

## BUBBA WALLACE IS THE KING'S MAN

**Darrell Wallace Jr. expected to drive No. 43 in 2018 as sponsor backs out of handshake agreement**

The iconic No. 43 Richard Petty Motorsports Ford is getting a new driver for the 2018 season but it's not the way the racing team hoped it would happen.

Smithfield Foods announced Tuesday it will not return to Richard Petty Motorsports even though the company had a handshake agreement with team owner and NASCAR Hall of Fame driver Richard Petty to be Aric Almirola's sponsor next season.

"We have had numerous discussions with Smithfield Foods regarding the extension of our relationship dating as far back as February," Petty said in a statement. "Over the past few months, Smithfield had continually told me they wanted to be with us, and I recently shook hands on a deal to extend our relationship.

"I come from a time when we did major deals with sponsors like STP on a handshake. I'm sad to see this is where we are now. This decision is very unexpected, and we are extremely disappointed in this late and abrupt change of direction.

Smithfield will instead join Stewart-Haas Racing in 2018 but will not be a part of the plans for Danica Patrick, who announced Tuesday she would not be



**Richard Petty wants to have Bubba Wallace in the legendary No. 43 full time next season.**  
PHOTO BY LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC



retuning to the No. 10 car next season.

With Almirola without a ride for 2018, African-American driver Darrell Wallace Jr. is expected to drive No. 43 next season, according to Motorsport.com. Wallace became just the fourth black driver in NASCAR Cup history when he made his debut at Pocono Raceway earlier this year. He will be the first full-time black driver in Cup Series history.

No official announcement has been made on the but Petty intends to keep his operation running.

"Losing a sponsor of this magnitude in September is a significant set-back

to Richard Petty Motorsports, but Andy (Murstein) and I are committed to moving forward with the No. 43 team," Petty said. "We have a lot of great partners who have expressed their continued support, and our fans will rally around the No. 43. We've been around since 1949, and we'll be around a lot longer."

Breaking NASCAR barriers is nothing new for Wallace, who in 2013 also became the first African-American driver since Hall of Famer Wendell Scott to win a race in one of NASCAR's three national series when he won at Martinsville in the Truck Series.

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