Encyclopedia of Rural America
The Land and People
Second Edition
Volume 2
N–Z

Gary A. Goreham
Editor

Grey House Publishing
The linkage of sport with secondary public education was an important component of rural sport. This linkage developed at the turn of the twentieth century and was aided by two major factors. First, popular collegiate sports were diffused to high schools, first in metropolitan areas, then in rural areas. Second, the population shift from rural to urban areas accelerated in the 1960s, causing disruptions and crisis in rural communities. Local high school sports programs became a source of community identity and cohesion during this period. School sport in rural communities promoted parental, alumni and community support for the school.

Since the 1970s high school sports programs faced numerous issues involving junior equity in boys' and girls' sports programs, pay equity between men and women coaches, rising costs of equipment and travel, and increasing commercialization. The organization of high schools within each state also has been an issue as smaller rural schools were pitted against larger, urban schools in state tournaments. Most states resolved this equity issue by instituting a classification system based on school size. As late as 1996, however, Indiana high school basketball still operated under a single class system.

Little league baseball was established in 1939 with roots in rural America. Carl Stolz of Williamsport, Pennsylvania, organized the league with initial support from Floyd A. Mutchler of Lycoming Dairy Farms. Little league grew from its humble beginnings to sponsor a national tournament in 1948 (Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, defeated St. Petersburg, Florida). Stolz received corporate support for the tournament from the United States Rubber Company, which made a long-term commitment to support the organization after receiving positive publicity. Presently, Little League Baseball, Inc. has more than $11 million in total assets and consists of more than 7,000 leagues with more than 48,000 teams. Most rural communities have a Little League team. Further, there are more than 8,000 international leagues in over 40 countries that are affiliated with Little League Baseball, Inc.

Currently, corporate sport dominates athletics. However, informal sport can be found throughout the nation. Rural areas continue to produce athletes who gain national recognition and superstar status. Although the future of sport will most likely continue to be dominated by urban-based corporate sport organizations, rural sport will continue to be an important component of rural communities. From high school sports to Little League, community-based softball leagues, Pop Warner League football, tennis, swimming and other athletic activities, sport will continue to provide recreation opportunities in rural areas and serve as a source of rural community identity and pride.

— Duane A. Gill

See also
Community, Sense of; Culture; Educational Curriculum; Gambling; Games; Horse Industry; Recreational Activities; Stock Car Racing

References

Stock Car Racing
A form of automobile racing using modified standard American cars on oval, usually paved, tracks. Beginning as speed competitions among moonshine runners, stock car racing developed into a nationally recognized American sport in the middle of the twentieth century. Bill France spearheaded the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing in 1948, organizing and legitimizing the races. Professional drivers make it a family affair, involving several generations. The mostly Southern sport courted corporate sponsorship from the beginning and attracts fans from throughout the country.
From Moonshine Runs to Race Tracks

Stock car racing, born in the delivery of moonshine liquor in the 1930s and raised by Bill France in the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR), brought the thrill of driving fast cars to rural southerners. Using only American-made standard or stock cars modified for racing, the blue-collar, predominantly Southern drivers proved which car is fastest on dirt and paved race tracks. Corporate sponsors watch the cars circle the track as rolling advertising billboards for their products. Stock car racing became the fastest growing spectator sport, encompassing drivers and fans from other regions and economic classes.

On the back roads of the Deep South and mountain roads of Appalachia, young men delivered moonshine liquor to the Piedmont and Tidewater Flatlands during the 1930s. The hardscrabble existence in the mountain regions afforded the residents few opportunities. The soil supported few cash crops besides corn and grain. Converting them into moonshine liquor made these crops easier to haul to market than the bulky harvest. Despite the federal government’s insistence on controlling liquor production through taxation, the local, independent-minded moonshiners continued to produce their wares with a free-enterprise mentality; they believed it their right to make a living as they had been for years. To outrun and outmaneuver local sheriffs and the federal revenue agents determined to stop the flow of untaxed alcohol, the drivers modified and improved their cars’ performance. Junior Johnson and Curtis Turner became legends for their skill in implementing a “bootleg turn”—rapidly reversing the direction of their speeding car. Johnson once commented, “I always think someday I’m gonna look in my mirror on the race track and see a flashing blue light. I got caught at the still [in 1955]. I never got caught on the road. They never outrun me” (Wilkinson, 1983; Bledsoe, 1975). The competitive daredevil drivers, proud of their driving ability and cars, inevitably began to race each other to prove who had the fastest car.

From one-on-one speed contests on back roads, in cow pastures, and dairies, the participants moved to old fairgrounds and horse racing tracks. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, racing remained a local event, often disorganized and run by shady promoters who sometimes absorbed with the gate receipts before the race ended. The racing boom exploded with returning World War II veterans. The red clay in the foothills of the Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains offered an excellent natural racing surface. Farmers easily cut out a quarter- or half-mile oval, hammered together wooden grandstand seating, and created a racetrack.

Bill France Creates NASCAR

The home of land-speed racing, Daytona Beach, Florida, became the site of the first organized and sanctioned stock car race in March 1936 when the American Automobile Association, the owner of the timing equipment, sponsored a race of a specified length and specific purse. Sig Haughdahl, a motorcycle and car racer, cut two passes through the sand dunes to form an oval beach road course for the race. Although it failed because of the deep sand and infighting among the local politicians, one of the drivers, Bill France, Sr., saw the potential; within two years he promoted races over the beach course. Drivers from as far away as the red clay ovals of Atlanta, Georgia, traveled to Daytona Beach to race, often generating more excitement along the way than when they arrived. France continued to hold weekend races; his vision, along with several other racers and promoters, created NASCAR in the 1940s to bring the sport respectability and profit.

In December 1947, Bill France, Sr. and Bill Tuthill, a promoter of midget car and motorcycle races, called a meeting with other promoters in the lounge of the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach, Florida, to discuss organizing stock car racing. Within two months, France and Tuthill drafted the plan for NASCAR, a name suggested at the December meeting by Red Voght, an early builder of some of the fastest Atlanta stock cars. France brought in one of his service station’s customers, attorney Louis Ossinsky, to handle legal issues and problems. They incorporated NASCAR on February 21, 1948, with France holding 50, Tuthill 40, and Ossinsky 10 shares of stock. NASCAR set and enforced rules, ensured that promoters paid purses, paid bonuses to top drivers based on a points-earned system, and sought insurance for drivers. The first year began slowly with only nine races, mostly promoted by France. The following year France’s novel idea to hold a new car race catapulted stock car racing into the popular sport for which he had hoped.

The new race used regular cars directly from the showrooms, thus the term stock. Spectators finally were able to see which American-made cars that the average person drove were the fastest. The fans could more easily identify with the Fords, Chevrolets, Pontiacs, Hudsons, and Plymouths, among others, than the nondescript modified lightweight cars with big engines previ-
ously run in stock car races. The June 19, 1949, race on a Charlotte, North Carolina, 0.75-mile dirt track attracted over 13,000 paying fans and instituted NASCAR's Grand National Division. This track evolved into the Charlotte Motor Speedway, a 1.5-mile track completed in 1960. In neighboring South Carolina, Harold Brasington, a construction worker and heavy-equipment owner, built an Indianapolis 500-type oval, 1.25-mile speedway for stock cars in Darlington in the summer of 1950. To overcome the deep sand that bogged down the cars on the Daytona Beach course, France built a 2.5-mile triangular oval off the beach where he staged what would become, after the Indianapolis 500, the second most-attended car race—the Daytona 500.

Bill France, as president of NASCAR, made stock car racing a national sport. To protect his brainchild, France courted politicians to prevent interference with his tracks and to thwart unfavorable legislation that might ban racing. As a self-styled, benevolent dictator, he kept the reputation of the sport uppermost, often to the disgruntlement of owners and drivers seeking an edge. When one car manufacturer modified a model to gain an advantage, France placed restrictions on it to bring all cars back to parity. Driver Bobby Allison, often frustrated with constantly changing rules, recognized that “Big Bill knew there were a lot of people who wanted to see those cars on the track, and he knew that having them look like the ones at home in the driveway was important. He made the rules where there wasn’t anyone who could run away and hide. Another thing he did was keep the rules where it didn’t take a young fortune to get started.” But France also ruled with an iron fist. Allison remarked, “There were no arguments, no back talk, no nothing. If you were going to race in NASCAR, you were going to do it his way and not say anything until you were asked” (Glick, 1992). In the 1950s when Curtis Turner and Tim Flock tried to form a drivers' union, France suspended them from NASCAR racing for four years. When France retired as president of NASCAR in 1972, his son Bill France, Jr. assumed control of the organization. The elder France continued as the head of International Raceway Corporation that operates Daytona International Speedway and Alabama International Motor Speedway at Talladega (the 2.66-mile track constructed in 1969) until his death in 1992. When Bill France, Jr. died in June 2007, his son, Brian, became chairman and CEO, continuing the family dynasty.

The Drivers

Unoil stock car racing succeeded in Daytona when blue-collar, working-class White men entered stock car racing as owners, drivers, mechanics and fans, upper-class men dominated motor sports in America. As the sport branched out from the South, drivers from Northern and Western states began to win their share of races. Except for Wendell O. Scott, who raced full-time between 1949 and 1973, African Americans lack a presence in NASCAR. Women remain on the sidelines, unlike drag racing's driver Shirley Muldowney and Indy Racing League's Danica Patrick, as relatives or race queens; the male network does not support women drivers or mechanics.

The mainstay of NASCAR remains the tiers of racing which bring the sport to short dirt tracks (for the Modified, Sportsmen, and other lesser divisions) near small, rural towns in the South (like the old three-eighths-mile clay Lanier Raceway in north Georgia), short paved tracks under one mile (like Richmond), and to the speedways of Charlotte and Atlanta for the Winston Cup Grand National Circuit. From more than 50 races a year, NASCAR pared down the annual races to 30 to 33 in 11 divisions. Fans in Martinsville, Virginia; Jennerstown, Pennsylvania; Loudon, New Hampshire; and Indianapolis, flocked to what NASCAR claims is the fastest growing spectator sport in America. The France family-run organization fosters loyalty from the drivers who earn bonuses in special NASCAR programs. Successful drivers such as Richard Petty and Darrell Waltrip never considered racing Formula One cars in the Indianapolis 500; Cale Yarborough and Bobby Allison briefly attempted to cross over to Formula One but soon returned to stock car racing.

NASCAR is a family affair in more than its organizational control. Three generations of the Petty family—father Lee, his son Richard, and grandson Kyle—successfully raced stock cars. Other racing families include the Bodine brothers (Geoff, Brett and Todd), fathers and sons Ralph and Dale Earnhardt, Ned and Dale Jarrett, and brothers Terry and Bobby Labonte, Dale and Michael Waltrip, and Rusty and Mike Wallace. Kyle Petty remarked that since racing is a time-consuming sport, with racing from February through the middle of November and building and testing cars in January, “If you’re going to hang out with your family, you have to hang out at a racetrack. So when you grow up in that environment and look for something for your children, you say: ‘Well, it wasn’t too bad
when I was growing up; it can't be too bad for them, either. So you bring 'em along” (Denlinger, 1995).

The sport also attracts families as fans. As the race car craze outgrew its Southeastern roots, Northern,
Midwestern, and Western middle-class families flocked to the racetracks and televised coverage. Compared
with other sports heroes, stock car drivers make themselves accessible to their fans for autographs, pictures
and personal contact. The fans, in turn, root not for a particular car, but its driver. They identify with the hu-
man in control rather than the brand-name of the car or its sponsors.

Sponsors
Long before baseball erected billboards or colleges sought corporate tie-ins, stock car racing depended on
sponsors to underwrite the costs of running the expensive machines. In exchange for financial support, the
owners emblazon corporate logos on the cars and drivers' uniforms. Initially supported by beer and tobacco
companies such as R.J. Reynolds, which lends its product name to NASCAR's primary series, the Winston
Cup, stock car racing appealed to other corporate sponsors who recognized the advertising potential in having
their product visible on every lap of a televised race. Sponsors include McDonald's, Budweiser, Valvoline,
and their product competitors Burger King, Miller Genuine Draft, and Pennzoil. Even country music perform-
ers see the benefit of sponsoring a rolling billboard.

When R.J. Reynolds backed the sport in 1971, Bruton Smith saw a wise investment future in stock car
racing. He developed the Charlotte Motor Speedway into a well-respected, and perhaps the finest, racing
oval in the country. Smith constructed condominiums overlooking the track in 1984. When he purchased the
Atlanta Motor Speedway in 1990, he vowed to convert it into a world-class speedway and attract fans from the
over three million people in the country surrounding Atlanta and return NASCAR to its roots in the At-
lanta area.

— Susan Hamburger

See also
Community Celebrations; Recreational Activities; Sport; Tourism, Ecotourism

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Substance Abuse
Use of a substance that produces impairment or distress; can result from the use of illicit (e.g., cocaine,
heroin) or licit (i.e., prescribed sedatives, stimulants, opioids) substances. This article overviews the epide-
miology of substance abuse in rural areas and highlights two substances that currently present specific and
substantial threats to rural areas: methamphetamine or "meth" and prescription opioids, particularly
OxyContin® or "Oxy." Specific aspects that contribute to or protect from substance abuse in rural areas will
also be briefly discussed.

There has been an increase in focus on substance abuse in rural America in recent years. This focus has
been driven largely by reports in the popular media surrounding “epidemic” levels of substance abuse, par-
ticularly methamphetamine and prescription opioids, in rural areas. While data from the Substance Abuse
and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) indicate that prevalence of substance abuse is lower in
non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas, dramatic increases in the incidence of reported sub-
stance abuse as well as in substance abuse treatment admissions have been observed in rural areas of the
United States. SAMHSA data also indicate that substances are more likely to be injected in non-metropoli-
tan areas than in metropolitan areas. Rural drug abusers entering treatment report high rates of lifetime al-
cohol use (which exceeds 80 percent by some estimates) and unacceptably high rates of other drug use, par-
ticularly opioids (which exceeds 25 percent by some estimates) and amphetamines (which exceeds 15 per-
cent by some estimates). These data suggest that sub-