

Both Yates cars on Daytona front row • Warriors

By JENNA FRYER
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DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

Robert Yates Racing went from skid row to the front row, emerging from the darkest season in team history to take the Daytona 500 spotlight.

At least for a week. David Gilliland and Ricky Rudd won the top two starting spots Sunday in qualifying for the Daytona 500, putting Yates back on the racing map after a horrendous season.

"There was a time last year when I felt like I maybe was the problem and wasn't in love with it and really wanted to leave (racing)," Yates said. "I could have walked out of here last year. I want this next year to get this thing up, get the sky that was falling on us, get it up."

That dark time saw Yates lose his drivers, a sponsor and both of his crew chiefs in a tumultuous year that saw the once-proud team collapse to the point that Yates was convinced he was dying. But just like a true racer, the car owner refused to close shop and fought to keep the family business on the track.

He handed the keys to his two cars to Gilliland, an unproven rookie, and Rudd, the Iron Man of



NASCAR driver Ricky Rudd, left, jokes with teammate David Gilliland before qualifications Sunday for the Daytona 500. Gilliland won the pole spot for next week's race, and Rudd will start on the front row.

NASCAR who spent last year out of racing and mowing the 30 acres of grass on his North Carolina farm.

They proved Sunday that there's life in this Yates team, after all.

Gilliland turned a lap of 186.320 mph to win the pole, and Rudd was right behind at 185.609 to put themselves on the front row for the season-opening Daytona 500 next Sunday.

"It's like a dream that I'm afraid to wake up from," said Gilliland, coming off Saturday night's second-place finish in the exhibition Budweiser Shootout.

Gilliland and Rudd were the only two drivers to lock down their starting spots under a complicated qualifying procedure for NASCAR's biggest event of the year that was marred when Matt Kenseth and Kasey Kahne's cars

failed inspection and Michael Waltrip's was impounded because of a suspicious part.

The top 35 drivers from 2006 are assured a spot in the 500, but their starting position will be determined by a pair of qualifying races Thursday. It leaves eight other spots to fill, and 26 drivers are vying for them. Dale Jarrett is guaranteed one of them by virtue of the past champions

provisional, as are the three fastest drivers in qualifying from that group. That caveat promised Boris Said, Sterling Marlin and Johnny Sauter spots in the race.

Toyota, which is making its Nextel Cup debut this season, had a horrendous qualifying effort and will need brilliant qualifying races to get the bulk of its Camrys into the field.

Jarrett is in, along with Dave Blaney, who earned a berth because of his 2006 standings. But the rest of the bunch struggled, including Waltrip, whose intake manifold was confiscated at the start of the day because inspectors found a questionable substance inside the part.

Waltrip, a two-time Daytona 500 winner, was 25th in qualifying and his Camry was later impounded.

"There's nothing wrong with it," Waltrip insisted. "We just had an oil problem of some sort."

David Reutimann was the best of the Toyota bunch at 15th, and was followed by Mike Skinner (18th), Waltrip, Blaney (39th), A.J. Allmendinger (40th), Brian Vickers (45th) and Jarrett (50th).

Juan Pablo Montoya flirted with the front row, putting his new No. 42 Dodge in the second spot only to be bumped from it moments later by teammate David Stremme.

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swagger that most championship teams possess this late in the season.

"I felt like (in the semifinal) our kids were a little passive because of our history with Chatard," Hogue said. "We played well enough to win, but I think it was in the back of their minds that they had our number."

"When they came in (Saturday), I didn't see that mind-set. I saw us cutting the nets down."

"When you have three years in a row of 17 wins, that tells you something about the quality of kids you have," Hogue said. "This is big for all of us. The varsity players, the (junior varsity) kids, our middle school, our elementary, and you saw our AAU kids gathering around wanting a piece of the net."

What did the Warriors do to earn their first sectional title?

Orender, the team's leading scorer this season, averaged 17 points in three sectional games.

Junior Sarah Condra hit 27 of her 34 free throws. Her four free throws in the final 1:30 against Chatard helped Whiteland fend off a late Trojans surge.

The Warriors' smothering defense limited its opponents to 36 percent shooting, including holding Roncalli to 9 of 44 from the field. The Rebels went scoreless for nearly eight minutes during a stretch that bridged the third and fourth quarters.

"I felt like we had it the whole time. (Hogue) said it was another game, but we knew it was a big game and we wanted to win it," Orender said.

Whiteland will need to bring the same effort they've displayed this postseason into Saturday's 10 a.m. matchup with Class 3A No. 6 Brebeuf at Mount Vernon.

Brebeuf (19-6) features Miss Indiana Basketball candidate Ta'Shia Phillips. She is the school's all-time leading scorer and had 32 points, 16 rebounds and seven blocks in leading Brebeuf to its 13th sectional championship.

• Trojans

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"This year, no one knew who was going to be good," Bowling said. "We came in here, and everyone was playing well off and on. There was no top team in the sectional."

The sting of last year's loss to the Flashes provided plenty of motivation for the Trojans.

"We wanted revenge," senior guard Lydia Feldman said. "We deserved it last year. Last year, it proved that favorites don't mean anything."

"This year, we weren't the favorite. We wanted to make sure last year's disappointment didn't affect this game."

Feldman, senior Heidi Reisinger and freshman Kirsten Gliemann each scored eight points against the Hawks.

Sophomore Olivia Yaryan and freshman Anna Munn led Decatur Central with 17 points apiece.

Center Grove has struggled at points this season, but the Trojans have managed to keep their focus, especially recently, coach Joe Lentz said.

"I think sometimes a team's moment comes when everything kind of comes together," Lentz said. "You play your best ball at the right time."

"This last week, we played our best basketball of the season. We noticed it in practice. They were more focused. It's the right time to play your best basketball."

O'Neal breaks Pacers record for blocks

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

Jermaine O'Neal scored 21 points and set an Indiana franchise record for career blocked shots in the Pacers' 94-80 victory against the Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday.

The Pacers took control with a 16-0 run at the end of the second quarter and built their lead to 23 points early in the third period.

The Clippers rallied within seven points midway through the final quarter, but O'Neal then hit two straight baskets and Mike Dunleavy, who finished with 20 points, added another basket to push Indiana's lead to 89-76. Los Angeles came no closer than 11 points the rest of the way.

O'Neal had four blocked shots, giving him 1,113 for his career with the Pacers and breaking the franchise record of 1,111 by former Pacers center Rik Smits.

Marquis Daniels added 14 points

and Jamaal Tinsley had 10 points and 15 assists for Indiana.

Los Angeles, losing for the 22nd time in the past 26 games against the Pacers, was led by Cuttino Mobley with 23 points and Elton Brand and Sam Cassell with 14 each.

The Clippers did not score over the final 4:14 of the second quarter, when the Pacers turned a four-point lead to a 52-32 advantage.

Cassell scored 11 points in the third quarter as Los Angeles cut the lead to seven, but a basket by Dunleavy started another 8-0 run that pushed the Pacers' lead to 77-62 starting the final period.

O'Neal, who left the game with two early fouls in the first quarter, returned in the second period and scored seven points during Indiana's big run. The Clippers had four turnovers during that stretch, including three straight possessions that led to layups by Dunleavy and Tinsley and three free throws by O'Neal.

In Sunday's other games

Cavaliers 99 Lakers 90

CLEVELAND — Sasha Pavlovic scored 13 points in the fourth quarter, picking up the slack for LeBron James, and the Cleveland Cavaliers shut down Kobe Bryant in the final minutes for a win against the Los Angeles Lakers.

Heat 100 Spurs 85

MIAMI — Dwyane Wade scored 18 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter and the Miami Heat held San Antonio without a field goal for more than seven minutes down the stretch on the way to beating the Spurs.

Trail Blazers 94 Wizards 73

WASHINGTON — Jarrett Jack and LaMarcus Aldridge scored 18 points apiece and the Trail Blazers held Gilbert Arenas to nine points during a victory against the Wizards.



The Pacers' Jermaine O'Neal, left, blocks the shot of Corey Maggette during the fourth quarter of their game Sunday in Indianapolis. The Pacers won 94-80.

• Record

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accomplished something only two other swimmers in state history have been able to by winning the same two individual events in her first three years of high school competition.

Elkhart Central's Lindsay Benko (1991-93) and Anderson's Debbie Daniel (1981-1983) are the only other swimmers to achieve the feat.

McKeehan harbors thoughts of Olympic glory, and after this weekend's performance she has linked her name with two Olympic gold medalists: Benko and Coughlin.

"You hear those names and you see how far they've gone in their swimming careers, and a lot of people look up to them," McKeehan said. "Hopefully one day people can look up and say the same thing about me."

McKeehan's double win and

two fourth-place finishes by senior teammate Melody White in the 200 and 500 freestyle events helped the Trojans to a sixth-place team finish, one spot better than a year ago.

Carmel won its 21st consecutive team state title with a score of 335 points, and Hamilton Southeastern finished runner-up with 280.5 points.

White, who will swim next season at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Calif., bettered her fifth- and ninth-place finishes of a year ago at the state meet.

"Every year she has improved and every year she's played a bigger role in terms of being a contributor to the program," Todd said. "For her not only being a team captain but to score as many points as she did at the state meet says a lot for her and her work ethic."

White and McKeehan both also swam for the Trojans 200 and 400 freestyle relay teams.

They were joined by Lindsey Gasiorowski and Holly Reed on

the 200 relay that took sixth place, and by Gasiorowski and Morgan Davis on the 400 relay team that finished fourth.

Besides the Center Grove contingent, two area athletes advanced to Saturday's finals: divers Monica Dodson of Whiteland and Natalie Grissom of Franklin.

After sitting out last year's high school season to concentrate on her club team training, Whiteland diver Monica Dodson returned to the state meet looking to capture the school's first-ever diving state championship.

Dodson, who placed third in the 1-meter diving event in 2005, narrowly lost to Heritage Christian's Audra Egenolf 445.20 to 438.80 and finished runner-up.

"I dove really well, but a point here and there adds up when you're diving with high-quality divers, and you can't afford to mess up," Dodson said.

Heading into the 11th and final dive, Dodson held a slim 396.25 to 396.00 advantage over Egenolf.

While Dodson tried to clear her mind listening to Garth Brooks on her iPod, her coach was a little more anxious poolside.

"The entire time I was calculating in my head the points because I knew all the (degree of difficulties) that (Egenolf) had were higher than the (degree of difficulties) that (Dodson) had, but she had good dives. It came down to that last dive," Whiteland diving coach Corey Ervin said.

Dodson's final dive earned her a score of 42.55, but Egenolf flawlessly completed a dive with a higher degree of difficulty and scored a 49.20, narrowly beating Dodson.

"It was pretty much I have to nail it. I ended up doing OK, but I didn't do what I needed to do," Dodson said.

Egenolf and Dodson dive together for their club team, Starz Diving, and will be partners in a synchronized diving event at the U.S. Open in April.

"I train year 'round with Audra, and she's a great dri-

ver, and I know she works hard. I know she deserved it," Dodson said. "If I had to lose to anyone, I'm glad it was her, but you know it would have been awesome to have a state title."

Dodson's runner-up finish is the highest in school history, bettering her own third-place finish in 2005. Her total score of 438.80 was her highest 11-dive meet score of the season.

Next year, Dodson will be diving at the University of Florida. She hopes the high pressure level of events like the state finals will help her in the future.

"It was a good experience, a good learning experience," she said. "Hopefully it will benefit me in college when I go on to bigger meets."

Dodson wasn't the only area athlete to compete in her final high school meet.

Grissom placed 16th, and Center Grove's Anna Wimmerauer was 22nd in the 1-meter diving event to round out the Johnson County contingent.

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