

Travis B. Bryan III, Attorney at Law
 • Former Brazos County District Attorney
 • Certified by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization in Criminal Law
 • TAMU Class of 1969

Craig M. Greaves, Attorney at Law
 • Licensed by the Supreme Court of Texas in the Area of Criminal Law
 • No Optional Certification by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization
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Car owned by Earnhardt wins the Dura Lube 400

ROCKINGHAM, N.C. (AP) — The race ended just the way The Intimidator would have liked — with one of his cars bumping and thumping its way to the checkered flag.

Tears flowed and the crowd at North Carolina Speedway roared Monday as Dale Earnhardt Inc. driver Steve Park paid tribute to his late boss with a victory in the Dura Lube 400.

When the rain-delayed race was over, Park grabbed the No. 3 Earnhardt hat hanging from his gearshift lever and thrust it out of his car window, holding it high in salute to the fallen hero as he took a slow victory lap.

He reversed direction with a smoking spin in front of the main grandstand and drove back the other way before stopping briefly alongside teammate and Daytona 500 winner Michael Waltrip. The two exchanged a high-five and took off in opposite directions around the 1.017-mile track, both with No. 3 hats thrust in the air.

It was a fitting and comforting end to an event that began on Sunday with a frightening first-lap crash that took Park's other teammate, Dale Earnhardt Jr., out of the race. The younger Earnhardt came away with minor bruises in a wreck eerily similar to the one in which his father was killed on Feb. 18 on the final lap of the Daytona 500.

"It's been a tough week and this is a dream finish," Park said. "Dale's gone, but he's not forgotten, and he's going to be with all the DEI drivers the rest of the year."

The win wasn't easy. Bobby

Labonte, the defending Winston Cup champion, was banging at Park's rear bumper on a final lap that came down to which driver got the best run off the fourth turn.

The two bumped and the right rear of Labonte's car caromed off the concrete wall. Park pulled away, winning by two car-lengths.

"I threw a block on him because I was trying my hardest to win this race," Park said. "I did what Dale Earnhardt would do."

Labonte, also wearing one of the black, red and silver No. 3 Earnhardt hats, said, "I got up on the outside of him a little bit and we were both slipping and sliding with that many laps on tires. I got up into the fence a little bit with the right rear. I tried hard to come back, but it's hard to get a good bite off (turn) 4."

"It's been a tough week and this is a dream finish."

— Steve Park
winner of Dura Lube 400

Park, who got his big break when Earnhardt hired him in 1996, had to compose himself in the final laps.

"I was emotional. I had tears coming down those last couple laps," he said. "Then I had to kind of wipe my nose and get back up on the steering wheel, 'cause that's what Dale would want me to do."

Park's car ran out of gas on the victory lap and needed a push to Victory Lane, where he scrambled out of the

cockpit, climbed on the roof and leapt into the arms of his crew.

He scrambled back onto the roof, turned to the crowd and raised his arms in victory, bringing a huge roar from the 30,000 spectators who returned Monday.

As he celebrated, Park got a call from Earnhardt's widow, Teresa, now the team owner, who was watching the race at the DEI shop in Mooresville, N.C., about 90 miles away. Park said she was emotional but happy.

Rain on Sunday forced postponement of the last 341 laps of the 393-lap race. Monday was totally different, with the gloom of the previous afternoon giving way to bright sunshine.

Once the race resumed, it became a great fight among Park, Labonte and pole-winner Jeff Gordon.

It appeared three-time series champion Gordon was in command late in the race, but tire wear played a big part in the final result.

Park wrestled the lead from Gordon on lap 339 and Labonte got past to take second on lap 379. At that point, the leader was ahead by more than four seconds, but Labonte began cutting into that steadily.

By the final lap, Park's yellow No. 1 was just a few car-lengths ahead of Labonte's green No. 18 Pontiac.

"I saw Bobby starting to catch me. I put a block on him to try to win this thing," Park said. "I'm just glad it was him. He's won this race. ... If it wasn't him, we probably both would have wrecked. But he checked up and he gave me the opportunity to win, and I want to thank him."

Sports in Brief Baseball team heads to Houston

The Texas A&M baseball team heads to Houston to take on the University of Houston Cougars at 7 p.m.

The Aggies (4-7) are coming off a series loss last weekend against the Baylor Bears.

The Bears took the first two games of the series at the University of Houston Field, but the Aggies said Jorge Collier won on Sunday at Baylor for Collier.

A&M freshman pitcher Ryan Wardinsky added less relief and junior shortstops Ryan Wardinsky added RBIs as the Aggies won.

Ags take two Florida swing

The Texas A&M men's team recorded two victories over top 25 teams this week during its Florida road trip.

The Aggies defeated the ranked Florida Gators, 5-2, in Gainesville, Fla. A&M defeated the 22nd-ranked Hurricanes, 5-2, on Sunday at Coral Gables, Fla.

The victories improved the record to 9-2 and gave the four victories over top 25 teams in the past two weeks.

A&M senior Shuon ranked 17th in singles, defeated on the trip, defeated Florida's 15th-ranked Overholser, 6-4, 6-4, and Michael Lang, 6-4, 6-2.

The Aggies will take a from competition this week, returning to the court Mar. 7 against the Kansas hawks in Lawrence, Kan.

ATHLETIC EVENT WEEKLY CALENDAR

Baseball	at Houston	Houston, TX	Tuesday 27th	7 p.m.
Women's Tennis	Houston	College Station	Wednesday 28th	6 p.m.
Softball	at Houston	Houston, TX	Wednesday 28th	7 p.m.
Women's Basketball	Kansas	College Station	Wednesday 28th	7 p.m.
Men's Basketball	at Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	Wednesday 28th	7:05 p.m.
Men's Swimming	Big 12 Championships	Austin, TX	Thursday 1st	
Softball	Aggie Invitational	College Station	Friday 2nd	3:30 p.m.
Baseball	Continental Classic	College Station	Friday 2nd	
Archery	Indoor Nationals	College Station	Friday 2nd	
Men's Basketball	at Baylor	Waco, TX	Saturday 3rd	7 p.m.
Equestrian	Region 2 Championships	College Station	Saturday 3rd	



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