

Changing Times Silence National Speed Sport News

by John Close, www.closefinishes.com

One of the best friends auto racing ever had passed into history last week as National Speed Sport News "America's Motorsports Authority" published its final issue.

Since August 16, 1934, National Speed Sport News served the racing community with coverage of national, regional and local racing events. In an era where racing wasn't televised, radio coverage spotty at best, and newspapers full of stick and ball sports, 'Speed Sport' was a well of information to anyone thirsting for any kind of motorsports news.

Propelled by the efforts of legendary motorsports journalist Chris Economaki, NSSN became the bible of auto racing, an oracle delivered in newsprint. For 76 years - including well after the evolution of the Internet - Speed Sport was a welcome weekly visitor at countless racetracks across the country and in the mailboxes of fans everywhere.

Today, it is gone.

Unfortunately, times change and as much as Speed Sport stayed current with outstanding editorial content, the cost of printing and distributing a newspaper became prohibitive. In truth, Economaki - now 90 years old - probably kept the printed edition of Speed Sport alive longer than it was financially prudent to do so.

While Speed Sport will continue to live on with its own Internet edition, it will be hard pressed for it to ever replace the printed version. For those of us in the sport for more than 25 years, it's nearly impossible to explain the anticipation and excitement of seeing the latest edition of Speed Sport in your mailbox every week.

Unlike the Internet articles we breeze through today and dismiss in a matter of seconds with a single keystroke, Speed Sport was something you kept around reading it over and over until the next issue came.

It's pretty safe to say that Speed Sport also had a profound impact on this writer and my desire to be a motorsports journalist. Those stories and the style they were written in - burned into my brain as a young Wisconsin boy in love with auto racing. Today, they still influence what and how I write about the sport.

Having my work published in Speed Sport over the years was a major career accomplishment is an understatement - something I will always be thankful for. Those feature stories and race reports are among my most cherished written achievements. To this day, I still have almost all of the copies of Speed Sport in which my stories appeared and dozens of other classic issues safely tucked away in a cabinet.

My guess is I'm not the only one who has stacks of NSSN spirited away somewhere. You'll forgive me if every so often I break them out and remember a time when racing 'and just about everything else' was a lot simpler.

Thanks for everything, Chris. The printed version of National Speed Sport News was a hell of a ride. Every racer and fan whoever leafed through its pages is way better off today because of it.

Sprint Nextel On The Ropes?

Here's another item in the financial pages that caught our eye this week.

In July, 2003, Nextel inked a 10-year, \$750 million dollar deal to serve as the title sponsor of the NASCAR Cup Series. Two years later, a merger between Nextel and Sprint boosted the concern to the third-largest communications company in the world.

Now another proposed merger between communications giants AT&T and T-Mobile not only has Sprint Nextel on the ropes, but also brings into play the question of whether the company will continue to support the NASCAR Cup Series when its current agreement is up at the end of the 2013 season.

The news of the proposed \$39 billion dollar acquisition of T-Mobile by AT&T totally spun out Sprint Nextel stock last week as the company lost more than 13 percent of its stock value in just one day.

The AT&T/T-Mobile deal is more than just a customer grab to en-



hance its already insanely popular I-Phone platform by AT&T. The merger would create company at least three times the size of Sprint Nextel. It would also fashion a mega 4G coverage network that would not only dwarf Sprint Nextel's reach, but could also make the company's 4G/WiMax/Clearwire network system - already considered not to be the standard of the future - an unpopular choice for customers who are looking for better and faster connections for devices such as I-Phones and I-Pads.

Early estimates conclude that the AT&T/T-Mobile deal would eventually control as much as 80 percent of the wireless market in the United States. To be sure, Sprint Nextel isn't going anywhere soon. According to its 2010 fourth quarter financial statement, the company has 33.1 million regular subscribers and 16.8 million prepaid subscribers. Those are numbers that most of us can't comprehend.

Still, in today's ever fluid business world, having your competition grab the lion's share of your market can't be good. Should that happen, it stands to reason that Sprint Nextel won't be in a position to renew its deal with NASCAR in just a couple of years.

This is a story you will want to keep your eye on. •

2011 GMP Schedule

-Saturday, March 19

Georgia Electric Vehicle Rally

-Saturday, March 26

Pre-Season Open Practice

-Saturday, April 23

GMP Pro Late Models - Season-Opening Race Event! - Georgia Racing Hall Of Fame Night

-Friday-Saturday, June 3-4

American Cancer Society Relay For Life

-Saturday, June 11

NASCAR K&N Pro Series Returns To GMP

-Thursday, July 14

Opening Ceremonies - Dizzy Dean Baseball World Series of Speed

-Saturday, July 16

Pro All Star Series (PASS) Late Model Race
GMP World Series of Speed

-Saturday, August 13

GMP Back To School Racing Classic - Pro
Late Models

-Saturday, September 17

CRA Super Series/Second-Annual
George Elliott Memorial Event

-Saturday-Sunday, October 1-2

2nd Annual Georgia Bluesfest

-Thursday-Sunday, November 10-13

28th-Annual World Crown 300



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