

SPORTS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1999
THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

41 DAYS TO GO

THESE NEW GUYS ARE REALLY GOOD
Senior PGA Tour rookies such as Bruce Fleischer, left, are giving dominant forces Hale Irwin and Gil Morgan a run for the money.
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Gasparilla local-motion



Saturday's race winners
Lauri Drake crosses the finish line to win the women's 15K race.

TAMPA—Locals dominate the Gasparilla Distance Classic for the first time in the history of the race, with winners from Tampa and St. Petersburg.

By Bill Ward
of the Tampa Tribune

It's a safe bet that in 21 previous Gasparilla Distance Classics the winner never stayed overnight to help the masses file through the finish area. But this is the new era of the arch-longest-running road race, one that has led forward to its international field to better embrace locals.

Saturday's winners were 21-year-old Gasparilla 15-kilometer and 16 races certainly had a provincial feel to them. University of South Florida sophomore Russ Gerbers powered through a strong north wind on Bayshore Boulevard to take the overall 15K title in a time of 48 minutes, 48 seconds. St. Petersburg's Laura Drake, a lawyer-turned-pastor's daughter, was the women's winner in 54:53. Nine of the first 10 finishers in the men's race live in Tampa, and all but one of the top 10 women hail from Hillsborough or Pinellas counties.

True, there was a lack of pre-race electricity without elite runners chasing the more than



USA's Russ Gerbers, left, is congratulated after winning Saturday's Gasparilla 15K.

Fall, injury turned out to be blessing for Leiber

A discarded banana peel on the Bayshore Boulevard race course near the finish line of the Gasparilla Distance Classic last year sent 75-year-old Dick Leiber of Clearwater tumbling and sliding along the concrete, cutting him, bruising him, sending him bloodied to nearby Tampa General Hospital.

Thirty stitches, butterfly Band-Aids and medications repaired him after daughter Valerie Mesalina and others helped him cross the finish line of his favorite race. He did admit as he was going down — a cast on one arm disabled his use to reduce the fall — and crawled face first, that he would have done it bold surfer.

Well, Dick Leiber not only was dived, he also found out the banana peel did not shorten his life but saved it, extended it. At 74, wanting a better number and in a better health than last year, he jogged/walked (shown also as



TOM MCEWEN
The Morning After

MONKEY BUSINESS

Now that Dale Earnhardt has a Daytona 500 victory under his belt, the fabled monkey squary rests on the back of Terry Labonte.

By Lisa Mammone
of the Tampa Tribune

DAYTONA BEACH—Crew chief Larry McDevitt's first success in his pocket from his 3-year-old daughter leading up to Ernie Alberici's Daytona 500 victory in 1992.

Team owner Richard Childress abstained from eating peanuts on pit road and carried his wallet of \$50 bills before Dale Earnhardt won his first Daytona 500 last year.

Then there was Sterling Marlin, who wore by a couple of "squarys" from a local hamburger joint before Daytona 500 victories in 1994-95.

Superstitious seems to have had a hand in reaching Daytona's elusive Victory Lane for some teams, but not all.

With today marking his 21st Daytona 500 start without a win, five-time NASCAR Winston Cup champion Terry Labonte has long given up on conventional race preparation and embraced a typical routine.

"I'll go to the driver's meeting and then eat lunch, but I won't eat a hamburger. I did that one time and it made me sick," said Labonte, who is one of five drivers competing in the Winston 500. He'll be 51 million homes in today's Daytona Cup season opener at Daytona International Speedway.

"I'm not superstitious, but I used to be," Labonte said. "I bought this new Rickyard 400 Motor Carlo race car. I picked it up and got it back to the shop and was admiring it [when] somebody asked what number it was. I couldn't



Thanks to Dale Earnhardt, upper left, all eyes are on Terry Labonte, who has yet to win the Daytona 500 in 20 attempts. He starts 12th today.

Bolts take beating, look to next year

TAMPA—The Lightning lost their eighth straight game, dropping a 3-1 decision to the Sharks at the Ice Palace on Saturday.

By Tom McEwen
of the Tampa Tribune

And the beatings go on.

The only thing that changes for the NHL's pelt is the severity of the losses. Some are downright brutal. Others, such as the 3-1 setback to the San Jose Sharks at the Ice Palace on Saturday night, are brutal.

It's a loss. The eighth in a row and 38th of this exhausting season, one in which the Lightning no longer can find so much as a tie game. The Lightning has lost six of its last seven games, including Saturday's.

So, with 23 games left, what's a team to do? Well, with the playoffs well out of reach of possibility (overriding Coach Jacques Demers acknowledged publicly for the first time Saturday), the Lightning has decided to put even more emphasis on young players.

It'll have to try and win games. Demers said. "But we're going to start looking more at some of the prospects, kids like Karol Belik and Xavier Delisle. Defenseman Karol Belik will be next. He'll be recalled from the minors today to replace Kjetil Samuelsen or Petr Svoboda, both recalled during Saturday's loss.

Proving the Lightning can find new ways to lose players, as well as games, the team was forced to leave early in the first period after being hit in the head by an errant clearing pass while sitting on the bench. The good news is it was not heady five that took him out.

"He's a little woozy, so we'll have to wait and see how he is (today) before making a determination on Monday," Lightning trainer Curtis Bell said. "If he wakes up OK (today), he'll try to skate. If he skates OK, he may play Monday."

Bulls follow Frazier, hustle to 72-57 win

TAMPA—With B.B. Waldon starting out on the bench, senior Antonio Frazier squares a 72-57 victory against Southern Miss.

By CARTER RADON
of the Tampa Tribune

Andrick Frazier already was setting in for the usual cool-down period — the minutes pass, the aching muscles tighten — when South Florida coach Bob Greenberg relayed the message two minutes before tipoff.

The senior guard from Tampa Prep was starting. The freshman forward from out of this world was out, even though a injury against the Bulls (12-16, 57 in Conference



South Florida's Cheney Asbury (10) looks to pass the ball as Southern Miss' Arthur Stapleton defends during USF's 72-57 win.

Gators rip Dawgs

ATHENS, Ga.—Hergen Weats' three-point shooting gives Florida its first win against Georgia at Athens in four years.

A Tampa wire report

No. 23 Florida's long-distance shooting was impressive Saturday as the Gators defeated Georgia 74-64 for their first victory at Athens since 1995 and a sweep of the season series.

Kevon Warkus went 6-for-7 from three-point range and Florida hit 11 of 20 three-pointers. Warkus scored 21 points and reserve Greg Stoll made five of eight three-pointers for the Gators (17-6 overall, 85 Southeastern Conference).

"This is a huge win for us. Florida coach Billy Donovan said.

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