

Send comments and tips through e-mail to: sports@tampatrib.com
PAUL C. SMITH, Senior Editor for Sports, (813) 259-7753
Sports fax: (813) 259-8146

SPORTS SUNDAY

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE



MARTIN FENNELLY
Columnist

King's arrival perfect balm for Daytona

Looking down at the infield, and the sites stretched onto the grass — www.nascar.com and www.daytonainternational Speedway.com — you begin to wonder if it has all changed forever, if NASCAR will ever be the same.

Saturday's Pepsi 400 said so. It was the first major sports event ever broadcast on air-work television in prime time. Can series of left turns ever get any bigger than this?

But where was the King? You could have your corporate tents and your sponsors parties and your mainstream target audiences and your boom-season fans. None of it seemed right in Daytona this week. Someone was missing.

Richard Petty was sick. Damn sick. So sick he was nowhere to be found around the garage at Daytona, where so one has driven more miles than him. He hadn't run here in seven years, but he'd still never missed a race since 1965. He was around. He'd walk around and folks would see him and break out the cameras. Really.

But King Richard was sick. So sick.

Last week he was at home in North Carolina when he passed out. He spasmed the floor, cycling his head and blackening an eye. At the hospital, doctors found a bleeding ulcer that had ruptured. Petty had lost more than 40 percent of his blood.

Richard Petty has had ulcers before. They cut him about a third of his stomach a few years back. He's also had his gall bladder removed, had prostate surgery. He wears hearing aids. Richard Petty turned 62 Friday, but turned old several years ago.

He spent three days in the hospital and his birthday at home. He'd usually spent it at Daytona, at what was once known as the Firecracker 400.

So Richard Petty wasn't at Daytona for his birthday, and if you've never been to Daytona, we can't explain what has about him. The first time I ever visited the high banks, the first driver I wanted to see was leaning over the engine of the 41 car.

He was making jokes with his crew. He wasn't in his driving suit, but his other suit, the one made of blue jeans and cowboy hat and cowboy boots and wraparound sunglasses. Richard Petty in that garage, having himself a time.

It was at Daytona in 1984 that Petty won his 200th and final NASCAR race. It was a Firecracker. Four years later, Petty almost died on this track in a memorable crash. Now this.

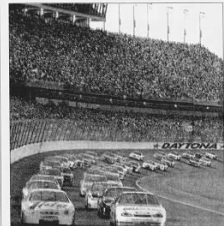
Saturday came — and the King arrived. He watched Dale Jarrett win the Pepsi 400. Petty had to be here. His doctors said it was OK, though his wife, Linda, was worried about him. That's always been her job.

RACING HAD CHANGED so much since Richard Petty was truly king, and not all of the changes have been for the better. So I made my way to the Petty hold a news conference to explain his absence. He seemed the same. So did Daytona. So did racing.

"They moved around with me about a half-hour and found out I was bleeding inside," Petty said. "Everything is back to normal. I was running a little low on STP there, they filled me up and I was ready to go."

"We're going over to England next week," he said, smiling. "We're going to take three of my oldest granddaughters. We're going to London for two or three days and then going to Paris for two or three days. Linda has been there before, three or four times. The never been. Been to London one time. The girls are big on this Princess Diana deal or whatever."

This Princess Diana deal. The King lives. All hail.



Lakeland's Joe Nemechek, right, leads the Pepsi 400 field into Turn 2 Saturday.

Jarrett captures Pepsi 400 victory

By LISA MAGENHEIMER
of The Tampa Tribune

DAYTONA BEACH — It was certainly not the kind of finale CBS wanted in its first NASCAR prime-time broadcast, but no one else was complaining at Daytona International Speedway.

With three laps to go, there was a much-anticipated wreck and more spectacularly, a shoutout to the yellow flag between two veteran drivers that caused the 41st annual Pepsi 400 to end under caution.

leader Dale Jarrett captured his third victory of 1999 and third career win of Daytona after beating Dale Earnhardt back to the yellow flag on Lap 156.

A final pit stop 12 laps earlier allowed Jarrett to go the distance after his crew gave him No. 88 car just a splash of gas. Of course, it wasn't enough to get the 42-year-old to Victory Lane. His Robert Yates-owned Ford ran out of fuel entering pit road following the race.

"What a stop," said Jarrett, who started 21st and regained the lead from Sterling Marlin after the pit stop. "They said they were going to get me four seconds of fuel. No way that was four seconds. I was sitting there boiling my time and eventually I went my way."

For Earnhardt, who led four times for 18 laps and challenged Jarrett, Rusty Wallace and Bobby Labonte for most of the evening, it marked the sixth time he finished second in either the Pepsi 400 or Daytona 400.

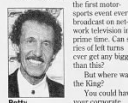
"Another second place at Daytona. That's all I need," said Earnhardt, who drove the No. 3

pit stop. "They said they were going to get me four seconds of fuel. No way that was four seconds. I was sitting there boiling my time and eventually I went my way."

For Earnhardt, who led four times for 18 laps and challenged Jarrett, Rusty Wallace and Bobby Labonte for most of the evening, it marked the sixth time he finished second in either the Pepsi 400 or Daytona 400.

"Another second place at Daytona. That's all I need," said Earnhardt, who drove the No. 3

See RACE, Page 7



STEVE WILTGEN
of The Associated Press

Rivals take Centre stage

WIMBLEDON, England — Men's tennis premier rivalry — Andre Agassi vs. Pete Sampras — is back in the spotlight today in the Wimbledon final.

By STEVE WILTGEN
of The Associated Press

From stragglers in the juniors to finalists at Wimbledon in the twilight of their careers, Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi have studied each other with fear and respect.

No one intimidates Sampras more like Agassi. No one intimidates Agassi more like Sampras.

They met again today on Centre Court for the 20th time as pros, both seeking one more piece of history, one more piece of each other.

"He has made me a better player," Sampras said Saturday after a 2-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4 semifinal victory against Britain's Tim Henman.

"We've covered a lot of ground for each other," said Agassi, who shredded the serve-and-volley game of two-time U.S. Open champion Patrick Rafter, 7-5, 7-6 (5), 6-2.

Sampras rose No. 1 for six years. Agassi will take over the No. 1 ranking Monday, or at least in their all-American final on the Fourth of July.

Sampras is the defending Wimbledon champion and five-time winner. If he wins again, he'll be the only man to win Wimbledon six times since 1968.

Sampras is the defending Wimbledon champion and five-time winner. If he wins again, he'll be the only man to win Wimbledon six times since 1968.

Sampras is the defending Wimbledon champion and five-time winner. If he wins again, he'll be the only man to win Wimbledon six times since 1968.



Andre Agassi, top, and Pete Sampras will be chasing a piece of history today when they take the court against each other in the Wimbledon final.



STEVE WILTGEN
of The Associated Press

Line ends for teen phenoms

WIMBLEDON, England — Davenport and Graf will meet in today's women's final after beating Stevenson and Lucic.

By STEVE WILTGEN
of The Associated Press

On the surface she once thought suitable only for cattle, Lindsay Davenport reclaimed the No. 1 ranking and reached her first Wimbledon final against seven-time champion Steffi Graf.

Davenport and Graf put the brakes on the racket rise of two of the most talented teens to come along in recent years. 19-year-old Alexandra Stevenson and 17-year-old Mirjana Lucic.

Stevenson's wondrous Wimbledon debut ended Saturday with a 6-1, 6-1 drubbing by Davenport, whose deep, flat groundstrokes pinned her behind the baseline and kept her from changing the net as she had against others.

Lucic, at No. 134 the lowest ranked woman to reach a Grand Slam semifinal, gave Graf a scare but succumbed, 6-7 (2), 6-4, 6-3 after the 39-year-old German string together four consecutive games from 4-1 in the second set.

While Davenport is seeking her second Grand Slam title, Graf goes for her 25th a month after capturing her sixth French Open.

"I'm more than amazed and surprised," Graf said of her surge back toward the top of tennis after missing most of 1997 and 1998 with injuries.

While Davenport is seeking her second Grand Slam title, Graf goes for her 25th a month after capturing her sixth French Open.

While Davenport is seeking her second Grand Slam title, Graf goes for her 25th a month after capturing her sixth French Open.

While Davenport is seeking her second Grand Slam title, Graf goes for her 25th a month after capturing her sixth French Open.

Soccer patriotism enters play for Americans

STANFORD, Calif. — A World Cup showdown against powerful Brazil means something more than a championship game berth.

By HARRY WILSON
of The Associated Press

Five years to the day since the U.S. national soccer team sought to make World Cup history against Brazil, it will do so again.

With just the slightest difference: Gender.

Oh, and maybe one other: The Americans are favored.

Today, the U.S. women play their semifinal match at Stanford Stadium against the Brazilians. At the same site in the 1994 men's tournament, Brazil edged the United States, 1-0, and went on to win its fourth world championship.

Coming back to 1994, well, as some of you know I am a huge soccer fanatic," defender Brandi Chastain said, "so I did

a lot of traveling that summer to all the games in California. Today I had a flashback, as she has was driving in on the 19th anniversary of the driving to the USA. Brazil match in 1994 with a big American flag on my car."

And I was thinking how exciting it is to have people driving that same route to come see us play in such a similar and important game."

The '94 game was considered one of the best in women's soccer history.

The '94 game was considered one of the best in women's soccer history.

World Cup

WORLD CUP
TODAY'S SEMIFINALS
■ USA vs. Brazil at Stanford, Calif., 4:30 p.m. (ET)
■ Germany vs. France at Boston, Mass., 7:30 p.m. (ET)
SATURDAY'S GAMES (All times Eastern, GMT)
■ Costa Rica vs. USA, 10:30 a.m. (ET)
■ Czech Republic vs. USA, 10:30 a.m. (ET)

Inside

Mutiny lose 5th in a row
Tampa Bay drew its best crowd of the year but drops a 2-1 shootout to Kansas City.

Sunshine State Games

The weekend sports festival in a big investment in Tampa Bay's bid for the 2012 Olympics.

Baseball

The Devil Rays' road winning streak ends as they lose to Toronto.

TORONTO at Tampa Bay, 7:05 p.m. (ET)
WFLA-TV 10
WFTS-TV 28
WTVT-TV 33
WWSB-TV 10
WWSB-TV 10
WWSB-TV 10