

**MAZDA SPEED**  
MOTORSPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Presents

# A Driver's Guide to Understanding Motorsports Media



***A resource for building championship  
form off the race track...***

*By Brian Till & Calvin Fish*



## A Look Ahead

Every time we go to a racetrack and/or get our credential at the beginning of a season, we always have to sign that pesky release form. You know, the one that states that motor sport is dangerous and so on. Well, perhaps there should be another release that states how dangerous poor media preparation and public relations skills can be to your career!

Seriously. Think about the bad interviews that you have seen or the stories that you have heard regarding behavior at various events. You laughed at the time, but we train to hone our skills at driving, but seldom hone the skills that can ultimately decide who wins and loses off of the track.

In today's racing world, you have to have the "whole package". Hopefully this guide can help.

Best of Luck,

Calvin Fish and Brian Till

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## First Impressions

It has been said that you only get one attempt at first impressions. Wow, rocket science. Although the majority of the focus of this guide will be on media preparation, you should never mitigate the importance of first impressions outside the media circles. It is your career and everyone you meet, everyone who comes into contact with you has the potential to help you move along your career path. They also have the ability to bring your ride to a screeching halt.

### ***Appearance***

Your appearance speaks the first words for you. Whether you are at the racetrack or not, people will judge you first by what they see. This is not to say that a tuxedo is your daily attire, but it doesn't take a lot to make yourself presentable whether you



are on your way to the grocery store or on your way out to dinner. If you look in the mirror and cringe or wonder “is this okay”, it isn't. Be presentable. That can mean sweats on the way to the gym; preferably clean ones and without explicit graphics that would make your mom blush! But dress for where you are going and be presentable.

Why? It really is very simple; you never know who you are going to see, or more importantly, who is going to see you. You are constantly on the lookout for sponsors who want to invest millions of dollars in to your career. Do you look like a multi-million dollar investment?

You come down for breakfast on a race weekend at 6:00am and there are only one or two other people in the restaurant. So, it doesn't really matter that you look like a street person in your grungy sweats with a heavy metal t-shirt that has some rather “adult lyrics” across the back. Right? Except for the fact that the lady in the booth two tables down just happens to be the wife of the CEO of the company that you've been working on for the last 6 months for that big sponsorship package. You, of course, have no way of knowing that until she and her husband stop by your trailer later in the day and she has THAT look on her face. You know the one. The one that says she will be pretty vocal to her husband about “that driver guy” who was wearing “that t-shirt that I told you about” at breakfast this morning. Whoops...

### ***Actions***

And what about dinner? Well that's pretty much a no brainer. You always behave at dinner, especially on race weekends. Right? Well race weekend or not, the same

applies. You never know who you are going to see and where. You may be on vacation and run into someone at restaurant literally on the other side of the world. I've done exactly that. Then again, you may not run into them; but they can still see you. Look, butter pats projected by a napkin will indeed stick to the ceiling. We all know that. But your days of winging things across a restaurant need to be fading away.



And obviously, the same reasoning holds true for travel. Airplanes and airports are no place to be ripping it up or giving the agents and/or flight attendants a hard time. And once again, it doesn't have to be on the way to or from a race. You are now in the public eye (or desperately trying to be) so act the part.

And then, there are the fans. You may not be famous today, but what about tomorrow? That is what you're aiming for, right? Well the way you treat the fans and spectators today will come back to you in the future. Have a bad day and blow someone off by being rude and obnoxious and you potentially made your paycheck a bit smaller in the future. Race fans are the most loyal consumers in the world. If you represent a sponsor and act like a buffoon, not only have you lost a fan but your sponsor may have lost a customer. And guess whose paycheck ultimately suffers?

And finally, what about your actions on the drive home from the track, the school, the gym or the restaurant? You are a professional racecar driver and your street driving will be scrutinized even more closely than those of your friends. You will also be pressured to show your skills; but save it for the track. Police officers aren't impressed with your ability to drive at high rates of speed. And rental car companies aren't impressed with your ability to play bumper tag with your fellow drivers on race weekend. Leave that to "Days of Thunder Part II".

But on a very serious note, a plaintiff's attorney will be impressed with the fact that you are a racecar driver when you do something stupid on the street and injure one of his clients. To him, it is like shooting ducks on the water.

### ***Attitude***

So you think you're pretty good, do you? And you manage to portray that thought process to everyone that you meet. There is a small problem though: you don't back up your attitude with your on-track performance.

Look, to succeed at any sport you have to have belief in yourself and in your ability. There's no question that the world's greatest athletes succeeded not because they

thought that they could. They succeeded because they knew that they could. Call it self-esteem, self-confidence or maybe even ego. But when others begin to refer to it as arrogance and cockiness you're heading into dangerous waters. If others refer to you as cocky or arrogant, you had better be able to back it up...consistently. And even then, you will rub many people the wrong way. Some of those people may be decision makers along the way.

You will be amazed at who you run into down the line in your career. Mechanics that you threw under the bus come back to be team owners. Members of the media that you so easily blew off become producers, directors or editors. Little sponsors that could do nothing for you take their little companies public. And all of these individuals will remember you...and your attitude.

### ***The Brat Pack***

While some of the drivers we deal with are quite young (and getting younger it seems), no one we deal with in professional motor sports is young enough to be excused the temper tantrum. You are supposed to be professional racecar drivers. Jumping up and down, stomping your feet or generally throwing a fit when things don't go your way isn't a way to impress.

Emotion is good. It is what often times drives us to win races and championships. It is what gets you through difficult situations: as long as it is channeled in the right direction. Emotion and passion literally drive this sport. But stay on top of both and use them to propel your career not get you on the television because of your child-like antics.

Someone's first impression of you shouldn't include your fiery temper and bad attitude.



## Second Impressions

Okay, we lied. You do have other opportunities to make impressions; second and third and fourth and so on....

It is these following impressions that we'll call "representation" challenges. And really, "the challenge" shouldn't be all that difficult. It is simply a matter of following what we just discussed regarding first impressions.

### ***Who do you represent?***

You "represent" yourself, your sponsors, your team and the series that you compete in. Go back to the scenarios that we discussed before and realize that not only you, but also all those others are part of the impressions that you make.



Having a series hat and a sponsor/team shirt on while arguing with the gate agent at the airport or while sizzling a blueberry across a restaurant at 50 mph is probably not the best "representation" in the world.

### ***Who represents you?***

What we mean by "representation" extends not only to you, but those that you surround yourself with and associate yourself with as well. Remember that your "friends" and your PR representative all represent YOU. I'm sure we all have "friends" that we wouldn't want affecting our business, but that is just what you do when you bring them to the track and put them in front of team owners and sponsors.

And the same goes for your PR rep. Research carefully and thoroughly before you hire. Get recommendations from other teams and drivers. Request examples of their work. Read their press releases for accuracy, length and storyline. You don't want someone representing you who is unfamiliar with racing or who produces a novel every time they create a press release.

### ***It Is Personal***

And the stickiest of all subjects when it comes to representation and how you are perceived: “Racing Dads” and “Racing Moms”. This can be an ugly subject. It is so simple but so complicated. These people are the ones that want, sometimes even more than you, your career to succeed. But by their actions (nagging, bickering, poor sportsmanship, complaining to name a few) they actually are sabotaging it. Having a discussion about how much they have helped you and how much that means to you is easy. Continuing that same conversation into the “but now people are beginning to say...” is undoubtedly one of the hardest things to do.

It is not wrong to seek some help here. Your PR person can perhaps help (without endangering their job!). Or maybe you have a manager or friend that is helping direct your career. Maybe they can help steer your parents’ desires in a more effective direction. Even team owners have been known to become involved here. The point is, if you need help, seek it. There is no reason to let well-intentioned family make life difficult. It is your career. Understand your duties as far as who/what you represent and who is representing you.

## Opportunities to Shine (Or Nosedive!)

Okay, we now all understand the importance of impressions and proper representation. You will have many opportunities throughout your career to put your skills to the test and come out shining. Of course you will also have the same number of opportunities to execute the big nosedive!

### *Interviews*

Throughout your career you will talk with print reporters, radio hosts, television reporters, pit reporters and a new breed of media hounds, those that specialize in web-based media. And although we will discuss in detail a bit later the different approaches that the different media require, suffice to say that these people take YOUR story to the public. Once again, you can help navigate those stories to your benefit with some of the concepts that we have already discussed. And also know that whenever you open your mouth, you are ultimately responsible for how those words are used.

### *Banquets/Award Dinners*

Banquets and Awards Dinners are a great place to shine. They are also fraught with opportunities to fall on your face; sometimes literally. If you only think about the guest list at such functions it becomes very apparent that this is where you must understand that your career



is being held up for all to see. Not only will you meet and mingle with team owners that can put you in the seat, but you will also be in front of series officials and sponsors that can take you to the next level. Any appearance on stage will only put you, literally, in the spotlight even more. And you don't have to be on the list to be called up on stage or to be called back if you've already received an

award or acknowledgement. Don't be caught pouring that last glass of wine out of the bottle that you have single handedly emptied as they bring you back up for another word!

## ***Humor***

Don't get us wrong; you have a personality so use it. Be yourself but be aware of pitfalls along the way. Humor is a welcomed trait, but if you decide to tell a group at cocktail hour an off color joke you had better be prepared for unexpected consequences. Remember the CEO's wife from breakfast? Now she just overheard your "guys only" joke. Guess who's not laughing?



## ***Language***

And language. It's the same story. Banquets, Award Dinners, Product Launches are all places where what you say can easily be overheard. What may not seem offensive in the group you are speaking with may well be to the group standing behind you. And they can hear your every word.

And because motor sport is an international sport, those not intimately familiar with the English language or U.S. slang might want to familiarize themselves with it. There are words used on a daily basis in other countries that don't carry nearly the weight that they do here. It is your job to know what is and what isn't acceptable.

## ***Alcohol***

To begin with, half of you are probably not old enough to legally drink alcohol. The other half need to understand its consequences. We said earlier that Banquets and Award Dinners were places to shine or fall on your face. With the help of a little alcohol, you can do just that: fall on your face.

First: age. If it is illegal for you to partake because of your age, what kind of message are you sending to everyone in the room when you do? Once again, it's not who you see as much as it is who sees you.

And if you are of age you need to go back to the concept of appearances on stage putting you in "the spotlight". Accepting an award for driving while you are slurring your words is not only unprofessional, it is irresponsible. The two don't go together. Not to mention the reaction that you'll get as you ramble on about this or that because your head is still swimming in that last glass of wine or beer you had.

And for both age groups, alcohol in general when it comes to your career is a dangerous game. Any alcohol related violation can be treated with harsh punishment, not only from the court system, but by the sanctioning bodies as well. At minimum, you will have a PR nightmare to deal with. At the worst, it can take a tremendous toll on your racing career.

# Media

## ***An Overview***

Anytime you have the opportunity to deal with the media, whatever the type, by all means, be conversational and be yourself. The camera, the microphone and/or the tape recorder may be intimidating, but you are not talking to them, you're talking to the reporter. Have a conversation. The difficult part is to be concise with your answers and still answer the questions. These opportunities are opportunities to differentiate yourself from others competitors. No one is trying to steal away your personality: quite the contrary. It is your personality that many times makes (or breaks) a good interview. And by all means, thank the reporter for their time as well.

## ***Relationships***

Other than your team and your sponsors, the most important relationships that you maintain throughout your racing career may well be with the members of the media. These individuals bring your story, your words, and your personality to life via the different media outlets. They control what makes air and what makes it on to the printed page.



That's not to say that, by befriending these professionals, nothing bad will ever be seen by the viewing public or by readers. But by establishing good relationships with the people that will chronicle your career, you help them understand YOU and what makes you "tick". They will better be able to represent your story to the public. And yes, at times, in editorials where it is all about opinion, they can be your best friend or worst enemy. Having good relationships just may get a little slack cut for you in a difficult time.

That said, the majority of people that you would like to have a good working relationship with in the motor sports media have been at it for a while. They know the sport and they know B.S. when they hear it.

Don't waste someone's time with a story full of excuses. You need to understand that reporters are busy, both print and electronic media. On any given race weekend

a reporter may be covering three or four different races plus several “human interest” pieces as well. As we said, they don’t have time for bull.

Here are some simple rules that will take you a long way.

- Be humble
- Admit mistakes
- No Excuses
- No Whining!!!



## Media Strategies (Sometimes Life is Good)

### ***Be Accessible***

Make certain that you understand the importance of your message as a driver and the message of your sponsors and be accessible to the media to present those



messages. Your PR people are responsible for delivering the bullet points to the media and setting up interviews. Their job is to get you in front of the media by keeping the media center current with your information and selling story lines to the various media outlets. You are responsible for selling those points in interviews. Be available and be professional.

It is important to remember the bullet points of the message you and your team are trying to convey. Every driver is a very different individual with their own style, vocabulary and personality. Remember to “be who you are” and deliver the important points in your own way. If you try to memorize written statements you will undoubtedly come off as being capable of only repeating written statements. Use bullet points and be yourself.

### ***Be On Time***

This should really go without saying. Everyone on a race weekend is busy. From the teams, crews and drivers to the people in the concession stands to the television compound and everything in-between, people are VERY busy.

You don't have a corner on this market and like you, the others have a job to do as well. Just like practice or qualifying, the media set their schedules before the weekend to make the most of air times, story deadlines and advertised press conferences. By being 15 minutes late to a scheduled interview you **a)** show how little you care and **b)** illustrate your lack of professionalism and **c)** do nothing to endear yourself to those who have taken the time to try and put you in front of the public in one way or another.

You are a part of the story that is being put together, but you don't have to be. There are others that would relish the thought of being in that particular media outlet. Grab the opportunities when they arise, make the most out of them and view each and every interview as a way to further promote your career.

Make sure when the interviews are set up that you have the contact information of the reporter and/or producer who is arranging the piece. Things happen on race weekends, so if something arises that will not allow you to make your scheduled appointment simply call as far in advance as you can and try to make other arrangements.

### ***Restate the Question***

One of the most important skills that you can learn when working with the media is to try and restate the question that you were asked. As we have said before, be conversational and be yourself, but try to work the key point of the question in with your answer and the production team/network will have a stand alone sound bite that can be utilized in updates and news programming. As for print media, they will have usable quotes as well that don't require a long set-up; you're providing that with your answer.

Q: "How different is the formula car from the GT3 Porsche that you are used to driving?"

A: "The formula car is so different from the sedans that I am used to driving. It is so much lighter, the power-to-weight ratio is much better, the aerodynamics are critical and the braking is spectacular."

Wrong Answer: "It's really different."

Obviously the correct answer can stand on its own. Print or television could use the simple set-up of "We asked \_\_\_\_\_ about his new challenge" and the answer says it all. Once again, working the original question into the answer creates multiple avenues to use the material in different media.

### ***Different Media / Different Approaches***

It is important to understand the type of media you're dealing with whether it be print, audio or television and then speak accordingly. What works in one form of media doesn't necessarily work with another. Jokes, gestures, facial expressions don't come across well in print. Television/film capture emotion through facial expressions, speech patterns, body language and voice inflection. Audio-only pieces capture the audible emotions such as speech patterns, voice inflection and verbiage without the visual backup. Print captures only the actual words spoken. Unless the writer takes the time to establish the moment, words alone will tell the story without the supporting attributes of visuals and audio. Be careful about joking and sarcastic remarks with print media. Many times those types of comments don't transfer well to print.

It is also important to remember the types of media and how answers need to be established. If you go back to always finding a way to restate the question, you will be in a good position. But understand that you need some idea of how interviews are going to be used. Two good examples are the sit down "personal profiles" pieces

that television sometimes does and radio interviews. In the case of the profile pieces, the nature of the piece is such that the interviewer's questions will not air, so you need to be sure to restate the question so that all of the answers are available to the producers if needed. As for the radio interviews you need to know if they are live or recorded. If they are live, a conversational approach is okay. Although, even in a live interview it's good if you can find a way to work in question restatement in the answer. By doing so, the station or its affiliates can grab sound bites to use later or for promotional purposes. If the interview is taped it is imperative to remember question restatement. You know that they will only use a few of your answers in the finished product so be sure to restate questions so that your answers sound complete and you sound professional.

### ***Respect the Interviewer***

You may make your living at racetracks, but many times those that interview you don't. Even in television, many reporters are new to the world of racing. All of that means what may seem so trivial to you or be something that you do every time you are at the track may seem like magic to them. Or they may ask you a question that "anybody would know the answer to". Well, maybe not. Remember that you eat, sleep and breathe the sport; they don't. Understand that you may have to explain yourself in more elementary terms with some outlets and/or you may need to reform the question for the reporter in order to make everyone, including yourself, look a little more intelligent!

### ***The Sponsor***

Ah, those that make this sport tick...the sponsors. Without them, we would not race. Using them in long, run-on interviews takes you off of the "Best Interview" list, puts you on the "Painful Interview" list, which in turn gets your sponsor less media time which in turn causes your sponsor to leave the sport! Definitely a vicious circle.

Obviously you want to get your sponsor as much coverage as possible, but no one (and especially the producers in the control truck) likes to hear NASCAR type sponsor run-ons in drivers' answers. Yes, we all know that the sponsors allow us all to have a job, but place patches accordingly, ask before the interview if they are or can be shown and/or try to work them in along the way. The "K-Mart, Havoline, Goodyear, AT&T, Pepsi, Gatorade, Energizer, Suave, Tombstone Pizza Ford really ran well today" won't cut it. You may get it in once, but only once. "The Ford was great today and with K-Mart and all our other partners we were able to put it up front." Answers like that will endear you to producers and consequently you will have more interviews and more chances to tout other sponsors. Face it, if you're boring and generally a bad interview; guess whose not going to be on the short list the next time?

## **Media Strategies** *(When Bad Things Happen; and They Will!)*

Driving a racecar is a lot like passing in football. Woody Hayes once said that only three things can happen when you pass a football and only one of them is good. I believe that the same goes for racing to some extent. Only one person/team can win. Therefore, when a pit reporter sticks a microphone in front of your face it's going to be for one of several reasons and only one of those (okay, maybe two) are good. If you're leading or won that's great. But chances are at sometime in the event they're going to ask you "what broke", "why the contact", "why are you're struggling today", "what happened in the crash", etc. You get the point. Bad things happen when you drive racecars and the media wants you to tell the fan about those bad things.



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### ***The Long Way Home***

There is no longer walk in the world than the walk back to pit lane after you have been involved in an incident or had a mechanical failure; especially if the fault was yours.

After the safety and medical teams have cleared you either at the scene or at the track medical facility, you should head back to pit lane. More than likely, that is where your team will be. They will be beginning to wind down from the now shortened race.

But more importantly, that is where the media will be. It is important that you get your side of the incident out to the media outlets. No one is going to come looking for you; there are not enough reporters to seek you out. The stories are in the pit lane and on the track. Come back to the pits, make yourself available for a few minutes and if no one comes to get your take after a few minutes, head back to the trailer.

## ***Emotion and Language***

When the unfortunate time comes go back to the beginning: be conversational and be yourself. That said, you'd better control your conversation and yourself! You should look disappointed and/or angry if something bad has happened; all of those feelings come with the territory and show viewers the emotion of our sport. But think before you speak and control your comments. Once the words pass your lips, you can't get them back.

"Colorful language" has become a huge issue in television these days (thank Janet Jackson and the "wardrobe malfunction" at the Superbowl for crackdowns on everything). Networks are very serious about this and you will have the microphone pulled from in front of you and the camera gone in a split second if you fail to control your tongue. You will also attract the ire of the sanctioning body and the networks won't be the only ones paying big fines for your language on-air. Emotion – good. Loosing control of your tongue – expensive! Why make a bad day worse?

## ***Show Respect / Get Respect***

We talked earlier about respecting the reporters that work your events. Experienced or not, these people can be your best friend or worst enemy when things go wrong.

To that end, if the moment has been dramatic and you need to a chance to gather your thoughts, ask the reporter if they can give you just a minute to get composed. Most of the

professionals you will encounter in pit lane are professional enough to give you that courtesy. But be aware, they will give you JUST a minute. If they work for television, the reporter has a producer screaming in his/her ear to get the story. Respect their job and they will respect you and your needs.



## ***What Goes Around...***

Along the lines of respect...once again know that the reporter will most likely try to help you out in a difficult time. However, if you tell them to go take a hike when there is something that the producers/directors and viewers want an answer to, you more than likely just damaged your level of respect within the television compound. As we said above, bad things happen in racing. You are a professional and expected to act as such both on the racetrack and off: in good times and bad. No one on the

television side wants to make you look like a fool. However, what you do to yourself by denying access or having attitudes above and beyond is solely your problem.

### ***The Lifeboat***

We all know that a racecar occupying a certain piece of racetrack always seems to attract other cars to that same specific geographic location: in other words, a crash. Just as we mentioned about controlling your emotions without blanketing them completely, be aware of the “Blame Game”. Everyone will want to know what happened and chances are very good that a reporter is going to ask you your side of the story.

Here’s the deal...you just got out of a very powerful and fast racecar that you (possibly with the help of one of your fellow competitors) crashed. Your bloodstream is full of adrenaline and the details of the crash may not be crystal clear in your head. You may think that they’re clear, but trust me, they’re not.

On the other hand, there are probably at least 25 state of the art television cameras around the facility of which at least two of them are guaranteed to have captured some, if not all, of your mishap on tape. Seeing that television is a visual game, the producer is going to give you about five seconds of face time to begin your explanation at which point they will roll the crash footage over your explanation. Trust me on this; you really want the explanation to match the video...perfectly.

If there is any doubt about any car in any way at any time throughout this crash you had better seriously think about employing the “I’ll have to see the tape to be sure” line.

Things very often times look different from another perspective. Don’t fall into the emotional trap of tearing up the other driver without absolute certainty of what happened. The other car may have been pushed into you by someone you didn’t see or any other myriad of possibilities that you couldn’t be aware of without seeing tape.

Quite simply put, give yourself an out. Give the interview from your perspective but know that emotion and adrenaline sometimes blur perspective.

“I’m very frustrated! This is the fourth time this year we’ve been involved in an incident. I pretty sure what happened but I want to see the tape before I really get too angry. But it doesn’t really matter because we’re out of the race and I’m more upset for the XYZ company that supported us so much to get us here. We’ll be back!”

You controlled your tongue, showed emotion like you should, didn’t commit to calling anyone an idiot and delivered your sponsor some well-deserved coverage. So easy to write but so difficult to do.

### ***The Other Option***

Remember the importance of having good relationships with the media? Maybe this unfortunate situation is one where you can utilize that level of goodwill and good standing that you have cultivated over the years.

Perhaps instead of apportioning the blame as we mentioned above or using your “lifeboat”, give the final word on the incident to the booth.

“I’m just so frustrated right now that commenting before I saw any tape would be a mistake but I’m sure that the guys up top got a great view of the incident.”

Once again, you related your frustration, came off professional in the control of your emotions and left the call to others who have the best view in the house.

### ***Confessions***

By all means, if the mistake was yours, admit it. Once again, you are a professional racecar driver and as a professional you admit when you make a mistake. That part of the game is probably the hardest thing you’ll ever have to do. But the respect that comes from others when you shoulder the responsibility, state the facts and then carry on will go a long way. Be honest and people will respect you. Blame everyone else for your mistakes and people will grow tired of your attitude very quickly.

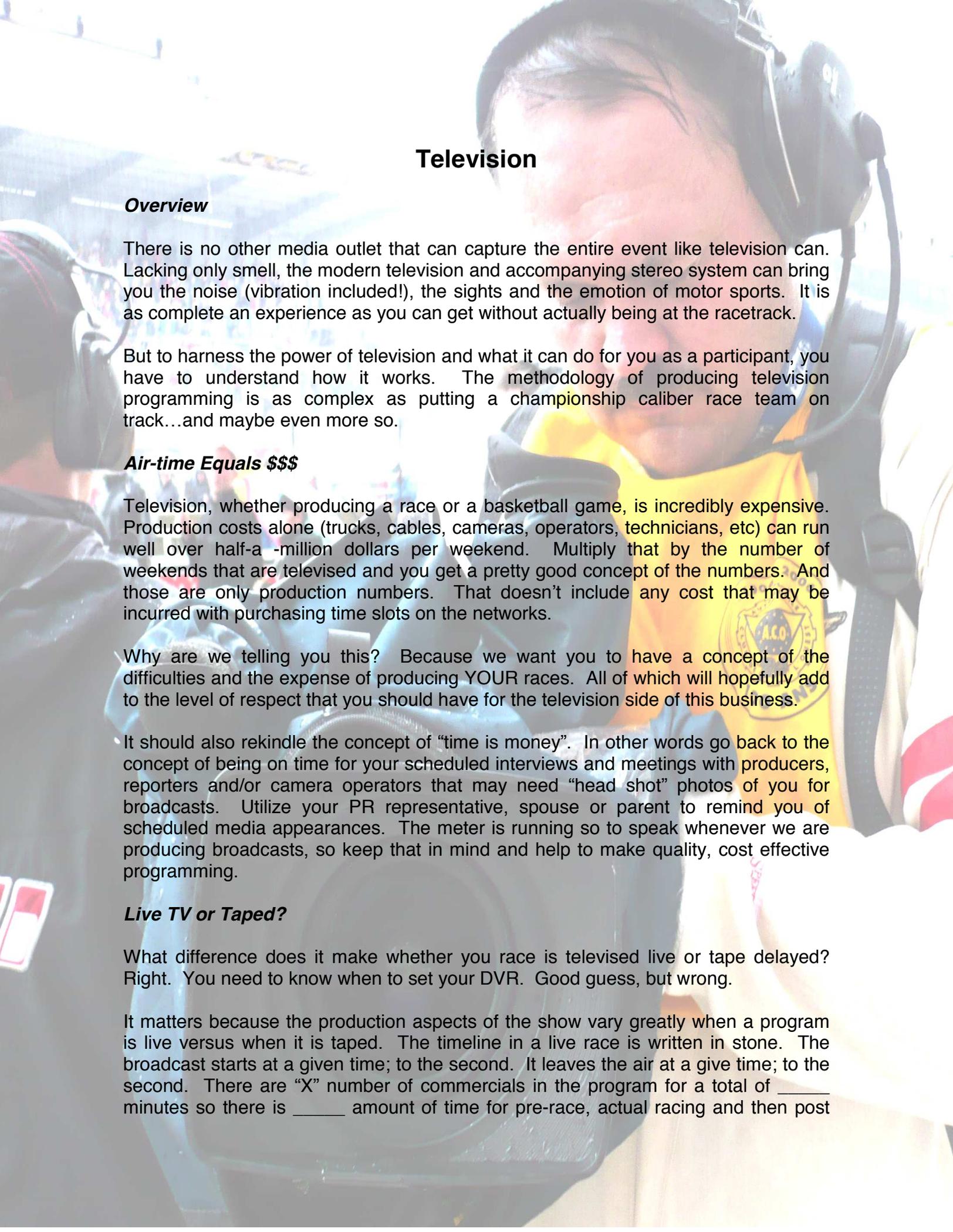
Making sure that you apologize to the other competitors is appropriate and to the team and the sponsors as well. Once again, your ability to show responsibility will go a long way with your team and your supporters.

**Never** accept what isn’t yours but take the hit if you’ve set yourself up for it and people will respect you for what you are: a professional.

### ***There Is No “I” In Team***

You win and lose as a team. We have heard many drivers talk about “I won” and “we had a problem”. How does that work? It is a race TEAM and operates as such. When you win the TEAM wins and need to be included in the accolades.

But there are always going to be good times and bad times. When the bad times come it is still a team. Be careful about apportioning blame to the team. You are a part of that group and the chemistry is critical. Not to mention that “team” that you’re blaming tightens your wheels each race! Everyone has to work as a cohesive unit so perhaps the answer to the tough questions such as “What’s going on?” needs to be “we need to regroup as a team and correct the problem”. You included yourself in the team and therefore included yourself in the fix.



## Television

### **Overview**

There is no other media outlet that can capture the entire event like television can. Lacking only smell, the modern television and accompanying stereo system can bring you the noise (vibration included!), the sights and the emotion of motor sports. It is as complete an experience as you can get without actually being at the racetrack.

But to harness the power of television and what it can do for you as a participant, you have to understand how it works. The methodology of producing television programming is as complex as putting a championship caliber race team on track...and maybe even more so.

### **Air-time Equals \$\$\$**

Television, whether producing a race or a basketball game, is incredibly expensive. Production costs alone (trucks, cables, cameras, operators, technicians, etc) can run well over half-a -million dollars per weekend. Multiply that by the number of weekends that are televised and you get a pretty good concept of the numbers. And those are only production numbers. That doesn't include any cost that may be incurred with purchasing time slots on the networks.

Why are we telling you this? Because we want you to have a concept of the difficulties and the expense of producing YOUR races. All of which will hopefully add to the level of respect that you should have for the television side of this business.

It should also rekindle the concept of "time is money". In other words go back to the concept of being on time for your scheduled interviews and meetings with producers, reporters and/or camera operators that may need "head shot" photos of you for broadcasts. Utilize your PR representative, spouse or parent to remind you of scheduled media appearances. The meter is running so to speak whenever we are producing broadcasts, so keep that in mind and help to make quality, cost effective programming.

### **Live TV or Taped?**

What difference does it make whether you race is televised live or tape delayed? Right. You need to know when to set your DVR. Good guess, but wrong.

It matters because the production aspects of the show vary greatly when a program is live versus when it is taped. The timeline in a live race is written in stone. The broadcast starts at a given time; to the second. It leaves the air at a give time; to the second. There are "X" number of commercials in the program for a total of \_\_\_\_\_ minutes so there is \_\_\_\_\_ amount of time for pre-race, actual racing and then post

race. It's all pretty simple math: only so many minutes in a broadcast and some are reserved for commercial breaks. The "show" has to fit in the remaining time frame.

There are other factors that come into play in a live versus taped program...

### ***We're live...You're on!!!***

In live television everything is choreographed to the second; literally. From the opening segment to the closing billboards (credits if you will) everything is measured with a stopwatch and must exactly fill the time slot given. The more you understand this, the better you will be in your media role.

I. The pre-race segment. You're out on the grid and you've been asked to do an interview in the first couple of segments. The pit reporter that is doing the interview is keeping you abreast of the timing. When they tell you that it will be to you in one minute, two minutes or whatever, they KNOW that it will be! In other words if you have agreed to do the piece, now is not a good time to run to the bathroom. Get your "personal time" scheduled a bit better. Chances are that the show cannot wait. If you're gone when the time comes, you're done. More than likely that interview won't be worked back in.

And remember the topic of being on time and the other topic of respect for each others' jobs. Not showing up for interviews or showing up late repeatedly is a great way to loose the respect of the producers of the programs. Show respect for those that are trying to produce good television programs of YOUR races and they are much more likely to show respect for you in difficult times.

II. Be patient. I know that we've asked you to be on time, but we'll also ask you to be patient. Remember that we've said that everything is timed to the second. It is quite possible that before, during or after an event that a pit reporter will want to get a word with you for the broadcast. They set things up with you and just as they are about to go live with your smiling mug, something happens on track or the previous interview went long. The producers decide that they have to cover the accident on track or must take a quick commercial break because of time constraints. Understand that no one is conspiring against getting you on camera; it is just the way things go sometimes!

If the interview is in the pre-race and gets pushed, the reporter will do what they can to let you know the progress. They are aware that you made time for them and postponed your bathroom visit to be there at a certain time. They will be in constant contact with the producers getting a timeline on the proceedings. If you must leave or get suited up to get in the car, the reporter will pass along that information. In this case it is not you that stood up television, it is television that stood you up! Do what you can to accommodate, but if you've got to go, you've got to go (so to speak!!!).

If there was an accident on track it means that you are more than likely out of the race anyway or you wouldn't be available to speak with in pit lane. In that case you probably aren't in the best of moods but be patient and let the reporter do their job. Chances are it will only be two to three minutes before they get back to you anyway and this is time that you can use to cool off a bit anyway.

And if the interview is a post race interview, chances are you're in a relatively good mood because you probably have a top three finish, maybe even a win! Victory lane can be a very hectic place. The producers are not only trying to get the winner's thoughts and possibly those of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> as well, they are also trying to wrap up the program. It is busy in victory lane and it is VERY busy in the production truck! Once again, just be patient and the reporter will find you and keep you informed as to the timing.

### ***Speaking of Timing***

We keep talking about the timing of a broadcast and how important it is. The timing of your answers is also critical. You may be asked a question that you give a fantastic detail oriented answer to that takes 45 seconds to a minute to complete. The problem is that there was only 30 seconds of time!

More often than not the reporter will let you know if your answer needs to be short and sweet. But in reality, you are always better to be as informative but as precise as possible. Obviously some questions require a bit longer response, but talking for the



sake of hearing your own voice will win you no friends! Be aware of how long you've been rambling. If you feel like your story is going on and on, find a way to gracefully get out of it as soon as you can.

You will also notice that reporters will have their own ways to let you know that you need to "wrap it up". Some will take their empty hand (the

microphone is in the other) and make a motion off camera to "wrap it up". I've known others, because they're standing so close during most interviews, to actually give a little kick so that you'll know to wind down! Whatever the tactic, be aware that they are trying to tell you to end it. It is always embarrassing to have the reporter just pull the microphone away from you while you are in mid-sentence because your answer has been way, way too long!

### ***Pit Lane Interviews...The Order of Things***

Perhaps now is a good time to explain just how these interviews in pit lane work; the order of things if you will.

When a pit reporter finds a story (you've crashed or broken and have come back to pit lane like you should or you've finished well but out of the top three) they will call the Pit Producer on their headset. The reporter will "sell" their story to the Pit Producer as to why it is relevant to the overall big picture. If the Pit Producer "buys" it, he will in turn "sell" the story to the Producer whose job it is to tell the overall story of the race. The Producer will ultimately decide whether the story will air. If things are good to the Producer he/she will in turn ask the Director to either find a replay of the incident (or you taking the checkered flag) to roll over the interview. Once the Director has the video to support the story, the line goes back the other direction. As you can see, it can be a bit time consuming.

Reporter – Pit Producer – Producer – Director  
THEN  
Director – Producer – Pit Producer – Reporter – Interview!

So...when we ask you to be patient, and be on-time and understand how things work, you now know why!

### ***Thank Goodness It's Taped!!!***

No, not really. The taped programming works almost exactly the same as live television. In fact most taped programs are produced in a method known as "Live to Tape". In other words, it is produced just as if it were live. The only difference is the programming is going to tape and not directly out onto the airwaves. There is still a time slot that the show must fill and all the other details of the broadcast are the same.

True taped programs that are shot in pieces and then built in post-production are becoming a little rarer. In fact it can cost more to produce these programs because of the editing time that it takes to build them. The one good thing about taped programming is that big foul-ups can be edited out. But don't count on it! If you merely make yourself look like a fool in a taped program but there is nothing wrong with the broadcast as far as FCC regulations go, you may be out of luck. Remember the relationship conversation? It helps to have friends at a time like this. If anything, a taped program allows for more replays and the like. Hopefully you are not a part of the replay unless it was a spectacular pass!

### ***Answers...Live or Taped***

The one thing that shouldn't change between live or taped interviews is the way that you answer the questions being asked. We talked earlier in the Media Strategies

section about restating the question and about being concise with your answers. The same holds true for your television interviews live or taped. And for the same reasons we talked about earlier.

If you answer a question and the answer can stand on its own (meaning someone can listen only to the answer and understand the subject of the question) then that answer can be used in a myriad of ways. It can appear in the show open. Broadcasters who know nothing about racing can use it on a news program without a lot of set-up.

Whether live or taped, answer the questions with a restatement you'll always be correct. And remember, short answers make better sound bites.

### ***Get the Picture?***

It is always amazing to us how paranoid some drivers are about sponsorship and the marketing-side of motor sports but regularly miss the opportunity to get good air-time for their sponsors.

The point is, it is your responsibility to make sure that YOUR sponsors are in the background of YOUR interviews. In a pit lane full of timing stands, pit carts and fuel rigs there is sponsor signage everywhere. Hopefully, your sponsor signage is on your pit equipment as well.



If so, make sure when someone asks you for an interview that the background is full of your sponsor's logos. We have seen interviews with drivers where competing sponsor logos are in the background, right over the drivers' shoulder! Many times the reporter and/or camera operator will catch this, but that really is not their job. Your job is to represent your sponsor, team and series in the best possible manner and part of that job is to understand the surroundings of your interviews.

The same goes for your driver's suit. Make sure that important sponsor logos/patches can be seen in a tight shot like a pit lane interview. Anything from the chest up will usually make air.

Don't rely on hats to tell your sponsor message; they make bad television. Any time you have a hat on in an interview it is very possible that the producer or director will tell the reporter to ask you to take it off. Hats usually create a shading effect across your face and make it difficult to see you. Sunglasses have much the same effect; they hide your eyes.

### ***What Are You Looking At?***

Maybe the real question is "WHERE are you looking?"

One of the questions that we hear the most when we set up interviews is "where should I look?" It is an honest question to say the least. Do I look at the lens or the reporter?

One of the first subjects we tackled in the "Media" section was to feel comfortable and be yourself in any interview. You are having a conversation with the reporter not the camera or the microphone or the tape recorder. The more you view it this way, the better the interview you will give. It really is quite simple when you think about it, but the red "on-air" light on the camera has a way of making intelligent people turn in to, well let's just say less intelligent people!

Remember, it is a conversation. It just so happens that other people are listening in. But your focus should be on the person that you are having the conversation with.



## In Closing

### ***Practice Makes Perfect***

You go testing in your racecar to become a better driver. You may even take data home to study. You look at speed traces, lap charts and you review the races when they are aired on television. You study your performance so that you can improve.

You need to take the same approach with your media presentations as you take with your driving. You need to study what you have done, target areas to improve and practice to become better.

On the racetrack, some drivers are better at high-speed tracks, other better at technical venues. In the same way, some people are just more comfortable with the media. Their personalities a bit more out-going, they feel a bit less nervous in front of a camera or microphone. But the good thing is that there is no “testing limit” on the amount of media practice that you can do.

You should strive to review every interview that you do. How did you answer the questions? Were the answers clear and concise or did you run on a bit? Did you work your sponsors in artfully or did you turn the interview into a short-track stockcar type sponsor run-on? Have someone else (PR person?) give you an “outside” opinion. And when you’ve finished, plug in your video camera and practice. Have someone ask you questions and be aware of not only what you say, but also how you say it and your physical posture.

As for print media, read every line that pertains to you and the story. How were your words perceived now that they are in black and white? Is the emotion and connotation absent? Are you being perceived the way you would like to be? If not, rethink the way you answered. Have someone give you a list of questions and then write or type the answers down immediately with no cross-outs or changes. Learn to “see” the answer in print before it actually makes it there.

### ***Checkered Flag***

Just like your race team strives to give you the best equipment, we hope that we have given you a quality look inside the media aspect of your business. As you go on with your career, media will change. We have seen the internet command a presence in the media marketplace over the last decade and there is no reason to think that other advances won’t come along as well. As the “vehicles” of media change and evolve, so will your approach.

But understand that at the foundation of the business will always lie the basics that we have discussed here. Things such as understanding the media outlet that is being utilized will become even more important. Restating questions, being concise,

being respectful, being on time all will remain cornerstones of presenting a professional image to the media and to the public as well.

Good luck with your career both on and off the track. And by the way, we'll be watching...

