

Darrell Wallace, a Black NASCAR Driver - a Rarity

by: Dan Gelston
AP Sports Writer

LONG POND, Pa. (AP)

Darrell Wallace Jr. woke up around 2:30 a.m. ready to race. Hours later, he strode across the stage for driver introductions to a nice ovation from thousands of NASCAR fans, his little slice of race history ahead.

Wallace became just the eighth Black driver to race in NASCAR's top Cup series when he started the No. 43 Ford at Pocono Raceway. During the week he chatted with team owner and Hall of Fame driver Richard Petty and, like any rookie in his debut, tried to stay calm.

"It's just another race car. That's how I'm treating it," Wallace said Sunday. "I'm trying to prove to everybody that I belong here."

The 23-year-old driver had some issues early in the race — he was too fast on pit road and nearly missed his pit stall because he looked for the

number he used in his second-tier Xfinity Series team.

But he's a Cup driver. Wallace was bombarded this week by interview requests and fans flocked to him around the Pocono garage. More commonly known by his nickname "Bubba," the easy-going Wallace handled the spotlight with ease.

Watching the race on TV 3,000 miles away in California, Bill Lester was rooting for Wallace. Lester made two starts in 2006 and was the last black driver to make a Cup start. Lester met Wallace at a Truck race in Kansas a few years ago and had followed his progression through NASCAR.

"I think he's doing a great job," Lester said. "I'm glad he's getting a chance."

Lester was a sports car driver who had little interest early in his career at chasing a NASCAR ride. He wanted to compete in races like the 24 Hours of Daytona, not necessarily the Daytona 500.

But it was more than stock cars that soured him on NASCAR.

"Whenever I watched it, I saw a bunch of Confederate flags — stars and bars staring back at me," he said. "It was racing I could not identify with. Drivers I could not identify with. For me to wind up in NASCAR, it was a huge anomaly."

Lester made his only tests local control as decided by local leaders within the community in which he resides.



Driver Darrell Wallace Jr. looks out from the garage before practice for Sunday's NASCAR Cup Series Pocono 400 auto race, Friday, June 9, 2017, in Long Pond, Pa. (AP Photo/Matt Slocum)

start in NASCAR's developmental series in 1999, had 142 career starts in the Truck series and was 45 years old when he made those two Cup starts in 2006.

"I wanted to be where the action was. I wanted to be where I could make a name for myself and compete with the best," he said.

Lester said he tuned out the racism that came his way.

"I was booed during driver introductions for no reasons that I could appreciate," he said. "Did it affect me? No, but I was well aware of it and was conscious of it that not everybody was welcoming of my presence. I can't change what people have been brought up to think

and believe."

According to NASCAR, Wallace joined at least seven other Black drivers in to reach the Cup level in the 69-year history of the series: Elias Bowie, Charlie Scott, Wendell Scott, George Wiltshire, Randy Bethea, Willy T. Ribbs and Lester.

Scott is the only one to win a Cup race, on Dec. 1, 1963, and the next win at a NASCAR national event by a black driver came in 2013 when Wallace took the Truck Series checkered flag at Martinsville.

Ribbs made 23 starts in Truck in 2001 and three starts in Cup in 1986. He is the subject of an upcoming documentary that will recount the prejudice he faced during a long career. U. S. District Court Judge Orlando L. Garcia, affords apparent vindication for Sheriff Hernandez's stance on the ICE detainer issue.



Travis County Sheriff Sally Hernandez

fast in her belief that federal immigration laws should be handled by federal agents. Additionally, she has adamantly insisted that ICE should present warrants or court orders, signed by federal judges or magistrates, to the county jail to hold individuals in which they have a custodial interest - given the fact that ICE detainees are simply "requests to hold."

A ruling issued earlier this week by the Hon-



U. S. District Court Judge Orlando L. Garcia

In the case Julio Trujillo Santoyo v. United States of America et al., Judge Garcia has ruled that "Defendant Bexar County's policy of honoring ICE detainer requests was the moving force behind violations of

reer. He contends the sport never tried to bring more black drivers to the track or fans to the stands.

"NASCAR is happy with the way it looks," he said. "They're quite comfortable."

NASCAR has made several steps toward boosting minority involvement. There's a "Drive for Diversity" program that has paid few dividends with Wallace, and fellow Cup drivers Kyle Larson and Daniel Suarez all graduates of the development system. The program started in 2004 and was designed to attract minorities and women to the sport in all fields, from the track to the front office.

"Bubba's talent, personality and unique story Plaintiff's Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment rights, which resulted in the unlawful detention of Plaintiff for a period of up to 48 hours. The Court therefore concludes that Plaintiff is entitled to partial summary judgment on the issue of liability."



Julio Trujillo Santoyo

The smell of freedom in Travis County and throughout this wonderful state is strong. Sheriff Hernandez intends to stand with those who wish to take a deep breath and taste the sweetness that only true freedom can deliver.

The Smell of Freedom



Texas Governor Greg Abbott

As noted in previous press releases, the Travis County Sheriff's Office, led by Sheriff Sally Hernandez, strives to ensure all victims of crime have an equal voice, and all who are alleged to have committed criminal offenses are held to account through the criminal justice system. Sheriff Hernandez has held

On June 5, 2017, speaking at a Bell County Republican Party dinner, Texas Governor Greg Abbott gave clues that his olfactory system de-

resonates with our fans, but it also helps spark new interest in the sport," said Jill Gregory, chief marketing officer for NASCAR. "He's earned this opportunity in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series, and we believe his development and success will encourage other young, diverse drivers to pursue careers in NASCAR."

Wallace, one of NASCAR's social media stars, has five years of experience in the Xfinity and Camping World Truck Series, and has five wins and 20 top-five finishes. But his Cup gig — which came when RPM driver Aric Almirola was injured in a fiery wreck at Kansas — come at an opportune time; while NASCAR has pushed Wallace to corporate America, Xfinity sponsorship dried up and he was about to lose his ride.

"I think it's a crying shame that he doesn't have enough support to keep the Xfinity program going," Lester said. "That should tell you all you need to know about the state of affairs."

Wallace just wants to make the most of his time in the 43.

"I'm just glad he's getting the chance and I hope he's able to get more opportunities," Lester said. "I hope it can start to change some things about the way we're appreciated in the sport. I'm not betting that it will."

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G.E.A.Y.A.

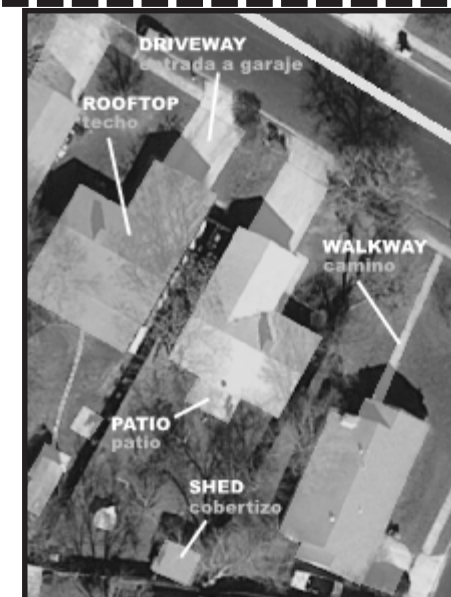


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Park Festival @ 12:noon-8:pm



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