

NASCAR's Bubba Wallace Receives Beauty for Ashes



Bubba Wallace is a Christian who is definitely a trooper. Amidst prudently confronting racism, he has emerged as a positive defining face in the world of professional stock car race driving with NASCAR. After almost being the victim of a hate crime and responding intelligently, NASCAR upped their sensitivity training for personnel. Following his activism on racial injustice, NASCAR began prohibiting Confederate flag displays. In publicly announcing that he deals with depression, Bubba received mounting support and hence, further opened the topic's discussion and healing platform. And as a talented drummer whose rhythmic strikes have helped him cope with depression, his drumming skills have been perfected.

This all points to the truth that as great outcomes can result from adverse situations, God does indeed give beauty for ashes. But before Bubba's face so beautifully became a defining face in car world racing, his parents knew that his birth was worth embracing. William Darrell "Bubba" Wallace Jr. was born in Mobile, Alabama on October 8, 1993 to White father Darrell Wallace Sr., owner of an industrial cleaning company, and Black mother Desiree Wallace, a social worker. Bubba was raised in the city of Concord, North Carolina. Like many professional drivers, Bubba started racing early. Bubba started racing in the Bandolero and Legends car racing series as well as local late model events, all at the age of nine.

In 2005, Bubba won 35 of the Bandolero Series' 48 races, and in 2008, he became the youngest driver to win at Franklin County Speedway in Virginia. In 2010, Bubba began competing in the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East, driving for Rev Racing as part of NASCAR's Drive for Diversity program, and was signed as a development driver for Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR). Bubba won his first race in the series at age 17 at Greenville-Pickens Speedway, becoming the youngest driver ever to win at the track.

later in 2010, Bubba won at Lee USA Speedway in New Hampshire, on his way to finishing third in series points. And epic for him in 2010 at aged 17, Bubba became the first African American to win the Rookie of the Year award in a NASACR series, his first major milestone of more to come that would defend his worth in the world of car racing. Bubba loved the speed vehicles travel and the camaraderie among drivers, clearly communicating the feeling that invigorates to People in a July 2020 issue. "It's an adrenaline rush," said Bubba. But as an African American soaring in a predominately White sport, Bubba has experienced his share of racism, but it just motivates him to keep soaring, something he told People in a July 2020 issue. "Whenever I was younger, I never would understand it, but my parents would always just be like, 'You know what, don't mind that BS that's going on over there.

Let's come back next week and beat their tails.' And that's what we did. We'd come back and eventually shut them up. So, it's been like that ever since. And now that I do understand it, I look at it and laugh and just think of where we're in this world. Obviously it still goes on every day, but for people to use that as something to offend me, or affect me, or knock me off my block, that ain't going to happen. It only motivates me to do better," said Bubba. So regardless of any

negativity towards him, including sour comments, looks, or stares, Bubba kept his eyes on his positive affairs... and continued achieving and soaring in car racing, being given from God beauty for those ashes.

Xfinity SeriesIn 2012, Bubba was in the "minor league" circuit in NASCAR, the Xfinity Series. In various years between 2012 and 2015, Bubba raced with the Nationwide Series for JGR, with Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, and for Roush Fenway Racing. In 2016, Bubba earned his best career finish at Dover International Speedway with a second place win, and in 2017, signed with Biagi-DenBeste Racing to drive the No. 98 Ford at Chicagoland Speedway where he would score a 10th place finish. Awesome Bubba!

Bubba is an African American soaring in a predominately White sport. So regardless of any negativity towards him, including sour comments, looks, or stares, Bubba kept his eyes on his positive affairs...and continued achieving great race finishes and kept soaring in car racing, being given from God beauty for those ashes.

Truck SeriesIn February 2013, Bubba ran a full season in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (CWTS) in the No. 54 Toyota owned by Kyle Busch Motorsports (KBM). On October 26, 2013, Bubba became the first African American driver to win in one of NASCAR's National series since Wendell Scott did in 1963, winning the CWTS Kroger 200 at Martinsville Speedway. In 2014, still with KBM, Bubba raced full-time with the CWTS. He won the second annual Mud summer Classic and the season finale at Homestead Miami Speedway.

As the years followed, Bubba kept on the up and up. With the CWTS in 2017, Bubba drove the No. 99 Truck for MDM Motorsports, and won the race. In 2018, Bubba drove No. 20 for Young's Motorsports at Kansas, in 2019 for TruNorth Global 250 at Martinsville and Vankor 350 at Texas driving the No. 22 for AM Racing, and 2021, Bubba joined Spencer Davis Motorsports to drive their No. 11 in the Pinty's Dirt Truck Race on Bristol Motor Speedway's dirt layout. Awesome Bubba! Bubba is an African American soaring in a predominately White sport.

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Cup SeriesIn 2017, Bubba moved on up. On June 5, 2017, Richard Petty Motorsports (RPM) announced plans to have Bubba drive the team's No. 43 Ford in place of an injured racer, making Bubba the first African American to race in the Cup Series since 2006. Bubba qualified for his Cup debut at the Pocono 400, and was able to advance to the second round and start 16th where he finished 26th and one lap down.

In 2017, after one player announced his departure from RPM, team owner Richard Petty announced in an interview of his and the team's intentions to hire Bubba as the new driver of the No. 43, and on October 25, 2017, Bubba was officially introduced to the team as



their new driver, the first African American driver to have a full-time Cup ride since Wendell Scott in 1971. Awesome Bubba!

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Prior to the season-opening Daytona 500, Bubba received support for his achievements from National Baseball Hall of Famer Hank Aaron and Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton. He drove the No. 43 Chevrolet Camaro to finish second, the highest finish by a full-time rookie driver in race history. In October 2018, Bubba was named in Ebony magazine's Power 100 list, joining the ranks of other prestigious African American sports stars and political figures.

At the 2019 Monster Energy NASCAR All-Star Race, driving with RPM, Bubba won the second stage of the Monster Energy Open and finished 5th in the All-Star Race. In 2020, in the Pennzoil 400 at Las Vegas, Bubba finished 6th for his best finish on a 1.5-mile track. When the COVID-19 pandemic halted further physical races, Bubba was 18th in points. As the initial months of the pandemic put a hold on professional sports, there was always something positive Bubba focused on, namely bettering oneself and helping others.

Activism and Racial Incident As much as Bubba has achieved and soared in minding his own affairs as a professional race car driver, when it comes to activism, he also cares about the affairs of others and gets involved.

As an African American who soars in a predominately White sport, Bubba knows how people can discriminate for nothing other than race. So in May 2020, following the murder of Black man George Floyd by a White police officer in Minneapolis, MN, Bubba began speaking out about the abuse of African Americans by the police, and hence, became the face of stock car racing's involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement. Bubba called on NASCAR to prohibit displays of the Confederate battle flag at NASCAR races. On June 10, 2020, NASCAR officially banned the display of the flag at its events. So as a result of Bubba's stance on racial injustice, and as NASCAR supported him with banning the Confederate flag at events, God granted Bubba beauty for those ashes. On June 21, 2020, it was discovered that a noose had been placed in Bubba's garage stall at Talladega Superspeedway.

As NASCAR condemned the act as "heinous" and said they would consult with law enforcement, Bubba intelligently spoke out about this unfortunate incident, tweeting his reaction on social media, and Newsweek wrote about it in June 2020. "Today's despicable act of racism and hatred leaves me incredibly saddened and serves as a painful reminder of how much further we have to go as a society and how persistent we must be in the fight against racism. Nothing is more important and we will not be deterred by the reprehensible

actions of those who seek to spread hate. As my mother told me today, 'they are just trying to scare you.' This will not break me, I will not give in nor will I back down. I will continue to proudly stand for what I believe in," said Bubba.

Also in a social media tweet as Newsweek wrote about in June 2020 was Bubba praising fellow drivers who are driving real change and championing a community that is accepting and welcoming of everyone. "Over the last several weeks, I have been overwhelmed by the support from people across the NASCAR industry, including other drivers and team members in the garage.

Together, our sport has made a commitment to driving real change and championing a community that is accepting and welcoming of everyone," said Bubba. Sometime following the incident, NASCAR drivers and crew pushed Bubba's car to the front of pit road in a show of solidarity. A subsequent FBI investigation concluded that Bubba was not the victim of a hate crime, as the alleged noose had been in the garage since 2019. Following the FBI's determination that came after Bubba's initial reaction, people questioned Bubba's integrity and called him fake. Bubba seemed apathetic that he wasn't targeted, and was frustrated by the backlash he received, and he vowed that this unfortunate incident would only serve as the impetus to keep him soaring, something he told CNN in June 2020. "I'm mad because people are trying to test my character and the person that I am and my integrity. It was a noose. Whether tied in 2019 or whatever, it was a noose. So, it wasn't directed at me but somebody tied a noose. That's what I'm saying. This will not break me, none of the allegations of being a hoax will break me or tear me down. It will piss me off, absolutely. But that only fuels the competitive drive in me to shut everybody up," said Bubba.

With Bubba's inner strength keeping him going forward, his Christianity, his family, fans, and other supporters, and with the NASCAR team having his back, he continued to soar, and from this unfortunate incident, NASCAR went a step further and began requiring sensitivity and unconscious bias training for its personnel. So as a result of Bubba's stance on his own racial injustice, as NASCAR supported him by requiring sensitivity training for staff, God granted Bubba beauty for those ashes.

Moving on Up In September 2020, Bubba left RPM and moved to 23XI Racing, a NASCAR team created by basketball legend Michael Jordan and NASCAR veteran Denny Hamlin. Bubba served as the first driver in the No. 23 Car. Bubba scored the first win for a McDonald's sponsored car since 1994. On October 4, 2021, after a shortened race due to rain, Bubba earned his first career Cup win at Talladega, the first Black driver to win a Cup Series race since Wendell Scott in 1963.

Bubba was humbled by his historic win as he told WSLS News on October 5, 2021. As Bubba mentioned his tendency to not focus on breaking records and making history, he was happy with the win, especially to please those who continuously root for him. "I know a lot of history was made today. I never think about those things. It







obviously brings a lot of emotion, a lot of joy to my family, fans, friends," said Bubba. Bubba has indeed been through a lot, but with this historic win, God definitely gave him beauty for those ashes. Handling Depression Some may argue that beauty doesn't exist without ashes, as it takes bad circumstances to happen so that a good, beautiful finish can eventually result. Whether or not some agree, Bubba has definitely acknowledged his personal ashes...his depression, a condition he's suffered with at various points in his life, something he revealed in May 2021 to Autoweek. "There's a stigma that, if you're on TV, are an athlete or celebrity, that you don't have problems. That's not true. I'm trying to erase that stigma because, I continue to say it, depression doesn't care who you are. It doesn't care how much money you make. It doesn't care what you look like. It doesn't care. You know? It doesn't care what kind of car you drive, or if it's a race car, because it's real and will attack you. There are days you feel like you're good, and the next day it's a slap in the face, and a punch in the gut and you don't know what to do, or what to think. You're just down in the dumps and then you have to go in public, put on your best face and show up and do your job, and there are days where that's really hard," said Bubba. As difficult as these ashes have been to Bubba, the down-to-earth sports figure who was just providing an honest answer to a media question concerning mental health, inadvertently, the beauty is that he has had legions of fans and other supporters reach out, thanking him for bringing more public awareness about depression and healing and hence, he has saved many lives and made people realize that they are not alone. In various previous social media tweets from October 17, 2019, Bubba highlighted the beauty for ashes results of his reveal. "A lot of people have come up or reached out to me after speaking out about depression, thanking me.. to this day," wrote Bubba. "People see depression as a sign of weakness. I'm guessing that's why a lot of people hold it in.. just by speaking about my struggles, it's helped so many people! So many! That's not weak at all. It's the exact opposite I feel. Speaking up holds a lot of power and strength!.." wrote Bubba. "We face a lot of trials and tribulations in life.. basically a lot lol. We all have different ways of dealing with them. My mother always tells me this is just another chapter in God's plan that he has written out for you. I believe that 100%..." wrote Bubba. Philanthropy and Healing Twenty-eight-year-old Bubba has been given much beauty for ashes. In 2017, he founded and runs

the Live to be Different Foundation. That same year, Bubba voiced the character Bubba Wheelhouse in the Pixar film Cars 3. In 2018 from February 15-February 22, Bubba starred in the 8-episode reality show series from Facebook Watch entitled Behind the Wall: Bubba Wallace that follows Bubba preparing to compete in his first Daytona 500. Bubba was also the National Motorsports Press Association's Pocono Spirit Award winner for the second quarter of 2020, and the recipient of the Comcast Community Champion of the Year award for 2020. In Bubba's first season with 23XI Racing, his campaign will be documented and spotlighted on Netflix, with camera crews documenting his entire journey, from concept to execution. Bubba told Autoweek in May 2021 details about the Netflix project. "It's been a lot of fun. Yeah, we've been filming since January, I would say. It was actually my idea. I wanted to give my fans an inside look. I went to my management team to see how we could make it happen. I felt this would be a perfect documentary to show everything it takes to be successful at the top level of NASCAR," said Bubba. Bubba and co-owner of 23XI Racing Denny Hamlin appear in the music video for Post Malone's 2021 song "Motley Crew." Bubba believes that God allows for dilemmas in order to strengthen people, and as music is indeed his outlet, Bubba has made this known in a social media tweet from October 17, 2019: "He places obstacles in front of us to test us, to make us learn. God also places blessings in our life.. people, music, sports, etc.. Racing plays a huge role in my depression to be honest. But that's all I've known for 17 years. Music is my counter act to it..." wrote Bubba. As the ashes go up in smoke, maybe the beauty is that Todd Rundgren, famous for his song "Bang the Drum All Day" will be placed in Bubba's life, and one day they can have the ultimate jam session... as Bubba drums away his issues, and as Todd drums away his work problems "like it was the boss's head," they'll be banging on the drum all day...and enjoying every minute of it. Beautiful, huh?

By: Tonya Huffman

Photos: NASCAR - Getty Images

BUBBA WALLACE