

Job pool empties at Speed Channel and NASCAR

Today marks the beginning of a tough couple of weeks for two groups of individuals who earn a living in NASCAR.

The first – broadcasters and behind-the-scenes personnel at SPEED – have known for months their jobs would be eliminated in the switch from the television network's all-motorsports format to the new multi-sport Fox Sports 1 program offerings.

The second – full-time NASCAR officials – will begin finding out their fate in two weeks at Bristol.

Film At 11?

For months now, Fox has been trumpeting the debut of Fox Sports 1. After 18 years of being America's only full-time motorsports network, Charlotte, NC-based SPEED will go dark when Fox Sports 1 takes over this Saturday, August 17.

The 'new' Fox Sports 1 network will still telecast NASCAR Sprint Cup practice and qualifying sessions and Camping World Truck Series races. Unlike SPEED, it will also feature baseball, soccer and college sports among its main program offerings.

And while a few shows like NASCAR RaceDay, NASCAR Victory Lane and Race Hub will also be a part of the Fox Sports 1 motorsports programming lineup, many other racing programs such as SPEED Center and Wind Tunnel have already signed off for the final time.

Meanwhile, other automotive-related shows like Dumbest Stuff On Wheels, Wrecked, Monster Jam, Pass Time and R U Faster Than A Redneck will also bite the dust.

All of this is bad news for those working at SPEED –

especially those who moved from Stamford, CT when all of SPEED's operations were consolidated into a new Charlotte office/studio complex in 2008.

Some of the more than 100 SPEED employees have already hit the bricks. Others already know or will soon find out what their fate is. Considering the new Fox Sports 1 network is likely to be headquartered in Los Angeles, only a select few (those in the graphics division that will continue to produce Fox Sports 1 promos) will likely be retained.

The job slashing at SPEED comes on the heels of a 15 percent workforce layoff – or about 40 jobs – at the Charlotte-based NASCAR Productions studios last fall.

Bottom line – if you live in Charlotte and you work in the motorsports television production industry – you're probably going to be looking for a job in what is already a depleted market of opportunity.

And, for the loyal gearhead viewers of SPEED? Get used to less automotive programming and higher cable/satellite provider fees on Fox Sports 1 – all coming to you this Saturday.

NASCAR To Nix Officials? -

Just under a month ago, NASCAR announced a set of initiatives intended to streamline several areas of the sport. Included in the 11-point program was a projected overhaul of how the stock car racing kingpin conducts technical inspection at the racetrack.

NASCAR has indicated it will reduce pre-race inspections while increasing post-race tech. Meanwhile, it will now be done by a pool of NASCAR officials, not by groups of officials separated by series.

Can you say layoffs?

Anytime you consolidate efforts, there are sure to be casualties. As such, NASCAR will be looking to phase out many Sprint Cup, Nationwide and Truck Series officials.

Certainly, those in the pre-race inspection process have to be among the 'expendables.' Also on the block will more than likely be those who work at track registration/sign-in as



NASCAR is rumored to be replacing them with automated kiosks as early as next season.

According to sources, the first phase of this staff cutback will come at Bristol next week where NASCAR will be offering a voluntary buyout program to select full-time officials. The hopes are that as many as 25 full-time officials will opt out voluntarily and take a 'package.'

The rest?

They'll have to fend for themselves hoping to be retained as NASCAR initiates yet another 'modernization' process.

Watch for more on this evolving story as all three NASCAR divisions head to Bristol August 21-24.

About John Close

John Close covered his first race as a professional media member in 1985.

Since then, Close – a former Associated Press newspaper sports editor – has written countless articles for numerous motorsports magazines, trade publications and Internet sites.

His Close Calls column appears each week on www.CloseFinishes.com, www.MotorsportAmerica.com and www.RacingNation.com.

Close has also authored two books - *Tony Stewart - From Indy Phenom To NASCAR Superstar* and *NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series - From Desert Dust To Super-speedways*.

Close also spotted more than 150 NASCAR Cup, Nationwide and Truck events from 1995-2008.

You can direct comments/inquiries to Close at closefinishes@carolina.rr.com

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