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NASCAR 2016

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

2016 Will Be Year Of Change

NASCAR has instituted many changes for the upcoming season, and more are on the way.

Mike Helton, Vice Chairman of NASCAR sat down for an interview session last Wednesday at the Greater Talladega Area Chamber of Commerce awards luncheon, and gave his assessment of what racing fans could expect during the upcoming season.

"I've got a lot of enthusiasm about '16 because '15 felt good," Helton said. "Particularly toward the end. The sophomore year of the elimination Chase format proved to be as exciting, some people said more exciting, than the first year, and I thought the first year was going to be hard to beat. We went into the sophomore year hoping we could top that and we did."

"Now we've got two years under our belt and coming out of the box at Daytona, the strategy, the craftiness of the race teams every weekend to get in the Chase and get to Homestead (Miami Speedway, the Chase's final race) is going to contribute to each race being entertaining and exciting."

NASCAR has decided to apply the Sprint Cup Chase format to both the Xfinity Series and Trucks.

"The Xfinity and Camping World Truck Series will have their championships wrapped up in a similar way (to Sprint Cup)," he continued. "That brings everybody together. The magnitude of the Chase has been such that it's a natural for Xfinity and the truck series to do that."

"I don't expect any more tweaks. Brian (France, NASCAR CEO) has commented several times about how we struggled hard to get to the moment where we pulled the trigger on the elimination format. We struggled until we felt it was right. We talked about it for a long time and I'd go out on a ledge for it and Brian would talk me out of it, then Brian would go out on the ledge and I'd say, 'are you really sure?' It was a 10-year cycle getting it ready."

"Quite frankly, it happened from the other NASCAR officers and we sitting around in a big room and said, 'Why don't we do that? We want to do something exciting. It can't help but be exciting.'" Now it's such an entertaining format I'd be afraid if we tweaked it any we might mess it up."

The seven-race NASCAR Xfinity Series Chase will begin at Kentucky Speedway on Sept. 24, and feature 12 drivers and two elimination rounds, with four drivers competing in the Championship 4 at Homestead-Miami Speedway.

A win in the first 26 races all but guarantees a driver entry into the NASCAR Xfinity Series Chase, provided the driver is in the top 30 in points and has attempted to qualify for each race. Drivers who win two Dash 4 Cash bonuses are also guaranteed a Chase

birth.

The first round, called the Round of 12, consists of the races at Kentucky, Dover and Charlotte. All drivers will start with their points adjusted to 2,000, with three additional bonus points added to their total for each win in the first 26 races. If a driver wins a race in the Round of 12, the driver automatically advances to the next round. The remaining available positions (1-8) that have not been filled by wins will be filled on points.

Each driver who advances to the Round of 8 (Kansas, Texas, Phoenix) then will have their points reset to 3,000. Drivers who win a race in the Round of 8 automatically advance to the Championship 4. The remaining available positions (1-4) that have not been filled by wins will be filled on points.

The four drivers who advance to the Championship 4 at Homestead will have their points reset to 4,000. The highest finishing Championship 4 driver will be crowned the NASCAR XFINITY Series champion.

The seven-race NASCAR Camping World Truck Series Chase will begin at New Hampshire Motor Speedway on Sept. 24. It will feature eight drivers and two elimination rounds, with four drivers competing in the Championship 4 at Homestead-Miami Speedway. A win in the first 16 races all but guarantees a driver entry into that Chase, provided that the driver is in the Top-30 in points and has attempted to qualify for each race.

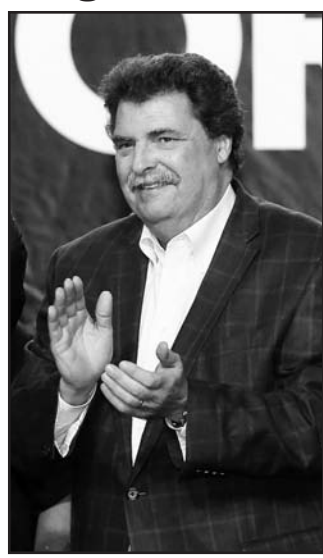
The first round, called the Round of 8, consists of the races at New Hampshire, Las Vegas, and Talladega. All drivers will have their points adjusted to 2,000, with three additional bonus points added to their total for each win in the first 16 races. If a driver wins a race in the Round of 8, the driver automatically advances to the next round. The remaining available positions (1-6) that have not been filled by wins will be filled on points.

Each driver who advances to the Round of 6 (Martinsville, Texas, Phoenix) then will have their points reset to 3,000. Drivers who win a race in the Round of 6 automatically advance to the Championship 4. The remaining available positions (1-4) that have not been filled by wins will be filled on points.

The four drivers who advance to the Championship 4 at Homestead will have their points reset to 4,000. The highest finishing Championship 4 driver will win the championship.

All rules outlined above also apply to both series' owner championship structure.

"There are many things NASCAR is looking at," Helton continued. "A charter system is one of them. I can tell you that it is not a done deal. We are working on it, along with the team owners. I know that Brian has placed a high priority on it, but that's



Mike Helton

all I can say."

Sporting News reported that the new charter system was likely to be unveiled during Speedweeks, which begins Feb. 11, as teams prepare for the Sprint Unlimited exhibition race and the Feb. 21 season-opening Daytona 500.

Since June, NASCAR officials and team owners have been trying to complete a plan that would guarantee certain teams starting spots for all races this season and possibly reduce the weekly fields to 40 cars from the current 43.

According to *SN*, the plan calls for 36 charters, or car franchises, that would be guaranteed a spot in every race. Charters can be sold if an owner wanted to get out of the sport or reduce the number of full-time cars in fields.

The charter system would also give team owners more economic security with a minimum threshold of winnings earned in a season and supposedly give team owners a greater say in proposed rule changes, something the union-like Race Team Alliance pushed for in 2015.

NASCAR spokesman David Higdon said in a release: "NASCAR and NASCAR Sprint Cup team owners have continued to make progress in our discussions. There still is work to be done, but we remain very optimistic that we'll have agreements completed prior to the start of the 2016 season." Rob Kauffman, chairman of the Race Team Alliance consortium that has been brokering the deal on behalf of the owners, also felt positive about negotiations.

Teams have lobbied NASCAR for years in hopes of some type of franchise that would make their teams more financially secure. Once the charter system is in place, prospective newcomers would have to purchase a team in order to break into the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series. There are no dollar estimates available on how

much each team would be worth, but even the small one-car operations would be worth millions.

But no matter what happens, Rick Hendrick is not worried about his financial situation. As one of NASCAR's most successful team owners and owner of an empire of car dealerships making millions every year, any one of his four racing teams can operate on his pocket change.

This past weekend, Hendrick showed what type bank accounts he has access to.

He paid \$1.2 million at the Barrett Jackson Auto Auction to buy the first production 2017 Acura NSX hybrid sports car. Don't expect him to be driving it around Charlotte. It will be added to his stable of luxury sport and collectible cars. The NSX features an engine that is powerful enough to rocket the car from 0-60 mph in 3.0 seconds and on to a top speed of 191 mph.

Racing Trivia Question: Who won the 2015 Daytona 500?

Last Week's Question: Which driver has the most Daytona 500 wins? Answer: Richard Petty tops the list with seven. Cale Yarborough is second with four, and Jeff Gordon comes in third with three.

You may contact the Racing Reporter by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com.

Bowling scores

Monday Night Men: Bill Smith 236, Dewey Allen 213, Bart Rodgers 225, 236, Doug Tanner 277, 234, 230, Series 741, Ranny Jones 206, Johnathan Everett 202, Kenneth Clark 264, Jay Burrell 224, 223, Del Neiffer 335, Derrick Rice 221, 232, 226, Steve Whittenburg 209, Greg Whittenburg 232, 220, Ron Wingate 212, Keith Rhodes 206, Michael Whitehead 224, Taz Matetzschk 215, 239, BJ Gilbert 223.

Monday Night Ladies: Monita Rodgers 202, 211, Peggy Kidder 197, Sarah Chumbley 199.

Young at Heart Seniors: Stanley Tyler 211, Anne Sorelle 172, Mel White 237, Del Neiffer 223, Barry Rice 223, 207, 192, Series 622, Bruce Burnett 232, Linda 201, Sarah Chumbley 210, Ron Wingate 235, 200, Bart Rodgers 214.

Thursday Night Fun: Doug Roberts 224, Pam Bierce 200, Bob Bischoff 221, Stanley Tyler 200, Roy Johnson 204, Curtis Corn 211, Bonnell Thomas 211. NTFeb3,22:CA



Mountain High Hikers schedule two hikes every Tuesday, one long and one shorter, as well as occasional specialty hikes. Weekly trail maintenance trips are scheduled every Thursday. Come enjoy the beautiful mountains and waterfalls we have here. Check the website www.mountainhighhikers.org for schedule and contact numbers. NTFeb3,22:CA

Blairsville Sorghum Festival donates to UCRD Youth Ball Program



(L-R): Kim Bridges and Duff Conley

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival is continually trying to give back to the community. We do not publicize a lot of them, but are proud this year to be able to donate funds to the UCRD ball program as one of our many donations. Meeks Park and staff have been so gracious to allow us the use of the park as home of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival every year and we are most appreciative. NTFeb3,210:CA

2016 Baseball & Softball Registration Will Be Open at the Union County Recreation Office January 11th-February 12th!



DON'T BE LEFT OUT!

Register in the

Recreation Office (310 Wellborn St.)

OR

Online at meekspark.com before February 12th

Age Groups:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3-4 CoEd- Smart Start | 11-12 Boys- Baseball |
| 5-6 CoEd- TBALL | 11-12 Girls- Softball |
| 7-8 Boys- Machine Pitch | 13-14 Boys- Baseball |
| 7-8 Girls-Machine Pitch | 13-14 Girls- Softball |
| 9-10 Boy's-Baseball | |
| 9-10 Girls- Softball | |

Union County Recreation Department Presents

The Annual Daddy/Daughter Dance

Saturday, February 6, 2016
6 - 9 PM
North Georgia Technical College
\$50 Per Couple*
Includes dinner and Limo ride.

A semi-formal evening full of music, dancing, photos, dinner, and a limo ride!

Purchase your tickets now in the Recreation Office (310 Wellborn Street) before they are gone!

*After the first child an additional \$20 will be charged for each additional child.

TICKETS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE TO THE FIRST 50 COUPLES