one."

For most of the year, the Grizzlies' offense has clicked. Now they're focusing on defense.

Halfway through the conference season, the Grizzlies' had allowed opponents in six of seven

games to shoot better than 50 percent from the field.

The Grizzlies have stepped up their play since. Franklin has held all five of its opponents to less than 50 percent in the second half of the conference season.

"When you actually saw it on paper, you could actually see the defense wasn't there and that we needed to improve on it," Finke said. "Our offense was fine and running real well. We needed to improve our defense if we were going to win conference. We've been controlling games (now)."

Prather admits Franklin typically plays its best basketball late in the season. And now that the Grizzlies are in tune on offense and defense, he wants it to continue heading into the tournament.

"You look at the defensive end, and that's the last piece of the puzzle," Prather said. "We have to continue to get better without giving any ground in other aspects of play. Then, hopefully, we're one of the teams that's playing the best when it matters most."

CUT TO THE CHASE

Remaining games for the top three teams in the Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference men's basketball standings:

Transylvania	Franklin	Hanover
Today at Franklin	Today at Transylvania	Today Mount St. Joseph
Saturday at Defiance	Saturday Hanover	Saturday at Franklin
7:30 p.m.	7:30 p.m.	7:30 p.m.
3 p.m.	3 p.m.	3 p.m.

• Education

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

taking place at Indiana's 66 Boys and Girls Club locations and is aimed at raising reading and math skills and scores.

Funded through Temporary Aid for Needy Families, the program is designed to help children with their homework and give them an opportunity to explore and meet people in many career fields, said Susan Sahn, Franklin Boys and Girls Club program director.

Children qualify by meeting certain criteria, with the primary one being they are enrolled in their school's free or reduced-cost lunch program, Sahn said.

Mitch's Kids is part of the Boys and Girls Club career exploration program. Children must attend 30 sessions of tutoring and seven of 10 career exploration activities, which include listening to guest speakers.

Those who register and complete the task receive a pizza party and a free Boys and Girls Club membership good for one year. Currently only 22 children are signed up for the program in Franklin. Sahn said the club can take up to 50 more.

"Kids are pretested in math and reading proficiencies, and we

THE STETTER FILE

Name: Mitch Stetter
Age: 25
Occupation: Left-handed relief pitcher for Nashville Sounds, a Triple-A affiliate of the Milwaukee Brewers
Uniform number: 41
College: Indiana State
Major: Physical education
High school: Southridge
Hometown: Huntingburg
Parents: Blake and Susie Stetter
Siblings: A sister, Carrie, 22; and a brother, Luke, 9
Hobbies: Water skiing and ping pong
One thing people don't know about him: He says he's the best Wiffle Ball player in southern Indiana

hope, along with school, they're getting homework help here," Sahn said. "But we're also doing fun activities instead of just homework."

Brooke Pleak is one the Franklin Boys and Girls Club children enrolled in the Mitch's Kids program.

Pleak, a 10-year-old Franklin resident, wants to be a scientist or a WNBA player someday.

And Stetter reiterated to her the importance of getting an education to achieve those goals.

"I learned that it's important to get an education so you can get a good job," said Pleak, a fourth-

grader at Creekside Elementary School. "I really liked to do experiments in science class, and I also play travel basketball for the Franklin Lady Cubs. I learned it's good to get an education."

Stetter and Schaub went to college at Indiana State. Stetter was drafted in 2003, his senior year, by the Milwaukee Brewers and has spent the past three years moving up the ranks.

He played rookie baseball for Helena in 2003, moved up to low-A Beloit and high-A High Desert in 2004 and last year spent time between Double-A Huntsville and Triple-A Nashville.

This year, he was invited by the Brewers to attend spring training for the first time in Phoenix starting Friday.

"I've had trouble sleeping the last few nights," Stetter said. "I want to get out there and meet and pitch in front of big-league coaches. I'm getting anxious and excited."

Stetter told children that the most important thing in life is to have an education. Ironically, he still has to finish his.

Stetter, who majored in physical education, still has 30 credit hours remaining to earn his degree. But he told the children that he plans on doing so.

"I wanted to be a P.E. teacher or coach," he said. "But you never know what is going to happen."

• Alpine

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

afternoon downhill. Ligety took a star turn under the floodlights during the evening slalom.

He was as consistent as a metronome, rocking smoothly back and forth, back and forth, smacking away gates with his orange gloves and black shin guards.

"You've just got to get in the starting gate," Ligety said, "and throw down whatever you've got."

When he finished his final run, the day's fastest at 43.84 seconds, the youngster nicknamed "Ligety Split" raised his hands and took a well-deserved bow.

Still, he had to wait to celebrate.

First, Ivica Kostelic of Croatia finished a half-second shy. Then, World Cup slalom champion Benjamin Raich of Austria went off-course about 30 seconds into his run.

That was it. U.S. skiers Steven Nyman and Scott Macartney tackled Ligety, and the trio of teammates rolled in the snow. Ligety took a victory ride on the others' shoulders, waving a U.S. flag.

"It's a great day, especially with Bode skiing out," Macartney said. "Ted stepped up."

Ligety, from Park City, Utah, had never finished better than 10th in a top-level combined race. On Tuesday, he was best with a total time of 3 minutes, 9.35 seconds.

Kostelic won the silver, 0.53 behind, and got a hug from sister Janica, herself a champion Olympic skier. Rainer Schoenfelder of Austria was third, 1.32 back.

Raich, meanwhile, pushed his goggles atop his head and slowly made his way down the hill.

"Bad luck," he said. "Of course, I'm sad, but life must go on."

It wasn't the first time Ligety benefited from an error by Raich. Ligety's first career World Cup podium finish came in December at Beaver Creek, Colo., when Raich skied off-course on the second run of a slalom, allowing the American to finish third.

The performance must have been a relief to the team, after Miller and Daron Rahalves were afterthoughts in Sunday's downhill, and Lindsey Kildow had a horrifying crash in women's downhill training.

On Tuesday, U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association president and chief executive Bill Marolt found himself defending the team's motto: "Best in the World."

And yet, Miller seemed in great shape for his first Olympic gold (he took two silvers at Salt Lake City) after a glistening downhill and what appeared to be a good-enough-to-still-lead opening slalom.

It turned out not to be.

As a replay showed, Miller failed to negotiate a gate two-thirds of the way down the slalom and was bounced from the competition half an hour later.

Nothing new there: Since winning a World Cup slalom on this very same hill in December 2004, Miller has failed to finish 11 of 14 slaloms.

"I don't really intend to get that disappointed," Miller said, then managed to make a joke: "I mean, at least I don't have to go all the way down to Torino tomorrow" for the medal ceremony.



AP PHOTO

American Bode Miller straddles a gate during the first run of the slalom portion of the men's Alpine combined at the Turin Winter Olympic Games on Tuesday.

TUESDAY'S ROUNDUP

A look at what happened in the Turin Winter Olympic Games on Tuesday:

Plushenko wins short program

Evgeni Plushenko's biggest fan was his closest competitor, U.S. champion Johnny Weir.

Weir marveled at the 90.66 points the Russian star put up in the Olympic men's short program. Plushenko's personal best gave him more than a 10-point lead on the three-time U.S. champ, a massive gap.

"It's wild. I didn't think anyone would get above 80.00," Weir said.

Plushenko, winner of three world titles, was the American's pick for gold before the Olympics began, and Weir still doesn't think there's much of a chance he'll lose in Thursday night's free skate.

"If he falls three times, maybe, just maybe someone can squeeze by," Weir said.

From the moment he stepped on the ice until the conclusion of his short program to Puccini's "Tosca," Plushenko never flashed even a hint of a smile. This was all business for the 2002 silver medalist.

He nailed every element, from a quad toe loop-triple toe loop combination to a solid triple axel.

U.S. women top Finland

The U.S. women's hockey team closed preliminary play with a plodding and graceless 7-3 win against Finland, a team that represented the Americans' first real test of the tournament.

The U.S. actually trailed by two goals at one point late in the second period before rallying for five third-period goals, two by Angela Ruggiero.

Sarah Parsons also scored two goals for the Americans (3-0), who were anything but perfect. They trailed and flailed for most of the first 41 minutes, raising the possibility of the team's first loss in international play to a non-Canadian team.

Snowboarder injured

The rough-and-tumble sport of snowboardcross claimed its first Olympic injury victim before the opening race was even run when American Jayson Hale hurt his knee during a practice session.

Hale was running alone, not four-wide as is typical in competition, when he got too much air on a late jump and landed awkwardly.

He was taken to a medical center in Sestriere. Dr. Jim Sterling, the U.S. Olympic Committee's chief medical officer, said Hale tore his anterior cruciate ligament and suffered significant bone bruising around the knee.

Hale returned to the athletes' village in Bardonecchia, where the snowboarding events are conducted. He is expected to decide in the next few days whether he wants to remain in Italy for the remainder of the games or go home.

Mom wins speedskating gold

Calling home to check on her 2-year-old son, Svetlana Zhurova heard him chirp the name of a Russian speedskating medalist.

"Dmitry, second. Dmitry, second," he told her.

When she calls again, Zhurova hopes to hear something about dear of Mom.

"I hope he tells me, 'Mama first, Mama first,'" she said.

The 34-year-old Russian who took a break from sports to become a mother, won the gold medal in the women's 500. She skated a combined time of 1 minute, 16.57 seconds to give Russia its second speedskating medal in Turin.

Germans sweep women's luge

Courtney Zabolocki glanced up at the awards platform, where three Germans were lined up shoulder to shoulder, celebrating their latest haul of Olympic medals.

Zabolocki couldn't bear the painful, familiar sight.

"So close," she said, biting her upper lip. "It's very hard."

Zabolocki brought U.S. women's luge within four-tenths of a second of Germany's high-powered luge machine. The Americans, though, have one last step to climb to reach the podium.

Sylke Otto won her second straight gold, Silke Kraushaar completed her Olympic collection with a silver, and newcomer Tatjana Huefner won bronze in a predictable German sweep at the Turin Games. Zabolocki settled for fourth.