

# At 72, driver plans comeback at Daytona

## 1966 Rookie of the Year aims to make statement for seniors

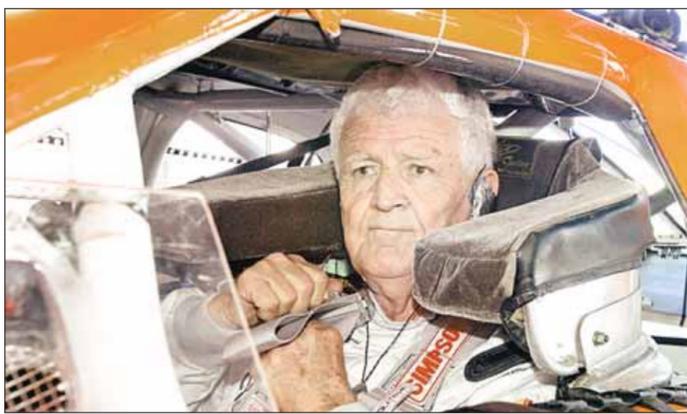
By JENNA FRYER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

Long after the big-budget NASCAR teams pulled into the Daytona garage, a bright yellow hauler, sans the logos and pricey paint scheme, navigated its way through the gate.

Perched behind the wheel of the big rig was 72-year-old James Hylton, whose decades-old image donned the side of the truck. He steered his way past Jeff Gordon, Matt Kenseth and the rest of today's NASCAR stars to his assigned spot along the fence and then went to work unloading his car.

Yes, his car. The 1966 Rookie of the Year is attempting a comeback of epic proportions, bringing a car to pre-season testing Monday as he chases his long-shot dream of qualifying for next month's Daytona 500.



James Hylton, a 72-year-old driver, adjusts his seat belt in his car at Daytona International Speedway during NASCAR testing in Daytona Beach, Fla., on Monday.

"I am doing this for seniors to show that at 70 years old, you don't have to go hunting for an old-folks home. You can go race for a little bit," Hylton said. "A lot of the old drivers want to come out here and hang out in the pits and see if I can do it."

The odds are stacked against Hylton,

who made the first of his 15 Daytona 500 starts in 1966. But he's not doing this because he foolishly thinks he can win the Super Bowl of NASCAR.

Rather, Hylton just wants a spot in the record books as the oldest driver to ever make a Cup race. He already holds the mark in both the Busch and ARCA Series

but is now focused on making it a trifecta. The Cup record of age 65 is shared by Hershel McGriff (Sonoma, 1993) and Jim Fitzgerald (Riverside, 1987).

"More power to him," said David Stremme, one of 11 current Cup drivers who weren't born when Hylton notched his only two victories. "You've got to believe that if he makes the race, he might earn more money finishing last than he did in an entire season of his early days."

"That kind of money could carry a guy through an entire year and make it worth giving it a shot."

Indeed, Carl Edwards won \$269,882 last season for finishing 43rd in the biggest race of the year. Hylton, meanwhile, estimates the most money he ever made in a single season was about \$150,000.

"I won Talladega (in 1972), and it paid \$24,000," Hylton said. "Now they pay you more than that just to show up."

But Hylton has to do a lot more than just show up, which he learned the hard way on the first of three days of testing. When he headed out to the track at the start of the morning session, his radio didn't work, and it took hours for him to get it functioning.

By the time he made his first lap,

every other driver had practiced, broke for lunch, then practiced some more.

In all, Hylton ran just five laps, and his top speed of 181.397 mph was the slowest of the day and a far cry from the 185.090 mph that David Gilliland posted to lead the day.

"You can't beat youth; I know that," he shrugged.

And he may not be able to beat the numbers, either: About 60 drivers are expected to vie for the 43 spots in the Daytona 500 field.

But Hylton will be giving his effort in a proven car and good strong engine, all courtesy of Richard Childress. Hylton has known the car owner since the two raced against each other in the 1970s, and Childress agreed to sell a super-speedway car to him from his fleet.

The car that was selected is a good one, too: Robby Gordon drove it to victory in a Daytona qualifying race in 2004. "The ace in the hole for me is Richard Childress," Hylton said. "Unofficially, he's not backing this thing. But as a friend, he is."

"Him and I raced together back in the early '70s, and we traveled together and doubled-up our pit crews. But I don't know what happened: He went on to be a multi-millionaire and I went on to be poor."

## SOCCER

MADRID, Spain

### Spanish team president belittles Beckham

David Beckham was belittled by Real Madrid's president Tuesday as a Hollywood wannabe spurned by most of the world's top soccer teams.

Team president Ramon Calderon, in comments expected to further sour relations between Beckham and the Spanish club,



CALDERON

said the English midfielder joined the Los Angeles Galaxy because there were no other takers.

"The proof that our technical staff was correct not to retain him has been borne out by every other technical staff in the world not wanting him even though he was out of contract," Calderon said in a speech to university students that was broadcast by Cadena COPE radio station.

He added: "David Beckham is going to be some sort of film actor living in Hollywood."

## TENNIS

MELBOURNE, Australia

### Most don't like it hot at Australian Open

Soaked with sweat, top-seeded Maria Sharapova had come within two points of a first-round exit at the Australian Open.

When it was announced the roof would be closed over Rod Laver Arena after her match, Sharapova clapped her hands above her head and raised her right thumb to applaud the decision.

Asked after her 6-3, 4-6, 9-7 win Tuesday against Camille Pin if it was hot enough, Sharapova replied: "You're not kidding."

Not long after Sharapova trudged off to see a doctor, rehydrate and take a cold bath while the temperature soared above 104 degrees, Rafael Nadal strolled onto a center court shielded by the retractable roof and cooled by air conditioning.

Sharapova and Nadal represented both ends of the spectrum as heat became the story of the day in Melbourne on Tuesday, forcing two players to give up rather than pass out and delaying the start of dozens of matches until after sundown.

## FOOTBALL

MIAMI

### Mike Shula a candidate for Dolphins coach job

The latest candidate to emerge for the Miami Dolphins' coaching job has a big edge in name recognition: He's a Shula.

Mike Shula interviewed for the job Saturday, a person familiar with the team's search said Tuesday. The person asked for anonymity because the Dolphins have declined to identify candidates.

Shula's dad, Don, coached the Dolphins for 26 years, holds the NFL record with 347 victories and is a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Hiring the younger Shula would mean a swap of coaches with Alabama. He was fired by the Crimson Tide in November and replaced by Nick Saban, who left the Dolphins on Jan. 3 after two seasons.

Two other candidates have interviewed with Miami twice: former Atlanta Falcons coach Jim Mora and Georgia Tech coach Chan Gailey.



Richard Petty, right, talks with former Winston Cup champion Benny Parsons, center, and driver John Andretti during a practice session at the Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, N.C., on May 24, 2000.

## '73 NASCAR champ Parsons dies at 65

By JENNA FRYER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Benny Parsons, a taxi driver who became a NASCAR champion in 1973, died Tuesday from lung-cancer complications, his son Keith said. He was 65.

Parsons died in Charlotte, N.C., where he had been hospitalized since Dec. 26.

A member of NASCAR's 50 greatest drivers and a lovable fixture at the track, Parsons won 21 races, including the 1975 Daytona 500, and 20 poles. He was the first Cup competitor to qualify for a race faster than 200 mph, going 200.176 mph at the 1982 Winston 500 at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway.

He retired from racing in 1988 and entered broadcasting. He spent the past six years as an NBC and TNT commentator and continued to call races from the booth during his treatment.

"Benny Parsons was a true champion, both on the racetrack and in life," NASCAR chairman Brian France said. "Benny loved our sport and the people that make it up, and those people loved him. He will be remembered as being a great ambassador for the sport."

Parsons was diagnosed with cancer in his left lung in July. Parson, who quit smoking in 1978, underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments and was declared cancer-free in October. But the treatment cost Parsons the use of his left lung, and he was hospitalized last month when doctors found a blood clot in his right lung. He was placed in an induced-coma.

Parsons, known throughout NASCAR as "BP," hosted a weekly radio program and kept fans updated on his condition in a blog on his Web site.

"As my radiation oncologist told me today, John Wayne lived and had a great career with one lung. There is no reason why I

can't do the same," Parsons said in a Dec. 18 entry after learning of the damage to his left lung.

"If given a choice between cancer or losing a lung, I would say that I got the right end of the deal," he added.

That feisty spirit was one of Parsons' trademarks, carrying him from a poor childhood in the North Carolina foothills to a job driving taxis and then to the top of NASCAR.

He remained popular with fans and the driving community. Michael Waltrip came to pre-season testing at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway this week with "We Love You BP" painted on the side of his car.

"Benny Parsons was the kindest, sweetest, most considerate person I have ever known," said Darrell Waltrip, a three-time NASCAR champion. "He was almost too nice to be a racecar driver, and I say that as a compliment. In my 30 odd years of racing Benny Parsons, I never knew of anyone being mad at Benny."

Parsons was always on the lookout for new talent and proved to have a keen eye when he discovered Greg Biffle and urged car owner Jack Roush to hire him sight unseen. Biffle went on to win championships in NASCAR's Truck and Busch Series and is now a top Nextel Cup driver.

"It's obvious he's the only reason why I am here in this sport," Biffle said. "I would still be in Washington racing local stuff if not for BP."

Parsons was born July 12, 1941, at his parents' rural home in Wilkes County, N.C., and eventually moved to Detroit, where he worked at a gas station and a cab company owned by his father. After winning ARCA titles in 1968-69, he returned to North Carolina in Ellerbe to become a full-time racer, often listing "taxicab driver" as his occupation on entry forms.

## Bush congratulates Cardinals

By BEN FELLER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### WASHINGTON

President Bush said Tuesday that even in a losing streak, it is possible to win by sticking with your goal and showing character no matter what the doubters say about you.

He was talking, of course, about baseball.

Bush, a lifelong fan of the sport, honored the World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals by commending them for winning the hard way.

To be sure, the Cardinals were not a powerhouse on their way to the White House.

The team limped into the playoffs with the worst record of any World Series champion in a non-

strike season. The Cardinals played with castoffs in key positions and a sense of being slighted by people other than their fans.

"When you overcome the odds this team overcame, you've got to play as a team," Bush said. "And they did."

In beating the Detroit Tigers last fall, the team was led by a little guy: David Eckstein, a sparkplug of a shortstop who stands 5-foot-7.

"They said he can't hit. They said he can't throw," Bush said of Eckstein, who stood smiling behind the president with his teammates.

"Listen, David, I've made a career out of people underestimating me," Bush said, drawing laughs from a packed East Room audience.

Bush lauded the team's entire operation: its management, coaches, players and fans. He had plenty of nice words for his old business partner, Cardinals Chairman Bill DeWitt Jr., who worked with Bush

when the president was managing partner of the Texas Rangers.

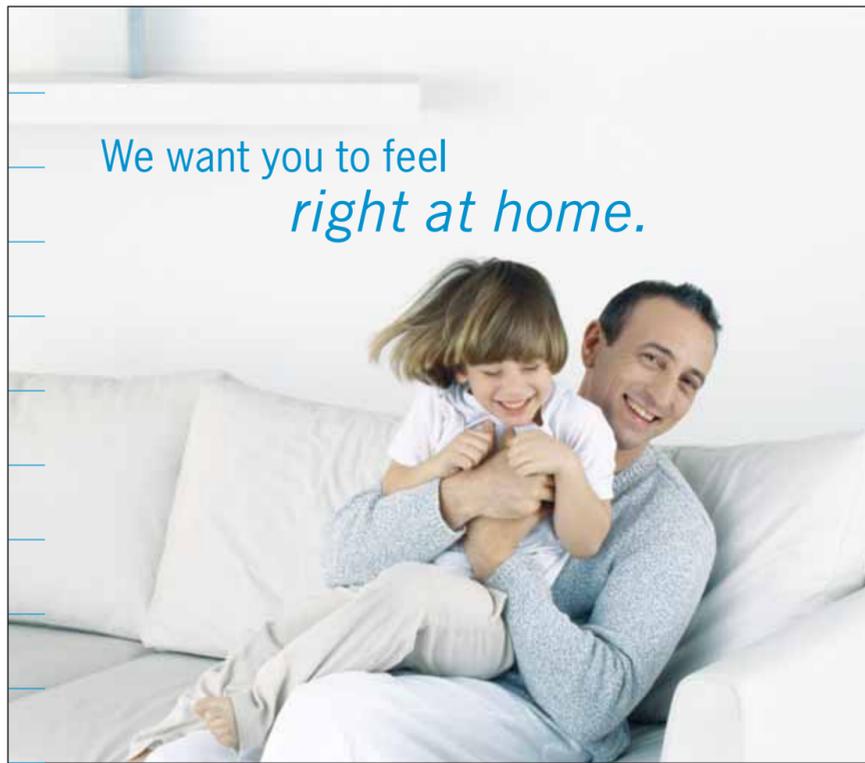
"The Cardinals now have won 10 World Series. That's 10 more than the Texas Rangers," Bush said.

The biggest applause, though, came when Bush introduced an injured Marine, Lance Cpl. Chad Watson. Bush met him at Walter Reed Army Medical Center recently and noticed the soldier was wearing a Cardinals hat. So he invited him to the ceremony.

"You never know where you're going to find a St. Louis Cardinal fan," Bush said.

A few notable players, chiefly slugger Albert Pujols, did not attend because of schedule conflicts. Pitcher Jeff Suppan led the team into the room even though he is with another team now, the Milwaukee Brewers, after signing a \$42 million contract in the off-season.

More than a few players, despite being used to a spotlight, seemed a bit overwhelmed around the president.



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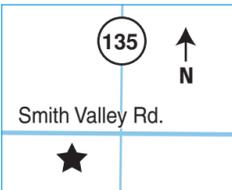
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