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Father Still Knows Best-The Family That Races Together(and races and races and races together)

Nextel Cup fans are knowledgeable about American's fastest growing sport. Most would have an answer if you asked them what family has captured more NASCAR titles than any other. Older generation fans who remember King Richard would say the Petty family. Those who still feel the fiery passion of the Intimidator would of course say the Earnhardt family. And if you asked the same fan what state that family calls home, North Carolina would seem a fairly safe answer. Safe, but wrong. Neither the Petty family nor the Earnhardt family holds the distinction of most NASCAR titles. That honor goes to the Kosiski family of Omaha, Nebraska. Brothers Joe, Steve, and Ed have accumulated 2 National and 6 Regional NASCAR Weekly Racing Series titles, and 12 points Championships on the Busch/O'Reilley All-Star Tour, forerunner of today's WDRL. Those 20 championships are more than the Pettys and Earnhardts combined.

The three well known racing brothers have driven to victory lane nearly 1,000 times. However, with hundreds of wins, the NASCAR titles, numerous track and tour championships, none would claim to be a Midwest racing legend. They do know one though. Their father Bob may be the best stock car driver Nebraska has ever produced.

Bob's first race came in the summer of 1952, at a fairgrounds track in Central City, Ne. The car he drove was a coupe owned by his father Joe. Sixteen year old Bob jumped into the car when the originally scheduled driver-the brother of Bob's future wife Grace-did not make it to the track because of motorcycle mechanical problems. So began a 29 year career in which the Omaha driver was a threat to win wherever he drove.

Just how many wins did the patriarch of the Omaha racing clan have? Wife Grace laughed when asked, and said "we never kept track of that kind of thing." Wins came frequent enough for the elder Kosiski to claim 13 points titles at Sunset Speedway in Omaha, and over 20 such championships overall. Bob's knack of finding a way to visit victory lane was a sometimes headache for promoters. Ex-Sunset promoter Craig Kelley stated, "more than once my dad had to put a bounty on Bob," a prize to be claimed by any driver able to stop a lengthy Kosiski win streak.

In 1960, Kosiski competed on the famed IMCA circuit against the likes of Ernie Derr and Ramo Stott. "It wasn't like today," Bob noted. "In those days you either raced IMCA or NASCAR, not both." Running over 60 races that year, Kosiski not only held his own against the IMCA greats, he

scored his biggest victory at the Minnesota State Fair. He claims that as his most memorable on track experience, though wife Grace added another memorable moment, "one holiday weekend Bob raced five times in four days and won all five races."

When asked to describe his father's racing style, son Joe stated "smooth. Dad had an old coupe he drove for two years, and only got one little dent in it. He wasn't one to pass a bunch of cars in a hurry, he just picked off one at a time. Unless he was mad," laughed Joe.

Kosiski neither encouraged, nor discouraged his sons from following him on the track. However, it was a part of their life, and all three wanted to become drivers. All three started working on Bob's cars by the time they were in junior high. There were several rules though. They had to be done with homework before they could work on the car, and they had to keep up their grades. AND, even though the track was close to home, the Kosiski kids did not get to go to the Sunday night races at Sunset Speedway until the end of the school year. "Even if we cried," added Joe.

When asked what was the biggest influence Bob had on his three sons as drivers, Joe stated, "I'm sure that Steve and Ed would agree it was to give 100%, or don't do it." "If you are going to do it, do it right," said Bob. And this philosophy has guided not only the family's racing endeavors, but the businesses they run as well, from Kosiski Auto Parts to being co-owners of Nebraska Raceway Park.

"I always felt some pressure from Dad when I first started racing," stated son Joe. "However it was not a bad pressure, and I think it helped make me a better driver. Sometimes even when I won I knew I had not run that good of a race, and it was easy to tell looking at Dad. We could always tell when we did good though from the smile."

Racing has changed from greatly since Bob retired in 1980. Camaros he drove as 'late models,' are now just a support class. "The racing is better, closer," stated Kosiski. "And while people may drive a little over their head sometimes, I don't think there is much intentional today. There is too much money involved."

Kosiski does help his racers a little, but is more content just to watch them. "I may help set valves, or with a motor if they are having some trouble, but I don't work with chassis or anything," he stated. And watching requires a little bit of effort anyway.

“We have four daughters that we are just as proud of as the boys,”

Grace emphasized. “Kathy Kovac, Mary Kay Flynn, Sue Koskovich, and Sandy Hobscheidt.” Both Sue and Sandy are married to racers, late model drivers Scott Koskovich and Jason Hobscheidt. So Bob has five drivers to follow, not just three. At Nebraska Raceway Park Bob and Grace watch from their normal viewing area atop son Joe’s trailer. “You can see a lot watching from the infield,” stated Bob, “though it is easier to watch them if they are spread out some.” There are some nights it is just impossible to watch them all. Joe might be at a WDRL event in Minnesota, Steve at a TORA show in Kansas, and Ed, Scott, and Jason might be at a NASCAR Weekly Racing event at ACS in Corning, Iowa. The invention of cell phones was a good thing for this family, and shortly after the conclusion of the racing, the entire clan is aware of just how good a night the family had at the race track.

With five cars often on the track at the same time, there are occasional “run-ins” between brothers or in-laws. And who gets to referee the bruised feelings at Thanksgiving or Christmas? “Things are pretty well settled at the track,” noted Bob. “And no one holds grudges.” But with seven children and their spouses, and 19 grandkids and other relatives “things are hopping anyway during the holiday season, at times we have more than 40 people at the house” laughed Grace.

In just a few words, Bob summed up what racing has given his family. While the wins and championships, notoriety and fans are all great memories, for the Kosiski’s, racing “has kept the family together. We are a really close family.” And in the end, that is what is important for all of us who believe that auto racing is like no other sport.

Sidebar-Now And Then

Today when any of the Kosiski family pull up to the pit gate at a race track, it is in a sleek hauler with a long, enclosed trailer. These wonders of the highway have made family participation in the sport much easier for drivers, but the Kosiski’s remembered when times were much different. Bob’s first tow vehicle was a tow truck from his father’s garage. Later there were station wagons or pick-up trucks pulling home-made open trailers.

“I can remember once the entire family rode in a station wagon towing dad’s car. We were going from a race in Harlan, IA to one in Owatonna, MN. That night we slept on picnic benches at a rest area,” stated son Joe. “And we weren’t the only ones either. There were four or five others doing the same thing.”

