

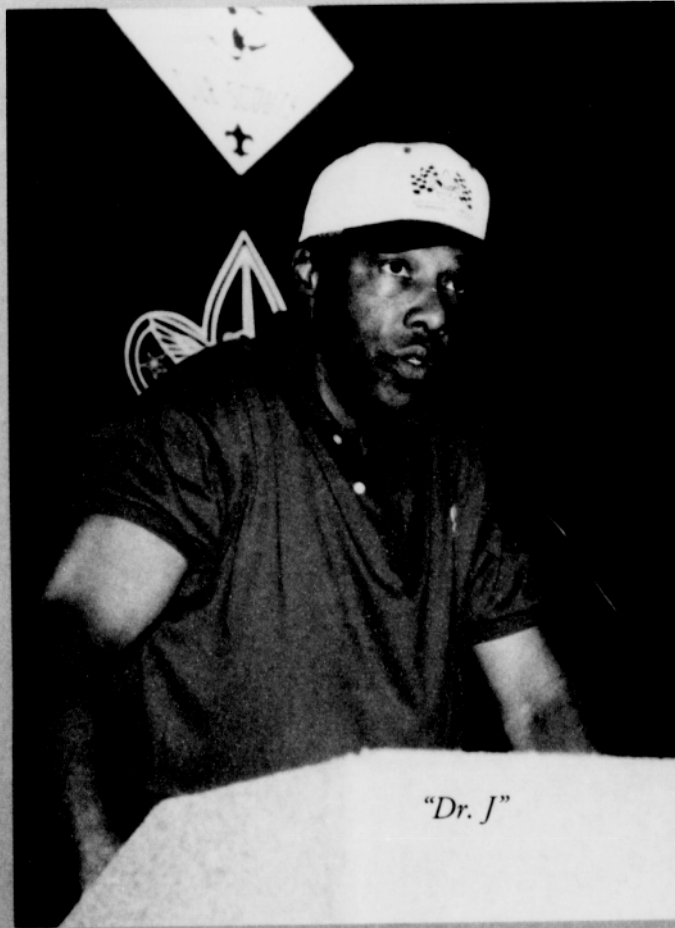
day, feeling the horsepower, watching the driver put on his equipment, there's a parallel there to getting ready for a pro-football game. With the size of the crowds, it's simply unbelievable -- it's like a Superbowl every weekend." With the help of friend and former coach Joe Gibbs, Washington and Erving put together a team and landed the Dr. Pepper sponsorship, the key component necessary for a serious, competitive racing program.

Although their 1998 season was a steep learning curve, they had reason to be satisfied: They finished 38th out of 110 teams and beat teams with top name drivers and years of experience on the circuit. As a result, Dr. Pepper signed a multi-year agreement to continue its sponsorship of the African American-owned team.

"We weren't the greatest racers last year, we tore up a lot of sheetmetal," conceded co-owner Jackson. "But we worked hard at it and after we got our act together, the sponsor decided to come back." The team's dedication to success made a difference to the sponsor. "As a second year sponsor, we are encouraged by the tremendous progress this team made in its rookie season, and we are impressed with the resiliency displayed by the team throughout 1998," said Cindi Clark, Dr. Pepper's senior vice president of marketing. This year, the team looks forward to moving up considerably in the point standings and has made several important changes. They have switched cars from a Ford Taurus to a Chevy Monte Carlo and changed drivers, bringing in Mark Green, who finished 13th in drivers' points last year. Green raced all 38 Busch races in 1998, and posted four top ten finishes. In the pivotal position of crew chief -- the "quarterback" of the pits who calls the shots on race day -- they've got a 30-year NASCAR veteran in Darrell Bryant. This lineup gives the team hope that victory will follow. "We have great expectations for the 1999 racing season," says Washington. "We are confident in our ability to be competitive in every race."

Still some African-American racing fans are unhappy that more blacks are not employed by the team, especially as driver, the most visible team member. Acknowledging that concern, Jackson answers, "We do hope to bring more African Americans on board. The problem is that there just aren't many around in this sport."

Of the seven full time crew members who work in the pits on race day and in the Lexington, N.C. racing shop, the Washington/Erving team employs one African American. Ken



"Dr. J"

Scott drives the huge tractor trailer that transports the cars and equipment to the races. He also handles refueling the car during race day. "Right now, African Americans just don't see the opportunities here," Jackson continued. Echoing the sentiments of African Americans who have managed to break through into full time professional racing, Jackson says, "You have to be in racing, hanging out in the garages, getting to

**"The team has also developed a "show car" program involving the Boy Scouts of America."**

know people and the sport. Then, when there's an opening, you're there." "We

want black faces in every area," Washington declared, "people in every position they are qualified for. If nothing else, we want to make people aware of our participation in this sport."

In an effort to build greater awareness and opportunities for African Americans at all levels in motorsports, the team has undertaken several outreach programs. The team has several show cars -- replicas of the #50 race car -- that travel to various events. People can sit in a race car to get a feel for what a 3,400 pound, 700 horsepower racing machine is like. The team has also developed a "show car" program involving the Boy Scouts of America. The cars will be made available for promotional events and will be used to help recruit youth and adults into scouting.

For their part, Dr. Pepper is launching a national promotional campaign this Spring, "Thirst To Win," based on the Washington/Erving team. The grand prize for ten winners will be a street-ready Monte Carlo painted just like the Washington/Erving #50 Dr. Pepper race car. Other prizes to be won from Dr. Pepper cans, bottles and cups will include trips to major stock car races, cash prizes and t-shirts.

Still it's an uphill battle for recognition on and off the circuit, says Jackson. "But participation of teams like ours is going to bring more people into the sport."

And the team is also searching for a major minority sponsor as well. It's up to us to expose African Americans to this sport, says Washington. "This team would also present a great opportunity for a major African American sponsor to come on board with us." ■