

Papis finding success in truck series



By Lou Bezjak

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Max Papis knew it wasn't going to be easy when he decided to make the jump from open wheel to NASCAR.

Papis has had his ups and downs since his Nationwide Series debut in 2006 but is finally getting to run a full season in one of NASCAR's top series, the Camping World Truck Series. The Italy native will drive the full season for Germain Racing, which fields three teams including one for last year's truck champion Todd Bodine.

"I wanted to run a full season in NASCAR because that has been my goal since I put my butt in the Hendrick developmental car in 2004," Papis said. "When my sponsor GEICO came to me last year and asked if I wanted to continue to run 18 Cup races or full season in trucks, it didn't take more than two seconds for me to say yes (to trucks)."

Papis drove in eight truck races last year with one top-10 finish. But most of his time the last two years was spent racing a part-time schedule in the Cup Series. He ran 15 in 2009 and 18 last year but some of them were start-and-park efforts. Papis was replaced by Casey Mears in the No. 13 car late last year.

Papis admitted he probably wasn't ready for the jump to Cup and would have rather run in the Nationwide Series. But his sponsor GEICO had to leave the Series when Nationwide took over as a sponsor.

"I have done everything right to my NASCAR learning curve until I jumped into the Cup car because that isn't the right thing to do. I couldn't say no, though," Papis said. "I knew I wasn't prepared, but I couldn't turn it down. I didn't achieve the results I wanted."

That's not the case so far this season both on and off the track. Papis is off to a good start in the trucks with a pair of top-15 finishes and is eighth in points coming into Saturday's Too Tough to Tame 200 at Darlington Raceway.

Papis also has stepped up his workout regimen with trainer Chris Carmichael, who used to work with former cyclist Lance Armstrong. The workout routine includes weights and plenty of cycling, Papis' other passion.

Papis estimates he rides about 200 miles on the bike per week.

"My workout gives me an edge, definitely, when I'm out there in the truck. I know that I have an edge on most everyone here in this garage because I've been taking care of my body," Papis said.

That should come in handy at Darlington, which has been known to be tough on drivers.

Saturday's race will be Papis' third trip to Darlington but first in the truck series. He drove in two Cup races at the track and finished 29th in last year's Showtime Southern 500.

"I love the history. When you look at the history of winners, they are just badass racers, point blank," Papis said. "That's what makes it really special. You need to be really brave and that kind of fits my style."

"I'm expecting faster in the corner with the trucks than with the Cup car and it's going to be a physically demanding race, but I am up to the challenge."