

Earnhardt looking to add to legacy at Talladega

BY GEORGE DIAZ
ORLANDO SENTINEL

Dale Earnhardt Jr. cried the last time he rolled into Talladega.

He was in Victory Lane, just a few days after his late father would have celebrated another birthday. Bittersweet memories of a place that the Earnhardt family cherishes.

Dale Jr. used to come here years ago with his daddy, and Dale would stick 100 bucks in his son's pocket so he could go race go-karts with his friends. He now races in a stock car for much higher stakes.

A NASCAR Cup title. Earnhardt will go to Talladega, Alabama, this weekend facing a win-or-go-home scenario in the postseason Chase. His 21st-place finish at Kansas last weekend did him no favors.

He is now 31 points behind Martin Truex Jr. for the final transfer spot heading into the last phase of the Contender round of NASCAR's playoffs. The lowest four-ranked drivers without a victory will be

eliminated from the Chase after Talladega.

Go time. "If I had to go to Talladega next week with one car, one driver and one shot, I'd want it to be with Dale Jr.," said Darrell Waltrip, a three-time Cup champion and now an analyst with Fox Sports.

It's not just a hopeful sentimental twist on Sunday's plot line. Dale Earnhardt won 10 times here. Dale Jr. has won six times, including a dominant performance in the May race when he led a race-high 67 laps.

"I wouldn't rather be going anywhere else than Talladega for the next race if we need a win," Earnhardt Jr. said. "That is a good opportunity for us. Even over Daytona, I think we can go to Talladega and do the job."

Tag, he's it. There are others in a pinch as well. Matt Kenseth is 35 points behind the final transfer spot and needs a win as well. Ryan Newman is eight points back. Kyle Busch is six points behind Truex Jr.

But all eyes will be on Earnhardt, NASCAR's favorite son.



NASCAR Sprint Cup Series driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. during practice at the Kansas Speedway recently.

"Dale Earnhardt's biggest goal in his career has been to add to the Earnhardt legacy," Waltrip said. "The Earnhardt legacy at Talladega and Daytona is unmatched. And he likes adding numbers to that legacy."

As always, this is a man-and-machine deal. The odds are stacked in his favor as well if you consider those variables.

"I know that one race, one opportunity, one chance makes the odds feel bad, but we won there

this year. And we went to and ran third in the [Daytona] 500 and we won our 125 [qualifying race]," said Earnhardt Jr., who also won Daytona's rain-delayed late-night summer race.

Talladega will always involve random chaos. A driver could be coasting with a fast car and a smooth ride when the pack makes a run for the front, somebody gets discombobulated and, next thing you know, you're flying upside down at 200 mph.

But there are good variables, too. Talladega. Earnhardt. Look it up.

"If you lived around Dale Earnhardt Sr., you heard him talk about Talladega," Waltrip said. "You were there with him, you watched him, you observed. I think you can learn a lot that way. All these guys whose fathers were racers, you take things that you can absorb and apply once you get behind the wheel of a car."

It's time for Dale Jr. to use that applied science big-time on Sunday.

Go time.

Scarborough hockey rink project in jeopardy

BY ALEX ACQUISTO
THE FORECASTER

SCARBOROUGH — If major donors do not come forward by the end of next March, the group proposing construction of an ice hockey rink will hang up its skates.

After a year of targeted fundraising, the grassroots group Friends of Scarborough Hockey this week said it has not been able to raise any money from donors with deep pockets.

Jeff Murray, one of three founding members of the FOSH, on Tuesday said the nonprofit group has not been able to get its fundraising "off the ground."

Murray, the fundraising chairman and a father of three children, all of whom have played or still play on the Scarborough High School hockey team, said the group has not raised any funds.

Starting with a handful of dedicated parents of ice

hockey players and figure skaters, Friends of Scarborough Hockey was founded two years ago in response to the lack of a convenient and accessible skating rink.

The closest rinks are in Saco, Portland or Gorham, and those arenas are largely used by private or professional teams.

Practice locations for student athletes tend to change each year. Often, players from the Scarborough High School hockey team would have to be bused to one of the three locations for a 5:30 a.m. practice, to accommodate school start times and other teams' schedules.

Consequently, parents in Scarborough mobilized and drafted plans to build an approximately 40,000-square-foot rink for \$5.5 million, next to the Benjamin F. Wentworth Intermediate School parking lot, off Gorham Road. The facility would accommodate students not only from Scarborough schools, but also from Cape

Elizabeth and South Portland.

Designed primarily for hockey and figure skating, it is also intended to be used as a multi-functional community facility for other sports, like indoor soccer and lacrosse.

The proposal was approved by the Town Council last December and detailed preliminary sketch plans were presented to the Planning Board in January.

FOSH worked with several fundraising organizations to learn how to effectively raise money for the project, according to a statement from Chelsie Woods, a FOSH board member. It soon became clear that it could take closer to 2 1/2 years to raise the money needed, she said.

"We couldn't establish an anchor donor to get us started in the whole process," Murray said. "And that was our focus, ultimately, to try to find large donors."

Since the project can't unfold without the promise of multi-million dollar donations, it has

stopped gaining momentum.

Ideally, the group needs one or two donors who are each willing to pledge at least \$2 million, Woods said.

Without those substantial pledges to seed a campaign, fundraising efforts typically cannot attract enough small-donor support to succeed.

"The balance of the project is at a stage where it wouldn't make any sense to spend time on other tasks," Murray said.

"When we started this effort a couple years ago, naively, we felt the fundraising was maybe the least of our concerns," he said. "Obviously that's not true. (Now) it's most of our concern."

"We really need the community's help, hopefully that is in the form of someone local to step forward," Murray said.

In the meantime, ice hockey players from Scarborough will continue practicing at OA Sports Center in Saco.

Amateur Schmitz raises \$25,000 to play in Masters

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The improbable road to the 2016 Masters continues for Sammy Schmitz.

A 35-year-old from Farmington, Minnesota, who won the U.S. Mid-Amateur in Vero Beach, Florida, with a hole-in-one on a 290-yard par-4 in October, found himself with a spot in the major at Augusta National but without the means to make the trip feasible next April.

Schmitz, who was ranked 3,724th when he won last month, and his wife, Natalie, decided to ask for help.

On Sunday, they created a GoFundMe page to try to raise a few bucks to mitigate some of the costs that Schmitz is responsible for to practice, prepare for and play in the Masters.

"We currently live in a small town in Wisconsin

where the winters are filled with snow and the cold temperatures will make it almost impossible to practice," Natalie wrote when she launched the page. "Being a nurse I can only pick up so many extra shifts to help support my husband."

Three days later, the couple ended the fundraising effort because they had reached a staggering total of \$25,000 in donations.

"I have decided not to accept any more donations until further necessary," Schmitz wrote in an update on the page Wednesday. "I started this fund less than three days ago and can't believe how much support we received locally and nationally."

The Minnesota Golf Association will manage the funds including paying for practice rounds at Augusta National before Masters week.



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