

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Some might say that Juan Pablo Montoya has beginner's luck. The Colombian won the CART title in his rookie year and won the Indianapolis 500 and the Rolex 24 at Daytona, each on the first attempt.

# NASCAR INSIDER

**A LOOK AHEAD:**

- **What:** The Budweiser Shootout
- **When:** 8:30 p.m. Saturday
- **Where:** Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway

**THE NEWCOMERS** A periodic look at some of the new faces in the sport

# Montoya's new beginnings

## Former open-wheel driver aims to find success in NASCAR

By **RICK MINTER**  
Cox News Service

**Atlanta**  
Juan Pablo Montoya is truly a world-class race driver, having won races on the elite Formula One circuit, the Indianapolis 500, a championship in CART and the Rolex 24 at Daytona. But as the Colombia native adapts to NASCAR, he has proved to be a personable, humble guy off the track and an intense competitor on it.

He has taken in the scene and won over some fans, at one of the rowdiest places on the NASCAR circuit, the infield at Talladega Superspeedway. He went there in the fall at the invitation of his Ganassi Racing teammate, David Stremme.

"He was there for the ARCA race," Stremme said. "I said, 'Hey, want to go ride on the golf cart?'"

"People loved him."

Stremme said he sometimes loses sight of the fact that he's in the company of a famous drivers, who has won major races all over the world.

**Juan Pablo Montoya** speaks to both English- and Spanish-speaking reporters. The driver was born in Bogotá, Colombia, on Sept. 20, 1975.



**All smiles:** Juan Pablo Montoya brings a wealth of experience to Chip Ganassi Racing.

"He's really down to earth," Stremme said. "I forget a lot of times that he's won the Indianapolis 500, competed in Formula One. I'll talk to him about going to his first Daytona 500, and he's done all these other things."

During his limited appearances in 2006 and in preseason test sessions this year, Montoya has worked hard to be a good teammate to Stremme and Reed Sorenson and to make his No. 42 Dodges run faster.

Car owner Chip Ganassi, for whom Montoya drove open-wheeled cars earlier in his career, isn't surprised at Montoya's work ethic or attitude.

"I don't know if it's from working with him before or if he's an easy guy to get along with, but he's slid right in," Ganassi said. "He shows a lot of leadership, and that's the important thing. He's as playful as anybody, but when it comes time to put the facts where they need to be and put the pedal to the metal and get the job done, he's right there."

"He doesn't get caught up in petty little things."

Montoya, who is the first top NASCAR driver to answer almost as many questions in Spanish as he does in English, seems to feel right at home in NASCAR.

"The fans have been amazing, and the racing is just unreal," he said.



DAMON HIGGINS / Cox News Service

**Montoya's** first career Nextel Cup race was last season's Ford 400 at Homestead-Miami Speedway (above). He finished 34th after being involved in a crash on Lap 251.

## Rick Minter's OBSERVATIONS

Some key storylines this week in NASCAR.

**Elliott: Too far back**

It might seem as if NASCAR's decision last week to limit the use of past champion's provisional starts to six per season would upset former Cup champion Bill Elliott. But he says the opposite is true.

"They did me a favor," Elliott said, explaining that because the past champion's provisional, when used, goes to the most recent champion not already qualified for the race, he's often unable to claim the provisional starting spot because his title was won in 1988.

Former champions, including Dale Jarrett, who won titles since Elliott got his, would take the final starting spot if more than one past champion failed to qualify for a race. Neither Elliott nor Jarrett drive for a car owner currently in the top 35 in owner points, so both have to qualify on speed or rely on the past champion's provisional.

And with the unusually large number of drivers planning to race full time this year, other former champions could have to rely on the provisional, making it harder for Elliott to claim it.

"I'm too far down the list," Elliott said, adding that he would never use the provisional on a regular basis, even if NASCAR allowed it.

"I couldn't do that," he said.

Elliott also believes NASCAR should take the additional step of limiting the number of times car owners in the top 35 in points can get guaranteed starting positions despite their car being too slow to qualify on speed.



ELLIOTT



NASCAR

**Jeff Gordon** tests the new banking at Las Vegas Motor Speedway last week.

**In the banking**

There were dramatic speed increases and scary crashes at Las Vegas Motor Speedway last week during two days of testing. Drivers struggled trying to adjust to the track's new banking, which has been increased since the Cup cars last raced there from 12 degrees in the turns to 20 degrees.

Elliott Sadler paced the field in Tuesday's test with a speed of 188.772 mph. Last year, Greg Biffle won the pole at Vegas with a lap at 172.403 mph.

Among the drivers who crashed while adjusting to the new asphalt and banking were Tony Raines, Reed Sorenson, Kasey Kahne, A.J. Allmendinger and Biffle.

"We are running ridiculously fast speeds," Tony Stewart said in a teleconference during a break in testing. "It's stupid to be running this fast in a Cup car, in my opinion. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me why we're running mid-to-low 29-second laps in a 3,400-pound stock car around here."

Kahne said he liked the new track.

"I liked the old Vegas; I like the new Vegas," he said. "It should make for a good race once everybody gets out there and gets in a groove and starts moving around some."

**New tire contract**

Any questions about whether Goodyear might go away from the NASCAR garage were answered last weekend, when the tire manufacturer and NASCAR announced a contract extension.

Goodyear will remain the exclusive tire supplier for the Nextel Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck Series for the next five years. Goodyear has been supplying tires to NASCAR racers since the 1950s.

**Always on the go**

Ken Schrader, who turns 52 in May, appears to be nearing the end of his full-time Nextel Cup career, but it doesn't seem like he's going to cut back.

Schrader raced last week at two dirt-track races in the Southeast, one at Columbus, Miss., and the other at Brunswick, Ga.

It also doesn't appear that Schrader, who will split the driving duties of his No. 21 Nextel Cup car with newcomer Jon Wood, does his extracurricular racing for the money.

His 12th-place finish at Golden Isles Speedway in Brunswick earned him \$800, and his 21st-place run at Columbus Speedway was worth a whopping \$200.

# Documentary reflects on Earnhardt

## New film gets to the core of driver's 'moral fiber'

Casting a lead actor for a movie about the late Dale Earnhardt wasn't a problem for the makers of the movie "Dale."

"The Intimidator" is the star of the documentary, which was produced by NASCAR Images and CMT Films and will be shown this year in 40 cities where the NASCAR circuit is racing.

The movie is a mix of never-seen footage of Earnhardt and recent interviews with Earnhardt's mother, widow, children, siblings and former car owner Richard Childress.

It includes the in-car camera view as Earnhardt's car sped toward the wall at Daytona International Speedway on Feb. 18, 2001. That view of the crash that cost him his life has never been shown.

Throughout the movie, race scenes and interviews are wrapped around segments that were filmed as Earnhardt fished in a

pond on his farm and reflected on his life and career.

It shows a side of Earnhardt that few outside his inner circle rarely saw. One conversation revealed that despite Earnhardt's success in the sport — he already was the sport's top star at the time of the filming — he worried that there might come a time when he couldn't get a ride and would lose his stature.

Many scenes portray Earnhardt's relationship with his son, Dale Earnhardt Jr. The father teaches the son how to water ski. The son quizzes the father in a mock Victory Lane interview. In some scenes, it appears that Dad is too busy being a NASCAR racer to spend quality time with his son. Nevertheless, Dale Earnhardt Jr. gives the movie high marks.

"It is truly amazing," Earnhardt said,



EARNHARDT

adding that before seeing the movie, he was unsure of what he would see. The film's content was approved by his stepmother, Teresa Earnhardt, and Childress.

"I was thinking, 'What have I not seen? Am I going to be sitting through a whole bunch of stuff that I've already seen before?'" he said. "But all the footage they got for that movie, I'd never seen any of it. If this felt like behind-the-scenes for me, imagine how it's going to feel to the fans? I was amazed, blown away. It was perfect."

He said the moviemakers did a great job of portraying the personal side of a man who seemed larger than life to most race fans.

"It just really told what kind of man he was," Earnhardt Jr. said. "You get down to what his moral fiber was. Most of the fans, and a lot of media, didn't know him well. He had that hard, outer shell, 'The Intimidator.'"

"(The movie) opened him up more than he would have ever done on his own. It's a really good film."

— Rick Minter, Cox News Service

## NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

- 0** Career Budweiser Shootout starts for David Gilliland, who will start the race because he won a pole at Talladega Superspeedway last year.
- 2** Toyota Camrys running in the Shootout (driven by Dale Jarrett and Brian Vickers).
- 3** Shootout victories by Dale Jarrett, who tops all other drivers in this year's starting field. (The late Dale Earnhardt is the all-time leader with six.)
- 7** Sets of brothers who have raced in the Shootout once Kurt and Kyle Busch take the green flag. The others are Rusty and Kenny Wallace, Bobby and Donnie Allison, Bobby and Terry Labonte, Jeff and Ward Burton, Geoffrey Bodine and Brett Bodine and Geoffrey and Todd Bodine.
- 21** Drivers in this year's Shootout (the record is 22, set in 2002).

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