



# NASCAR INSIDER

## NASCAR QUIZ

Q. Which driver played college basketball on the same Georgetown team as Allen Iverson?  
A. Brendan Gaughan (right).



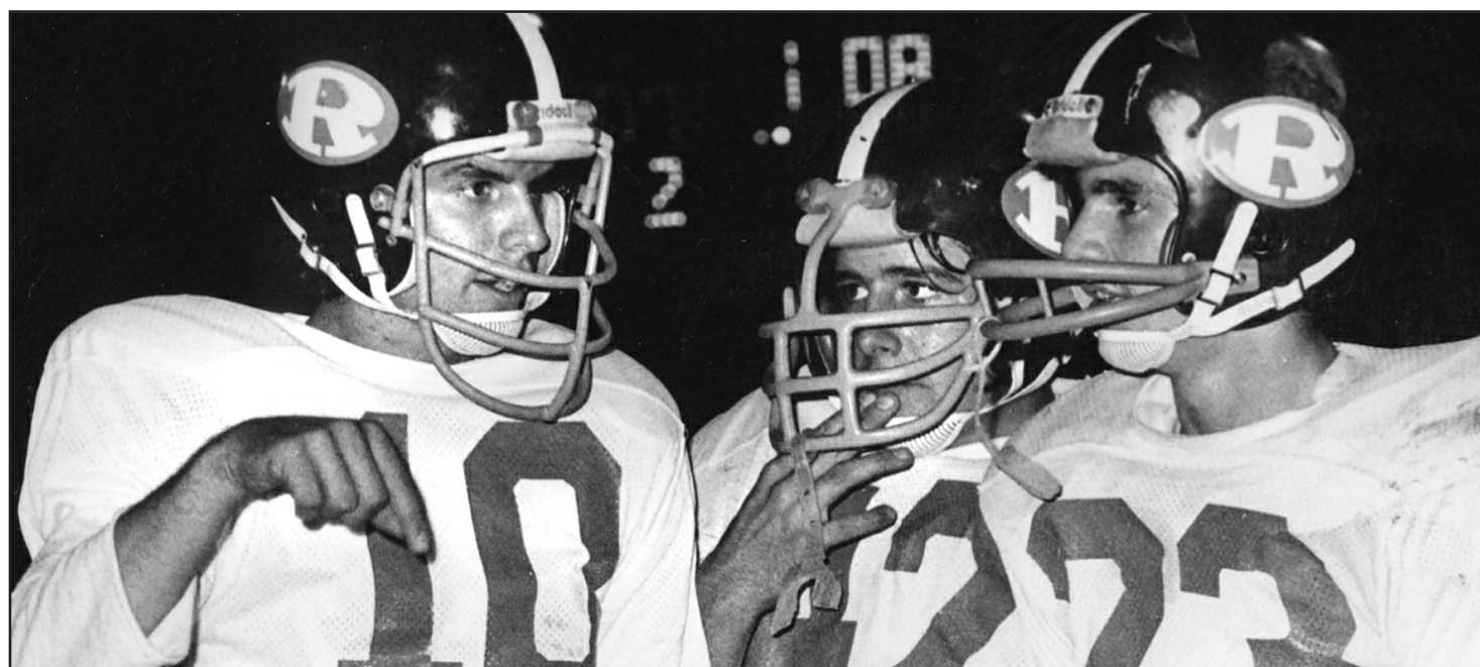
# Automatically athletes?

Second of a two-part series

By RICK MINTER  
Cox News Service

**A**re drivers athletes? Atlanta Critics might argue that all a driver does is sit in a car and turn left. Others would argue that NASCAR drivers must be in top physical shape to

meet the physical and mental demands that the sport requires. As it turns out, many of NASCAR's top drivers were star athletes in other sports long before they began their racing careers. Here's a look at a few of them.



Courtesy CHARLIE GREGORY

Quarterback Kyle Petty, left, led Randleman High to the North Carolina state playoffs and attracted college attention.

## KYLE PETTY

- **Racing accomplishments:** Petty has eight victories and eight poles in Nextel Cup racing. He was fifth in points in 1992-'93. He also helps manage his Petty Enterprises race team.
- **Other sports:** Petty played football, basketball, baseball and golf at Randleman High School, where as quarterback he led his team to the North Carolina state playoffs for two seasons.
- **Other opportunities:** Petty said he had football scholarship opportunities at East Carolina, Catawba and Lenoir-Rhyne. He visited Georgia Tech when Pepper Rodgers was coaching but already had decided racing was his future.
- **On drivers as athletes:** "I really believe that we are just as much an athlete as

people who play football, basketball, baseball, golf, lacrosse or rugby," Petty said. "We participate in an activity that requires hand-to-eye coordination and endurance. And we do what we do for three or four hours at a time. It requires a lot of stamina."

- **If he could be another athlete:** "I'd be the beer guy at the baseball game. I don't think I'd be into sports. I think to go into whatever you do, you have to have a passion for it and want to live it day-in and day-out. And there's nothing I ever wanted to live day-in and day-out except for racing."
- **From Charlie Gregory, his high school coach:** "He was a well-above-average athlete. He played quarterback for me.

He started two years and led us to the state playoffs his senior year. We got beat in the second round by the team that won the state championship. Kyle was a good basketball player, good golfer, good all-around athlete. He had some offers, but he wanted to follow in his dad's footsteps."

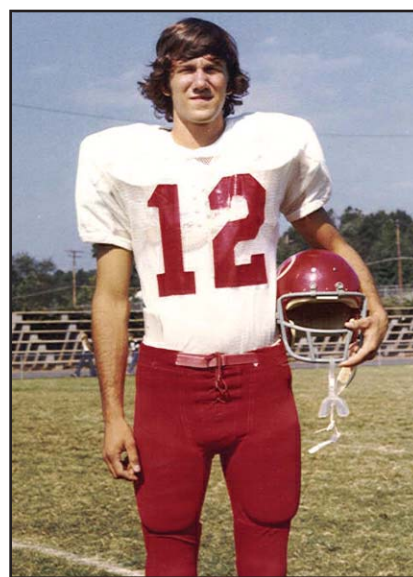
- **From Petty on Petty:** "I went to a small school where everybody played basketball, baseball and football. We went straight from one season to the next. We were conference champions a couple of times and went to the state playoffs a couple of times. We were like a Class A school. There were 80-something kids in my graduating class. I was recruited by some small colleges, but I told them, 'Don't call me again, I'm not going.'"

## DALE JARRETT

- **Racing accomplishments:** The son of former NASCAR great Ned Jarrett, Dale Jarrett won the 1999 Winston Cup and is a three-time Daytona 500 champion.
- **Other sports:** Jarrett lettered in baseball, basketball, football and golf at Newton-Conover High School in Newton, N.C. He says he plays to a 7 handicap on the golf course now, but he was a scratch golfer a year after high school. "It wasn't until my senior year that they allowed me to play both baseball and golf because they were both spring sports," he said. "My sophomore and junior years I played golf instead of baseball. But then I was able to get back to the baseball diamond and do both."
- **Other opportunities:** Jarrett had several scholarship offers, most notably from the University of South Carolina to play golf. "It was something that I looked at," he said. "There were opportunities at smaller schools to play football and golf. But at (that) time, I had a lot going on in my life, so I opted to go to work for my dad and eventually get into a race car."

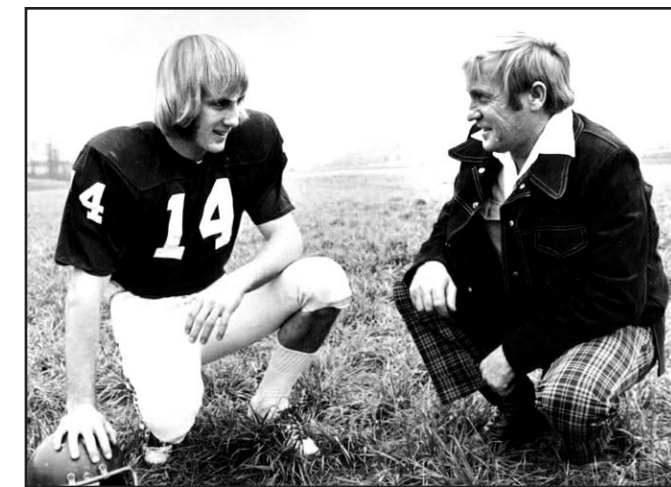
- **On drivers as athletes:** "I know a lot of athletes who admire these race drivers that I compete with out here, and myself for being able to sit in a 150-degree racecar for three-and-a-half hours. We don't have any timeouts to call. We don't have halftime. It takes quite a bit to do that."
- **If he could be another athlete:** "I would be Tiger Woods, because he's the best athlete in the world."
- **From Don Patrick, his high school coach:** "Dale had super athletic skills. The only thing he was lacking was speed. But he's made a living with speed. He could have been a college prospect at free safety with his height. He was a tremendous competitor and good leader who wanted things done right."
- **From Jarrett on Jarrett:** "I've been competing since I was 5 years old and started playing baseball. I guess it's a family trait. It's something that I've always done. It doesn't matter if it's a sport, a board game or whatever it is. I want to win."

—Jeff Hood, Cox News Service



Courtesy PENNY COPEN

Dale Jarrett was a small-college football prospect and a major-college golf prospect in high school.



Sterling Marlin played receiver and quarterback for his high school football team, but he knew he wanted to follow in the racing tracks of his father, NASCAR driver Coo Coo Marlin.

## STERLING MARLIN

- **Racing accomplishments:** Marlin has 10 victories and 11 poles in Nextel Cup racing and two victories in NASCAR's Busch Series. He's a two-time Daytona 500 winner and five times has finished in the top 10 in points.
- **Other sports:** He played receiver and quarterback for the Spring Hill (Tenn.) Red Raiders, leading his team to appearances in the postseason every year he played.
- **Other opportunities:** Marlin said he got a few feelers from small colleges, but he knew he wanted to race.
- **On drivers as athletes:** "I think they are. You go to places like Bristol or Martinsville on a hot day, and you're pretty beat up after 500 laps. Last year at Indy, I took a laser thermometer in the car with me, and it was 141 degrees inside the car, so you have to be in pretty good shape to do it or you'll give out."
- **If he could be another athlete:** "I probably would have liked to play football," Marlin said. "I wasn't really big enough to do it, but I would have enjoyed it."
- **From Brud Spickard, his high school coach:** "Sterling was a good one. He was a winner. He could have gone on and played college ball. I'd say that if he wasn't racing, he'd be coaching football now. He has a football mind. ... But he was raised up in racing, and that's all he knew."
- **From Marlin on Marlin:** "I played receiver and quarterback my senior year. I played 10 games, got suspended for one for cutting a tree down at school. ... One game I attempted 16 passes and completed 14 for 226 yards, but I had a receiver, McDonald Oden, who went to the NFL (played three seasons for the Cleveland Browns)."

## ELLIOTT SADLER



Elliott Sadler was the captain of his high school basketball team in Lawrenceville, Va.

- **Racing accomplishments:** Two of Elliott Sadler's three Nextel Cup victories came in 2004, when he finished a career-best ninth in the championship standings while driving for Robert Yates Racing.
- **Other sports:** Sadler attended Brunswick Academy in Lawrenceville, Va., and lettered in five sports — baseball, basketball, cross country, football, and golf — in high school. He managed to accomplish this feat while racing on weekends. He was captain of the baseball and basketball teams.
- **Other opportunities:** Sadler received 18 small-college scholarship offers, primarily in baseball. Instead, he chose to walk on at James Madison University and play basketball for coach Charles "Lefty" Driesell. Sadler sustained a career-ending knee injury that prevented him from playing under the legendary coach. "Now I've got a great sit-down job," Sadler said.
- **On drivers as athletes:** "I think everybody is an athlete in their own way in professional sports. I think a NASCAR driver who can sit in a car that's 150 degrees for four straight hours while running 200 mph definitely has a knack to do that while staying focused at his job at hand."
- **From Dennis Moore, his high school coach:** "Elliott is very competitive. He set most of the records in scoring in one game against York. He was a good passer and good leader. He's always been very competitive. He just doesn't like losing."

—Jeff Hood, Cox News Service

## Sporting backgrounds

NASCAR drivers who have had success in other sports:

### MICHAEL WALTRIP

**Status:** Assembling a new race team with a new manufacturer, Toyota. He has won four times in Nextel Cup, twice in the Daytona 500, and has 11 Busch Series victories. He finished 37th in the 2006 Cup standings.



WALTRIP

**Other sports:** Waltrip played tennis in high school, and according to his publicist Chris Goodnight, didn't lose a tennis match during his junior and senior years in high school. He's best known for running marathons, including the Boston Marathon. He said he started running the day after Thanksgiving, 1996, at the age of 33. "Sporadically over the years, I'd always worked out playing basketball, racquetball and all that. But that was the first

time I really set out a plan to start running and make a commitment to it."

### JEFF BURTON

**Status:** Drives the No. 31 Chevrolet for Richard Childress Racing. Finished seventh in the 2006 Cup standings.



BURTON

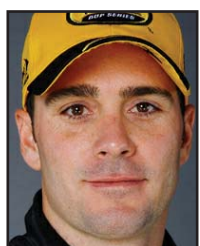
**Other sports:** He played soccer and basketball in high school. "If you read the press reports, I was darn good, but in reality, I wasn't that hot."

### JIMMIE JOHNSON

**Status:** Drives the No. 48 Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports. Won the 2006 Nextel Cup championship.

**Other sports:** Johnson had to

drop sports during his senior year because he was racing and accepting prize money, so his eligibility was gone. "I used to swim (and) I was on the diving team and also played water polo," Johnson said. "I was all right. I won some different meets ... and some individual stuff, but I never made it to varsity. I guess I needed an engine."



JOHNSON

### GREG BIFFLE

**Status:** Drives the No. 16 Ford for Roush Racing. He finished 13th in the Cup standings in 2006. Biffle won the Busch Series title in 2002 and the Craftsman Truck Series title in 2000.



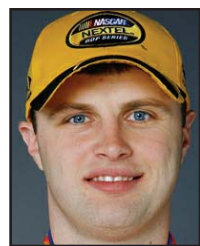
BIFFLE

**Other sports:** The Vancouver, Wash., native wrestled in high school before turning his focus to racing. "It was a lot of fun," said

Biffle, who wrestled in the 120- to 127-pound classification. "I enjoyed it. I was kind of a competitive person. I think I wrestled because my brother did. So, I wrestled for a couple of years anyway. Then I decided that cars were more important."

### TRAVIS KVAPIL

**Status:** After finishing 36th in the Cup Series in 2006 driving for Cal Wells in the No. 32 Chevy, Kvapil will drive the No. 6 Ford in the Craftsman Truck Series for Roush Racing in '07. He was the 2001 rookie of the year in the Craftsman Truck Series and the truck series champion in 2003.



KVAPIL

**Other sports:** He played defensive back and wrestled for a year in high school. "I was all right as an athlete. I played sports coming up. I was quarterback on the JV team, but it got to the point where I saw I didn't have a future in those sports but I did in racing, so I quit all my high school sports and went to work on racecars."

## A LOOK AHEAD

(All activities at Daytona International Speedway)

### FAN FESTS

- Jan. 9: Nextel Cup
- Jan. 12: Craftsman Truck
- Jan. 16: Nextel Cup
- Jan. 20-21: Busch

Fan fests begin at 5 p.m. Admission: Nextel Fan Fest, \$15; Busch and Craftsman Truck, \$10 each. Tickets are available at [www.racetickets.com](http://www.racetickets.com), by calling 1-800-PITSHOP, or on site at Daytona USA.

### TESTING SESSIONS

- Jan. 8-10: Nextel Cup, first session
- Jan. 12-14: Craftsman Truck
- Jan. 15-17: Nextel Cup, second session
- Jan. 19-23: Busch (two different sessions)

Fans can watch testing for free from Oldfield Grandstands. Testing starts at 9 a.m.

### SPEED WEEKS

- Feb. 10: Budweiser Shootout
- Feb. 11: Daytona 500 pole qualifying
- Feb. 15: Gatorade Duels
- Feb. 18: Daytona 500