# LapbyLap

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With Dale Jarrett No. 1 and Ricky Rudd No. 3 in the Winston Cup points race, Robert Yates has proven that his organization can win

# Neck 'n Neck

By Rea McLeroy
LapbyLap

Dale Jarrett smiled easily, confident again that the season was under control. Ricky Rudd chipped in comments, discussing the advantages of their two-car operation.

As they consider championship potential and what this Winston Cup season offers, Jarrett and Rudd generally don't speak about individual success and honors.

They talk about working together, about tag-teaming the competition and taking Robert Yates to his best season in history. They comfortably discuss a growing friendship and a solid relationship between crew chiefs Todd Parrott and Michael McSwain. Fleshing out one another's thoughts and analysis, the pair seems content in each another's company.

Of course, it's easy to be that way. With a combined five wins, 17 top-five and 25 top-10 runs this season, Jarrett and Rudd have no trouble finding the silver lining. The toughest thing they face is dealing with beating one another on a regular basis.

The dynamics of the relationship are grounded in respect. Neither driver defers to the other's success, but each listens to the other's ideas. Some weeks, they run cars that are eerily similar. Other races, the only common traits seem to be the Ford logo and the engine.

It works.

"I've got a lot of admiration for [Jarrett]," Rudd said. "He's champion-ship caliber and won championships. He doesn't express a lot of ego. Anytime I need something, Dale is there to help us."

Rudd offers Jarrett the same support. Now that Jarrett, who won the Winston Cup title in 1999, is back in the championship race, he finds Rudd an even greater resource.

"We're working closer and accomplishing more," Jarrett said. "We've always talked, but now we've put our heads together, and we're able to see the results more on the racetrack."

Although they have competed against one another for years, it wasn't until they became teammates that Jarrett and Rudd truly came to know one another. In the 1½ seasons since the two joined forces, they've learned to understand not just spoken words but also the true meaning behind them. Together they have taken Yates' racing program to its highest level.

"The two teams have actually come together and are probably closer now than they have been since I've been with the team," Rudd said.

LapbyLap photos by Sherryl Dennison-Creekmore

**Dale Jarrett (clockwise from top left), owner Robert Yates and Ricky Rudd have proven they have what it takes to compete for the NASCAR championship.**

Their shops are in different cities, but that doesn't seem to interfere with the operation. Instead, the drivers say it helps.

Although it would seem that sharing a shop would produce the greatest advantage, it didn't create the Yates' dynasty that seems to be in the works now. Teams haven't always benefited from sharing a shop — struggles in one operation can affect the second team. Or if one team is competing for a championship, that can distract the other group, which still may be trying to build an identity. That isn't the case here.

But McSwain and Parrott talk regularly and work together to find the best ways to build cars and set them up with shocks and springs.

It works.

With Jarrett tied for first in points and Rudd in third, only 28 back, they have proven that Yates' setup works. Looking down the road, neither driver sees the struggle for the championship as interfering with their relationship. Instead, they see working as a team as the only way to win that elite title.

After all, it's what got them to this point.

"I think we've got too open a relationship to hold anything back," Jarrett said. "I'm going to feel like if we get ourselves to that position, that Ricky and his team have been a big part of that, and I wouldn't want to hold back at that point in time."

*Rea McLeroy covers NASCAR for the* Richmond Times-Dispatch.

## PIT STOP

How many times has Darrell Waltrip been the Winston Cup series champion?

*See answer below*

## Just the Stats

**NASCAR POINTS LEADERS**

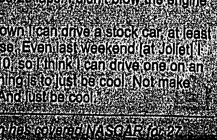
| Winston Cup | | Busch Series | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Dale Jarrett | 2,695 | 1. Kevin Harvick | 3,023 |
| 2. Jeff Gordon | 2,695 | 2. Greg Biffle | 2,865 |
| 3. Ricky Rudd | 2,667 | 3. Jason Keller | 2,845 |
| 4. Tony Stewart | 2,491 | 4. Jeff Green | 2,759 |
| 5. Sterling Marlin | 2,414 | 5. Mike McLaughlin | 2,424 |
| 6. Rusty Wallace | 2,349 | 6. Elton Sawyer | 2,418 |
| 7. Kevin Harvick | 2,319 | 7. Tony Raines | 2,415 |
| 8. Dale Earnhardt Jr. | 2,278 | 8. Jimmie Johnson | 2,351 |
| 9. Bobby Labonte | 2,258 | 9. Chad Little | 2,264 |
| 10. Johnny Benson | 2,193 | 10. Randy Lajoie | 2,253 |
| 11. Matt Kenseth | 2,191 | 11. Kenny Wallace | 2,234 |
| 12. Mark Martin | 2,174 | 12. Jeff Purvis | 2,190 |
| 13. Steve Park | 2,156 | 13. Scott Wimmer | 2,165 |
| 14. Jimmy Spencer | 2,128 | 14. Kevin Grubb | 2,144 |
| 15. Jeff Burton | 2,098 | 15. David Green | 2,097 |
| 16. Elliott Sadler | 1,983 | 16. Jamie McMurray | 2,049 |
| 17. Bobby Hamilton | 1,980 | 17. Jay Sauter | 2,009 |
| 18. Ward Burton | 1,975 | 18. Bobby Hamilton Jr. | 1,987 |
| 19. Bill Elliott | 1,966 | 19. Rich Bickle | 1,984 |
| 20. Ken Schrader | 1,872 | 20. Hank Parker Jr. | 1,903 |

## RACING THIS WEEK

**Pennsylvania 500**

- **Where:** Pocono International Raceway (Long Pond, Pa.)
- **When:** July 29, 12:30 p.m.
- **On the air:** TNT
- **Qualifying:** July 27, 3 p.m.
- **Distance:** 200 laps, 500 miles
- **Track qualifying record:** Tony Stewart, 179.391 mph, July 21, 2000
- **Track race record:** Rusty Wallace, 144.892 mph, July 21, 1996
- **2000 champion:** Rusty Wallace

**Pocono International Raceway**




- **Track:** 2.5-mile triangle oval
- **Banking:** 14 degrees, turn 1
  8 degrees, turn 2
  6 degrees, turn 3

**Busch Grand Nat'l**

- **Race:** NAPA Autocare 250 (Pikes Peak International Raceway)
- **When:** July 28, 3:30 p.m.
- **On the air:** NBC

*Who's Hot:* Dale Jarrett. His win Sunday kept him tied for first and gave him the edge in the tie-breaker with four wins to Jeff Gordon's three.

*Who's Not:* Johnny Benson. He's on the verge of falling out of the top 10 for the first time since March.

### On the Record

*"We were loose, and I guess [Kevin Harvick] just drove all over us. That's not the way you race and make friends around here. We probably won't be inviting him to our Christmas party."*

— **Bill Davis, Ward Burton's car owner**

**Pit Stop answer:** Three times (1981, '82 and '85)

## NASCAR NOTES

# THE OTHER GORDON: Robby says he's a new & improved driver

**Jeff Gordon** insists that it's still too early to start looking too closely at the points, and with 17 Winston Cup races left, he might be right. "What I've learned about running for championships is you don't focus too much on the other guys. You focus on your own team," Gordon said.

Tempers were hot in the garage after Sunday's race. **Jerry Nadeau** had words with Jimmy Spencer. Nadeau cut low on Spencer late in the race. The two made contact, and Nadeau was the loser in the showdown. His car slammed the wall and sustained heavy damage.

**Robby Gordon** was satisfied with a 25th-place finish Sunday. It was his first run in a Winston Cup car for Richard Childress. "I'm proud to be driving Richard's car, and I'm glad to have brought it back in one piece ... because there are a lot of people saying I can't bring them back," Gordon said.

LOUDON, N.H. — So this is the new and improved Robby Gordon, eh?

Gordon smiles. His talent has never been questioned, rather the question has been his temperament. Too mercurial, some say. Too bossy, others say.

MIKE MULHERN
LapbyLap

But now, as he faces a crossroads in his career, perhaps a key milestone, Gordon looks like a changed man. Calmer, more in control. Less judgmental.

Mellow? Well, let's not get carried away. But even in the moments after his hard loss at Sears Point in late June, after a controversial tussle with Kevin Harvick, now ironically his new teammate for the time being, Gordon was the model of composure, even conciliatory. It was a quite remarkable performance for a man known for temper tantrums.

"I've been 25 before, so I know what it's like," Gordon, now 30, says gently of the Sears Point affair.

"We went to Watkins Glen and I helped Kevin out. At the point he was 9 seconds a lap off me and got on with only 10 of a second just by walking in the pits a couple of corners.

"There is no beef between me and Kevin. We flew back and forth on the plane.

"The way I look at all this — I used to take this way too seriously. I mean we do race cars, and it's pretty cool. But we'll race again next weekend.

*"I used to take this way too seriously. I mean we do race cars, and it's pretty cool. But we'll race again next weekend."* — **Robby Gordon**

And having that kind of attitude, providing the team and sponsor don't get too mad for having that attitude, I don't think there's any reason to get too mad."

A mellow Robby Gordon?

"I think I've learned a lot," Gordon says. "To learn you have to make mistakes. I think from some of the mistakes I've made I've been able to learn and build on them. And I try not to make the same mistakes twice. But maybe I have made the same mistake twice, but let's not make it a third time."

On Sunday, he subbed for the injured Mike Skinner in Richard Childress' Chevy and finished 25th in the New England 300. The part-time job is one that Gordon could have for the next few weeks.

While Skinner mends his body from a bad crash at Chicago, Gordon continues mending his reputation. Gordon's game plan Sunday was not necessarily to charge out there for a win but rather to try to prove to the field, to potential car owners, potential sponsors, that he could do a solid job without the histrionics.

"I appreciate the opportunity from Lowe's and Richard Childress Racing and I think it's a great opportunity to showcase my abilities," Gordon says.

"I hate to take the opportunity through somebody's misfortune ... but somebody was going to take the ride, so I'm glad they called and gave me the opportunity. Now I'll try to do the best I can.

"Having my own team to run last year was a big building experience on what it takes to do this stuff. Now I know what it takes to get a transporter down the road. It's not as easy as just putting the guy in the seat and sending him down the road. When you understand all those things, you tend to not complain as much. Because it's not as easy as it is to armchair quarterback.

"And that will only help me."

Gordon's future is cloudy. Since splitting with car owner Larry McClure in March, he has been trying to put everything back together. He had a shot to win the Indy 500 again; he's one of the most talented Indy drivers ... and one of the few who can cross back and forth into NASCAR.

And next year?

"I don't have any deals," he says. "Right now the most important thing is to show I can drive a race car, which I've done. I feel I can drive an Indy car. I showed that at Indianapolis. I didn't drive one for more than a year and then qualified on the front row and then led 26 laps. I didn't blow the engine up.

"Now I've shown I can drive a stock car at least on a road course. Even last weekend (at Joliet) I ran in the top 10, so I think I can drive one on an oval too. The thing is to just be cool. Not make any mistakes. And just be cool."

*Mike Mulhern has covered NASCAR for 22 years for the Winston-Salem Journal.*



# MSBL on final run

The Mooresville Summer Basketball League is gearing up for its version of the seventh-inning stretch.

Heading into this the final week of regular-season play, three teams remain within a field goal of still netting the MSBL championship, while all members are sharpening their acts in readiness for the upcoming league post-season tournament.

With just two league dates left in regulation play, the slim upper hand belongs to the Mo'Styles Clippers, fielding an 11-1 overall record that earned it the top spot by a one-game spread over the current runner-up and just a two game advantage over the present third-place entry. The Clippers preserved that position with three wins in as many outings within the past two-week period.

Run & Gun dropped out of the first-place tie and into sole possession of second, at 10-2 overall, with a 2-1 record in its past three games. That allowed Cleveland, at 9-3 and responsible for that win over Run & Gun, to also move into the picture with outright ownership of third.

Only Statesville Bam, alone in fourth, completes the list of teams playing at or above the break-even mark, at 6-6 through 12 games.

The rest of the league stacks up as follows, with the Ballers fifth, at 5-6, followed by the identical 2-10 crew from the Statesville Allstars and Carolina Connection.

Over the past couple of weeks, the Clippers posted the only undefeated effort to boost their first-place stat us. With just one more game scheduled to be held on the courts, the Clippers are assured of no worse than sharing the regular-season championship.

However, it is that lone remaining game featuring Mo'Styles that looms large, as it it tabled to be held against current second-place Run & Run that will complete the league's regular-season agenda in the final of three games to be played Saturday evening in the Senior High gym.

Once final standings are confirmed, single-elimination tournament play surrounding the traditional slam dunk and three-point shooting contests will take place the weekend of Aug. 4-5

Clippers 106, Allstars 79,
C: Rodney Gidney 29. A: Sherrod Avery 22.

Bam 2, Connection 0,
Run & Gun 63, Ballers 55,
RG: Napoleon Lowery, Darien Fish, 13 each. B: Max McLaughlin 24.

Clippers 87, Cleveland 76,
Cli: Tony Davenport 26. Cle: Minter 15.

Ballers 58, Allstars 55,
B: McLaughlin 24. A: Avery 21.

Run & Gun 69, Bam 59,
RG: Fish 18. B: Johnson 21.

Cleveland 87, Run & Gun 77,
C: Juan Fleming 33. RG: Waldrop 24.

Clippers 81, Ballers 79,
C: Davenport 24. B: McLaughlin 30.

Allstars 2, Connection 0,

| | |
|---|---|
| Mo'Styles Clippers | 11-1 |
| Run & Gun | 10-2 |
| Cleveland | 9-3 |
| Statesville Bam | 6-6 |
| The Ballers | 5-6 |
| Statesville Allstars | 2-10 |
| Carolina Connection | 2-10 |

# Mustangs

Continued from page 1B

hits, while Nathan Abraham and Aaron Meadows spanked a double each.

In the convincing win over Spencer, Dylan West pitched all five innings for his second tournament win, spraying just three hits in the process.

Skidmore racked up three hits to top the hit parade, one that included two base knocks each from West, Abraham and Carson Smith, and single cracks apiece courtesy of Meadows, Chris Bonaventure, Ryan Pietryzk, Jordan Champion and Cameron Rhyne.

In the draw with Rowan, pitcher Compton stacked up six strikeouts while allowing five hits in the no decision.

The offense featured single base hits each from Abraham, Meadows, Bonaventure, Smith and Jacob Mays.

In the win over Concord/Odell, Pietryzk, Bonaventure and Mays all shared mound duties to combine for the win.

At bat, Bonaventure and Mays collected two hits each, while Meadows, Smith, Champion and Garrett White socked single base hits each.

Mooresville opened play in the attraction with the four-run win over Davie County, riding West's four innings of four-hit, 11-strike-out pitching combined with one inning's work from Bonaventure.

Abraham, West, and Bonaventure chopped out two hits apiece, with Skidmore, Meadows, Mays, Champion and Brandon Broome all pitching in with a base rap each.

# Fall season

Continued from page 1B

beginning at 4 p.m. at South Iredell High School.

Jeff Cummings, head varsity soccer coach, reminds any and all interested participants that they must have a completed physical examination before being eligible to take part in any team activity.

Tryouts will start Aug. 1 and continue every afternoon from that point.

The tryouts are for those interested in playing at either the varsity or junior varsity level.

Before any South Iredell athlete can participate in any sports activity, they must have a completed physical examination form.

This year christens a new era in South Iredell sports history, with the school engaging for the first time at the state's highest 4A level. South Iredell will be a member of the 4A class Central Piedmont Conference that features six charter members. In addition to SIHS, others making up the circuit include Dave County, R.J. Reynolds, South Rowan, West Forsyth, and North Davidson.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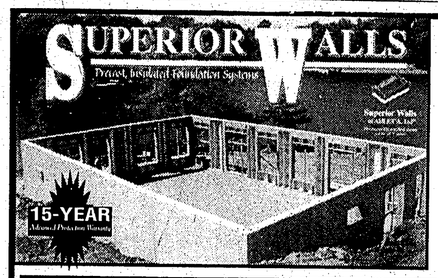

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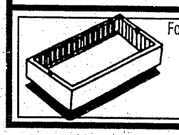

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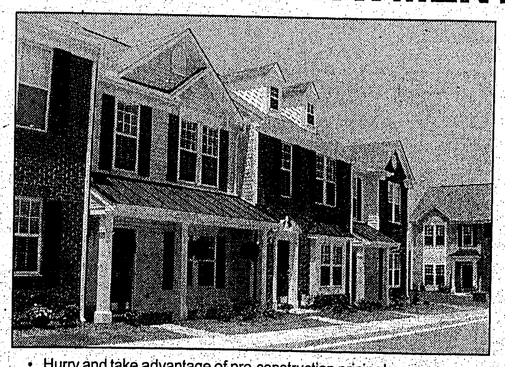

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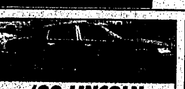

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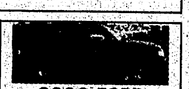

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