

Earnhardt already a fan favorite in booth

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Dale Earnhardt Jr. leaned toward the track in the broadcast booth and holstered like a NASCAR fan at home over a gripping final lap in his debut race.

Once Kyle Larson tried to swipe the lead from Kyle Busch with a daring pass at Chicagoland, Earnhardt could not harness his enthusiasm.

“Slide job!”
“SLIDE JOB!”

Earnhardt smiled and clapped his hands at the move and — in a flash — the retired NASCAR star had a signature call.

“I was really surprised that that took off like it did,” Earnhardt said Friday at Daytona International Speedway. “I got done with the race, went to the car, drove to the airport. By the time I got to the airport, everybody was texting me, saying it over and over, and I’m hearing it everywhere all week.”

Sure enough, race fans on social media parodied the call and “slide job” was used as a voice over for other memorable moments in sports. At Daytona, fans cried out “slide job” and they clamored on Twitter for a business to produce T-shirts with Earnhardt’s image and the quote.

Earnhardt could only laugh at the hoopla his



AP Photo/Terry Renna

NASCAR auto racing fans walk by a billboard advertising Dale Earnhardt Jr. in his new role as a broadcast personality at Daytona International Speedway on Friday in Daytona Beach, Fla.

excited cries created in a sport desperate for any kind of feel-good buzz. It was exactly what NBC Sports counted on when it hired the outspoken and folksy Earnhardt, a two-time Daytona 500 champion, to work the booth this year.

Take a walk around Daytona and it’s clear the biggest star in the sagging sport is still Earnhardt — who retired at the end of last season on the heels of his 15th straight

most popular driver award.

The Daytona fan zone has a billboard-sized ad promoting itself as “The World Center of Racing” on the same wall as a close-up image of Earnhardt wearing a headset with the caption, “Same Dale. New View.”

Earnhardt’s presence looms large in a sport that has failed to create any new stars anywhere nearly as popular as the driver who inspired “Junior Nation.”

He hosted a Q&A with drivers such as Austin Dillon and Denny Hamlin in the fan zone before Friday night’s qualifying runs.

“He’s like the John Mad-den of racing,” NBC analyst and former crew chief, Steve Letarte, said.

Hold the turducken.

It was only one race and even Earnhardt conceded the call wasn’t quite ready to join the pantheon of “Holy Cow!” and “Whoa, Nelly!”

in enduring catchphrases in broadcast history.

“I don’t know that that’s a catchphrase because I don’t know that you can just work it in any time,” Earnhardt said. “That was just a natural reaction to what I was seeing. That’s what my bosses asked me to do, say what I was thinking.”

Earnhardt is a bit of a NASCAR everyman, and called the action in much the same way a couple of bud-

dies might see it over a couple of beers at a bar.

But fresh off the track, Earnhardt had the experience necessary to describe first-person action for fans at home.

“Down the front straight-away, there’s another bump coming into turn 1,” Earnhardt said, looking at the view of an in-car camera. “You feel it right THERE (as the car jiggled). It’s like driving off a set of stairs. It’s not a dip. It’s really a ledge.”

Sam Flood, the NBC Sports executive who hired Earnhardt, said his only advice for the former driver was to simply be himself. Earnhardt had some broadcast experience as the host of his own podcast and found the tip easy to follow.

“I’m not having to trim as much rough edges as I thought I would,” Earnhardt said.

There was a bit of a Junior bump on the ratings — the Chicagoland race was up 14 percent from last season. Yes, there was the caveat that last year’s race was in September and went up against the NFL. But certainly there were a few disconnected fans who tuned in — thanks in part to a massive promotional push that featured Earnhardt at the expense of the drivers — just to hear an unfiltered Earnhardt have fun in the booth.

“I’m just trying to find my lane, man,” he said.

Venus goes out as Federer marches on

By MATTIAS KAREN
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LONDON — Venus Williams became the latest former champion to be knocked out at Wimbledon.

Her sister Serena is still going strong, though, after overcoming her toughest test so far this week.

In the men’s tournament, Roger Federer’s latest victory never looked in doubt as he won 37 of 40 first-serve points and stretched his Wimbledon winning streak to 29 sets, beating Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany 6-3, 7-5, 6-2.

The eight-time champion and No. 1 seed next faces 22nd-seeded Adrian Panariño of France, who beat Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 5-7, 6-3.

Venus couldn’t complete a third consecutive comeback as she lost to 20th-seeded Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands 6-2, 6-7 (5), 8-6 in the third round on Friday.

“Just ran out of time in the end,” Venus said. “She played really well. You have to win the last point, and I didn’t succeed in that today.”

She is the fourth former women’s champion to get knocked out, joining Maria Sharapova, Petra Kvitová and last year’s winner Garbine Muguruza.

That leaves Serena as the only remaining woman to have won the tournament. The seven-time champion



AP Photo/Tim Ireland

Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands, left, meets Venus Williams of the US at the net after defeating her in their women’s singles match on the fifth day at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London on Friday.

came from a break down in the first set to get past Kristina Mladenovic 7-5, 7-6 (2).

Venus had rallied from a set down in her first two matches. Her exit means eight of the top 10 seeded women have gone out before the end of Week 1.

The 38-year-old American, last year’s runner-up, was the oldest women’s singles entrant in 2018.

Serena took her Wimbledon winning streak to 17 matches, thanks in part to 13 aces. She missed last year’s tournament while pregnant.

She faces another mother in the fourth round Mon-

day: 120th-ranked qualifier Evgeniya Rodina of Russia, who upset No. 10 seed Madison Keys of the U.S.

“Serena is my idol,” Rodina said. “So it will be great to play against her.”

Keys also came up short with a comeback attempt after fighting back from a set and two breaks down, losing 7-5, 5-7, 6-4.

In a match full of big swings, Keys led 5-2 in the first set before Rodina won the next nine games to go 4-0 up in the second.

The American player won five games in a row to level and then broke back to make it 4-4 in the third set,

but Rodina earned another break to secure victory.

Rodina, through to the fourth round of a Grand Slam for the first time, was 0-15 against top-20 ranked opponents before Friday’s win.

Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev reached the third round in the men’s event by beating Taylor Fritz of the U.S. 6-4, 5-7, 6-7 (0), 6-1, 6-2 in a match that was suspended on Thursday after the third set.

Zverev also erased a 2-1 deficit in sets three times to reach the quarterfinals of the French Open, his best result at a Grand Slam.

COACH: Wants to call Pendleton home for many years

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after his parents split. After graduating from Magic Valley Christian School, Dong attended Boise State University where he spent time with the Broncos’ men’s basketball team and “got involved with the scout team ... and just learned the ins and outs of a Division I program,” he said.

After graduating from Boise State in 2007, Dong landed a job at Filer where he worked for the past 10 years as a teacher, administrator and coach.

“He’s a great combination,” Jerome said. “He’s a great addition to our PE/Health department, well-rounded educator and coach and he’s been at it for 10 years. He came from a school of similar size and has been coaching there for

10 years as an assistant, JV coach, athletic director and dean of students. And he knocked it out of the park in the interview.”

Dong will take over a Buckaroos program that has been one of the most consistent winners in Class 5A in the last five years. Under Broaddus and Tedder, Pendleton was 76-47 overall (.618) and went 35-10 in the Columbia River Conference with three conference championships. The team finished fourth in the state tournament in 2016-17.

“It’s a unique situation because more times than not when a coach leaves it’s a bad breakup or the cupboards are bare,” Dong said. “But I’m walking into a situation where the team is returning the (conference) player of the year in Tyler Newsom and some other tal-

ented kids. I had a chance to watch some film of them and we had an open gym and they’re better than advertised ... they impressed me for sure.”

At Pendleton, Dong said he wants to get involved with youth programs as much as possible and hold different camps to help mold the boys that might become varsity Buckaroos down the road.

And for the current high schoolers, Dong hopes to keep the Pendleton winning tradition alive. He got a feel for the school and the team while visiting recently, and believes that with Pendleton’s “top-notch facilities” and talented athletes the Buckaroos will remain one of the best in 5A.

“Realistically we want to win league championships every year,” he said. “And

then of course the ultimate goal is to get to state and win it.”

Dong said he is excited to bring his family — wife Jessica, and four kids Addie (8 years old), Aubrey (5), Titus (3) and Paxton (three months) — to Eastern Oregon and to hopefully call Pendleton home for many years to come.

“That’s the plan,” he says. “Especially with the age of my two oldest girls getting started in school, it’s hard to move once you put down roots. The ideal situation here is to be around 10 years at least, hopefully more. ... But I’m ready to get started.”

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OSU: Fehmel and Abel could become 1-2 punch

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12 pitcher of the year and All-American.

Bryce Fehmel and Kevin Abel could become OSU’s new 1-2 punch atop the weekend rotation. Fehmel, a senior-to-be, owns a 26-5 overall record and 3.17 ERA in 61 career appearances (40 starts) while Abel is coming off one of the greatest runs in CWS history.

In seven starts and 16 relief outings as a freshman, Abel finished 8-1 with 108 strikeouts and a 2.88 ERA in 81½ innings. The righty tossed a two-hit shutout to seal the national championship and was the first pitcher to win four games at the same CWS.

Anderson said Abel’s 10-strikeout effort against Arkansas was the best pitching performance he’d ever witnessed.

“Especially with the way his season went,” Anderson explained. “He had his ups and downs and I’m sure a lot of people doubted him, but that’s what your freshman year is for. He came into the biggest moments of his life and he was as cool as I’ve seen anyone be.”

Fellow returnees Grant Gambrell, Christian Chamberlain, Sam Tweedt, Jordan Britton and Nathan Burns all possess starting experience. Key relievers Brandon Eisert, Dylan Pearce and Mulholland have also worked extended innings while Dakota Donovan came on late in the season. Mitchell Verburg redshirted in 2018 and could be another righty option out of the pen.

The loss of Heimlich is significant, but OSU’s crop of arms projects to be stron-

ger from top to bottom next year.

“All those questions about this pitching staff were answered in Omaha,” said Gretler, who recently signed with the Pittsburgh Pirates. “And they might even be better because guys will be older and more experienced.”

Added Mulholland: “I can’t really tell you who is going to fit in there, but it’s going to be exciting to watch it shake out.”

Adley Rutschman, a two-year starter at catcher and potential No. 1 overall pick in next year’s MLB draft, will be back to anchor OSU’s defense and batting order. The majority of Zak Taylor’s 48 starts in 2018 came at first base.

Corner infielder Tyler Malone (41 starts), all-around infielder Andy Armstrong (33) and outfielder Preston Jones (13) all saw plenty of time last season. Armstrong filled in admirably at second base for Madrigal, who missed 26 games with a broken left wrist.

Jones is likely to take over for Kwan in center while Joe Casey projects as a left fielder.

“There are some really good players that didn’t get to play much this year,” coach Pat Casey said. “Just a lot of good guys there.”

OSU must replace seven of its top hitters from a team that led the Pac-12 with a .321 batting average, but Gretler isn’t expecting the offense to fall apart.

“The talent is obviously there,” Gretler said. “There’s no doubt it’s going to be different, but every year guys step up and improve. Whoever it is, it’ll be great to see.”

LEGION: Two more tough loses for Hodgen

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runs early and lost the lead in the final inning.

Hodgen scored twice in the first inning when Quinn Doherty drove in Ty Beers with a sacrifice fly RBI and Logan Weinke brought home Kyle Field with a RBI single. The team made it a 3-0 lead in the third inning when Weinke hit his second RBI single of the game, scoring Field again.

However, in the seventh inning, starting pitcher Tanner Sweek gave up a walk and two singles that scored one run to get Northern Lakes on the board. Then after Ryan Stahl took over in relief, Northern Lakes drew another walk, reached on an error that also scored the tying two runs, and then hit a single to bring in the go-ahead run.