



Papis Has Accent On Winning



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By Jim Rising

Max Papis is in eighth place in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series point's standings. (Photo: LAT Photographic)

You notice two things when you talk to Max Papis. First, the accent from his native Como Italy, while still as thick as a good spaghetti sauce, does not make it hard to understand him. And secondly, Max Papis loves life, loves racing and is a lot of fun to talk with.

The driver of the No. 9 Geico Toyota Tundra in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series says that even when he is the heat of competition, beatin' and bangin' on a tough track like Darlington Raceway he thinks in English. So much so that it has become second nature to him.

"I went once two years ago to race in the 24 hours at Daytona for an Italian team and I had an extremely hard time to describe what the car was doing in a language that was not English," Papis said.

He still does lapse into his native tongue now and then. "When I don't want anyone to know exactly what I am saying I just make up a little swear word in Italian."

In interviews Papis is always upbeat and energetic. It's clear that he enjoys racing and talking about it. "It's not that I put on a face," Papis said. "I am truly enthusiastic about what I do because I love what I do in my life and that translates a lot into what I do in my sport."

Papis has driven successfully in motor racing series as diverse as Formula 1, IndyCar and Grand-Am and is a member of the GM Corvette racing team. But the 41 year old is determined to make his mark in NASCAR.

"I took a lot gambles to come over and race NASCAR," Papis said. "I made a promise to my father that I would do this, become the first ever Italian racer besides Mario Andretti to race and win in NASCAR. I am a determined guy and I will make this happen this year."

Heading into Saturday's Too Tough To Tame 200 at Darlington Raceway Papis recognizes the history associated with "The Lady In Black."

"For me if you look at the names that have been in that winner's circle they are the guys who have made the history of NASCAR," Papis said. "For me, Darlington means a lot. You definitely have to be on your game. There is no room for let's see how it is when you are up against the wall. It's a place for total commitment."

Having competed in all three of the major NASCAR series, Papis knows that to be competitive in the trucks you must be ready to be tough.

"It's a contact sport, where you really have to show your muscle. You beat and bang on people and I like that part of racing," Papis said. "From a driver's standpoint the Truck Series is amazing. It's very intense. You have to go hard right away and I enjoy the fact that you are up against top-notch guys like Todd Bodine and Ron Hornaday."

Papis thinks that his edge in the sport is his intense commitment to keeping himself in tip-top shape physically. His workout regimen includes sessions with trainer Chris Carmichael, who used to work with former cyclist Lance Armstrong.

"You need to work on yourself every day," Papis said. "I know that there are very few people in the NASCAR garage that would be able to compete on the physical side with me. I enjoy being able to ride 100, 150 miles on the bike in a day and combine that with strength training back at the shop with the coaches."

When Papis looks for a role model in NASCAR he focuses on Mark Martin. Like Papis, Martin is famous in the sport for his great attention to physical conditioning.

"To me Mark Martin is a great example that age doesn't matter," Papis said. "That it's all about how you take care of your body, how determined you are and how much talent you have."



(Left to Right) Members of Team Germain, Brendan Gaughan, Todd Bodine, Justin Lofton and Max Papis.
(Photo: LAT Photographic)

Papis feels that the transition from the highly technologically developed areas of motor sports that he has competed in such as Formula 1, where data is transmitted real time to teams of engineers for analysis, to the more seat-of-your-pants feel of NASCAR takes time.

“You come in from winning races in other series and people expect you to go out there and win races right away,” Papis said. “They don’t realize that to be able to go out and win races you need at least four years of driving the same equipment.”

In his locker is a picture of his close friend, Formula 1 champion Ayrton Senna, who was fatally injured in a crash while leading the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix.

“I look at him, he was a special friend of mine,” Papis said. “I look at his smile. When I get a little butterfly in my stomach before the start of qualifying or the start of the race I just remember to smile and go out do what you know, and things are going to come to you.”

SPEED’s coverage of Saturday’s Too Tough To Tame 200 at Darlington Raceway begins at 4:30 p.m. ET with *NCWTS Setup*.

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