

FROM POLITICS TO SPORTS LATINOS ARE BEING WOODED: THIS TIME ITS NASCAR SEEKING HISPANIC EYEBALLS



NASCAR dads, predominately white and usually assumed to have differing political affiliations and choices have not allow their political prejudices to overshadow commercial expediencies and have reached an agreement with Fox Deportes, the Spanish-language cable sports channel, to broadcast 15 races starting in February. According to the agreement, six of the races would be broadcast live. This will include the hugely popular Daytona 500, which will be broadcast in Spanish for the first time in the race's history. Other races, shortlisted for broadcast are races at the Bristol Motor Speedway, Charlotte Motor Speedway and Talladega Super Speedway. Reports shows that Latinos make up only a mere 10 percent of NASCAR viewers and hence it felt that it needed to go out of its way to reach a younger and more varied section to arrest falling viewership and improve television ratings. It recently took on board the services of Ogilvy & Mather to help them prepare a marketing roadmap that would lead Latinos to the sport. NASCAR has also asked people on its communications and marketing teams to assess and address needs of young viewers and involve themselves in Hispanic outreach. "It's important for us across the board to have a diverse fan base," said Steve Herbst, vice president for broadcasting and production at NASCAR. "We want our fan base to look and feel like America. We want it to be similar to what makes up the entire population." In an effort to orient Latinos to racing, Fox Deportes will show four half-hour educational programs before the races that will explain everything about the sport and provide answers to questions regarding the sport's rules and regulations, its culture, its background, its drivers and its past. The network will also wet appetites for the sport through daily and weekly news segments that will be run leading up to and during the races. Racing will have to compete with baseball and soccer for popularity amongst Latinos, who have shown a marked preference for the former two sports. Many major league baseball players are Hispanic. How much of shift in allegiance, will the efforts bring only time will tell? Vincent Cordero, executive vice president and general manager at Fox Deportes felt that assumptions of what Latinos like and what they don't like to watch are archaic and need to be looked at with a new perspective. "We have to redefine the paradigm of who the U.S. Latino market is. Across the board, a paradigm has been based on a concept that's probably dated," he said. There are some Latino drivers in NASCAR, but they are only a few. Some of the better known names are Juan Pablo Montoya of Colombia, Nelson Piquet Jr. and Miguel Paludo, both from Brazil. Viva La Raza, earned boasting rights by becoming the first auto racing team from Mexico to be a part of NASCAR. Once the Latinos can be enticed to watch the races on television and get them hooked to the sport, the next logical step would be to get them to buy tickets and watch the races live, "For every sport, we want people in the building," Mr. Herbst said. "Nascar is no different." However, NASCAR Multicultural Development Manager, Alejandra Diaz-Labrecque said that the program was more about education and not just about selling tickets or getting a quick return on our investments, "Our Hispanic effort, we know it is more about this key audience learning about the sport and the interest and passion will come later."