

What Would Dale Do?

Applying the 2004 NASCAR Points System
to the “Earnhardt” Years

by

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Abstract

The process for computing points to determine the winner of the NASCAR championship was changed effective with the 2004 racing season. The previous points structure had been in place since 1976. This analysis gives a brief history of the origins of NASCAR and analyses the changes that would have occurred had the new process for determining the NASCAR champion been used during the years when seven-time series champion, Dale Earnhardt dominated the series.

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Earnest Hemingway once said, “Auto racing, bullfighting, and mountain climbing are the only true sports. All the rest are children’s games played by adults.” Seven-time NASCAR champion, Dale Earnhardt said, “The most important things in my life is [sic] God, my family and that black #3 GM Goodwrench car.” [1]

A Brief History Of NASCAR

The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) series had its rather humble beginnings on the sand beaches of Daytona, Florida. At the turn of the 20th century when automobiles were in their infancy, would be record setters gathered on the beaches around Daytona to accelerate to top speed and see which driver and car was fastest. When speeds became higher than the short, narrow, bumpy, and windy beach course could handle, these ongoing attempts at setting and holding the land speed record moved to the Bonneville salt-flats in Utah in 1935. The city leaders in Daytona, concerned that the loss of so called “Speed Week” would leave the city as just another beachside town, decided to hold an auto race. A local ex-racer designed one of the most unique stock car racecourses ever run. The track ran across a part of the beach for about one and a half miles, then cut across the dunes to a one and a half mile stretch along the highway that paralleled the beach, then back across the dunes onto the beach again. The first race on this 3.2 mile course was run in March of 1937 and featured cars that were street-legal family cars rather than modified special race cars. Because of poor crowd control and problems with the cars getting bogged down in the sand and blocking the course, the initial race was a financial failure and the city council decided to end their involvement. Their decision to

discontinue involvement in promoting an auto race was just the beginning of the story. [2, p. 12-14]

One of the participants in that first race, William Henry Getty (Bill) France, from the Washington, D.C. area convinced the local Elks club to support a 1937 Labor Day race. Despite improvement in the track and better management, the Elks claimed to have lost money and withdrew their support. France was not ready to give up and convinced a local restaurant owner to put up some prize money for a second race to be held in July of 1938. This event was a success and actually made money. France had his start on his way to becoming a successful racing promoter. After World War II, in 1947 France organized NASCAR. He established uniform racing rules, an insurance program, guaranteed purses, placing structure on the activity of stock car racing. [3]

The growth of NASCAR from its infancy in those early races of the 1930s to today has been nothing short of phenomenal. In that first race, beside the \$100 in prize money, France convinced local businesses to sponsor additional prizes: “a case of motor oil, a box of cigars, a \$2.50 coupon for a local men’s store, and \$25 off a used car from the local lot.” [2 p. 14]

The inaugural Daytona 500, held in 1959, featured a finish that was disputed for three days. The flagman and Bill France held that Johnny Beauchamp had prevailed over Lee Petty (father of Richard Petty). There had been no provision for cameras to record the finish line since it was not expected that a brand new five hundred mile race on a brand new track would result in a photo finish. After three days, the New York Times provided film that indicated that Lee Petty had finished in front of Beauchamp by a fender. [2 p. 73] Petty’s win carried a prize of \$19,050 for first place. The 2004 winner of the Daytona 500, Dale Earnhardt, Jr. collected almost \$1,500,000 in prize money. It was estimated that the NASCAR race recently held in August at

the Indianapolis Motor Speedway created an economic impact in the local economy of Speedway, Indiana of nearly \$220 million. [4]

At a conservative average of \$60 million per race, the 36 race NASCAR series pumps some \$2.2 billion into local economies. NASCAR has become a huge national enterprise and, surprisingly, remains a family owned business. The France family remains firmly in control of the sanctioning body for a racing series that now permeates mainstream America. NASCAR has been described by 2002 Series Champion, Tony Stewart as, “just like a big, giant family. It's like the Waltons on steroids.” [5]

Dale Earnhardt and the “Earnhardt” Years

Dale Earnhardt won the NASCAR championship seven times. He won his first championship in 1980 in his second full year of competition in NASCAR. He won additional championships in 1986, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993, and 1994. He remains tied with Richard Petty for the greatest number of championships won. From his rookie year in 1979 through 2000, Earnhardt's total winnings from races was \$40,596,369. Dale Earnhardt won his only Daytona 500 in his twentieth attempt. The first prize money for that race was \$1,059,105. Earnhardt averaged a final points finishing position of 4.5 for the twenty-one years in which he raced. On February 18, 2001, Earnhardt died on the last lap of the Daytona 500 while two cars he owned finished in first place (Michael Waltrip) and second place (Dale Earnhardt, Jr.). He is the only driver ever killed during the Daytona 500 race. Earnhardt's twelfth place finishing position in the 2001 race paid \$194,111. Earnhardt was ranked in a third place tie with John Lennon on the 2002 Forbes list of highest annual income (\$20 million) attributed to a deceased celebrity behind Elvis (\$37 million) and Charles Schultz (\$28 million.) [6]

Earnhardt's death sent shockwaves beyond the NASCAR community into America's national consciousness. Many people questioned how these individuals could suppress the reality of the risk to participate in a sport that can lead to death. Tazio Nuvolari drove race cars in the early years (1924 through 1950) of European Grand Prix racing and was the first race driver to driver for the now famous Italian auto maker, Enzo Ferrari. Nuvolari, when asked, "Aren't you afraid of being killed while racing?" replied, "Many people say they would choose to die in their sleep but they aren't afraid to climb into bed every night." [1] Strangely enough, he died at home in bed as the result of illness. Dale Earnhardt was asked about the comments made by some of his fellow competitors who suggested that NASCAR slow the cars before the tour returned to New Hampshire where drivers Adam Petty, grandson of Richard Petty, and Kenny Irwin had been killed in separate accidents. He replied with some sense of annoyance, "I've heard some drivers saying, 'We're going too fast at Charlotte, we're going too fast here.'" Earnhardt told the reporter, ". . .if you're not a racecar driver. . .,stay home. . .get out of the race car if you've got feathers on your legs or butt. Put a kerosene-soaked rag around your ankles so the ants won't crawl up your legs and eat your candy ass." [7]

Preliminary Considerations in the Present Study

The focus of the present study is to apply the new NASCAR points system to the seven years when Dale Earnhardt was the series champion and to several additional years when he finished relatively high in the points. The data for each race of each year from 1976 through 2003 was collected from www.nascar.com. An example of this information from one race (the 2003 Daytona 500) can be found on the website:

http://www.nascar.com/races/cup/2003/1/data/results_official.html

The final championship results for each of the years, 1976 through 2003 were obtained from www.nascar.com. An example of this information for one championship year, 1980 can be found on the website: http://www.nascar.com/races/cup/1980/data/standings_official.html.

These data were input into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets where each worksheet contained the results from one race. For the purposes of additional future study, all available data, finishing position, starting position, car number, driver name, make of car, sponsor of car, points/bonus awarded, laps run, status at end of race, and winnings were included. Additionally, the date of the race, the number of the race, and the name of the event were recorded. Using VBScript these data were organized into a Structured Query Language (SQL) database. According to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), SQL is “the standard language for relational database management systems. SQL statements are used to perform tasks such as update data on a database, or retrieve data from a database.” [8] Based on appropriate algorithms, points were computed using the new points system for the selected previous years data.

Two initial issues arose regarding managing the data. The date of the race information required writing an algorithm to rearrange the input information to a form that would be workable for SQL data base queries. Also, the points total column included two pieces, the total points and the bonus points awarded, needed to be separated into two different columns so that determination of appropriate points and bonuses could be determined using the new points system.

An important discovery through the process of this study was the importance of looking forward to the desired results and planning the data management carefully to accommodate the analysis required. Substantial time can be saved in analyses of this type by carefully managing the form of the initial data to facilitate the analysis. In the present study, better management of

the information regarding the dates of the races would have streamlined the process. As is often the case, however, suitable workarounds can be done to address these issues. The algorithm created to manipulate the date information as well as algorithms to handle the analysis of previous results and apply the new points system to these previous results was the heart of this study. This algorithm included SQL code (in *italics*) that helped “clean up the data.” One example of such code is:

```
for cdriver=0 to Ubound(ardriver,2)  
ardriver(0,cdriver)=trim(replace(ardriver(0,cdriver),"*", ""))
```

This code removed the * that appeared in the data beside the names of the rookie drivers who participated in the race. Other data items such as date coding, handling particular race points issues where no points were awarded for a particular finishing position due to having the race entry postmarked after the deadline, and others, were cleaned up with appropriate SQL code. Once data clean up was accomplished, the finishing position for each driver in the race was used to compute the points result for the driver under the new per-race points system. Creative use of coding allowed creation of relatively short algorithms to improve the speed of the analysis process. This is an important process that is suggested in any analysis involving motor racing. It would be inconsistent to have slow computing processes being used to analyze results from auto racing. The following SQL code (in *italics*) assigned points for finishing positions using the new NASCAR points system.

```
If ardriver(1,cdriver)=1 then  
newpoints=180  
Elseif ardriver(1,cdriver)>1 and ardriver(1,cdriver)<7  
Then Newpoints=(170-5*(ardriver(1,cdriver)-2))
```

Elseif ardriver(1,cdriver) > 6 and ardriver(1,cdriver) < 12

Then newpoints = (146 - 4(ardriver(1,cdriver)-7))*

Else newpoints = (130 - 3(ardriver(1,cdriver)-11))*

There was no change in the bonus points structure under the new points system. Additional code, not outlined, consisted of looking up the previous bonus points and adding these bonus points to the totals computed under the new points system algorithms.

The Old Points System Explained

For the years 1976 through 2003, the series champion was determined by adding their points results from each race and deducting any points penalties for infractions and violations that occurred during the season. For each race, each first place finish in a race is awarded 175 points. For finishing positions two through six, the points decline by five points per position. For finishing positions seven through eleven, the points decline by four points per position, and for finishing positions twelve and lower, the points awarded decline by three points per position.

Five additional bonus points are awarded for leading a single lap during the race and for leading the most laps. A winning driver in a race was always awarded five bonus points for leading a lap (since they led at least the last lap). If a winning driver also led the most laps in the race, they received an additional five-point bonus. Under the previous system, a driver could win a maximum of 185 points by winning and leading the most laps. It was possible under the previous points system for the second place finisher to score the same number of points (180 points) as the winning driver provided the second place driver led the most laps. Because the collected data included championship results for each season, this analysis did not require any process regarding results under the old point system.

The New Points System Explained

During the first twenty-six races of the current thirty-six-race season, each first place finish in a race is awarded 180 points. Second place is awarded 170 points. For finishing positions three through six, the points decline by five points per position. For finishing positions seven through eleven, the points decline by four points per positions. For finishing positions twelve and lower, the points decline by three points per position. As under the previous points system, bonus points are awarded for leading a single lap (five points) and for leading the most laps (five points.)

At the end of the first twenty-six races of the season, the ten drivers having the highest points total are included in the Chase for the Championship (CFC). Additionally, any driver not in the top ten in points who is within four hundred points of the leader is eligible for the CFC. All points for all drivers are reset for the run for the championship. At the end of the first twenty-six races, the driver with the highest point total has their points reset to 5,050. The points for drivers in position two and below are reduced (from 5,050) by five points per position. The CFC consists of the last ten races of the season. The point total for each driver is determined by adding their race points for each of the ten races to the initial total at the start of the CFC. At the end of the ten race CFC, the driver having the most points is crowned champion. For 2004, in addition to all other winnings during the year, the champion receives \$5,000,000 for winning the CFC.

The 2004 NASCAR season consists of thirty-six races. Some of the earlier years of this study had fewer than thirty-six races. Because the new points system consists of the last ten races of the season (27.78%), for the purpose of this analysis, the number of races in the CFC is in the same proportion as in the new points system. Seasons with fewer than thirty-six races were split

into the proportion 72.22%--27.78%. For example, the 1980 season consisted of 31 races. For the purposes of this study, the number of races before the CFC was 22 with the CFC for 1980 consisting of the last 9 races of the season. The 1986 season consisted of 29 races, split at 21 before the CFC and 8 races in the CFC for 1986. Additionally, an adjustment was made to the 400 point window available to drivers who make the championship. This adjustment consisted of multiplying 400 points by a multiplying factor designed to equate points available in the first part of the season. This multiplying factor was determined by dividing the number of races in the season of interest by 36. This provided an appropriate reduction in the 400 point window. For example, since the 1986 season consisted of 31 races, the point window was reduced to 344 points to account for fewer races available in the preliminary part of the season.

Appropriate SQL code was written to manage the points totals for the first portion of each season, to determine the drivers who made it into the CFC, to reset the points appropriately for the drivers in the CFC, and to manage the points totals during the CFC until the end of the season, and to then determine the championship ranking for the end of the season.

Results

The first year considered in the analysis was 1980. This was the year in which Dale Earnhardt first won a NASCAR championship. Under the old points system, Dale Earnhardt won by 19 points over Cale Yarborough. When the new point system is applied to the year, 1980, Dale Earnhardt would still win the championship, but by only one point. Terry Labonte would be the driver benefiting most under the new points system. His finishing position in 1980 would increase from 8th to 3rd. Richard Petty would lose the most finishing positions from 4th to 8th. The table gives the results under both points system for the drivers finishing near the top.

1980 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Dale Earnhardt
2	Cale Yarborough	2	Cale Yarborough
3	Benny Parsons	3	Terry Labonte
4	Richard Petty	4	Darrell Waltrip
5	Darrell Waltrip	5	Benny Parsons
6	Bobby Allison	6	Jody Ridley
7	Jody Ridley*	7	Bobby Allison
8	Terry Labonte	8	Richard Petty
9	Dave Marcis	9	Harry Gant
10	Richard Childress	10	Richard Childress
11	Harry Gant		
12	Buddy Arrington		
13	James Hylton		
14	Ronnie Thomas		

In 1986, Dale Earnhardt won his second championship by 288 points over Darrell Waltrip and led third place finisher Tim Richmond by 294 points. Under the new points system, Richmond would move into second place to Earnhardt with a points deficit of 176 with Waltrip moving down two spots into fourth place. Rusty Wallace would have gained the most positions under the new points system and moved from sixth to third. Bobby Allison would have lost the most positions from seventh to tenth. The table gives the results under both points system for the drivers finishing near the top.

1986 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Dale Earnhardt
2	Darrell Waltrip	2	Tim Richmond
3	Tim Richmond	3	Rusty Wallace

4	Bill Elliott	4	Darrell Waltrip
5	Ricky Rudd	5	Ricky Rudd
6	Rusty Wallace	6	Bill Elliott
7	Bobby Allison	7	Geoffrey Bodine
8	Geoffrey Bodine	8	Bobby Hillin, Jr
9	Bobby Hillin, Jr	9	Terry Labonte
10	Kyle Petty	10	Bobby Allison
11	Harry Gant		
12	Terry Labonte		
13	Neil Bonnett		
14	Richard Petty		

In 1987 Dale Earnhardt won his third championship by 489 points over Bill Elliott. Using the new points system, Earnhardt would have finished second in the championship behind Elliott by 99 points. Earnhardt had built up a large lead prior to the final eight races of the season. Under the new points system, this lead was reduced to a five point lead going into the chase for the championship races. Both drivers had outstanding results during the final portion of the season. Earnhardt won two races and Elliott won three. Two races during this championship run where Earnhardt had engine failures gave Elliott enough edge to have taken the championship.

1987 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Bill Elliott
2	Bill Elliott	2	Dale Earnhardt
3	Terry Labonte	3	Darrell Waltrip
4	Darrell Waltrip	4	Terry Labonte
5	Rusty Wallace	5	Kyle Petty
6	Ricky Rudd	6	Richard Petty
7	Kyle Petty	7	Ricky Rudd
8	Richard Petty	8	Rusty Wallace
9	Bobby Allison	9	Ken Schrader
10	Ken Schrader	10	Neil Bonnett
11	Sterling Marlin		
12	Neil Bonnett		
13	Geoffrey Bodine		
14	Phil Parsons		

Dale Earnhardt won his fourth championship in 1990. Using the new points system, he would retain that championship with only one change in position among the top five finishers. Elliott, who finished fourth would take over third position from Geoffrey Bodine who would move into fourth. Rusty Wallace would lose the most positions from sixth to ninth and Ken Schrader would gain the most positions from tenth to sixth.

1990 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Dale Earnhardt
2	Mark Martin	2	Mark Martin
3	Geoffrey Bodine	3	Bill Elliott
4	Bill Elliott	4	Geoffrey Bodine
5	Morgan Shepherd	5	Morgan Shepherd
6	Rusty Wallace	6	Ken Schrader
7	Ricky Rudd	7	Ernie Irvan
8	Alan Kulwicki	8	Ricky Rudd
9	Ernie Irvan	9	Rusty Wallace
10	Ken Schrader	10	Kyle Petty
11	Kyle Petty		
12	Brett Bodine		
13	Davey Allison		
14	Sterling Marlin		

In 1991, Earnhardt won his fifth championship. Harry Gant, one of the oldest drivers in the series got on a “hot streak” toward the end of the 1991 season and won an unprecedented four races in a row. Three of these races would have been during the chase for the championship. His lowest finish during the eight races that would have been the CFC for 1991 was 23rd. His finishes included 3 wins, two second place finishes, two fourth place finishes, and twenty-third. These outstanding results during the last part of the season would have propelled Gant from a fourth place result under the old points system to a championship and relegated Earnhardt to a second place finish.

1991 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Harry Gant
2	Ricky Rudd	2	Dale Earnhardt
3	Davey Allison	3	Davey Allison
4	Harry Gant	4	Sterling Marlin
5	Ernie Irvan	5	Ricky Rudd
6	Mark Martin	6	Mark Martin
7	Sterling Marlin	7	Darrell Waltrip
8	Darrell Waltrip	8	Rusty Wallace
9	Ken Schrader	9	Ernie Irvan
10	Rusty Wallace	10	Ken Schrader
11	Bill Elliott		
12	Morgan Shepherd		
13	Alan Kulwicki		
14	Geoffrey Bodine		

Dale Earnhardt won his sixth championship in 1993 beating Rusty Wallace by 244 points. Under the new points system, Earnhardt would have finished in second place behind Wallace by 52 pts. Jeff Gordon, as a rookie in 1993, would have benefited under the new points system and gained five positions from fourteenth to ninth.

1993 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Rusty Wallace
2	Rusty Wallace	2	Dale Earnhardt
3	Mark Martin	3	Ernie Irvan
4	Dale Jarrett	4	Kyle Petty
5	Kyle Petty	5	Mark Martin
6	Ernie Irvan	6	Dale Jarrett
7	Morgan Shepherd	7	Ken Schrader
8	Bill Elliott	8	Morgan Shepherd
9	Ken Schrader	9	Jeff Gordon
10	Ricky Rudd	10	Geoffrey Bodine

- 11 Harry Gant
- 12 Jimmy Spencer
- 13 Darrell Waltrip
- 14 Jeff Gordon*

Dale Earnhardt won his seventh and final championship in 1994. Under the new points system, he would retain that championship. Morgan Shepherd who finished sixth in the championship would benefit the most by moving into second place under the new points system. Jeff Gordon would move up three spots from eighth to fifth, Michael Waltrip would move up three spots from twelfth to ninth. Ken Schrader would benefit least with the new points system and would lose three positions from fourth to seventh. Ernie Irvan suffered a horrific crash at Michigan with nine races remaining in the season. His injuries caused him to miss the last nine races of the year. His results prior to what would have been the chase for the championship would have positioned him for a serious run toward the end. As it turned out, Kenny Wallace was a replacement driver for Irvan during this final run for the championship. His results during the last nine races would have left him in tenth place in the run for the championship only because the car driven by Irvan would have qualified for the chase for the championship in 1994.

1994 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Dale Earnhardt	1	Dale Earnhardt
2	Mark Martin	2	Morgan Shepherd
3	Rusty Wallace	3	Mark Martin
4	Ken Schrader	4	Rusty Wallace
5	Ricky Rudd	5	Jeff Gordon
6	Morgan Shepherd	6	Ricky Rudd
7	Terry Labonte	7	Ken Schrader
8	Jeff Gordon	8	Bill Elliott
9	Darrell Waltrip	9	Michael Waltrip
10	Bill Elliott	10	Kenny Wallace
11	Lake Speed		
12	Michael Waltrip		

- 13 Ted Musgrave
- 14 Sterling Marlin

Dale Earnhardt finished second to Rusty Wallace in the championship in 1989. We examined the results using the new points system for this year and found that Rusty Wallace would retain his championship while Earnhardt would drop two places into fourth. Darrell Waltrip would gain two spots from fourth to second.

1989 Results			
Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Rusty Wallace	1	Rusty Wallace
2	Dale Earnhardt	2	Darrell Waltrip
3	Mark Martin	3	Mark Martin
4	Darrell Waltrip	4	Dale Earnhardt
5	Ken Schrader	5	Ken Schrader
6	Bill Elliott	6	Bill Elliott
7	Harry Gant	7	Harry Gant
8	Ricky Rudd	8	Terry Labonte
9	Geoffrey Bodine	9	Ricky Rudd
10	Terry Labonte	10	Davey Allison
11	Davey Allison		
12	Sterling Marlin		
13	Morgan Shepherd		
14	Alan Kulwicki		

Jeff Gordon won the championship in 1995 with Dale Earnhardt finishing in second place. Had the new points system been in place in 1995, Earnhardt would have won the championship over Gordon who would have lost three spots and finished fourth. Rusty Wallace, Terry Labonte, and Bobby Labonte would have each gained three spots based on the new points system. Sterling Marlin would drop three spots and Bill Elliott would have dropped out of the top ten.

1995 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Jeff Gordon	1	Dale Earnhardt
2	Dale Earnhardt	2	Rusty Wallace
3	Sterling Marlin	3	Terry Labonte
4	Mark Martin	4	Jeff Gordon
5	Rusty Wallace	5	Mark Martin
6	Terry Labonte	6	Sterling Marlin
7	Ted Musgrave	7	Bobby Labonte
8	Bill Elliott	8	Ted Musgrave
9	Ricky Rudd	9	Morgan Shepherd
10	Bobby Labonte	10	Michael Waltrip
11	Morgan Shepherd		
12	Michael Waltrip		
13	Dale Jarrett		
14	Bobby Hamilton		

The final year considered in this study was 2000. Bobby Labonte won the championship in 2000 and would have done so under the new points system. The big gainer in 2000 would have been Jeff Gordon who would have picked up four spots into fifth. The big loser in 2000 would have been Dale Jarrett who would have lost five positions from fourth to ninth.

2000 Results

Finish Order Under the Old Points System		Finishing Order Under the New Points System	
Rank	Driver	Rank	Driver
1	Bobby Labonte	1	Bobby Labonte
2	Dale Earnhardt	2	Dale Earnhardt
3	Jeff Burton	3	Jeff Burton
4	Dale Jarrett	4	Ricky Rudd
5	Ricky Rudd	5	Jeff Gordon
6	Tony Stewart	6	Rusty Wallace
7	Rusty Wallace	7	Tony Stewart
8	Mark Martin	8	Mark Martin
9	Jeff Gordon	9	Dale Jarrett
10	Ward Burton	10	Ward Burton
11	Steve Park		
12	Mike Skinner		

- 13 Johnny Benson
- 14 Matt Kenseth*

Summary

Dale Earnhardt won NASCAR championships in the years 1980, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993, and 1994. When the new points system is applied to the years in which Dale Earnhardt finished either first or second in the series championship, he would still win championships in 1980, 1986, 1990, and 1994, a net loss of three from his total of seven. In addition, he would have taken the championship from Jeff Gordon in 1995 under the new points system. He would not have won championships in the years 1987, 1991, and 1993. Consequently, seven-time NASCAR champion, Dale Earnhardt would have been five-time NASCAR champion under the 2004 points system. What would Dale do? Dale Earnhardt was a man of simple goals and desires. Simultaneously, he was a complex, enigmatic high school drop out and entrepreneur who built a huge financial empire that continues to grow today. He was first and foremost a race car driver who, above all, loved competing and loved competing most against those who were the most difficult to beat. He would do everything within his power to outrun everyone on the track. He would not complain about the points system because, in the end, that would not matter to him. Earnhardt raced to win because winning was what mattered. The points and the money took care of themselves.

At the time of this writing, there have been sixteen races in the 2004 season. The top ten drivers in points would be eligible for the chase for the championship. The tenth place driver, Kevin Harvick, is 401 points back of points leader Jimmie Johnson. Eleventh place driver, Jamie MacMurray is 483 points back with twelfth place driver, rookie Kasey Kayne, 484 points back. It appears that the 400-point rule will not be a factor in the chase for the championship and that only the top ten drivers will be eligible.

Further work in this study will involve evaluating results from all of the years of the previous points system to examine changes that would occur. Year by year analysis examining more detail about why the results changed will be considered. Additional work will be done to examine alternate points systems that could be implemented.

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