



BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL RACE TEAM, TWICE!

A race team is all about people

By Jimmy Makar

IN A WORD, BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL RACE team takes people. That's what it's all about, creating a group of people that pull in one direction for one common goal. In our case, that goal is winning races.

When Joe Gibbs contacted me to help him start his race team in 1991, all he had was a driver named Dale Jarrett, some cars, and equipment from Rick Hendrick. He also had a little bit of money and a sponsor, Interstate Batteries. When I agreed to come on board as the crew chief, it was up to me to find the people.

I told Joe it would take about 12 people to get things started, because he had a motor deal with Hendrick. So we went about interviewing people. I was looking for fabricators and mechanics at that time. The days of being a multifaceted crewmember were slowly fading away, but because we could only hire 12 people, we had to find a few that could do more than just the work of a mechanic. We needed people who had mechanical and fabricating skills as well and vice versa. We really wanted the least amount of bodies with the most amount of talent.

Not So Easy

It was a brand-new deal, built from scratch. Once I had people on board, we found a building that became our race shop; we started building and rebuilding race cars after evaluating what we could do with them. At this point, everything had come together.

This time, things weren't quite so easy. Sure, Joe had purchased Bobby's (Labonte) NASCAR Busch Series team in 1998 with the hopes of the team moving up to the Winston Cup ranks for the '99 season, but it didn't quite happen that

way. Bobby did want to run a few Busch races, so we moved a few guys up to the Winston Cup team and kept the Busch team intact.

The hardest part for me in putting together this second team was finding a crew chief. I didn't have to do that before, but I was pleased with what I saw in Greg Zipadelli. It also seemed a bit harder to find the quality people we wanted. There was an abundance of people to be hired, but the hard part was finding the people that would fit into the type of team we were trying to build.

Maybe we were more picky this time around, or maybe we were trying to race while we built this new team. We were actually trying to finish the '98 season and build a new race team at the same time. That was the biggest hurdle.

But once we got it together, we found that we had a cohesive team. All the personalities meshed. The goal at Joe Gibbs Racing is to have one race team, with two drivers and two cars. Others have three, four, or five teams, but they're all separate entities. Our philosophy is for all of us to work together as a team. Our fabricators may build a car for Bobby this week and Tony (Stewart) the next, but everyone works together.

Better Than We Knew

We didn't expect our two teams to be at the level they are this soon—especially Tony. I knew we'd eventually get to this point, but not this quick. I like to think the way we set up our teams has something to do with it. Our shop is not divided. Everyone cares about both cars, and everyone contributes to the success of both teams.

Next year, when Tony isn't a rookie anymore and we're racing together,

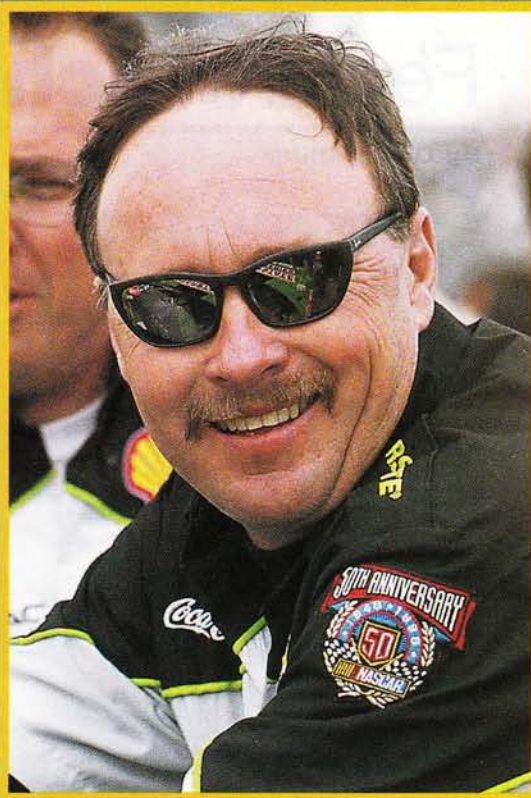


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there's going to come a day when it might be difficult to control the balance of egos and remain successful. Sure the guys on the #18 car want to beat everyone, including the #20 car and vice versa. There will always be a delicate balance you'll have to work on at all times, to keep a two-car team successful and internally healthy.

I think it's human nature that drives you to want to do more as an individual than as a team. But that's where the concept of the team being all for one and pulling toward the one goal comes in again. We try to live by Joe's motto: God first, family second, racing third. Although third is high on the priority list, we still do our best to approach things in that order.

It doesn't mean that we don't give 110 percent to our race team. We desire to win races and championships just like everyone else out there. We know it takes hard work to achieve that. But we try to create an atmosphere that brings out the best in our people. We want them to feel like the race team belongs to them. It's their race team; they have a lot to say about what happens, and what they do does matter.

Hopefully, we've got the right philosophy and it will carry out.

We'll have to work at it daily, I'm sure, but hopefully, we've got a good recipe for success.

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