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### The Race for Racial Diversity

#### Abstract:

Fifty years after the civil rights act its easy to take for granted the progress this country has made in society, its just as easy to forget about the same problems that faced the world of sports during those times as well. Motorsports has grown tremendously during this time in our country and has become one of our most popular sports. The integrations of college football and baseball are often looked at as some of the most popular examples of racial progress in sports but what about motorsports? Divisions of motorsports like Formula One, Indy car, rally cars and motocross have had successful African-American drivers but America's number one motorsport NASCAR has yet to have any. Why is it that one of the nations most popular sports has yet to be truly integrated? NASCAR is a large part of American culture so does this lack of attention to this fact say something about our society in 2013? NASCAR drivers come from local levels at small tracks like the one where I work. I will use my experiences and contacts through the local racing to scene to get a better idea of why there is a lack of African-American drivers at this level. I will also do cultural research through Google scholar to see how our society possibly has an affect on this shortage? I hope to find what kind of part communication plays into this lack of diversity and how a change in communication could benefit motorsports The largest implications of these findings could be that our society is not as supportive of potential changes to traditional motorsports and we are in just as much of a "stay the course" type pattern that we were in the 1950's.

Ernest Hemingway once said "There are only three sports: bullfighting, mountain-climbing, and motor racing. Everything else is merely a game." Motorsports exemplify some of the most core concepts of American values such as pulling one's self up by their bootstraps and becoming a success from hard work. This is the American dream of when dedication to your craft pays off with social advancement, motorsports are America. The biggest flaw of this community that exempts its American identity is the lack of racial diversity among it. America is the land of opportunity and equality, which are both characteristics of our major sports, except the world of racing. Growing up in a racing

family, I have seen this first hand. For over forty years, my family has opened the gates to one of the premiere dirt tracks in the south. We proudly exclaim that over two million fans have entered our gates in forty years of Saturday nights, but how many of those fans were not Caucasians? A good Saturday night brings over one hundred racecars to our facility, and as of 2013, only one of those has been African-American, the first one I can remember seeing in my lifetime. On opening night, I stood in the pits talking to the drivers to see how their offseason was when this fact was brought to my attention: “Hey Swims you see we got a Black driver this year? How long you think he’ll last before he gets run off? Gets expensive to fix those cars when they get wrecked every week.” Taken aback and still trying to fully accept what I had just heard I replied that in 2013, I hoped that the new generation of drivers would be beyond that sort of problem. The fact that comments like those are still made shows that the world of racing has a long way to go. NASCAR is failing to bring diversity to their sport due to their lack of communication. I will argue that NASCAR’s historical background, fan culture and communication failures have caused them to fail to achieve diversity and will continue to do so.

In order to see the current state of diversity in motorsports, it is important to reflect on how it started and appreciate the historical background of said diversity. Dating all the way to the 1920’s, the image of racecar drivers has been different from other athletes. One explanation of the early days of organized stock car racing is that it was immediately regarded as some kind of manifestation of the animal irresponsibility of the lower orders. It had a truly terrible reputation, the drivers were country boys and they had regular feuds out there putting each other against the walls, cutting tires and everything else” (Fuller 77). Stock car racing is a unique sport due to the fact that it stemmed from

illegal activities. In prohibition America, rural people who made their living off the land in places like Tennessee, the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama started making the side business of producing illegal liquor, or moonshine. They would then deliver this moonshine to their customers. The moonshiners needed cars that were big enough to store all their liquor but fast enough to out run any police that sought to arrest them for selling alcohol. Playful boasting about who had the fastest car quickly turned into informal races on Sunday afternoons when no one was working. This is the beginning of what would become known as stock car racing, which eventually evolved into one proper sanctioning organization known as the National Association of Stock Car Automobile Racing, or NASCAR. These notorious beginnings give this sport a different feel than any other game: “The sport of stock car racing is built upon the spirit of the renegade, the outlaw, the rouge” (Fuller 78). This establishment of the sport already gives it a disadvantage when it comes to any type of change or evolution. Additionally these roots bring a different type of fan base and they are just as much a part of the outlaw spirit as the drivers themselves. The historical sense of diversity in NASCAR is a small one. Search the NASCAR record books, and there is only one African-American driver to ever win an official NASCAR race, Wendell Scott. Scott is the Jackie Robinson of NASCAR, he was the first driver to break the color barrier in 1952. Much like Robinson, it was no easy for road for Scott. He was barred from competing in several tracks through the Carolinas and was never able to secure a financial sponsor. “If he had the equipment or financial backing, he could have won a lot more races” said Ned Jarrett, a NASCAR hall of famer (Lambert). Scott never had as good of racecars as the other competitors, but he still posted 147 top ten finishes, won a Virginia state championship and finished in the

top ten of the final point standings on four occasions. However, he was denied a rookie of the year award despite earning it and was frequently the victim of scoring errors. The most absurd being his lone win in 1963. Scott outran such legends as Richard Petty at a national race in Jacksonville, FL. However, when he crossed the finish line, he was ignored, and the checkered flag was waved for the driver in second place. "Everybody in the place knew that I had won the race" Scott later spoke (Lambert). A possible explanation for this is that, it was commonplace in those days of racing for each race to have a trophy queen. She would present the winner his trophy in victory lane along with a kiss. If Scott had been declared the winner at that moment then this would not have been a welcome scene in the 1960's South. It has always been speculated that in addition to the racial bias, this was the main reason the track did not want Scott winning the race and the potential riot that the sight of him and the trophy queen could have ensued. Scott did not get to celebrate his win, but was declared the winner weeks later. The record books may say that Wendell Scott was the winner that day, but the legendary sports moment that could have been was denied due to the racial prejudice of the time. In the decades since Wendell Scott, no African-American driver has won a race, and though few have attempted careers, none have been able to consistently compete in the top circuit of NASCAR. The 1990's brought an unparalleled expansion in NASCAR, and the once regional sport was now becoming a global phenomenon. In a 2005 survey NASCAR estimated their base to be up to 75 million (Livingstone) This aggressive expansion led NASCAR to vamp up their efforts in gaining a more diverse field of competition. "If we don't get diversity right this sport will not achieve what it needs to achieve from a popularity standpoint" said CEO Brian France(Livingstone). In addition to the growing

popularity, the diverse roster of other major racing organizations really pushed NASCAR to go in a new direction. The 2007 Indy 500 included three women in the thirty-three car field and several Latino drivers. In drag racing's top organization, the NHRA, a woman lead their point standings for most of the 2006 season. In addition to that an African-American driver, J.R. Todd, won three races. In Formula One racing, Black driver Lewis Hamilton has become one of the premiere stars on the circuit (Livingstone). This growing change in the diversification of motorsports worldwide has lead NASCAR to attempt to make a change. NASCAR launched the Drive for Diversity campaign in 2003. The goal of the program is to produce elite level minority and female drivers. The Drive for Diversity program is basically an organization that places minority drivers and mechanics alike into well-funded regional teams in order to hone their skills and eventually work their way up to the larger national series. Under this program, eighteen minorities were placed into prosperous positions for the 2007 season. It would be expected that such a program could be a potential breeding ground for top tier talent, but as of yet, that has not been the case. Many drivers and crewman have left the program believing they will have better luck on their own. One such driver, Joe Henderson III commented that he felt limited by the opportunities the program really gives. Henderson's father further stated that the program was a sham and filled with flaws: "The program is not designed to work because it is not properly funded, they call it a pipeline but nobody has come out of the pipe" (Livingstone). The head of the diversity program, Marcus Jadotte, answered the criticism with "We don't believe all these kids can be Nextel Cup drivers but we have found significant talent. We aren't where we want to be but we're making progress"(Livingstone). The diversity program is spreading to the individual race teams

in addition to being a strictly NASCAR funded program. Sam Belnavis is a former team owner and current chief of diversity operations for Roush-Fenway Racing. “The Drive for Diversity is working to the extent that we have participation”. He stated when asked about the state of the program (Livingstone). As previously mentioned, the program tries to include crewmembers into the fold as well. Up to twelve are selected each year and given prosperous positions. This is where NASCAR has found a slight bit of success so far. There are two African-Americans serving on pit crews at the highest level of NASCAR racing, the Nextel Cup. “Four years ago it was zero.” Belnavis went on to say that these jobs are increasingly difficult to obtain due to their reliance of top-level technological and mechanical skills. “You have to just grow prospects in some instances” (Livingstone). Belnavis may be giving the Drive for Diversity program too much credit but he is on the right track of there being slight progress. It is difficult for significant changes to happen overnight but why is that even harder in NASCAR? What kind of cultural factors of the sport have lead to this?

As previously discussed, NASCAR’s beginnings already give it a disadvantage for welcoming change. That spirit of the outlaw that so defines the sport can also be its greatest downfall. NASCAR has become part of the Southern identity and that does not always mean it is the most beckoning for diversity. NASCAR is such a strong part of the southern identity not only because of its roots but because it *is* the South, a growing world that is clinging to its roots in an attempt to remain true to itself. The deepest fear of the old South has hit in the last few decades, urbanization. Author David Goldfield stated. “Southern urbanization continues to reflect regional attributes, particularly those shaped in small towns and the countryside” (Goldfield 476). Basically despite the South

becoming the most economically important area of the country there is still a clinging to its own identity. There is a regional consciousness among southerners, that sets them apart from the rest of the country (Wright 8). Southerners will always have the mentality of “us versus the rest of the country” and in many ways the Confederate States of America is still a separate country from the United States. The very beginnings of NASCAR represent this mentality. The Indy 500 was established well before stock car racing and had turned into a well-funded highly advanced form of automotive competition. Manufacturers designed cars specifically for the race that were sleek and expensive. The South was riddled with poverty and nobody could afford to race these highly engineered cars. However, they could easily purchase a Ford Model T. This stark contrast in vehicles only further enabled the Southern mindset of this being “our type of racing”. The rest of the country had their expensive, fancy cars but the South did not need them. This further solidified the “us versus them” mentality and brought racing into that part of the equation as well. This is a major factor in the connection of the South and NASCAR. NASCAR is one of the strongest connections to the myth of the Old South. The chivalry tradition of individual achievement and honor are all a part of the shared value system between NASCAR and the Old South (Ribacki 296). Individual achievement is often one of the most celebrated traditions of the South and the culture of NASCAR shows this coinciding as well. It is the only major sport without any type of union and has failed to create one on two separate occasions (Howell 31). This all plays into the culture that surrounds the sport and the reluctance to change things. The culture of the South and NASCAR is that they do not want just NASCAR they want “their

NASCAR”. The sport is looked at as the Southern sport and if it begins to change then the last stitches that hold together the myth of the Old South will be gone forever.

It is easy to brush aside and think of these views as ancient but that is simply not true. The American political machine recognized this view and categorizes one of the most popular voting demographics as “NASCAR Dads”. These are described as “macho, socially and politically conservative, working class white-men, Southern in outlook if not heritage and hell-bent on returning George W. Bush to office” (Cobb 324). This demographic is one of the most sought after due to their numbers and like-mindedness. This shows that this is not a dying breed of our culture but if anything an escalating group. The characteristics of these groups do not exactly line up along with a strong search for diversity. The culture of NASCAR disdains change because it knows that the sport is the last true foothold of Southern identity and without it there is a fear that that identity will disappear forever. The result is a “stay the course” mentality that does not seek change to their beloved culture and NASCAR is a massive part of that. It would be easy to look at this fear of change and diversity as uniquely a Southern or NASCAR problem. However this has been a relevant issue in all of sports dating back in our history. While the South is a lot more resistant to change, it is not fair to say it is the only place in the country like that. The fact is that America does not like change as much as it wants the world to think it does.

NASCAR may still be the least diverse sport in the country but that does not mean that the other major sports had a smooth transition to more diverse rosters or that other sports had the most noble of intentions. Jackie Robinson is easily the most famous symbol of racial integration in sports. He had the courage to be the first man to break the



color barrier in baseball and has been rightly honored in every way possible by Major League Baseball. The owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Branch Rickey, has been equally applauded as a civil rights pioneer but many argue that his mission of diversity had little to do with actual civil rights. It is frequently stated that Rickey was simply acting as a smart businessman rather than pioneer. Author Robert F. Bark stated. "Having identified blacks as the untapped source of first rate, inexpensive, playing talent. He concluded that they could secure pennants and profits for his long struggling franchise while also killing off the gate rivalry of the Negro leagues" (Ogden, Rosen 81). While Rickey himself never openly admitted this some signs point to his some signs show his mentality. He was to be a recipient for a award for Civil Rights activism and he turned it down. He went on to comment "It would be a shame to take credit for that" (Ogden, Rosen 81). Do the intentions of those in management change the importance of the event? What if their had been no market for Rickey to tap into it? Would baseball have struggled with diversity for more years to come? It would be impossible to know for sure but it shows that the holy grail of sport diversity might not have been as holy as most think. Another of America's most popular sports is basketball. The NBA has always been one of the most diverse sports in the country with professional players from all over the world coming to America to play professionally. Around the same time Wendell Scott was winning his first race, the NBA was being dominated by a 7-foot tall African-American center named Wilt Chamberlin. Chamberlin was not the league's first African-American player but he was certainly the first African-American superstar. Chamberlin was one of the most famous figures in the country and one of the first athletes to transcend sports and become a cultural figure. However 1960's America was still a racially torn country and instead of

being a beloved figure like Michael Jordan, he was a villain, jeered everywhere he played. Wilt played for “moderate” cities like Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles but still he was not widely accepted. He frequently was bullied on the court while the referees would turn a blind eye then when he would talk about it with the media he was labeled “a lazy, immature, stubborn, pampered crybaby”(Ogden, Rosen 162). He was constantly over-analyzed by the white-dominated media. They were so eager to use him as an example to make the country believe in any stereotypes about African-Americans that everything he said was often twisted and used as criticism. His record of 100 points in a game, still stands to this day but instead of being applauded he was criticized as not being a team player and having poor leadership skills. Chamberlin was not given his true credit until decades after he retired. His story shows that diversity does not come easy in any sport. As mentioned, Chamberlin was playing in considerably tolerant areas of the country. These cities and the sport of basketball did not have the white Southern identity that NASCAR does, and yet, it still was not an easily accepted act. America is a country that slowly accepts change, and this is only amplified when it is a sport whose origins and most loyal fan base continue to be from the South.

Communication plays a key role in making any type of significant changes in the world. For example The Occupy Wall Street movement successfully used communication through social media to turn a few dozen protesters into a nation-wide movement. Large scale political movements like those in Libya were put together in a similar fashion. There is a reason militaristic dictators do not allow their people free access to Internet and technology, and that is communication. Communication is a powerful thing because it can lead to change, which is another of the main reasons there are little to no changes in

NASCAR culture. NASCAR greatly struggles with its communication specifically when it comes to diversity. NASCAR hangs its hat on the Drive for Diversity program, they look to this as their crowning achievement in diversification of the sport. For such a heralded program though I can hardly tell you what it is. The Drive for Diversity's website is extremely lacking. It seems to be nothing but a collection of overly worded mission statements proclaiming their quest for change. However, what they are doing to acquire this change is hardly mentioned. Obviously, it is some sort of developmental program, but how they ensure this development is not quite understood. Is it a school for drivers who need to learn or a placement program for people who have already had driving experience? I am still not quite sure. There was a place on their website where an application could be submitted. Therefore, I received the impression that the program requires all its applicants to come to them rather than going out to find them. NASCAR is like any other sport in that to get the best talent, race teams need to go out and recruit members. I get no sense from the Drive for Diversity program that they are actively looking for drivers or doing any type of scouting at all. Requiring drivers to come to them is a massive fault on the program, because the program is so hidden by NASCAR. As my history indicates I have been a loyal race fan my entire life. I have watched almost every NASCAR race on Sundays for years and I had no idea the Drive for Diversity program existed before this project. NASCAR has done nothing in order to promote the program. Their minimal footprint with social media can show this. The Drive for Diversity twitter page has 2,756 followers by comparison the NASCAR twitter account has 1,075,822. A quick scroll through the NASCAR twitter account shows no mention or retweets from the program, evidently NASCAR feels no need to share information about the program with

over a million people with a simple retweet click. Facebook shows a similar pattern. The NASCAR Facebook page has over 3.3 million likes, while The Drive for Diversity Facebook page has a paltry 1,323. Just for a comparison my family's small grassroots dirt track has over 14,000 likes on facebook. This is a clear indication of NASCAR's thoughts on the program when a subsidiary of a multibillion dollar corporation has significantly less of a Facebook footprint than a small family run business in north Georgia. Also, while watching a NASCAR broadcast there is never any sort of commercial or mention for the diversity program. These are broadcasts that can last for up to five or six hours and still they do not find the time to place in a ten second commercial or a mention from the announcers. Going to NASCAR's website and there is also little mention of the Drive for Diversity program. There are not banner links on the side of the page nor any advertisement at all. It would be easy to look at all this and assume that NASCAR just focuses on racing and does not like to talk about their subsidiary programs but this is not true. Scrolling down the website there are multiple banner links to the NASCAR Green program, a environmentally friendly program they have developed. There is also an advertisement for the program around the gas cap of every single stock car during races. The going green campaign also features several advertisements during race broadcasts. Another program NASCAR heavily pushes is the Home Tracks promotion. This campaign encourages the support of local racetracks for the better of the racing community. NASCAR Home Tracks has a commercial during every race broadcast that features star drivers like Carl Edwards. It's exposure shows in comparison to the Drive for Diversity program. When it comes to social media, the Home Tracks facebook page has 15,345 likes, nearly ten times more than the Drive for

Diversity's. Twitter tells a similar story the Home Tracks account has 33,181 followers nearly fifteen times more than Drive for Diversity twitter. It also has about 18,000 more tweets so it is being used astronomically more. The positive numbers that come along with both the Home Tracks and Green program show just how much communication plays a role in the success of a program. It is no coincidence that given the miniscule exposure of the Drive for Diversity program there has not been one success story in its ten-year existence. The Drive for Diversity program is not meant to succeed because NASCAR has clearly shown that it is little more than an afterthought to them. The diversity program comes across as a clear press relations move. It is nothing more than a program whose only existence is so NASCAR can say they are attempting to bring more diversity for their sport. Their incomprehensible lack of attention to the program proves this. As previously shown, NASCAR is the most behind when it comes to the state of diversity among motorsports and this why they felt the need to establish a specified program for it. However, their lack of attention to it shows that the program is not designed to actually be successful.

The Drive for Diversity program is not the only aspect of the sport that they are failing with communication on. NASCAR needs to embrace their past if they truly want to evolve into more diversity. Although I am not a baseball fan at all, I know who Jackie Robinson is and what he did. Meanwhile I am a lifelong racefan who watches every weekend and can name the majority of the starting field on Sundays but before this project I had never heard of Wendell Scott, and I was also not aware that an African-American had ever won a race before. This is a problem that can be entirely blamed on NASCAR. They have not embraced their past at all. Wendell Scott was a man who

competed in a sport most associated with Southern culture both in the 1950's and in the Deep South as well. This was man with unbelievable courage and yet he has never had the proper honor done to him by NASCAR. They instead have chosen to ignore him. We spent an entire semester talking about the disservice the University of Alabama has done to those in our past for the selfless act of desegregating the university. The term "bare minimum" was frequently used to describe the school's actions. However, these students did receive a clock tower in their name and vaguely worded as they may be, plaques honoring them. We still discuss how the school can do so much more and that is not enough. NASCAR cannot even say they have done the bare minimum because they have done nothing. Scott has never been mentioned in any sort of capacity and most disrespectfully, he has yet to be included in their hall of fame. The NASCAR hall of fame currently has twenty inductees so somehow they have found that many deserving people to be in their hall of fame but not their first and only African-American to ever win a race. I believe this lack of acknowledgment plays a clear role in the lack of diversity in the sport. If Scott had been properly acknowledged to the level of other barrier-breaking sports heroes like Jackie Robinson, then he could have inspired generations of potential fans or drivers and their lack of communication about him has cost NASCAR that.

In addition to embracing the past NASCAR needs to embrace its present. Just this season an African-American driver Darrel Wallace Jr was signed by Kyle Busch motorsports to race in the truck series of NASCAR. The truck series is looked at as a place where young drivers can hone their abilities and work their way up to the highest level. The truck series is generally seen as the third highest level a driver can race at. In order to make this diversity more known, NASCAR needs to effectively market Wallace

and make him one of the top stars of that division. This is a driver that is signed to a highly funded premier race team and could be a major star for them that brings in a fan base that was not previously there. However, this can only be done if NASCAR does not ignore him and makes him one of the focal points of their broadcasts, much like they have done for Danica Patrick. Patrick is a talented driver but has yet to achieve any real success in stock car racing. However you would never know this if you watched a NASCAR broadcast. She is pushed as one of their top stars. She is frequently in commercials for the sport and is one of their major marketing tools. If they can do this for a female driver who is still untested why could they not do the same for an African-American driver who is still gaining experience? Their handling of Danica Patrick shows that validity on the track is secondary to marketability when it comes to their drivers. Danica is marketed as if she is a championship contender who could be a threat to win every week and this has yet to be the case with her career. She is marketed simply because of her minority in the racing world. The same could be done for Darrel Wallace Jr. If history has shown anything, it is that one person can make a difference, especially in the world of sports. An example would be what Yao Ming did to the success of basketball in China, which traditionally had very little basketball in their culture. Yao Ming was not the first Chinese player in the NBA, but he was the first that was marketed the right way to become a national superstar but not for anything he did on the court essentially. This communication of him by the NBA has brought basketball to China in new levels and it is currently the number one foreign market for the NBA. If Ming can make basketball a success in China simply because of his marketability then why can the same not be done for Darrell Wallace? If Wallace was pushed as a major star

in racing than he could bring a new diversity to NASCAR that has never been seen before. Hopefully NASCAR learns to embrace their future and not ignore it like they have done previously. They are clearly failing at bringing diversity to their sport and they could finally succeed if they handle Darrel Wallace Jr the right way.

NASCAR is failing to bring diversity to their sport due to their lack of communication. First, their historical background and handling of racial issues have set them at a disadvantage for change. Second, the culture that surrounds the sport is one that does not accept differences very well. Finally, NASCAR's general lack of ✓ communication is a key aspect for their failing diversity and their success in changing things lies in this. NASCAR needs communication if it ever wants to be a successfully diverse sport and with the right kind of communication they could easily turn into that. NASCAR has to decide if they want to truly evolve into a sport or just merely be a game.



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