

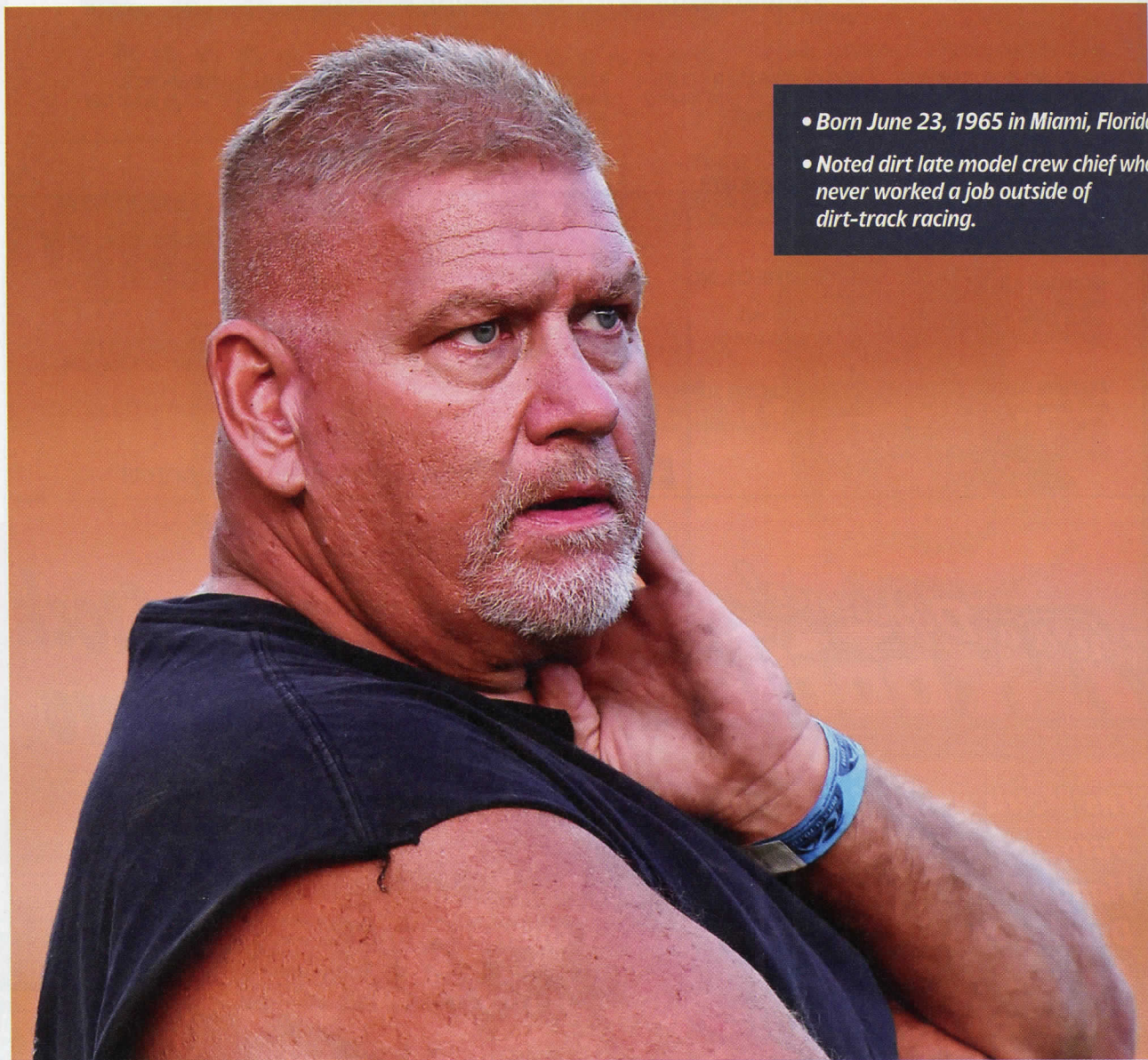
David Bryant

In His Own Words

PRESENTED BY:



As told to **Lew Boyd**



- Born June 23, 1965 in Miami, Florida
- Noted dirt late model crew chief who never worked a job outside of dirt-track racing.

You could say I love what I do. I was born in Miami and lived there for two weeks before coming to Maryville, Tennessee. I just love it here and don't want to go anywhere else.

As for my career, working on race cars is all I have ever done. And it has always been dirt.

I was lucky. We had a neighbor growing up named Cline Gregory, and he was a local level racer—and a good guy. I watched him carefully, and he became a mentor. Without me even realizing it, he taught me life skills, like how to grow up and to work hard. He always did things his own way, and I sure seem to have followed that course.

He also taught me about race cars, beginning with how to do fiberglass. By age 16, I was building fiberglass bodies, and that provided my living as I began to learn about other aspects of the cars.

By the early 1980s, I was crewing for a driver named Sonny Huskie at places like [now-defunct] Atomic Speedway in Lenoir

City, Tennessee. The cars were homebuilt in those days, and I realized it was not enough to ask a question about how to get faster. I could see if you didn't understand the adjustment, you weren't ahead. I made it my point to understand why, and I went after it—every aspect of a race car except for the engines.

By 1987, I became a paid crew chief for the first time. It was with Scott Sexton, just a regular guy, not the hero driver type. We became great friends and, as it turned out, we had lots of success. Our relationship lasted for most of 10 years, and, starting out as nobodies, we actually made a national impact and were a threat to win in super dirt late model shows with UMP, Southern Dirt, and Hav-A-Tampa.

We worked really hard, were very focused, picking and choosing which races we'd do, because we both wanted to be back home in Tennessee on Sundays. We were actually able to make a living out of what we won. I learned to be very careful about the budget.

There are lots of crew chiefs who will tell a driver how to drive. It was my job to understand how race cars work, and I've always been willing to adjust the car to the driver. So many people just want to know the right way to do setups for a hero driver. I don't care about that. I love working with kids, helping them to get to winning.

Of course, that is not to say that being a crew chief doesn't involve some driver coaching. I can be pretty flamboyant if a driver gets it totally wrong and does stupid things.

Sadly, over time Scott became ill and passed away. But our relationship and our style of racing really helped me to advance to bigger and wealthier teams. People had taken notice of us.

I worked for a number of teams after that and also got involved with some track operations. For three years, in the early 2000s, I was general manager of Volunteer Speedway in Bulls Gap, Tennessee. I have been around.

Then, about 10 years ago, I was hired to be crew chief for Blount Motorsports, a super dirt late model team right here in

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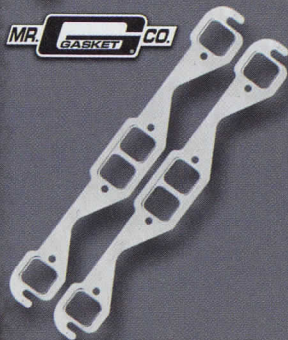
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Quote Worthy

"In '14 to '15, if we finished a race, we were pretty celebratory."

Winning car owner Steve Ritchey
Speedway Illustrated
September 2018

"We have done well, but time is passing, and I feel it passing me up. I'm still a flip-phone guy—no Internet, even. It's not that I don't love racing anymore. Maybe I like it too much."

Maryville. But at first, it involved more than just the cars. Turns out they had a relationship with Smoky Mountain Speedway, also right here in town, and asked me to do track prep there.

It was one huge challenge. The red dirt here in our area has more of a brain than any person I've ever met. You need to study it, learn it, watch how it changes color, water it, iron it—and massage it every night without rushing even a little bit. One load of water can turn you from a hero to a zero, and one night I really messed up. Fans were sitting there in the stands at 7:00 o'clock ready to go, and the place was so wet there was no way I could even pack it down. It beat me in the butt. You gotta get it just right. And to make it harder, each track is different.

I've been offered lots of track-prep jobs, even for motorcycle events, but there was certainly no way I could prepare both the Blount cars and racetracks, so I came back to the cars full-time. We have done well, but time is passing, and I feel it passing me up. I'm still a flip-phone guy—no Internet, even. It's not that I don't love racing anymore. Maybe I like it too much.

You know, if we have set fast time, have a good starting spot in the main and are thrashing to get ready, and I hear a street stock next to us start up and sound all screwed up, everything inside me wants to go help the guy. I don't care what class it is. It pays such personal dividends to help people do better.

The technology around these late model cars has gone right out of control. The expenses have become horrific. It is really sad to notice what has really happened over the last decade or so, not just for super dirt late models, but for racing in general. It was the mid-level workingman who populated the pit area as racing developed—concrete contractors, carpenters, electricians, the backbone of the sport. So many of them have bowed out and quit.

Five years ago, there were usually five races paying \$5,000 to \$10,000 to win, with a 35- to 40-car field within 200 miles of Maryville. No problem getting home on Sunday. Today there might be just one. That's a constriction of four times, and I hate it.

I'm not sure what can be done. I want to say "Stop! Fix it!" but the racers themselves just keep pushing that envelope, even when they know they can't afford it. No one wants to go slower.

No question we're still going at Blount, however. This year we're doing Schaefer's Southern Nationals Series again with Donald McIntosh. I noticed him parking next to us for a while and I liked the way he handled himself. He's a good kid, young and technical. And, under the circumstances, I feel Donald and I have become a good match. I watch the car out there very carefully, and, when he comes in, listen about what he is feeling. He then takes in all the data-acquisition numbers and works the shock dynos, and then we talk and come to concurrence about how to proceed.

We run 60 to 65 shows a year, and, even though we are a relatively small team, we make our presence known—even at the big ones like the Dream.

I'm proud of what we do and I still run a tight ship. But, with the expenses today, there is no way we can come close to breaking even.

You know, it hasn't been that long, but sometimes it seems like an eternity has passed since those great seasons with Scott Sexton, when we raced leaning more on our intuition—and it paid for all our hamburgers. 🍔