

Drive for Diversity program opens doors

No "free rides" given to minorities when chosen by owners

When Chris Bristol stood in Victory Lane at Hickory Motor Speedway on April 6, 2005, nobody had ever been where he was at before.

Bristol became the first African-American driver to win a race at Hickory Motor Speedway, a track buried in Deep South racing heritage. Undaunted by the history he made, Bristol just celebrated -- "I just always wanted to run up front," he said.

But a few days later, he got an e-mail that said his celebration could be felt in more places than the rural North Carolina town.

"It was from an older black gentleman who is an executive in Corporate America," Bristol said of the message. "He grew up in Taylorsville, which is near Hickory. He said when he was a kid that he wasn't allowed in the track because he was black. So he and his buddies would go climb this tree over to the side so they could watch the races.

"In our world, we take things like that for granted. But for someone like him to share that story with me, it puts everything in perspective."

Bristol plans to stand in those shoes again, only at a higher level. And NASCAR's Drive for Diversity program may provide the steps to get there.



One of eight drivers selected for this year's Drive for Diversity class, Bristol will be driving for Nextel Cup driver [Ken Schrader](#)'s team. And Schrader's not just paying the bills.

"It's great because Ken Schrader is confident enough to put you in his car," said Bristol, who will continue his stint in the Dodge Weekly Series this season.

So confident was Schrader that after practicing for a Late Model race at Phoenix, Schrader tossed the keys to his ride to Bristol and told him to turn a few laps. It was the same car that Schrader was to run the following day.

"I was nervous because he had to race the car the next day," Bristol said. "I mean, I ran hard, but I left enough on the plate so I wouldn't be worried about messing up his ride. It was amazing that he had the confidence in me to go do that."

Perhaps it wasn't that amazing considering Bristol, who was also the first black driver to win at Caraway (N.C.) Speedway, had three victories, 12 top-fives and 14 top-10s in the Dodge Weekly Series last season while driving for Joe Gibbs Racing. In pairing with Schrader this year, Bristol is committed to running 18 Late Model races, but sponsorship will dictate whether they can do more, such as ARCA or regional series races.

Filling Bristol's vacated seat at Joe Gibbs Racing -- 15-year-old Marc Davis.

Never mind that he doesn't even have his driver's license yet and is a sophomore in high school. With 11 years of racing under his belt, he's gone faster around a track than most adults twice his age. And three weeks ago, Davis and his family picked up from their Maryland home and moved to Mooresville, N.C., so the young gun could be closer to the Mecca of the racing world -- and JGR's shop.

"My dad and I always worked on cars, but the Gibbs equipment and the time they commit to the cars makes us successful," Davis said. "Driving skill is a big part of it, but to have a winning team, you have to have the resources."

Davis' desires, however, don't stop behind the wheel. In addition to his driving, the youngster owns two teams -- one in the Florida FASTkids/Fastrucks Series and a Limited Late Model team that competes at South Boston Speedway.

It's the Drive for Diversity program, he said, that will provide him the biggest opportunities in driving and learning how to manage the sport, especially at such a young age.

"To know that of the number of drivers that applied, I was among the eight selected -- that opens a huge door for me," he said.

The Nextel Cup Series is obviously the ultimate goal for drivers competing in the program, but becoming just the second black driver to win at NASCAR's highest level isn't exactly the carrot they're chasing.

"Let's say [Truck Series driver] [Bill Lester](#) lands a Cup ride for a race in 2006 and he's running up front at Talladega and wins," Bristol said. "That doesn't change my goals. My goals are to make it there."

By not placing parameters on such aspirations as breaking the Victory Lane color barrier and not competing under a be-first-or-don't-do-it attitude, Bristol understands the goal of the Drive for Diversity program, said director Bryan Kryder.

"We didn't sit down with these drivers and show them a timeline for their career," Kryder said. "There is no direct line of success. Some have taken quick paths, while for others it has taken a little longer. That's the nature of the sport in general."

Some may argue that diversity in the sport has taken long enough. But the program, Bristol said, has allowed minority drivers to do things they might not have otherwise done.

"I've been racing long before these programs were established, and I've even won some races," Bristol said. "But the biggest difference is the program has allowed me to get my foot in the door of places I would have struggled with before."

Driver Profiles

- **Chris Bristol** is competing with Ken Schrader Racing. The Columbus, Ohio, native made history as the first African-American to win a race at Hickory (N.C.) Motor Speedway and Caraway (N.C.) Speedway. He had three wins, 12 top-five and 14 top-10 finishes in 2005.
- **Brianne Cronrath** of Fleetwood, Pa., participated in the Drive for Diversity program in 2005, competing at Motor Mile Speedway in Radford, Va. This season she will join Spraker Racing Enterprises.
- **Allison Duncan** will drive for Richard Childress Racing in 2006. Duncan, from San Rafael, Calif., has been with the Drive for Diversity program since its initial season in 2004. Last year she became the first Drive for Diversity participant to win a race and the first woman to win at Stockton (Calif.) 99 Speedway.
- **Marc Davis** of Mitchellville, Md., will join Joe Gibbs Racing. In 2005 he competed at Summit Point (W.Va.) Raceway and Hickory (N.C.) Motor Speedway where he became the NASA Road Course points champion in the Super Unlimited Division.
- **Paul Harraka** will compete with Spraker Racing Enterprises. The Fairlawn, N.J., native had 20 wins in the World Karting Association and Stars of Karting Series in 2005. He is a seven-time World Karting Association national champion.
- **Jessica Helberg** of Petaluma, Calif., competed at various tracks across the West Coast in 2005, earning four top-five and 12 top-10 finishes. She will drive for drag racing icon Frank Pedregon in 2006.
- **Jesus Hernandez** of Fresno, Calif., returns for his second season as a Drive for Diversity participant. He finished 2005 with one top-five and six top-10 finishes. He will join MB2 Motorsports in 2006.
- **Peter Hernandez** from Blue Island, Ill., competed in the Mid-American Stock Car Series in 2005, finishing first in points with 14 top-five finishes. This season he will compete with Bill McAnally Racing.

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Handling Woes and Numerous Cautions Couldn't Stop Andy Loden From Winning Three in a Row at Hickory Motor Speedway

By Adrian Sanders ASandersRYRE@carolina.rr.com

Andy Loden, driver of the #29 Monroe Roadways Chevrolet really had his hands full as he battled to get his third win in a row in the Bojangle's Late Model Division. Between a car that was ill-handling, 16 caution periods, and holding off charges from fast cars such as #59 Coleman Pressley, Loden was glad to see this 100-lapper come to an end.

Andy Loden took the top spot in qualifying and led the field to the green flag with #59 Coleman Pressley on the outside in the Kingsford/Clorox car. Pressley jumped immediately to the lead at the drop of the green flag. On lap 2, Carl Cormier put the nose of his #58 Performance Center car under #74 James Hansen. The two almost touched as Cormier took the 4th place spot coming out of turn 4. By lap 4, Andy Loden is able to get to the more comfortable high line and challenge Pressley for the lead. Loden looks to the outside in 2 and assumes the lead on the next lap. The first caution of the night comes out on lap 5 as #16 Mack Little and #28 Mark Johnson go for a spin in turn 2.



Loden leads the field to the restart and things remain single file. On lap 10, #05 Brent Raymer looks to the outside of #74 for 5th but before the pass is complete, caution is displayed as #72 Richard Boswell loops around. The green flag flies for the restart as Brian Connor takes a look on Pressley for 2nd, but caution comes out again as #14 Randy Burnett goes spinning on the backstretch. On this restart, #59 Coleman Pressley gets a good start and takes a look to the inside of Loden but he is unable to make the pass. Caution is displayed again on lap 14 as #28 Mark Johnson and #13 Stephanie Brooks get tangled in turn 2.



Loden continues to lead as the green flag is displayed again. On the restart, #74 James Hansen tries to take a peek to the inside of #58 Carl Cormier for 4th, but Cormier hangs on to the spot. On lap 17, Hansen gets impatient and decides to take a look at Cormier's front bumper as he sends the 58 car spinning in turn 4. Cormier sustained minimal damage and is able to continue. NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series Officials also send the #74 of James Hansen to the rear of the pack for his aggressive driving tactics.

The field takes another restart with only 17 laps in the books. But it didn't stay green for long as the rash of cautions continue as #14 Randy Burnett spins in turn 2. Andy Mercer also sustained some damage as he was turned from behind while slowing to avoid the #14 car. Patience is running thin as the green flag is displayed. On lap 26, #02 Travis Sharpe gets into the bumper of #7x Ashley Huffman sending him spinning in turn 4. Officials move Travis Sharpe to the rear of the field for the restart for his overaggressive move.

On the restart, Coleman Pressley gets another good jump to try and take the top spot away from Andy Loden. Pressley gets all the way up to Loden's door on the backstretch, but he is still unable to re-assume the lead. On lap 29, #95 Keith Bumgarner moves into the top 5 after starting deep in the field as he passes #54 Brandon Dean for 5th. Things quiet down for one of the longest green flag runs of the night up until lap 43. Stephanie Brooks spun her car in turn 2 right in front of the leaders. Andy Loden almost scraped the wall just to get around the incident, but luckily all the front-runners made it by unharmed.



Loden leads the field back to the green with Pressley still hot on his heels trying to make the low line pass work. Bumgarner tries to challenge #05 Brent Raymer for 4th on lap 46 but he is unable to make the pass. Caution comes out on lap 49 as #58 Carl Cormier's night turns even worse as he goes spinning in turn 1. On the restart, Coleman Pressley takes another look to the inside of Loden, but he still can't make it work. On lap 51, Keith Bumgarner tries again for 4th spot on Raymer, but does it on the high side this time. It finally works and Bumgarner puts the #95 Country Chair Ford in 4th place. Caution comes out on lap 53 as #74 James Hansen spins in turn 4. After a brief green flag period of 2 laps, caution comes out again for a big tangle on the front stretch involving #64 Nick Losito, #7 Charlie Barham

and #16 Mack Little. On the restart, Pressley looks again to the inside of Loden, but slips in turn 2 unable to get the run. Caution comes out on lap 56 for the spun car #7 of Charlie Barham.



The green flag is displayed once again with Loden up front and Pressley still in chase. On lap 63, Loden goes way up the track in turn 1 getting completely sideways in turn 2. This allows Pressley, Connor and Bumgarner to get by and Connor ends up with the lead. On lap 65, Loden appears to have things gathered back up as he passes Bumgarner on the outside for 3 rd . Caution comes out on lap 67 for #54 Brandon Dean who has come to a stop near the turn 4 wall after apparently experiencing mechanical troubles.

#21 Brian Connor leads the field back around to the green flag. On lap 71, #29 Andy Loden goes to the outside of #59 Coleman Pressley to try and take over 2 nd . When the field went into turn 1, Pressley's car snapped loose sending him to the outside wall. Keith Bumgarner could not avoid the spinning car of Pressley as he goes nose into the wall bringing out another caution. This made it a tough night for Keith Bumgarner. He was able to continue but went several laps down as his damaged car could not keep the pace. The field tries for a restart twice, but caution flies twice more for cars getting tangled in turn 4 that included #14 Randy Burnett, #16 Mack Little, #71 Scott Young and #77 Clint Mills.

Brian Connor continued to lead for the restart with Andy Loden in tow. On lap 75, Loden looks to the outside of Connor and takes the race lead again. #01 Pete Silva lights the fuse and comes on strong late in the race as he works around the #41 of Jesus Hernandez for 5 th and 4 laps later takes 4 th from #05 Brent Raymer. On lap 84, #32 Kevin Leicht gets a run on #21 Brian Connor and takes over 2 nd place. One lap later, Brian Connor is off pace and heading to the pits as his night ends early with a blown motor. On lap 88, Pete Silva continues to have a great late race run as he works around Kevin Leicht to take over the 2 nd spot. Coleman Pressley worked his way back into the top 5 and also takes over 4 th on lap 89 after passing #05 Brent Raymer. The field remained under green for the rest of the race, but nobody had anything for Andy Loden as he picked up his 3 rd win in a row and his 4 th of the 2006 season. Coming in 2 nd was #01 Pete Silva followed by #32 Kevin Leicht, #59 Coleman Pressley and #05 Brent Raymer.



Andy Loden had this to say in Victory Lane:

“This baby was evil tonight. I don't know how it made it back to the front because it was an ill-handling piece. I had to work for that one, that's for sure. I thought we were going to be in trouble. I don't know exactly what happened over there in turn 2. It just snapped loose and I was going for a ride then. I was lucky to hold on to it. Coleman got under me a few times tonight. He was fast, I hated to see that he got in trouble. Pete was catching me there at the end and I was starting to get worried but luckily we didn't have a late race caution. I want to thank my sponsors Monroe Roadways, RE Suspension, Culp Petroleum and my crew of guys that work hard on this car.”



In the Pro-4 Division, Wayne Brown picked up another win in his #86 car. Brown was followed by #00 Ricky Crooks Jr, #55 Walter Hoke, #4 Adam Beaver and #1 Jacob Lehn.

Andy Mercer picked up another victory in the Limited Late Model Division. He qualified on the pole and led flag to flag. Mercer was followed by #92 Marc Davis, #14 Brandon Cox, #44 Matt DiBenedetto and #7 Paul Adams. Brandon Cox's finishing position was disallowed after failing to pass post-race tech inspection.

In the Advance Auto Parts Super Truck Division, #24 Ben Stancill picked up the win over #69 Trevor Hignutt, #99 Andrew Carlsen, #97 Kevin Bumgarner and #44 Ben Ebeling.

Nikki Long appeared to have picked up her 3 rd win of the season in the hobby stock division, but according to the NASCAR Dodge Weekly Racing Series Officials, her car did not pass post-race tech inspection. This gave the victory to #46 Jason Garwood. Coming in 2 nd was #90 Ronnie Sims followed by #14 Mike Sidden, #-1 Ronald Dale McNeill and #3 Tim Reece.

Join us next week on June 3 rd as Pepsi presents the Hickory Motor Speedway 56 th Birthday Celebration! Come prepared to see some awesome racing action in the Bojangle's Late Models, Limited Late Models, Pro-4's, J&J Roofing Street Stocks, Carolina

Vintage Racers and the Legendary Flathead Fords. See you there!



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