



NASCAR HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE WALTRIP STOLE HEARTS ON THE TRACK AND IN THE TELEVISION BOOTH

**SPEED Covers Induction of NASCAR'S Third Hall of Fame Class
Special Airs Sun. Jan 22, 6:00 PM ET**

Hill: "Most guys who come into the broadcast booth take a while to become seasoned professionals. For Darrell, it happened almost instantaneously."

When NASCAR Chairman and CEO Brian France called Darrell Waltrip's name last October as a newly-elected member of the 2012 NASCAR Hall of Fame class, the three-time champion exuberantly bounded onto the stage, grabbed France's face and kissed his cheek.

A surprise to those in attendance? Hardly.

Waltrip had made his passionate yearning to be in the NASCAR Hall of Fame no secret, and anyone witness to the three-time NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion's long and storied NASCAR career is well aware of his trademark flair for the dramatic, both on and off the race track.

Waltrip will be inducted into the third class of the NASCAR Hall of Fame on Jan. 20 (airs on SPEED Jan. 22 at 6 p.m. ET) alongside Cale Yarborough, Dale Inman, Glen Wood and the late Richie Evans.

It was Waltrip's flamboyant, over-the-top personality that won him legions of diehard fans and passionate "haters," and the same personality traits set Waltrip off on the wrong foot with his new crew at Junior Johnson's team in early 1981. Waltrip replaced fellow 2012 NASCAR Hall of Fame inductee and three-time champion Cale Yarborough when the latter left to pursue a part-time schedule at the conclusion of the 1980 season.

"I was very young and very passionate about working for Junior Johnson and Cale Yarborough," said Jeff Hammond, who served as the jackman for Yarborough's three title seasons, said about Waltrip succeeding Yarborough. "Each and every week, standing in our way was Darrell Waltrip. It was definitely a love/hate relationship because I loved Cale and hated Darrell. He was our rival. He was that Hollywood, flamboyant, pretty boy that you loved to beat. When I found out he was coming to drive for us, it was a tough transition for me. When you become friends with and admire a driver like Cale, you don't just replace him. It was a very awkward transition to begin with, at least for me personally."

Early in their relationship, Waltrip and Hammond were like oil and water because Hammond didn't buy into Waltrip's bombastic, over-the-top personality and unconventional driving style.

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But when they finally worked out the kinks and Hammond was named Waltrip's crew chief in 1982, they were a formidable force that teamed up for two NASCAR Sprint Cup Series championships and 43 wins, including the 1989 Daytona 500, making the pair one of the most successful driver/crew chief combinations in history.

Waltrip finally hung up his helmet and driving gloves in 2000 after 29 seasons as a Cup Series driver and 84 victories, which ties him with Bobby Allison for fourth-most wins of all time. But DW didn't retire his personality and popularity with the fans.

"He carried that over into his television career and I think that's what David Hill and everybody in the sport recognized," Hammond continued. "He's the John Madden of his sport. He's the Curt Gowdy -- that kind of guy everyone turns on the TV to watch because he is knowledgeable and has the inside story."

FOX Sports Media Group Chairman David Hill says he knew he had a hit on his hands with Waltrip from their very first dinner meeting during which they discussed partnering for the 2001 NASCAR on FOX season.

"I knew it was going to work as soon as I sat down with him that night in New York," Hill said. "He had this incredible knowledge of the sport. He had knowledge of the strategy of the sport, but more than anything, he had this boyish enthusiasm for NASCAR. When you look at people who have a boyish enthusiasm for the sport and great communication skills, the ones who immediately come to mind are those like John Madden in football and Tim McCarver in baseball. From that very first night, I knew DW was going to be one of the greats. He had the ability to look within the sport and communicate to the world what was going on."

Waltrip's aptitude for conveying the events in the 2001 Daytona 500, FOX's first NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race broadcast, helped carry the network through what became the sport's darkest day following Dale Earnhardt's death on the final lap.

"Darrell was just awash with emotion (when brother Michael won the race) and that telecast was one of the most incredible periods in anything I've ever done," Hill recalled. "Having FOX's very first NASCAR race start the season, and it be NASCAR's 'Super Bowl,' turns the butterflies in your stomach into buzzards. Darrell handled it so well, and with the realization that it wasn't just an accident with Dale Earnhardt – that it was a fatality – he went from rookie to experienced pro in a period of three hours. I've never seen anything like it. By the end of that day and when we went into the race at Rockingham the next week, he was a pro. Most guys who come out of their respective sport and into the broadcast booth take a while to become seasoned and fully professional. For Darrell, it happened almost instantaneously.

About SPEED™

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