

Dale Earnhardt dies after Daytona crash

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (AP) — Dale Earnhardt, one of the greatest stars in auto racing history, died Sunday from injuries in a last-lap crash at the Daytona 500.

The seven-time Winston Cup champion had to be cut out of his car after slamming into the wall on the final turn of the race while fighting for position. He was taken to the hospital accompanied by his son, Dale Jr., a young NASCAR star who finished second in the race.

"This is understandably the toughest announcement I've ever had to make. We've lost Dale Earnhardt," said NASCAR president Mike Helton.

Earnhardt died instantly of head injuries, said Steve Bohannon, a doctor at Halifax Medical Center.

"There was nothing that could have been done for him," he said.

The death comes at a time that driver safety issues are under increased scrutiny. Three NASCAR

drivers were killed in wrecks last season.

The accident happened a half-mile from the finish of the NASCAR season-opener, won by Michael Waltrip.

Earnhardt, running fourth, grazed Sterling Marlin's car, crashed into the wall at the high-banked fourth turn going about 180 mph, and was smacked hard by Ken Schrader.

Earnhardt's death was the biggest blow to auto racing since three-time Formula One champion Ayrton Senna was killed in the San Marino Grand Prix in Imola, Italy, in 1994.

Neil Bonnett, one of Earnhardt's best friends, was killed that same year in practice for the Daytona 500. Rodney Orr died in a wreck three days later, also in practice, and was the last driver killed at the track until Earnhardt's accident.

"NASCAR has lost its greatest driver ever, and I personally have

lost a great friend," NASCAR chairman Bill France Jr. said.

It was the second major wreck in five years in the race for Earnhardt.

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NASCAR president

a driver known for his aggressiveness on the track. He flipped wildly on the backstretch near the end of the race in 1997 but was not seriously hurt. He came back to win the race the next year on his 20th try.

Earnhardt is the leader among active Winston Cup drivers with 76 career victories. He also had the

most victories at Daytona International Speedway, 34.

The death made Waltrip's victory virtually meaningless, as drivers mourned one of their greatest stars.

"My heart is hurting right now," Waltrip said before news of Earnhardt's death was announced. "I would rather be any place right this moment than here. It's so painful."

Earnhardt was doing what he does best throughout the race, being the crowd favorite and bumping other cars for position.

He was a factor throughout, and spent the final laps close to his son and Waltrip, trying to block Marlin. Marlin had just passed Earnhardt, who was trying to get back by him on the low side of the track when there was slight contact that sent his Chevrolet spinning up the banking.

It turned to the right and hit the wall, and Schrader could not avoid hitting Earnhardt's car. Both cars

slowly began to slide down to the bottom of the track as the rest of the field raced by.

Earnhardt Jr. quickly left the postrace celebration for Waltrip and sprinted to the infield care center to be with his father. It took several minutes to get the elder Earnhardt out of the car, and he was quickly taken to Halifax Hospital.

Meanwhile, the crowd at Victory Circle was chanting "DEI, DEI," for Dale Earnhardt Inc., which owns the cars of his son and Waltrip. The celebration, which usually lasts 30 minutes, ended quickly.

Last May, Busch Series driver Adam Petty, the grandson of stock car great Richard Petty, was killed in Loudon, N.H. Two months later, Winston Cup driver Kenny Irwin also was killed at New Hampshire International Speedway.

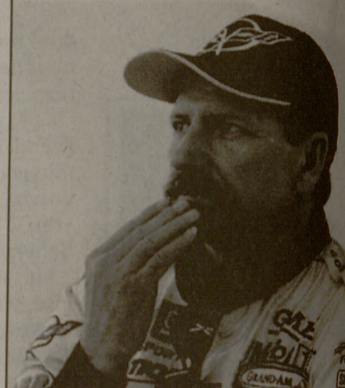
NASCAR truck series driver Tony Roper was killed in October at Texas Motor Speedway.

'Intimidator' dies


Dale Earnhardt, 49, was killed in an accident on the final lap of the Daytona 500 Sunday.

Career statistics

Starts	67
Wins	76
Top 5 finishes	23
Poles	23
Winston Cup Titles	7



Source: NASCAR



National Engineers Week
February 18-24, 2001
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LIFE Moonwalk (2/20) 10am-4pm at Rudder Fountain

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