



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

From left, Shaquille O'Neal, Gary Payton and Kobe Bryant are the summer's biggest Hollywood story.

Senkiw

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

An overworked limp playing basketball again qualifies as a tragedy. Payton reupped with the Lakers, meaning he just wants a payday with little work required. The rest of the cast members really aren't worth mentioning — just ask the Pistons.

The soap opera only gets better

in August when Kobe's sexual assault trial gets going. With a team that started the summer failing miserably in the NBA Finals, it's no shock that the future is in disarray.

Now, as the two best players in the league figure out what uniform they'll be wearing and the team searches for a new puppet, err, I mean head coach, the ending should be too good for even Hollywood to make up.

Briefly

USC's Odom agrees to 2-year extension

USC head coach Dave Odom agreed to a two-year contract extension with the university July 2. The contract now runs through April 30, 2008.

Odom's salary increases \$10,000 a year, bumping it up from \$150,000 to \$160,000, and he'll receive additional financial considerations as it relates to his media package. All other terms of the contract remain in full force and effect.

Odom is going into his fourth season at USC and was named SEC coach of the year in 2003-2004 after leading his team to a 23-11 record and its first NCAA Tournament bid since 1998.

"I am both pleased and excited that an agreement on a new contract has been reached with the university," Odom said. "I deeply appreciate the support of the administration and the support of the many Gamecock fans, who really have helped

bring new energy to our program.

Women's golf hires assistant coach

USC women's golf coach Kristi Coggins announced the hiring of assistant coach Marci Kornegay today.

Kornegay comes to USC from Winthrop University, where she served as an assistant coach for both the men's and women's golf programs since January 2002.

Kornegay lettered at the University of Mississippi from 1997-2001.

She earned Rebel Ringer honors for having the lowest cumulative score on the team in 1999, 2000 and 2001. In addition, Kornegay earned the team leadership award in 2000 and 2001 and was named team captain her senior year.

Kornegay also worked as an assistant at LSU from 2001-02 after graduation.

Darlington Raceway fighting to keep lone Nextel Cup race

BY PETE IACOBELLI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

New Darlington Raceway president Chris Browning won't paint any doomsday scenarios for the region or state about life without NASCAR racing.

"I'm probably, regrettably, in the best position of anyone to speak firsthand of what the consequences can be," Browning, the former head of recently sold North Carolina Speedway at Rockingham, said by phone from his new office Tuesday.

Despite Browning's efforts the past 12 years, NASCAR took one, then the other, of The Rock's two longtime race dates to satisfy larger tracks in less saturated markets. So he's understandably wary of some seeing him as the "Grim Reaper" of fading Southern racetracks.

"That's why I think I need to be proactive in speaking to legislators and officials and politicians," Browning said. "So many businesses in North Carolina just took (The Rock) for granted. They thought nothing was going to happen. Well, it happened and it happened pretty quick."

To prevent the same demise at Darlington — its Nextel Cup profile was slashed from two races to one for 2005 — Browning will convene with anyone who'll listen about the historic tracks.

One meeting will definitely involve Gov. Mark Sanford. Browning said North Carolina officials didn't seem serious about helping Rockingham until it was too late.

Darlington and Browning, who took over for Andrew Gurtis last month, will find an interested supporter in Sanford, said the governor's spokesman Will Folks.

NASCAR's announcement in May that Darlington would only have one race next year "certainly hit the governor's radar screen," Folks said. "He's very knowledgeable of what that means and keenly aware of the economic development ramifications."

Darlington Raceway sits in the heart of the Pee Dee region, one of the state's most economically depressed. University of South Carolina studies have shown NASCAR race weekends can pump up to \$25 million into the area.

Darlington's case also has a grass-roots push. A recently announced fan group, Fanz to Support the Darlington Raceway Tradition, is attempting to sign up as many members as possible (the \$5 fee going to charity) to show NASCAR's leaders racing interest remains vital and strong in South Carolina.

"They tell us we can go see races in Charlotte and Atlanta," said Bob Henry, the group's president. "I don't want to go to Charlotte and Atlanta. I want to stay right here."

Henry recently signed up country music artist Keith Bryant as the organization's spokesman. Bryant's song "Tradition Sure Runs Deep" off his latest album starts out, "We've got a family tradition

here, it's been around for 50 years."

Bryant says the song is about NASCAR racing, but easily translates to its oldest super-speedway in Darlington, where NASCAR first raced in 1950. "I'm proud if we can help keep racing at Darlington," Bryant said by phone.

Browning says he'll have to convince fans, trade associations and businesses to purchase Darlington tickets earlier than ever so he might have power with leaders at NASCAR and track owner International Speedway Corp. to pursue things like adding seats, improving the garage area and updating or rebuilding luxury suites.

Henry says sales are what corporations understand best. "They won't ignore us if we can do that," he said.

Whether Browning — or anyone — can grow Darlington is the big question. The facility lost a race despite its first Southern 500 sellout last Labor Day and capital improvements like SAFER barriers and a soon-to-debut lighting system.

And next year, Darlington's lone event comes on Mother's Day weekend, long the circuit's sacrosanct downtime.

But Browning says he took the job with confidence that NASCAR leaders were committed to Darlington's future.

"Am I concerned?" Browning says. "Yes, I'm concerned, but I'm excited too about what we can do here."



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