

Marlin blamed by some for Earnhardt's death

By Mike Harris
The Associated Press

Sterling Marlin said he "definitely didn't do anything intentional" when he bumped Dale Earnhardt at the Daytona 500, triggering the crash that killed the stock car racing great. He said it was "pure luck" he didn't crash, too.

The bump and the fatal accident set off a flurry of ugly e-mail to Marlin's Web site, and threats against him and his family have been phoned to his race shop in Mooresville, N.C.

"Maybe people are frustrated and just looking for somebody to blame. I'd do anything to not be here today, to not address this subject," said Marlin, speaking for the first time since the racing world learned of Earnhardt's death Sunday night.

"If people just come back to their senses, listen to what everybody's saying and watch the tape, that's all I ask," he said by telephone from his home in Columbia,

Tenn.

Earnhardt was killed on the last turn of the last lap of NASCAR's season-opening race, slamming head-on into the concrete wall after making contact with Marlin at the front of a tight pack of five cars fighting for position.

"I definitely didn't do anything intentional. We were just racing our guts out on the last lap of the Daytona 500," said Marlin, a two-time Daytona 500 winner who was longtime competitor and friend of Earnhardt's.

"I've only seen the tape once, but from what I saw, it was a totally racing accident," he said. "Kenny (Schrader) pulled up to make it three-deep going in, with me on the bottom.

"Some other guys were closing fast and I think Rusty (Wallace) got up on him and got him loose. Dale and my car barely touched, and it sent my car across the apron, and Dale's, too. He overcorrected, and then I didn't see

him again."

Marlin somehow kept his car going straight and went on to finish fifth in the season-opening race.

"It was pure luck I caught it," he said. "When you run across the apron at Daytona at 180 miles an hour, you usually don't come back."

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Sterling Marlin
NASCAR racer

Earnhardt didn't, sliding into Schrader. The two of them then slammed into the wall. The 49-year-old Earnhardt, a seven-time Winston Cup champion and the greatest driver of his era, died in-

stantly of massive head injuries.

Almost immediately, the threats and e-mails started for Marlin.

Chip Ganassi Racing team spokeswoman Gigi Liberati declined to go into detail about the phone calls and electronic messages, and she declined to say what kind of security measures have been taken.

"You have to look at every threat as serious. I obviously can't go into detail about what will be done, but there will be precautions," she said.

A patrolman was on duty outside the Ganassi race shop all day Tuesday.

By Tuesday, however, Marlin said the hate mail had slowly turned to messages of support.

"I didn't look at the computer, but I heard it did have some pretty bad stuff on it," he said. "Today, I heard it was all reversed. The calls I got, there wasn't a negative call from anybody."

Like Marlin, Wallace has been

shaken by The Intimidator's death.

"He and I were about as close friends as you can get in our sport, with the competition and all that goes along with it," said Wallace, who avoided the sliding cars in Sunday's race and finished third. "I just keep on running that last lap in my mind and keep saying to myself, 'Man, if I'd just been able to give him a little tap from the rear ... that could have meant all the difference in the world.' It's just a helpless feeling I have."

Marlin agreed with NASCAR's decision to go on with the race in Rockingham, N.C., on Sunday.

"Dale would want everybody to go and give it 100 percent," he said. "In part, I dread it. But, once you're in the car, nobody is messing with you. Dale had been doing this since he was a kid, and so have I. Getting in that race car is what we do.

"I'd like to go to Rockingham, dominate the race, win and dedicate it to Dale and his family."

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Feb. 21): Your imagination and creativity bring attention. Be there for an older person and receive generous rewards, as well. Overcome your shyness and share your visions in February and March. Just say you will in April. Don't think about the money; think about the folks you're helping. Give homework your full attention in May and steal time from your chores for your family in June. Do what you love and prosper in July. Hear constructive criticism in September but don't let it inhibit your imagination in October. The boss thinks of you as a friend in December. You can solve the puzzle to gain riches by next February.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Today is an 8 — You'll do best today working with a team. A group that's imaginative and creative is perfect. Do the planning now, but don't take action yet. You're liable to start out without something you'll need.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Today is a 5 — Be respectful and obedient for the next few days. Things that could affect you are going on over your head. Maybe you think you have nothing to do with the outcome, but they all look to you for common sense and stability.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21): Today is a 7 — You're reaching out and learning new things. You're interested in everything, and this could help you increase your allowance. Study hard, especially foreign languages. You're good at them, and learning a new one could boost your paycheck.

CANCER (June 22-July 22): Today is a 6 — You're still looking for the best deals. You're creative and full of great ideas. Try something you've read about, but haven't tried before. It won't be easy, but it could work out well for you.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Today is a 6 — If you have a partner or attorney negotiating to get your money, watch out. You don't want him or her to get wealthy while you go into debt. Keep

an eye on a person you've hired to do your talking or thinking.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Today is a 5 — You're still working hard and not making enough. The job seems interesting, though, so don't complain. Make up for it with the fringe benefits, the skills you learn and the friends you make.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Today is an 8 — Want to learn how to do something you've never done before? Get a good outfit to match your new aspirations, and advancement in your career is quite possible. Look like you're there already.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Today is a 7 — Home, family and stability are on your mind. Are you in love? You want to make sure that your loved ones are secure, but all you want to do is snuggle. Security's an ongoing assignment. Snuggle when you can.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Today is an 8 — You should be pretty good at what you're doing by now. Go over old material, just to polish your skills. Put your talents to work, too. Something that you can do around the house will save you plenty.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Today is a 6 — Money's coming in from work you've done in the past. Those checks are in the mail. How are you going to spend all this loot? Better go over your lists one more time, just so you don't forget anything.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Today is an 8 — You and a friend have a scheme to do good for others. If you haven't got a project like that going, step on it. This is a way to be a good guy and also to make a few bucks. No harm in that.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Today is a 5 — Older people, talking behind closed doors, could affect you and your job. Maneuver yourself to be in the right place at the right time, with the right skills. This is something of a guessing game, but you're good at those.

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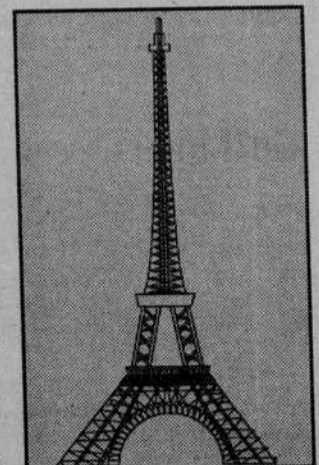
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