

national sprint car hall of fame

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL OF FAME

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NATIONAL SPRINT CAR
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dave Blaney

by Doug Kennedy

David Blaney was born on October 24, 1962, to parents Lewis G. "Lou" and Kate Keir Blaney. Their home was in Hartford, Ohio, in the northeastern part of the Buckeye State, which also was home to the family business, Blaney Lumber.

At 5'8", Dave Blaney was a successful basketball player on the state's number-one-ranked (Rev. Joseph) Badger High School team when he served as the team's point-guard in 1981. That Ohio Class 'A' Championship team also included his younger brother, 6'4" Dale. Interestingly, their father, sprint car and modified stock car champion Lou Blaney, also played high school basketball extremely well during his youth. Said Dave, "My brother made All-State. The best I could manage was All-County."

Dave's racing career began in earnest in mid-1981 when he began driving his dad's sprint car following high school graduation. It was at the same time that Lou Blaney moved from sprint cars to modified stock cars. Said Dave back then, about his first drive at the nearby Sharon Speedway, "I was cautious as hell, just feeling my way along. My brother and I had raced go-karts when I was younger, but it was nothing like this stuff. I sure didn't want to tear up my Dad's car the first time out."

"Dave was always driven and wanted to do well and knew what he wanted to do and how to get there," said his mother Kate. "The only thing he wanted to do was race."

"I was all about racing at 16 and 17," said Dave. "My dad had his own car and gave it to me after high school and I never gave it back."

In 1982, Dave followed Bert Emick's All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC), finishing the season third in points behind champion Lee Osborne and runner-up Fred Linder, and earning the "Rookie of the Year" title. The 1983 season brought seven ASCoC feature wins, another third-place in points behind champion Lee Osborne and runner-up Kenny Jacobs. To date, Dave Blaney has 46 career A-Main wins with the All Star Circuit of Champions, ranking him seventh on the all-time list.

"Dave was always driven and wanted to do well and knew what he wanted to do and how to get there," said his mother Kate. "The only thing he wanted to do was race."

In 1984, he landed the Ralph and Jim DePalma dirt championship car (now Silver Crown) ride on the United States Auto Club (USAC) circuit. Although he won no features that year in those long-distance

dirt champ car races, his smooth consistency, skill and bravery, and low-key, no-drama style in the Dick Johnson-wrenched Radio Hospital/Tom Stenger Ford machine earned the 21-year-old driver the "Rookie of the Year" honors and the overall point title (and the nickname 'the Golden Boy' from Ralph DePalma).

Dave continued racing with USAC for a couple of years, though his WoO commitments eventually made his USAC starts more and more infrequent (with his last one in 1997). Said Dave, "There's just not enough of those races for me. I was committed to being a full-time racer and there was a good living waiting for me in the World of Outlaws. The dirt cars were a gamble, hanging around there waiting for something big to happen."

Dave Blaney has raced with the World of Outlaws since 1983, earning his first win aboard Mike Bishop's Gary "Deuce" Turrill-wrenched Lone Star Racing entry in early '85. Said Dave in 1984 about Steve Kinser, "Steve's the king of this business as far as I'm concerned. His presence is just overpowering on the track. He's bigger than life to me, and (he's) my inspiration."

In 1985-87, Dave finished twelfth, thirteenth and seventeenth in WoO points, respectively. In 1988, however, he finished fourth in points behind Steve Kinser, Sammy Swindell, and Bobby Davis, Jr., respectively.

Said Dave back in the day, "I've had real good people showing me the way. First off with my Dad and Terry Shappell helping me. The first three years I ran we got going awfully good for a family car. Then I went with Gary Stanton for two years and, as far as I'm concerned, he's one of the best minds in the racing business. After that I went with the (Allan) Nott team. Mister Nott owned midgets back in the Forties, had seen a lot of racing and his cars were magic. When I was in them, there was just something magical about them."

1989 brought the World of Outlaws (WoO)/United Sprint Association (USA) split, with Blaney primarily following the USA in the Verlin Chupp-owned Gaerte-powered Challenger sprint car. With four USA wins, Dave finished fourth in points behind Steve Kinser, Sammy Swindell and Mark Kinser, respectively. He also finished seventeenth in WoO points that year, with another four WoO wins.

In 1990-92, Dave Blaney finished seventh, fifth and fifth, respectively, in points on Ted Johnson's tough touring circuit with sprint car owner Verlin Chupp.

In 1993, he started wheeling the Casey & Beverly Luna sprint car and he scored eleven WoO wins to earn the runner-up spot in points to champion Steve Kinser. He also won the King's Royal sprint car race at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway that year. And, in 1994, he finished second to champion Steve Kinser



PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL ARCH

again, this time with ten WoO wins to Blaney's credit.

On the strength of twelve feature wins, Dave Blaney finally won the 1995 World of Outlaws point title over Jac Haudenschild, Stevie Smith, Jeff Swindell and 'Oklahoma' Andy Hillenburg, respectively. Dave piloted the Kenny Woodruff-wrenched, Ford-powered, Casey Luna-owned, Vivarin-sponsored sprint car to his second King's Royal title that year, too. He finished the year by placing third in an Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) stock car race at Atlanta.

In 1996 and '97, Dave Blaney was WoO runner-up, again, to champions Mark Kinser and Sammy Swindell, respectively. Ironically, 1997 was Dave's first year in his own (Keith) Hylton-(Dave) Blaney Motorsports-owned, Amoco/U.S. Print/Vivarin-sponsored sprint car and his final year running full-time on the WoO tour. To date, Dave Blaney has 70 career A-Main wins with the World of Outlaws, ranking him eighth on the all-time list.

"The Buckeye Bullet" qualified for the A-Main of the Knoxville Nationals in Iowa in 15 consecutive years, 1983 through '97. He won the national championship race in 1997 and he has captured eight more 'top ten' finishes.

The versatile driver has one sanctioned win with the Northern Auto Racing Club (NARC), in addition to many, many open-competition sprint car wins to his credit. He won the 1993 Chili Bowl Indoor Midget Car Nationals in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1993. And he has tested Indy Racing League (IRL) Indy Cars in Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Dave Blaney has also been runner-up in 1989, '94 and '95 in the season-ending DIRT modified 200-lapper at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, another long-distance dirt-track race. That mile track was also the site of Dave's 1987 Syracuse Super Nationals WoO-sanctioned sprint car win.

Said Dave of mile tracks in general, and Syracuse in particular, "I like the racing and the speed. You're going straight and fast and it seems like I'm the best, the best I can be, on tracks like that. Syracuse is not as much car as everybody thinks. The driver has got a lot more to do with success there than any other track we run. You can pretty much run as fast as you're brave enough to go. The racing there isn't that great; it's hard to pass if you're really racing somebody. But just the thrill of racing is enough for me."

continued on page 15.



• 2014 INDUCTEES • 2014 INDUCTEES

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DAVE BLANEY

continued from page 13.

Dave ran his first Winston Cup event in the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) in 1992 for late model chassis-builder and friend Stan Hover at Rockingham, North Carolina.

In 1998, following his major sprint car wins in '97 in the Historical Big One at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway, the Knoxville Nationals and the Gold Cup Race of Champions at Chico, California, Dave moved into NASCAR stock car racing full-time with Bill Davis Racing. He graduated from the Busch/Nationwide Series, where he won the 2006 Dollar General 300 at Charlotte, to the Winston/Sprint Cup Series over time. He has also run with the Craftsman/Camping World Truck Series and the Canadian Tire Series in NASCAR.

Even though he made the move to NASCAR, Dave Blaney kept his Amoco-sponsored sprint car team active in the late Nineties by providing cars for his West Virginia University basketball-player/graduate/brother Dale, and the late Kevin Gobrecht. In 2002, Dave purchased the Sharon Speedway in Hartford, Ohio, along with partners Jim Weller, Sr., his late father Lou Blaney, and Bill & Ron Kirila. The track, which resides in the Blaney family's proverbial backyard, is, without question, their home track.

Now, Dave is helping his own young son, Ryan, in his blossoming career in NASCAR. Like his dad has done throughout his NASCAR career, Ryan will run races in all three of the top series this year, although he will be focusing on the Truck Series.

"He's always been my biggest supporter week in and week out," said Ryan of his dad. "I'm just grateful that he's been able to be at the race tracks most of the weeks. I think it's really cool to finally have him get the recognition he deserves. I know he's really excited and honored because my grandpa is in there. Unfortunately, I didn't get to see him back in the day when he was pretty much unstoppable."

When Dave left the full-time sprint car circuit, he was pretty much

unstoppable and at the top of his game – just coming into his prime. "Looking back on it, I don't think I made a mistake. I know that getting into NASCAR at 38 years old, I could have had some big times in sprint car racing, but if I wouldn't have done it, Ryan may not have had the chance of doing what he is doing now."

For 2014, Dave Blaney plans on some more sprint car racing along with his NASCAR stock car racing. "The Ohio All-Star Sprint Speedweek and the Lou Blaney Memorial at Sharon will definitely be on my schedule, the winged 410-cubic-inch sprint car feature winner at Markelysburg, Pennsylvania, on Sunday, May 18, 2014," he said.

He was quoted on NASCAR.com last fall as saying, "I would love to get back into sprint car racing a lot. It's hard to do it part-time. I did it part-time last year, and you can't be that good doing it part-time with those cars. They're hard to drive, and hard to get used to. I ran good sometimes; I ran bad sometimes. But it's still probably the kind of racing I love most. I just grew up around it, and that part's very cool."

As for his thoughts on sprint car racing, the 1995 National Sprint Car Poll "Driver of the Year" had this to say. "I grew up through the 1970s and that's all dad did. They are the fastest cars on dirt. There's just something about them. I really like the history of the sport looking back to the '50's and '60's and all those drivers."

"I don't know if I could really point out one highlight of my career," said Dave. "Winning the Knoxville Nationals and the races at Eldora were big nights for me and it was cool to win the WoO title, but for me, driving for that many years in good equipment and having the right guys work on it was probably what was special for me. That got me to where I could win those big races and the titles."

Dave and wife Lisa Beatty Blaney, formerly of Chariton, Iowa, today live in High Point, North Carolina, although the Hartford-Cortland area of Ohio will always be 'home.' Their family includes daughters Emma and Erin, and son Ryan.