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(NASCAR)**

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The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is a family-owned and operated business venture that sanctions and governs multiple auto-racing sports events. Bill France, Sr. founded the company in 1948 and his grandson Brian France became their CEO in 2003. NASCAR is motorsport's preeminent stock-car racing organization. NASCAR is second to the National Football League among professional sports franchises in terms of television ratings in the United States. Internationally, its races are broadcast in over 150 countries.

Stock car racing in the United States has its origins in bootlegging during Prohibition, when drivers ran bootleg whiskey made primarily in the Appalachian region of the United States. Bootleggers needed to distribute their illicit products, and they typically used small, fast vehicles to better evade the police. Many of the drivers would modify their cars for speed and handling, as well as increased cargo capacity, and some of them came to love the fast-paced driving down twisty mountain roads. The cars continued to improve, and by the late 1940s, races featuring these cars were being run for pride and profit. These races were popular entertainment in the rural Southern United States, and they are most closely associated with the Wilkes County region of North Carolina. Most races in those days were of modified cars. Street vehicles were lightened and reinforced.

In the 1920s and 30s, Daytona Beach became known as the place to set world land speed records, supplanting France and Belgium as the preferred location for land speed records, with 8 consecutive world records set between 1927 and 1935. Drivers raced on a 4.1-mile (6.6 km) course, consisting of a 1.5–2.0-mile (2.4–3.2 km) stretch of beach as one straightaway, and a narrow blacktop beachfront highway, State Road A1A, as the other. The two straights were connected by two tight, deeply rutted and sand covered turns at each end.

Early in NASCAR's history, foreign manufacturers had shown interest in entering the series; the British car manufacturer, MG, found a few of its vehicles entered, with some placing. For example, in August 16, 1963 in the International 200, Smokey Cook drove an MG to a 17th-place finish. The first NASCAR competition held outside of the U.S. was in Canada, where on July 1, 1952, Buddy Shuman won a 200-lap race on a half-mile (800 m) dirt track in Stamford Park, Ontario, near Niagara Falls.

In 2011, NASCAR announced a number of major rules changes. The most important was a simplified points system that is also being adopted by the Nationwide and Truck Series. The winner of a race now receives 43 points, with one-point decrements for each subsequent position (42 for second, 41 for third, and so on). The winner also receives 3 bonus points, and single bonus points are awarded to all drivers who lead a lap, plus the driver who leads the most laps. Another significant change involves the qualifying process for the Chase. The number of qualifying drivers will remain at 12, but only the top 10 will qualify solely on regular-season points. The remaining two Chase drivers will be the two drivers in the next 10 of the point standings (11th through 20th) with the most race wins in the regular season.

In 2014, NASCAR announced another revamp to the Chase format, expanding the Chase pool to 16 drivers, and

eliminating four drivers after every three races, leaving four drivers to compete for the championship at the season finale at Homestead. In addition, wins were given an increased emphasis, with the 16 drivers with the most wins (15 if the points leader is winless; points leader will receive an automatic berth) gaining a spot in the chase. If there are less than 16 winners, the remaining spots will be filled based on the conventional points system [1].

Although NASCAR frequently publicizes the safety measures it mandates for drivers, these features are often only adopted long after they were initially developed, and only in response to an injury or fatality. The impact-absorbing "SAFER Barrier" that is now in use had been proposed by legendary mechanic Smokey Yunick during the 1970s, but his idea had been dismissed as too expensive and unnecessary. Only after the deaths of Adam Petty, Kenny Irwin and Tony Roper in 2000, and Dale Earnhardt in 2001 did NASCAR revisit the idea of decreasing the G-forces a driver sustained during a crash. Other examples of available safety features that were slow to be implemented include the mandating of a throttle "kill switch". The "kill switch" was mandated after the death of Adam Petty, along with the requirements of an anti-spill bladder in fuel cells. Fire-retardant driver suits were required only after the death of Glen "Fireball" Roberts, who died from complications of burns suffered in a crash. Dale Earnhardt was killed after he received massive head and neck trauma from a hard crash in the 2001 Daytona 500. Earnhardt's death prompted NASCAR to require all drivers to use the "HANS device" (Head And Neck Support Device), a device that keeps the driver's neck from going forward in a wreck. In the mid-2000s, NASCAR redesigned the racing vehicle with safety improvements, calling it the Car of Tomorrow. The car has a higher roof, wider cockpit, and the driver seat was located more toward the center of the vehicle.

Similar to other professional leagues and sanctioning bodies, NASCAR has been the target of criticism on various topics from various sources. Some critics note the significant differences between today's NASCAR vehicles and true "stock" cars. Others frequently cite the dominance of the France family in NASCAR's business structure, policies, and decision making. Recently, the increased number of Cup drivers competing consistently in the Xfinity Series races has been hotly debated. Another general area of criticism, not only of NASCAR but other motorsports as well, includes questions about fuel consumption, emissions and pollution, and the use of lead additives in the gasoline. Originally scheduled for 2008, NASCAR adopted the use of unleaded fuel in all three of its top series in 2007. In 2011, NASCAR switched to E15 "green" fuel (15% ethanol and 85% gasoline) for all three touring series. As NASCAR has made moves to improve its national appeal, it has begun racing at new tracks, and ceased racing at some traditional ones – a sore spot for the traditional fan base. Most recently, NASCAR has been challenged on the types and frequency of caution flags, with some critics suggesting the outcome of races is being manipulated, and that the intention is not safety, as NASCAR claims, but closer racing. There have been a few accidents involving fans during races and even some off the tracks, but no spectator has ever been killed during a race in an accident relating to the race.

Expanding into international markets could increase NASCAR's popularity and allow foreign sponsors and manufactures to get involved in the sport. Some think that an increase in international diversity would translate into growth and generate greater opportunities for NASCAR fans.

References:

1. Mode of access: www.nascar.com. – Date of access: 15.03.2016.