

# Lapbylap

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## in for the long haul

By Rea McLeroy

LapbyLap

When he started his race team in Richmond, Va., in 1949, Junie Donlavey received a lot of help from his friends. Local companies paid for his trips, local guys volunteered countless hours in his shop. They gave him the means to become an owner, a way to be involved in the fledgling sport he loved.

Fifty-two years later, Donlavey remains committed to the area that fostered his career.

He'll never leave Richmond. He never may leave NASCAR.

These days, it's more of a struggle to get to the track week after week. Small-time owners just don't have the means to run against the multicar, high-dollar empires. Yet they are here.

Donlavey and Dave Marcis grew up with racing and helped NASCAR develop into the sport it is today. Now they struggle just to make the show and retain sponsors.

What makes them stay? They don't turn a profit, don't vie for wins and championships. A small-time operation is a losing proposition, a money drain filled with mounting frustrations and ever-changing employees. But it's still a race team. For Donlavey and Marcis, that always has been enough.

"NASCAR is racing," Marcis said. "That's what it's all about."

Marcis is taking some of his chips out of the game. He's keeping his team on a part-time basis, hunting for sponsorship as someone else replaces him behind the wheel.

"I think you need the additional people and the engineering people that you can afford to hire with the two- and three-car teams," Marcis said when he announced his retirement in July. "It gets tougher and tougher as a one-car team."

While Marcis is limiting his role, Donlavey is here for the long haul.

Donlavey's crew members — a few of whom have been with him since the early 1970s — call him "Chief." Some have quit so many times their status seems unclear day to day, but they keep showing up for work.

Donlavey said that kind of personnel has made his stay in NASCAR possible. But why has he remained in the sport?

"The times I thought about getting out of racing, I would stop and realize, this is where my friends are," he said. "I've got so many in racing, friends and competitors, so you will stretch a little and do without to be able to stay."

He has cut corners when possible, relied on the help of friends on other teams and managed

to secure sponsorships from time to time. It hasn't been easy. It hasn't made him rich, but it has made him a happy man.

"The reason you have some people stay in it is because it's what they want to do," he said. "If you want to do something, you can normally work around not having the type of money a lot of the big teams have that they can spend and throw away."

And fun always has been part of the deal. Making money has never been the driving force for someone working in Donlavey's garage.

"We had a big year and I think I made \$39,000 driving for Junie and I had to pay my own expenses," said Ricky Rudd of driving for Donlavey in 1979, when the team finished ninth in points. "That was a big-time job."

It's been a while since Donlavey, who owns the No. 90 car, had a team contending in the points race. He's happy just to be part of the sport, even this season, when his team has fallen to 40th in points and has missed 10 races. He doesn't focus on the performance aspect

but does say he could have won more if luck had gone his way. Donlavey's team has won just once in 819 starts — in 1961 with driver Jody Ridley in Dover, Del., where the Winston Cup circuit stops this weekend.

Donlavey doesn't want to think about cash, either. He said as long as he makes enough to pay the bills he's happy. So he manages on \$3 million or \$5 million a year instead of the \$15 million of \$18 million championship contenders spend. Donlavey said he wouldn't know what to do with that kind of money. Mostly, it would just make him wonder about the loyalty of his crew.

He doesn't have that problem now.

"If you're in it, and you don't have anything, normally the people you have around want to be in it, so you have a very good group," he said.

Not that Donlavey ever has had to worry about the commitment of his employees. Drivers such as Ken Schrader and Rudd

have driven for the owner. Former crew chief Tommy Baldwin Jr. now holds the same role with Ward Burton's team, and former chassis specialist Greg Conner worked as crew chief for the Midwest Transit team. The list of crew members who started with Donlavey and then moved to greener pastures is long.

He likes it that way.

Although Donlavey's team isn't running up front, Schrader doesn't believe NASCAR is squeezing out small-time owners.

"I don't see where those type of people are going away; it's just the sport is changing," Schrader said. "Rick Hendrick is as committed to this deal as Junie is. He loves it; he lives it. He's just got a lot of other stuff going on, too. ... I don't think we're losing a breed of people."

But there is no one like Donlavey in the garage.

No other single-car team idling along with a low budget and a long history. When Donlavey decides to give up on the sport, an era in NASCAR will end. He knows that but doesn't plan for it to happen anytime soon.

"I'll do it until I don't want to do it anymore," Donlavey said. "I've been very fortunate in being able to enjoy it knowing how to run a race team and not always being upset because we didn't run every race. ... The only thing I can say about it is it's been one of the best sports you can ever be involved in from the time I got into it until now."

Rea McLeroy covers NASCAR for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

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Junie Donlavey's

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### PIT STOP

This driver made his Winston Cup debut at Dover Downs International Speedway's fall race in 2000. Can you name him?

For the answer, see next week's page or go to lapbylap.com.

### Just the Stats

#### NASCAR POINTS LEADERS

##### Winston Cup

##### Bush Series

1. Jeff Gordon	3,768	1. Kevin Harvick	3,731
2. Ricky Rudd	3,546	2. Jason Keller	3,657
3. Dale Jarrett	3,375	3. Jeff Green	3,554
4. Tony Stewart	3,356	4. Greg Biffle	3,509
5. Sterling Marlin	3,302	5. Elton Sawyer	3,369
6. Bobby Labonte	3,267	6. Tony Raines	3,159
7. Dale Earnhardt Jr.	3,244	7. Mike McLaughlin	3,151
8. Kevin Harvick	3,230	8. Jimmie Johnson	3,133
9. Rusty Wallace	3,225	9. Chad Little	3,081
10. Johnny Benson	3,098	10. Kenny Wallace	2,972
11. Jeff Burton	2,979	11. Kevin Grubb	2,863
12. Mark Martin	2,948	12. Scott Wimmer	2,827
13. Bill Elliott	2,917	13. Randy LaJoie	2,769
14. Steve Park	2,859	14. David Green	2,750
15. Jimmy Spencer	2,838	15. Jamie McMurray	2,674
16. Matt Kenseth	2,829	16. Jay Sauter	2,613
17. Ward Burton	2,712	17. Bobby Hamilton Jr.	2,597
18. Elliott Sadler	2,629	18. Rich Bickle	2,504
19. Bobby Hamilton	2,608	19. Jeff Purvis	2,475
20. Ken Schrader	2,597	20. Hank Parker Jr.	2,419

For complete points standings and additional statistics, go to [www.lapbylap.com](http://www.lapbylap.com).

### RACING THIS WEEK

#### MBNA Cal Ripken Jr. 400

Where: Dover Downs International Speedway (Dover, Del.)

When: Sept. 23, 12:30 p.m.

On the air: NBC

Qualifying: Sept. 21

Distance: 400 laps, 400 miles

Track qualifying record: Rusty Wallace, 159.964, Sept. 25, 1999

Track race record: Mark Martin, 132.719, Sept. 21, 1997

2000 winner: Tony Stewart

Dover Downs International

Speedway

Track: 1.0-mile oval

Banking: 24 degrees

Bush Grand Nat'l

Race: MBNA.com 200 (Dover Downs International Speedway)

When: Sept. 22, 1 p.m.

On the air: TNT

Visit [www.lapbylap.com](http://www.lapbylap.com) for qualifying results and race-day coverage.

On the Record

"I am particularly touched by those 45 men and women on United Flight 93 and their heroic feat to save the lives of others. NASCAR drivers are described as being fearless and courageous, because that's our job. But what those passengers did on that plane is so far above the highest level of courage that I have ever seen on the racetrack, and, for that, they are very special heroes in my heart. Like in our sport, they did their best to put themselves in a position to win."

— Jimmy Spencer

Last week's Pit Stop answer: Joe Nemecek

### NASCAR NOTES

## Fans can expect tighter security this weekend at Dover Downs

Following the lead of other major sports, NASCAR officials postponed the New England 300 to the end of the season.

The Winston Cup event at New Hampshire International Speedway in Loudon, N.H., will be held on Friday, Nov. 23 and become the 2001 season finale.

"This is a time for families to come together," President Mike Helton said. "We felt that postponing [the] race was simply the right thing to do. We join the nation in mourning those who lost their lives, and pray that those wounded will recover fully."

It's a historic move for NASCAR — no race has been postponed for reasons other than forces of nature such as snow, rain or the wildfires that delayed a 1998 race at Daytona.

Drivers said they thought it was the only decision for NASCAR to make.

"There are far more important things going on in this country right now than running a race," points leader Jeff Gordon said. "We have all been deeply affected by this tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the victims."

DOVER, Del. — Usually, giant C-5A cargo planes doing lazy touch-and-goes raise eyebrows and drop jaws in the Winston Cup garage at Dover Downs Speedway, near the end of the runways at Dover Air Force Base.

But the pre-race fly-over show for Sunday's NASCAR race at Dover Downs, less than two hours east of Washington, will be poignant, since Dover Air Force Base is a key point in the U.S. response to the attacks.

The base is becoming a big mortuary, and the tiny town adjacent to it, with limited hotel facilities, will quickly become jammed with families of the victims of the tragedies. That has raised the possibility of NASCAR officials having to postpone this weekend's events at Dover. If so, that would be the second-straight weekend that stock-car teams would be idled, and it would create another logistical nightmare for the sport.

But Denis McGlynn, who runs Dover Downs, and John Dunlap, McGlynn's right-hand man, are both hoping that this weekend's race will come off as scheduled.

"Definitely, security has changed, but as far as we know, the race is going to happen," Dunlap said. "I know there have been some questions about that, because some hotel rooms are being taken away by Dover Air Force Base and the government because of the need to have places for forensic specialists and the families coming



MIKE MULHERN  
LapbyLap

up to identify bodies from the Pentagon crash that are being kept at the base. So some rooms are being moved around, and we are in the process of trying to help some of those people who have lost their rooms. I just talked with Denis, and he said that has become a real high-priority time today."

Dunlap says that the track is working with people in town who are willing to rent homes to the race teams.

"This has thrown a real monkey wrench in everything," Dunlap said. "It's tough enough that we have to deal with this atmosphere and the mood with what's happened, and trying to get things back to normal. But then to have those rooms taken away from people has made life even tougher."

"But the good news is Denis says that the race is still on, it's still supposed to happen. There is all this chatter about the race being postponed, because of all this Dover Air Force Base stuff. But from talking to Denis, I get the impression we're proceeding onward."

"And I really hope we have this doggone thing. For the obvious reason that people have planned their lives around it, and we get such a huge crowd from all over the Middle Atlantic states, from Pennsylvania, from New York, New Jersey, Maryland. And, second, you don't want to give the people who caused all this misery the satisfaction that we're having to change our lives. You want to get back to doing the thing you do."

"And, gosh, I have no idea where they could move the race to [on the calendar] or how they could do it. Switching races? Or would you try a race on a Wednesday? I just don't know how they could do any of that."

So McGlynn and Dunlap are pushing ahead with this weekend's plans.

"We have heightened security measures, though obviously I can't go into details," Dunlap said. "But there will be no coolers, no backpacks and no large bags allowed onto the Dover Downs track area. When you pull in to park, you need to leave all that in your car. People can't leave coolers at the gate; they'll be taken away."

With 140,000 fans expected Sunday, that is shaping up as potentially a major headache at the gates.

The status of the camper village next to the track, where as many as 3,000 motor coaches are usually parked, is still uncertain. "I haven't heard of any plans yet to go from camper to camper," Dunlap said. "But clearly, even in our own infield we're going to have to have vehicles checked when they're driving in."

The name of the race has been changed to the MBNA Cal Ripken Jr. 400, with the Baltimore Orioles' star shortstop planning to wave the green flag.

"Cal is a guaranteed first-round Hall of Fame look," Dunlap said. "We hope for a good pre-race show, but Dover Air Force Base is essentially on standby for war, so we don't know if they'll be able to make the fly-over jets available to us or not. However, we're going to hand out American flags to everyone when they come in, so the fans can all wave them when the race is ready to start. And we'll have Tanya Tucker to sing both the national anthem and God Bless America. So we'll have a patriotic spin to it."

Mike Mulhern has covered NASCAR for 27 years for the Winston-Salem Journal.

