

# LapbyLap

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LapbyLap.com

## great expectations

By Rea McLeroy  
LapbyLap

There have been a lot of surprises for Sterling Marlin in 2001. His success is not one of them. A veteran racer, Marlin might have thought he had seen everything. This season has proven that notion far from true.

There have been days when the phone rang off the hook with words of support and days when he took it off the hook to end the threats.

Marlin predicted the success, which was no surprise to anyone on his team. Before he had a car capable of winning the Daytona 500, before he clearly had the best car at Talladega and before he won Sunday at Michigan, Marlin knew his equipment and team were ready. He expected to be in the top tier of drivers.

He never expected to be so close to Dale Earnhardt's fatal crash. Nothing could have prepared him for the backlash from fans blaming him for the accident. Marlin said the threats of the so-called fans stunned him.

"The first couple of days after Daytona were pretty rough," he said earlier this season. "I've known Dale a long time and to get blamed for it... it was pretty bad."

The next week, Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Michael Waltrip both told fans to stop harassing Marlin. For his part, Marlin tried to ignore the incident. It was upsetting, but there was a championship to chase.

Strapped into his race car, the outside world faded.

"Once you get here and get in the race car, you're focused on the race car," he said. "You can block it out, not think about it."

That focus has Marlin off to a stellar start. His team has renewed confidence.

In the off-season, Marlin listened to questions about his team. Chip Ganassi took over as majority owner, and the team switched to the new Dodge. Would those changes help or hurt?

So far, they have helped. Winston Cup boasts so many teams running so close together that a team behind in development can't keep pace. Marlin had that problem last year. He had only four cars. This year, machines line the shop.

That's the difference. Marlin said he didn't suddenly remember how to drive or learn new skills in the off-season. The team simply had the time, funds and management to catch up.

"I'm the same guy sitting right here that I was when I finished 19th [in points] last year," Marlin said. "It's just all about the cars. You look at what you've got and compete with what you've got."

That lack of control was frustrating the past couple of years. Marlin believed he should be higher in the points and challenging for wins. It just wasn't happening.

"I knew I could do it," he said. "[It was] just doing all you could do with what you had."

Now he has the equipment to be successful. He has the team to prepare that equipment and the pit crew to help him maintain position during a race.

Is the Marlin team championship material? Team manager Tony Glover was careful about discussing the possibility earlier this season.

"This is basically a first-year team with a first-year owner," Glover said. "Dodge is a first-year manufacturer with a first-year engine. We just want to be competitive every week and let the points take care of themselves."

Rea McLeroy covers NASCAR for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

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It appears that Robby Gordon will be replacing Mike Skinner on Richard Childress's second team next season, with what is reported to be a three-year contract. Childress has told Mike Skinner he is free to look for another ride. Skinner is 44th in the points standings.

Perhaps Kyle Petty would have thought more about his recent 600th start if he hadn't grown up with the man who pushed the mark to more than 1,000. Petty doesn't plan to end the streak soon. He wants to prove the No. 45 teams he built for his late son, Adam, could have been competitive.

Although this is a season of surprises for Sterling Marlin, he has always known that he has a winning team

Visit [www.lapbylap.com](http://www.lapbylap.com) for complete coverage of NASCAR's report on the investigation into Dale Earnhardt's death.

## PIT STOP

This driver has more wins at Bristol Motor Speedway than any other driver. Can you name him?

For the answer, see next week's page or go to [lapbylap.com](http://lapbylap.com).

## Just the Stats

NASCAR POINTS LEADERS	
Winston Cup	Busch Series
1. Jeff Gordon 3,353	1. Kevin Harvick 3,543
2. Ricky Rudd 3,055	2. Jason Keller 3,307
3. Dale Jarrett 2,999	3. Greg Biffle 3,239
4. Sterling Marlin 2,979	4. Jeff Green 3,139
5. Tony Stewart 2,870	5. Tony Rances 2,813
6. Dale Earnhardt Jr. 2,840	6. Elton Sawyer 2,802
7. Rusty Wallace 2,805	7. Mike McLaughlin 2,799
8. Rusty Wallace 2,803	8. Jimmie Johnson 2,780
9. Johnny Benson 2,788	9. Chad Little 2,664
10. Kevin Harvick 2,743	10. Kenny Wallace 2,634
11. Steve Park 2,708	11. Randy LaPrie 2,532
12. Mark Martin 2,687	12. Kevin Grubb 2,507
13. Matt Kenseth 2,613	13. Jeff Runk 2,475
14. Jeff Burton 2,573	14. Scott Wimmer 2,432
15. Jimmy Spencer 2,568	15. Jamie McMurray 2,462
16. Bill Elliott 2,544	16. David Green 2,408
17. Elliott Sessler 2,353	17. Jay Sauter 2,360
18. Ward Burton 2,278	18. Bobby Hamilton Jr. 2,311
19. Ken Schrader 2,272	19. Rich Bickle 2,198
20. Bobby Hamilton 2,272	20. Hank Parker Jr. 2,167

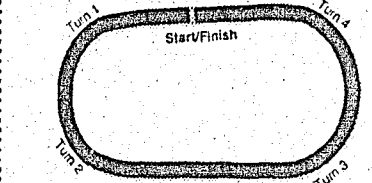
For complete points standings and additional statistics, go to [www.lapbylap.com](http://www.lapbylap.com).

## RACING THIS WEEK

### Sharpie 500

- Where: Bristol Motor Speedway (Bristol, Tenn.)
- When: Aug. 25, 7 p.m.
- On the air: TNT
- Qualifying: Aug. 24, 3:30 p.m.
- Distance: 500 laps, 266.5 miles
- Track qualifying record: Steve Park, 126.370 mph, March 25, 2000
- Track race record: Charlie Glotzbach, 101.074 mph, July 11, 1971
- 2000 winner: Rusty Wallace

### Bristol Motor Speedway



- Track: .533-mile oval
- Banking: 36 degrees

### Busch Grand Nat'l

- Race: Food City 250 (Bristol Motor Speedway)
- When: Aug. 24, 8 p.m.
- On the air: TNT

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

**Who's Hot:** Ricky Craven. He posted his third top-10 finish in four races Sunday and has moved up to 23rd in points.

**Who's Not:** Terry Labonte. He continues to struggle, dropping three spots to 28th in points after taking his eighth provisional this season.

**On the Record**  
"I should be really excited because finishing second is my best ever... We just ran out of time. I would have loved 10 more laps so we could duke it out."  
— Ricky Craven

**Last week's Pit Stop answer:**  
Ricky Rudd

## NASCAR Notes Botched Boxes? Woes follow telemetry equipment

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Mike Mulhern  
LapbyLap

"If you could think of anything strange that's going to happen, it's probably going to happen to this team."  
— Royce McGee

of lithium batteries well known, and with other safer batteries available, if NASCAR officials were concerned enough about the safety of these drivers and crews they might have considered a battery change, particularly after some lithium batteries exploded in Jeff Gordon's car at Daytona in February.

In the quest to give the viewers even more information about the sport, NASCAR's new TV partners are doing a lot on the technical side. But Sam Flood, the producer and boss at the track of the NBC effort, clearly needs to let his reporters down on pit road to get the job and get the story and not second-guess them from the isolation booth that serves as the TV command post. And Flood's men in the announcers booth need to step up their game, too. If Marty Snider gets the story from Robby Gordon that the TV box blew up and cost him the race, it should have gone on the air just like that, and if NBC's battery technicians wanted to argue the point, NBC should have put them on camera, too. And put the camera on the culprit box, to show the heart of the story.

Get the story and get it out on the air, that's their job. There have been enough questions over the past two years about how aggressive NASCAR's new TV partners might be in pursuing hot button or

touchy issues. NBC's handling of this issue came just as NASCAR's highly sensitive report on the investigation into the death of Dale Earnhardt was due and with NASCAR already suggesting that rival TV networks such as ABC and CBS might not be allowed into the Bristol track this weekend to interview drivers and crews over the Earnhardt investigation.

Larry McReynolds can sympathize with McGee because he has been right there in his shoes, face-to-face with unbelievably bad luck while crew chief himself for Childress and Skinner.

"In no sport ever can I remember something about the broadcast creating the outcome of the race... and that's what happened at Watkins Glen," McReynolds said, shaking his head. "That box catching on fire and blowing up... that's like a scoreboard falling out of the sky on you."

"We've seen strange stuff like this going on with that race team for more than four years now. Just look back at Atlanta last year: We were leading with 17 to go and had four fresh tires, and pulling away about two-tenths a lap... and how many engine failures do you see Richard Childress Racing have? And of all things, it was a rod bolt breaking."

"We don't need to get rid of those [telemetry] boxes, because it's good for the sport, good for that fan at home trying to understand some of the things that are going on at the race track. But we need to fix the problem."

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

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SUNDAY Call Friday before 3:00 pm

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## 255 Medical & Dental

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experience in a similar  
position is required. The  
successful candidate will  
have strong communication  
skills both written and verbal  
and possess an ability  
to relate well with diverse  
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should also have significant  
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ability and be familiar  
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Club Accounting Assistant.  
Minimum 2 year Associate Accounting degree or  
bookkeeping experience, MS Office, routine high  
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Fax resume & salary requirements to:  
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