

NASCAR back on track

Villagers take in Daytona 500, reflect on Nationwide Series crash

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By Amanda Drapiewski

A day after the spectacular crash that injured at least 28 people at Daytona International speedway, a group of NASCAR fans reflected Sunday on the dangers of auto racing.

About 25 Villages residents spent the afternoon at Colony Cottage Recreation Center watching 43 NASCAR racers zoom around the track during the annual Daytona 500. But they also thought about the crash that marred the Nationwide Series race the previous day.



Photos by Cal Gaines / Daily Sun
Bill Wilson, Steve Sorrentino and Bob Bowden enjoy some snacks as they get ready for the Daytona 500 race Sunday during The Villagers Motor Racing Club's party.

Kyle Larson's car went out of control on the final lap and smashed through the fence intended to protect spectators, spraying them with debris. Seven people remained in a Volusia County hospital Sunday with crash-related injuries, the Associated Press reported.

"That wreck was pretty bad," Bob Gey said.

"Thankfully nobody was killed," Annette Gey added.

Die-hard racing fan Wendy Touchette said that with NASCAR, it's all about the risk.

A crash "can happen anywhere, anytime at any race track," she said.

Touchette and a group of Villagers had attended the qualifying races Thursday in a lower seating section at Daytona, never expecting what would occur two days later.

"It's the thrill of the sport," she said. "You just don't want to see a wreck that bad, but there's nothing you can do."

Gary Civiletti also attended the qualifying races with Touchette.

"The wreck was bad, but you move on," the Village of Buttonwood resident said.

Civiletti said that he has been following racing since he was 13 years old.

"I used to drag race, then I kind of got over that," he said. "I got started on stock car racing in the mid '60s."

Now, years later, he sat with members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, watching the start of the NASCAR race season.

"I just love it," he said.

Jim and LeeAnn Douglass are hoping to love the sport just as much as club members do. It was the first time that the Village of Amelia residents had watched a race with a group – or even watched a whole race.

"We've been racing fans since today," Jim said with a chuckle. "We've watched bits and pieces before but never start to finish."



Wendy Touchette and Mike Anderson prepare to watch the race at the Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

With the warm welcome from the members, the Douglasses hope to continue learning more about racing and making new friends.

"We came to watch the race, meet some great people and have some good food," Jim said.

For any residents interested in joining, The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club meets at 7 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

The club is a residents-only group dedicated to sharing all motor racing interests. Many of the members are NASCAR fans, but they also support local racing venues in Florida.

For information, contact club president Gerry Hafer at 751-3643.