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Leadership Styles of Head NASCAR Executives: A Historical Perspective

A dissertation

presented to

The faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Joseph Aaron Hurd

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Keywords: NASCAR, Autocratic Leadership, Bill France, Brian France, Jim France

ABSTRACT

Leadership Styles of Head NASCAR Executives: A Historical Perspective

by

Joseph Aaron Hurd

This study sought to explore the leadership styles and theories employed throughout the existence of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). The research examines the decision process and subsequent outcomes, exploring how they ultimately affected the business and trajectory of the sport. NASCAR is the product of unique and specific characteristics of racing enthusiasts who turned their passion into an international empire. This illustrates how leadership styles, specifically dictatorial leadership, successfully managed decisions of the business. Through the use of qualitative research to review historical accounts of events, this study strives to explain how leadership guided the business from small beginnings to a worldwide phenomenon.

Data collected included document review, observations, and an interview. Synthesis of the data showed that each of the four primary leaders (Bill France Sr., Bill France Jr., Brian France, and Jim France) used the autocratic/dictatorial leadership style as they directed the sport. Historical evidence shows that this style of leadership was required to build the sport and move it to its current recognized level.

Recommendations for further study encourage future scholars to revisit the long-term impact of Brian France's leadership once more time has passed since his negatively charged removal from

the leadership position. Researchers would need to also examine the leadership of Jim France because at the time of this study he has been in his leadership position for less than two years.

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DEDICATION

To Crystal, who inspired me to reach for more. She is the love of my life, best friend, and truly an extension of myself. To my parents for their love and always being there to pick me back up. To my in-laws for their support. For my savior Christ, to better myself for your cause.

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I wish to thank my professors that have poured into me over this long journey. I have experienced amazing educators that have changed my life. Without David Matlock (even though he may not remember) and a rock show, I wouldn't have ever made it out of community college. Without Dr. Blanche O'Bannon, I may have never realized the dream of being a Tennessee Vol. My committee members for their willingness to serve on this project when it might not have fit their norm for dissertation service: Dr. Don Good, Dr. Bill Flora, Dr. Tom Lee, and Dr. Virginia Foley. I hold you each in great esteem.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is the world's largest organization that sanctions and controls stock car racing. NASCAR founders first gathered in December 1947 as a group of drivers, car owners, and race promoters led by H. G. "Big Bill" France, Sr. In 1948, it was officially founded as an organization. During the incorporation process, France controlled a majority of assigned NASCAR stock. The first formal meeting of this organization was held in February 1948. In 1950, NASCAR hosted its first race on a paved track in Darlington, South Carolina. France later opened the Daytona International Speedway, holding the first Daytona 500 in 1959. In 1972, Bill France Jr. succeeded his father and took control of the corporation. The era during which France Jr. controlled the organization began what is now known as *The Modern Era* of NASCAR. In 1971, R.J. Reynolds partnered with NASCAR. The result of that partnership was a multi-million-dollar investment in the development of marketing strategies that made the southeastern sport a national household name. This surge in popularity led to television exposure and, eventually, all races were televised by major networks. As its popularity increased, NASCAR became a premiere spectator sport in the United States (Hembree, 2000).

In 2003, because of failing health, leader Bill France Jr. transferred control of NASCAR to his son, Brian France (Litsky, 2007). The same year, due to financial concerns and further restrictions on tobacco-product advertising, the R.J. Reynolds corporation dissolved its partnership with NASCAR. R.J. Reynolds was replaced by Nextel in 2004; this relationship continued even after Nextel merged with Sprint in 2008 (Gluck, 2014). NASCAR experienced a decline in television ratings and race attendance, and Sprint withdrew its sponsorship after the 2016 season (Fielden, 2006). Monster Energy Drink became the new title sponsor, but for a

shorter contract than the leadership at NASCAR had hoped to sign (Gluck, 2016). In August 2018, Brian France was arrested for driving while intoxicated and possession of a controlled substance and was removed from his leadership role. He was replaced by his uncle, Jim France, the brother of former leader Bill France, Jr. (Weaver, 2018).

NASCAR, as an organization, has become more progressive over the years with more inclusion of women and minority drivers. However, there is still a decline in television ratings and race attendance that leadership hopes to correct. At this time, the sport sees the most dramatic challenges to leadership than it has ever faced (Willis, 2019).

Perspectives on Leadership

Leadership, in its best form, is determined based on who is most qualified and able to lead (Hitchcock, 2013). Leaders not only issue commands, but they implement change in situations and people as they guide others. The passing of leadership from one generation to the next has been a common practice regardless of the next generations' qualifications. As royal families, businesses, and tradesmen illustrate, the lineage of a dynasty does not guarantee successful leadership simply because the previous leader was related to the new leader. This has become a clear problem for NASCAR in recent years (Acker, 1989).

The France family has been at the head of the NASCAR organization from the very start. They have led it in all aspects—from rules, business structure, and outcome decisions to appointments of positions within the company—giving preference to France family members. In this corporation, a team of people controlled what was once “the fastest-growing spectator sport in America” (Simkins, 2019). Leone’s 2012 report cited NASCAR as second only to the NFL when ranking America’s most lucrative professional sports.

The France family has always been responsible for all major competitive changes and policy shifts within NASCAR. This is unusual among sports, as no other major sport is exclusively controlled by a single family (Alexander, 2015). The leadership style of the France family has permitted sports attendance, viewership, and cash flow of NASCAR events to rise to new heights seldom seen in sports history. Sports writer Ed Hinton stated, “[Bill France] knew it had to be a dictatorship to work” (Branham, 2015, p. 68).

The France family operates using a dictatorial leadership style, making decisions concerning all aspects of the business. Employees or participants not following directions were met with dismissal or the threat of removal. Seven-time NASCAR Cup series champion Richard Petty stated, “Well, let’s just say he ran the show. It was his show and I think everybody that raced in NASCAR for him knew it was his show. That meant that when he said, ‘this is the way it’s going to be,’ you knew there wouldn’t be any arguing about it and that there wouldn’t be any second thoughts” (Branham, 2015, p. 1). Petty continued: “My daddy would tell me, ‘It’s his ball, his ball game, and it’s being played on his ball field. If you don’t want to play, you can go home’” (p. 4). This style prohibits leadership to be challenged or questioned, although it is sometimes instituted more passively by clouding unrealistic demands in humor or allowing questions and input on the decision-making process, but ignoring responses (Gini & Green, 2013).

On preliminary viewing, an authoritarian style is typically used. Seldom are there opportunities for others to make decisions. The leaders seem offended by those who try to defy conventional leadership strategies. This type of leadership can be effective for producing action when needed, but often overlooks the skills and abilities of others that may improve the product (Hackman & Johnson, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this historical study is to develop an understanding of leadership styles utilized by NASCAR executives and to investigate leadership decision-making which has shaped the sport throughout its existence. This research was conducted through document analysis, and interviews with current NASCAR leadership. While much of the available literature focuses on the competitive aspects of the sport, elements of this documentation may be useful in the development of an understanding of leadership frameworks in decision-making processes.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used to guide the central framework of this study:

1. How has leadership evolved in NASCAR?
2. What leadership styles are most evident in NASCAR executive decision-making practices?
3. How has the leadership style of NASCAR executives impacted the business?

Significance of the Study

This research will potentially benefit those interested in leadership theory and practice who might be sports fans or wish to understand how sports leagues' leadership shape their business model. Relatively little research has been conducted about the leadership of any American sports league over its complete history. The idea of leadership is most commonly attributed to those within government, religion, business, and various organizations, focusing particularly on the administrators, directors and decision makers. In contrast, organized team sports are structured by leadership to focus on competitors more than the established body. The

researcher seeks to evaluate the leadership process for examination of the controlling powers, in this case the France family, of a major sport.

Numerous biographical works on founder Bill France and his son and successor, Bill France, Jr., have been written which examine their decisions and accomplishments; however, there is a paucity of research on leadership after their tenure or as a historical account. One of the more prominent biographical works has been published by NASCAR itself and written by B.A. Branham (2015), who works for NASCAR's public relations department. NASCAR's historical archives have been elusive to those wishing to produce works from outside of the company itself.

Key Organizations

To better comprehend the vocabulary surrounding aspects of NASCAR, a few important key organizations must be defined. These terms are as follows:

1. International Speedway Corporation (ISC) - The sister company of NASCAR which owns and manages a significant number of tracks used by NASCAR and other racing leagues. Founded by Bill France Sr. in 1953, the company signed contracts to build its first raceway—Daytona International Speedway—in 1957.
2. The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) - The sanctioning body and privately-owned company known for stock car racing in North America (NASCAR, 2019).
3. Speedway Motor Sports Incorporated (SMI) - A corporation that owns and manages tracks used by NASCAR and other racing leagues. The company was not official incorporated until 1994. However, Bill France's longtime rival Bruton Smith began

building the company in 1959 when he completed construction on Charlotte Motor Speedway (Speedway Motorsports, Inc, 2019).

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction, along with the purpose and significance of the study, research bias, and this overview. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature on NASCAR as a formal, supervising body, an examination of appropriate leadership theory, and a juxtaposition of desired outcomes as compared those demonstrated by the France family. Chapter 3 explains the research design of the study. Chapter 4 outlines the research findings. Chapter 5 lists outcomes and conclusions along with recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2. Review of Related Literature

This literature review includes a historical perspective of the leadership of NASCAR from its inception until the present time. The chapter provides a framework of NASCAR'S leadership since its formation. In order to understand the context of NASCAR's leadership, there must first be a context in which to compare the information. Thus, extensive information is included about leadership throughout other sports and businesses that operate similarly to NASCAR. Researchers present empirical findings on skills and characteristics of leadership theory used by the leaders through each of their tenures:

Wherever the focus of inquiry is on the effectiveness of leaders, or more specifically on comparing the effectiveness of different leaders in terms of measurable outcomes, studying the specific context leaders find themselves in becomes a prime task of comparative analysis. (Helms, 2012, p. 8)

This chapter will also offer insights into the legacy and corporate impact of each generation of France leadership.

Sports Leadership

Gregory (2011) stated

It's no secret that sports is all about leadership, whether that leadership comes from the best athletes, coaches or even commissioners and owners. Their voices are sturdy and commanding in the huddle or boardroom. They lead and teach by example, and they usually make the difference between winning and losing. (para.

1)

Leadership lessons from sports can be applicable to any walk of life. Professional sports are composed of individuals or teams who hold talents not commonly found among others competing within a set of guidelines to establish superiority. Expertise in physical and mental practices is developed through natural talent, practice, and training from leaders who understand what skills are needed to execute strategies that have been shown to produce outcomes beneficial to the set rules. Leadership is derived from team owners, coaches, trainers, or even the players themselves. Team owners seek out the best athletes, coaches, and trainers possible to maximize their chances of success (Guenzi & Ruta, 2013).

When professional sports were originally established, owners generated revenue primarily from fees charged to spectators for seeing the events in person. These events took place within enclosed ballparks, arenas, gymnasiums, and tracks. These teams were normally members of larger leagues who would schedule events with competitors to ensure consistent events and quality of competition for spectator viewing. These leagues eventually formulated championship events, which were normally determined by competition outcomes throughout the season (Wright, 2001).

Organized administrators formed formal sports leagues in the United States in 1869, just after the Civil War. The National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) established a professional category so that teams might compensate participants who played for established teams. The Cincinnati Red Stockings was the first team to declare themselves to be a professional team so that they might pursue the best players, thus allowing them to draw in the largest groups and maximum profits from attendance (Block, 2005).

Eleven other baseball clubs declared themselves professional that same year and reorganized under the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players which lasted from

1871 until 1875 (Block, 2005). For most of its existence, the NAPBBP was led by Robert “Bob” Ferguson. Ferguson, a player himself, was known for his strong character and honesty, traits long considered of importance among leaders. However, he was also known to be stubborn and suffer from a bad temper, which caused him trouble throughout his career (Pietrusza, 1991). Nonetheless, his funeral was so crowded by those who admired him that many people were turned away, illustrating the respect he garnered as a leader.

This league eventually closed, but many of its teams still exist today as part of the postcursor that is Major League Baseball (MLB) which was formally founded in 1903 (National League of baseball is founded, 2019). For the 2018 business year, Major League Baseball organizations reported revenues of \$10.3 billion dollars (Brown, 2019a). The league’s 30 teams played a combined 2,415 games with an average 28,830 in attendance per game, equaling a combined 69,625,244 tickets sold during 2018 (Brown, 2018b). By comparison these revenue numbers place Major League Baseball ahead of 54 countries in total Gross Domestic Product (World Population Review, 2019).

America’s most lucrative sport—professional football—formed as the American Professional Football Conference in 1920 and changed its name to American Professional Football Association later that year (Peterson, 1997). A short time later, in 1922, the league renamed itself again as the National Football League (NFL), the current league title. The league developed from a meeting of representatives of four teams whose leadership saw the benefits of cooperative business models. This would prevent unreasonable bids in recruiting particular players. In addition, this would assist in formalizing better schedules, thus helping each other generate more ticket sales (Peterson, 1997).

The National Football league elected Jim Thorpe as its first president, while he was still a player for the Canton Bulldogs (Golus, 2008). The temporary secretary—Ralph Hay, also the owner of the Canton Bulldogs—had the duty of naming the first official president to the leadership position. Hay chose Thorpe because his fame as an athlete lent more credibility to the league as a whole. Thorpe proved to be an accomplished athlete. A Native American member of the Sac and Fox tribes, he was an All-American football player in college (and later a football coach) in addition to becoming the first Native American to win a gold medal in the Olympics. He was also a Major League Baseball player who also competed in a professional traveling basketball team. All of this is evidence that Thorpe was one of the most well-known and most versatile athletes of his time. However, popularity does not automatically predetermine successful leadership. Thorpe’s greatest success as president was arranging a game in New York City which attracted approximately 20,000 fans (Golus, 2008). In fact, he never attended a league meeting even when the championship was being contended by several teams. In his absence team owners removed him from office and appointed one of their own to the position (Golus, 2008).

Currently, Roger Goodell leads the most powerful sports league, the NFL. Goodell came to the leadership position at the National Football League through a long process of ascending the leadership hierarchy. He started as an administrative intern after winning a letter-writing contest in 1982 (Adams, 2015). This process embodies the archetypal concept of the American dream: A young man writes a passionate letter desiring employment at an organization and ultimately achieves the head position of that very organization. However, Adams reported that most see Goodell as someone who leads through coercive influence, which puts him in a position that, as Northouse (2016) claims, is “ethically responsible to attend to the needs and concerns of

his followers” (p. 32) Since taking office in 2006, Goodell has instituted a personal conduct policy for the NFL which holds players accountable to their actions off the playing field (Goodell strengthens NFL personal conduct policy, 2007). This policy went so far as suspending the head coach of the New Orleans Saints for an entire season in response to the team paying bonuses for players to injure opposing players (NFL announces management discipline in Saints' 'bounty' matter, 2012).

This type of accountability was not often seen in modern sports, where industry influencers prohibited discipline to players in order prevent a disruption to the game and fuel the entertainment aspect of the sport. Goodell’s leadership showed that higher standards would not be compromised. He is aware of his desired trajectory with the league and expects that others act accordingly (NFL announces management discipline in Saints' 'bounty' matter, 2012).

However, Roger Goodell faced criticism when he was hesitant to react to controversy (Elliott, 2014). In 2014, Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice assaulted his then girlfriend in a casino elevator. Five months after the video surfaced the NFL suspended Rice for two games. After the penalty there was an expression of outrage and disappointment from media and viewers. People believed that the NFL, and by extension Goodell as leader, was dismissive toward the issue of domestic violence (Elliott, 2014). Goodell stated, “I take responsibility both for the decision and for ensuring that our actions in the future properly reflect our values. I didn’t get it right. Simply put, we have to do better. And we will” (Bien, 2014, para. 36).

A second tape of Rice’s assault on his girlfriend was made public and provided a better view of the incident. This time, women’s groups, politicians, and the general public recommended that Goodell should forfeit his leadership position or be fired. The owners could have used this as a moment to move forward from the embarrassment of the incident but instead

chose to keep the commissioner in his position. This was mainly attributed to Goodell's past of generating large amounts of money on the owners' behalf (Belson, 2014).

Goodell's leadership could be classified as transactional leadership, which is defined as "the bulk of leadership models, focusing on the exchanges that occur between leadership and followers" (Northouse, 2016, p. 170). The followers often see themselves as a means to an end. If followers performed their desired function, they are rewarded in small ways but do not necessarily find satisfaction in their work. In 2018, the National Football League saw revenues of more than \$16 billion dollars (Colangelo, 2019). The league's 32 teams played a combined 512 regular season games with an average 67,100 in attendance per game, equaling a combined 17,177,581 tickets sold for 2018 (2018 NFL Attendance Data). By comparison, these revenue numbers place the NFL ahead of 76 of 195 countries in the world in total Gross Domestic Product (World Population Review, 2019).

Oriard (2010) examined how the NFL ascended to a popular American sport in the 1970s and has remained there since. He attributed this continued success to decisions made by the leadership of the league. Oriard stated that NFL commissioners, along with team owners who select the commissioner, have made moves that maintain income at a progressive rate. Of all income revenue, Oriard claimed that the league's most lucrative aspect was the income from television rights. Unfortunately, the NFL's television revenue has climaxed and now thus has become a hindrance in other areas. For example, ticket sales for games are suffering, but television viewership is increasing. The NFL's involvement with 5 different networks (including their namesake, The NFL Network) saw an average of 15.76 million viewers with single games seeing as many as 22.12 million viewers. In-person attendance saw an average of 67,100, which is the lowest since 2011. This is attributed to the superior coverage of sports on television as

opposed to attending games in person with limited views from seats as well as issues of weather, parking, travel cost, and time (Brown, 2019a). These same trends have been noted across all major sports, including NASCAR.

As time continued, franchise leadership and team ownership in the NFL and in NASCAR have changed. Originally, owners and directors were middle-class businessmen. However, as professional sports have become a lucrative business in the United States, the leadership has also gravitated to wealthy men (Oriard, 2010).

The third largest sports league in the United States is the National Basketball Association (NBA). Composed of 30 teams, the NBA saw average attendance of 17,857 during the 2018-19 regular season schedule. A combined 21,964,110 tickets were sold making for more than 7 billion dollars in revenue (Badenhausen, 2019).

Daron Roberts, the director of the Center for Sports Leadership and Innovation at the University of Texas at Austin posited:

Adam Silver, the commissioner of the NBA has a history of really being pro-player when it comes to expressing views. You can think about one of the major decisions he first made, which was to ban the former owner of the Los Angeles Clippers... from the league because of the tapes that were leaked where he was using racial slurs. You've got the commissioner of the NBA saying, not only do we know that you have stances on social issues, but we want you to express them. And we want to help you do that. That is a very different stance than what you have seen from the NFL. Fast forward to 2017, a lot of criticism has been levied toward the NFL and the way they handled the Kaepernick situation. I think what's happened is that a lot of owners and general managers

have sat down in a room and asked themselves, “Can we weather the public firestorm that would erupt if we signed Colin Kaepernick?” and the answer has been a resounding “no.” (as cited in Groetzinger, 2017, para. 3)

This leadership stance has allowed Adam Silver to be interpreted as a more enduring figure than Roger Goodell within his own league. Player and NFL Players Association representative Jay Feely said, “There's a general distrust for him” and player Eric Winston added,

He's judge, jury and executioner. The joke around the locker room in Houston was that Goodell is like Xerxes [the ruler] in the movie “300.” He can do whatever he wants. Obviously, he has the power to do that—and that's partially our fault because we didn't get it addressed in the [collective bargaining agreement]—but it also doesn't make for a friendly environment. (Chadiha, 2012, para. 5)

Leadership of sports leagues is most often associated with the commissioners who are normally seen as the most powerful people in the sport. However, this is untrue because commissioners are working directly for the owners themselves. This is the case with the four major American sport leagues: the NFL, the MLB, the NBA, and the NHL. However, this is not the case with NASCAR, as the France family has owned and exhibited complete control of the league, equivalent to a commissioner title, since its beginning (Allen, 2011).

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver had assumed the position only a few weeks before Donald Sterling, team owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, made a racist tirade toward his then girlfriend. This was Silver’s first significant test of leadership and one that would set the tone for his administration in the coming years. He took decisive action by banning Sterling from the

NBA for life and issuing a fine of \$2.5 million (Zucker, 2014). If Silver had not responded in a manner that addressed the issue with swift severity, he would have compromised the trust placed in him by other owners, players, and fans. Useem (1999) discussed the moments that define a leader's tenure and legacy: "We all need to be ready for those moments when our leadership is on the line and the fate or fortune of others depends on what we do" (p. 1).

On the world stage, soccer—or as it is known in the rest of the world *football*—is by far the most popular sport. The International Federation of Football Association, often compared to the United Nations as FIFA, comprises 209 associations. The 2014 Brazil World Cup produced revenues of almost \$4.8 billion in total for FIFA (Manfred, 2015). FIFA was engulfed in scandal in 2011 as its leadership was accused of offering money in order to obtain votes during the league's presidential election. The sitting president, Sepp Blatter, was supposedly aware of these bribes but was cleared by an investigation by an ethics committee. Due to questionable leadership, the possibility of the World Cup being played in Russia (2018) and in Qatar (2022) was closely debated and reconsidered. In an email revealed during an investigation, the general secretary of FIFA wrote that Qatar bought the vote of placement. President Blatter was known to donate soccer-development funds to countries that would then cast votes on his behalf. Blatter felt that as an elected official, he wielded unlimited power. He is quoted as saying "I am the president of FIFA. You can't question me" (Gregory, 2011, para. 8).

Even with this audacious flaunting of power, Blatter still won reelection in 2011. In fact, he won with 186 of 203 votes. Few countries that participate in FIFA dare to question the authority of the president for fear of retribution in the future (Gregory, 2011). Heskett (2018) claimed that the utilization of fear in leadership has its place, but only for short-term use. Heskett stated that it is a leader's job to reduce fear to a minimum or his/her followers will become

startled into stagnation. This ultimately places more responsibility on the leaders of the organization, causing leaders to delegate their duties and creativity upward toward the top of the organizational structure. Thus, fear in leadership can produce more work for the leader as the micro-manager. Sugden and Tomlinson (2017) listed four mistakes Blatter made in his leadership of the world's largest sports league. The researchers first suggested that Blatter sought to micro-manage a large group without enabling the employees to realize their own potential, or even allow delegation of responsibilities at a level that allowed for actual engagement. Blatter was consumed in his own authority rather than any thought of the benefit of the organization.

Within this closed leadership structure Blatter continued his reign of fear without interruption. Normally this culture produces a whistle-blower that will become overwhelmed and speak out about the repressive leadership. Blatter was able to suppress this for many years through intimidation and payoffs. This leads into the third area that Sugden and Tomlinson (2017) cited: Blatter posits that, as a leader, he could hand-pick what areas of the league's involvement could show moral responsibility. Because Blatter tried to micro-manage all aspects of the league, he was unable to monitor all areas proficiently. Consequently, he simply dismissed problems and corruption away from him, displacing blame and claiming that ethical issues were not his responsibility. FIFA did not establish an ethical process to deal with issues until 2004, finally beginning to take a stand against individuals who would exploit the system for personal gain. This creates a system of checks and balances in the organization, making employees more comfortable when corruption is detected.

Blatter began to believe his own infallibility. Fans and media began to object to the greed, corruption, and arrogance they all witnessed. Sponsors reacted quickly when devoted fans withdrew their support of an association that appeared as corrupt and misaligned (Sugden &

Tomlinson, 2017). Sponsorships dwindled as details of Blatter's actions were discovered. Blatter's dictatorial regime resulted from a lack of checks-and-balances. Rather than blurring the roles of presidential office and the role of executive office, FIFA could have shared power. An active committee of leadership would be better suited to deal with an organization that encompasses such a large portion of the globe (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2017).

Historical scholarship on professional sports teams was noted in Seymour and Seymour's 1960 work *Baseball: The Early Years*. This work focused on early baseball practice encouraging ticket and concession sales, while decreasing player salary and infrastructure costs. This same theme has been a topic of interest for all leagues since then.

Like most sports, the beginning of baseball goes deeper than simply one man. Different variations of the game were played throughout the 18th century in different parts of the country. This parallels the beginnings of NASCAR, as many races sprung up around the country with different rules and guidelines determining how the events took place. Baseball developed a more formatted structure when money became involved. This factor is seen to be the predominant feature in motivating all major sports to adopt a unified rule system. Additionally, gambling motivated the use of box scores, assessment of individual skills, and trading of players to other teams (Thorn, 2012).

Since Seymour and Seymour's (1960) *Baseball: The Early Years* was released, there has been more historical research and review of sports in the United States. Texts like Levine's 1985 *Albert Spalding and the Promise of American Sport* describe the high profitability of franchised sports within the United States. The decisions and framework concerning profits and stability are determined directly with leadership in every league (Seymour & Seymour, 1960). While this historical research for a plethora of sports has become more common in recent decades, most

books published on the topic of sports management and historical focus on baseball (Howard, 2018).

Sports Business

Giamatti, Meachum, and Giamatti (2011) wrote that individuals could learn more about a society by watching a competition than how it operates in daily routine. Sports often carry more cultural information than simply the games themselves. The comparison between games and work is a common topic when discussing strategies and success.

Professional sports leagues are, at their heart, entertainment businesses. Often concepts of success in sports transfer naturally to the business world. The basic ideas of teamwork, management, and the ability to motivate others are important roles in both industries. A sports league has a major social and economic role in the lives of not only those who participate, but fans, and even the communities that host teams and events. Sports involve technical skills just as business does although both are, primarily at their core, a people-centric organization. These technical qualities include team objectives, individual and group responsibilities of team members, structures, and the rules in which the players or workers perform requisite duties (Guenzi & Ruta, 2013).

The leaders of the sports business must be able to create a narrative that echoes the personal struggles and celebratory moments of the fans. By ensuring that the stories of the sports heroes are told in a dramatic fashion, leadership can ensure that viewers keep tuning in to the events on a weekly basis. With higher viewership comes the ultimate goal of higher revenue from sponsorships, advertising, and lucrative television deals. Peter Guber, the co-owner of the Golden State Warriors (NBA), the Los Angeles Dodgers (MLB), and the Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC of Major League Soccer), writes that sports are a unifying force. He equates it to a

“modern day camp fire” where comradery is built. People of all of ages, races, and backgrounds come together, united for a single cause, cheering on the same team. These fans see themselves as a part of the story. They do not sit passively like they would at a film; instead they are in the presence of their team. They share a common arena, with similar colors, and engage the action by cheering and shouting instruction towards the field of play. Guber stated, “We’re not 1’s and 0’s... we’re ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs.” (Rishe, 2019, para. 4). There is a usefulness to being able to take data from attendance, viewers, and merchandise sales and use it to direct the changes needed in the sport and the desires of the audience. The data allows leaders to build a narrative that can relate to an emotional response of those following the action.

Tom Penn, president of LAFC, comments that leadership administrators must develop a strategically-formulated brand that will attract fans who possess an allegiance to that brand. He had employees come together at a home and invited motivational speaker and personal coach Tony Robbins via satellite. They enjoyed formative sessions that produced clearly defined mission statements that established a uniting idea that would encourage collaborative efforts under one banner. Their main goal was to first bring together everyone evolved with LAFC, then highlight what they considered the foundational pillars that represented the brand. By using these guiding pillars as a filter for all new ideas and processes, the organization was able to ensure that actions were consistent with their core structural needs. These pillars included, being “creative,” since Los Angeles is a creativity hub. They also wanted everything to be “loyal” to the game of soccer. They wanted the fandom of the team to be a “uniting” force within the community, as well as be recognized innovative in every way. These four pillars form the acronym CLUB (Creative, Loyal, Uniting, Beyond) and formed all of the organization's critical decisions in the early stages (Rishe, 2019).

Through these components that narrative connects with fans which attracts corporate partners. This emotional conveyance of information builds trust, connectivity, and community that provides meaning to the people. This role of sports business analytics allows those that formulate these narratives the ability to identify the needed audience and how to target those fans (Rishe, 2019).

Through these components that narrative connects with fans which draws in corporate partners. This emotional conveyance of information builds trust, connectivity, and community that provides meaning to the people. This role of sports business analytics allows those who formulate these narratives the ability to identify and target the needed audience (Rishe, 2019). NFL commissioner Roger Goodell stated:

Bringing together people with diverse racial, ethnic and gender background provides far-reaching and varied perspectives and skills that are crucial for any organization to expand its horizons. Making diversity in the workplace a priority is good business. A collaborative and inclusive team of employees provides the foundation for success and growth and we believe in it strongly. (Shropshire, 2015, p. 9)

Related Business Leadership

Henry Ford is credited with forever changing the strategies of production with the use of the assembly-line. Growing up on a farm, with a knack for repairing things, Ford was a far cry from the man he would one day become. He would hold over 100 patents, and at the pinnacle of his success, was one of the richest men alive. His simple roots and rise to success are comparable to that Bill France Sr. Both men could be considered self-made and both led with a passion that

bordered on obsession (Ford Motor Company, 2019). It has been said of Ford that, “No man in contemporary industry wields such dictatorial power” (Kaempffert, 1928, para. 1).

Ford, like France, ventured into his business before finding success later with a different company. Henry Ford founded the Detroit Automobile Company in 1899, but the company closed quickly in 1901. In 1903, he started the Ford Motor Company with other investors who brought capital to the project. Ford paid the workers extraordinarily well, which ensured his workers’ loyalty and allowed Ford to demand higher expectations. (MacGregor, 2019, p. 68).

Ford spent the rest of his life building his company until failing health forced him to hand control over to his grandson in 1945. This is another parallel with Bill France. As failing health became a concern for him, France too handed over control of his business to another generation of family. Both companies are still led by family members at this present time (MacGregor, 2019, p. 138).

Ford, like France, made use of the autocratic leadership style. He micromanaged all aspects of the Ford factories. Knowing he could not be everywhere at once to ensure that production was running at full capacity, he used money as a motivator. He once gave his employees a 100% raise. In Ford’s mind, this assured that workers would do what was necessary to meet goals and production from fear of losing a position that paid so well, compared to any other job they would be able to attain (Snow, 2013).

Ford’s controlling nature extended to aspects of both his personal life and business. Because he once had to pay exorbitant prices for glass for his manufacturing, he vowed he would not be dictated by money as he had with his own employees. He kept \$400,000,000 on hand so that no other person would be able to have anything indebted to him. This sum of money would

not only cover a need in an emergency but allow Ford to completely rebuild his entire operation if need be (Kaempffert, 1928).

When Ford opened a plant in Manchester, England, he was faced with some of the most powerful unions in the world. He found the problem easily overcome through the same methods he had implemented previously: he let money establish his power. He paid more than union scale wages and made the work day shorter. Ford thought so much like a dictator that he believed his ideas were not only correct for his employees and him, but for the general public as well. He was quoted as saying that the public does not dictate what it wants, so he gives it what it ought to have (The History Hour, 2019, pp. 253-268).

Ford established strict rules for those who worked for him. Those who were paid to advise him agreed with his judgment; those who did not were met with harsh punishments and dismissals. Ford went so far as to dictate how his employees lived their personal lives. He did not drink or smoke, and he ate healthy. Thus, he expected his employees to follow the same rules. Handbooks were given to employees that included home life guidelines as well as work rules. He saw hard work as the only function of man (Snow, 2013). Ford stated, "There's too much tradition in all human activity, too much respect for mere precedent...If it stands in the way of real progress it must be broken down" (Kaempffert, 1928, para. 4).

Ford's lifestyle and authoritarian leadership produced, as is often the case, a feeling of arrogance within him. Ford challenged Henry Winton, one of the best-known racecar drivers of his day, to compete in a race. Ford had never raced a car at a high speed before; but, being full of himself, he pulled off the upset and won the race (Ford, n.d. para. 4).

Ford and France also have a greater connection than their love of automobiles and dictatorial style. The Ford Flathead V8 engine that debuted in 1932 was the choice for early

racers. Ford's design filled the fields of the unorganized races throughout United States stock car races that Bill France Sr. would later form into NASCAR (Thompson, 2006).

NASCAR and Leadership

When considering NASCAR as an athletic competition, there are many facets to the competitive aspect, as well as to the business aspect. Although casual observers correlate NASCAR with specific drivers or their coordinating sponsorships, the less familiar names of the France family (Bill Sr., Bill Jr., Jim, Brian, Lesa) have been a significant force in this multi-billion-dollar spectator sport (Haden, 2016). Bringing an unorganized group of stock car racers under an umbrella of set rules and guidelines required dedication, persistence and insight into the sustained successful management of athletes, cooperative sponsorships, and fan interest. This interest is critical to the sport, as it attracts thousands of fans to racetracks each year, while including thousands more via television and connected devices. Combined with the ability to draw in Fortune 500 companies to partner alongside for sponsorships and fan experiences, NASCAR's leadership demonstrates a business savvy and personal engagement that many leaders would only hope to experience in their businesses (Gluck, 2014).

The first racers had compelling stories that were a marketing dream, including the first champion, Robert "Red" Byron, who was left with a shredded left leg from an explosion while serving in World War II. Byron was left wearing a metal leg brace that would be bolted to the clutch pedal so he would be able to race (McGee, 2012). Bill Sr. also saw the showmanship of promoting local and regional characters like moonshine runner Junior Johnson, who would eventually become legends throughout NASCAR as well as southern history. As Menzer (2001) comments, "Big Bill France was a strong personality in his own right, but even he realized quickly that the drivers were the stars of his show. He just had to keep them in line" (p. 85).

In 1972, Bill Sr. handed control of NASCAR to his oldest son Bill France, Jr. The change of leadership was met with mixed reactions (Branham, 2010). This event coincides with the beginning of what is known as the *Modern Era* within NASCAR history. Simultaneously, the first title sponsorship for NASCAR—R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company—paired their flagship brand Winston with the league. As Branham posited, “In retrospect, it’s clear the partnership between the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing and the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company was a match between an outlaw sport and an outlaw product” (p. 75). In 1979, CBS presented the first live flag-to-flag coverage of the Daytona 500, which carried a 29% share in the ratings. The wild finish put NASCAR on the map for many across America (NASCAR ‘Daytona 500’ TV ratings history + your guess for this year (poll), 2011).

Bill Jr. brought NASCAR to the attention of the rest of the world under his leadership, attracting some of the world's most powerful and profitable companies to become involved. He fostered storylines and made decisions that guided the sport to a peak where tracks proliferated across North American as special races were being held as far away as Japan (Branham, 2010).

In 2003, Bill Junior’s son Brian France was promoted to chairman and CEO due to his father’s ailing health (Willis, 2018). Brian was determined from the start to make his own mark on the family business and establish leadership just as his father and grandfather had achieved. He called for major rules changes that resulted in seasonal racing to unfold in a more competitive form with an elimination-style playoff much like that of college basketball. Broadcast ratings increased, and a new multibillion-dollar deal was reached with television networks. Sadly, an economic downturn and better coverage on television and connected devices forced a sharp decline in the attendance numbers (MacWatters, 2017).

Critics were quick to blame Brian France's leadership style and decision-making process for the decline in attendance. In 2018, Brian was arrested, for the second time, for driving while intoxicated, and he was found to have controlled substances in his possession. He was put on an indefinite leave of absence from his leadership roles, and control was turned over to his uncle, Jim France (Willis, 2018).

As Bill France Jr. and Brian France were each at the helm of NASCAR's empire, James "Jim" France, Bill Junior's younger brother, worked with NASCAR as a board member. Additionally, he ran its sports car division holdings and served in major roles within its sister company, International Speedway Corporation (ISC). ISC owns many of the race tracks that host the NASCAR events. Now in the position of chairman and CEO, Jim France aspires to make his mark on the family business while returning some of the presence of leadership seen in past generations. Current NASCAR president Steven Phelps spoke about the continued leadership style the France family has utilized throughout NASCAR's history: "We have new leadership here. The leadership is Jim France. It's Jim France's vision. It's Jim France's plan. It's Jim France who's going to get people to collaborate and be part of this. It's really about Jim" (Willis, 2019, para. 58).

Historical Perspective of NASCAR

Surrounding context is critical when determining an individual in leadership and their approach to administration. The sports climate and reach of media coverage in each age combined with the outside influences on viewership and sport participation influence the decision-making process from leadership (Oshani, 2015).

Bill France, Sr. sought existing experts to develop and expand his own reach within American racing to extend beyond his limited region of participation and promotions. France, Sr. understood that he alone could not overcome the regionalized racing establishments simply because of distance and time schematics that would require competing with other promotions (Branham, 2015). Through cooperation with other regional promoters, France Sr. was able to start something new that would put his league into a powerful position by having fans in more regions and allowing for broader media coverage that would produce a larger fan-base. This process created something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. By being the bigger entity, NASCAR would grow even larger by way of its own success. At the same time, this prestige attracted bigger-name competitors who wanted to showcase their athletic superiority, bringing with them their own fans who had previously followed individual careers rather than formalized leagues. Leaps in technology allowed citizens to be more connected through radio ownership and into emerging wide ownership of televisions. Veterans who had seen action in the World War II were also looking for the excitement and daring adventure for which the edge and danger of stock car racing could provide an outlet (Branham, 2015).

Cigarette companies also saw a rise in exposure from the expansion of media prior to World War II. Their impact was considerable as R.J. Reynolds' Camel brand served as the sponsor for the nation's first regular television news show. As modern science began to identify the links between cancer and smoking cigarettes, the United States government-imposed restrictions on the tobacco industry. Because of these restrictions, on-air television ads were prohibited as of January 2, 1971. The tobacco industry saw this as an opportunity to move its advertising dollars in another direction (Glass, 2018). These events allowed for tobacco producer and seller R.J. Reynolds to form a partnership with NASCAR for title sponsorship and

advertising. R.J. Reynolds's influx of money allowed NASCAR leadership to make changes and improvements that it had not experienced before (Hagstrom, 2001).

Although the effects of tobacco use became even more apparent in the minds of Americans into the 1990s, further steps were implemented to reduce advertising the products' reach to new customers. The Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement of 1997 placed a ban on advertising at an even greater level that directly prohibited sponsoring sports, music, and other cultural events (Master settlement agreement, 2014). This resulted in the removal of Winston from the sport in 2003. With that major operating partner removed from the climate coupled with the failing health of leader Bill France Jr., his son Brian France was promoted to assume the leadership role for the next generation (Clarke, 2008).

Just as television had made a rapid appearance in the American home after World War II, the overwhelming popularity of the internet changed how fans viewed sports in the beginning of the 21st century. Desiring to keep pace with the ever-changing digital landscape, NASCAR leadership began to take connections, information, and viewership in different directions in order to diversify its traditional reach and exposure. As sports viewership and consumerism has evolved in the United States over the last 80 years, there has been an effect on all sports and media companies that broadcast and report on outcomes. This consumer mindset is the driving force behind the entertainment value that leadership of sports leagues like NASCAR depend upon (Leitch, 2018).

Autocratic Leadership Theory and NASCAR

Northouse (2016) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 5). Effective leadership has become a topic

of study that has evolved over the years because the quest for defining success through business, government, and personal life has been a consuming force of people in our modern culture. Through theoretical framework, researchers developed approaches to identify key traits, methods, and behaviors that lead to quality leadership. In the case of organizations such as NASCAR, leadership is judged to be successful based on achievement. While competitors are judged upon top finishes, wins accumulated, and championships won, the league of NASCAR itself is often judged by how many views it accumulates as a direct product of the on-track racing action. These views then translate to marketing opportunities which equal money earned from the sales of advertisements. The following theories will be reviewed and considered when examining the leadership of each member of the France family while in their own tenure as Chief Executive Officer (Hagstrom, 2001).

Autocratic leadership is indicated by the localization of power with one specific leader making all decisions (Bass, Bass, & Bass, 2008). Autocratic leaders are normally perceived as being primarily concerned that the job at hand is accomplished without much worry for consequences that an outcome or process will have on the people involved. This type of leadership normally has four types of characteristics: (1) leadership makes all important decisions; (2) the leader is concerned with accomplishing of the task and not how it will affect the people involved; (3) a leader often hold a social distance from his/her followers that insulates him/her from personal engagement with subordinates; and (4) the leadership uses punishment as a motivation factor rather than a reward system (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004).

The autocratic style of leadership was once the dominant form of leadership in most of the civilized world. Kings and queens ruled over those below them from a distance, while dictators issued commands to subordinates with the expectation that their word was law

and that no subordinate would dare to question their authority. When dictators succumbed to death, family members were normally waiting to assume control where the previous leader ceased. In most situations, these dynasties were planned and nurtured so that the family would remain in control for generations to come. These changes manifest themselves in the nature of eras, normally named for the leaders themselves or a significant event that took place during that time period. This is indeed the case in the sports and business world of NASCAR. Each leader within the France family has an established era when he led, which was characterized by significant changes in the sport.

As the business progresses and evolves, the next leader is groomed to take the reins once the current leader retires. Although, in the latest leadership change, Brian France had to step away from his position prematurely because of personal and legal problems, this caused the leadership to pass backward a generation to the brother of former leader Bill France, Jr., Jim France. Even with Brian's issues, this is not a practice that seems to be ceasing in the near future. Jim France mentioned the question of succession when discussing the future of the sport and the leadership potential of his nephew Ben Kennedy: "This is what we do, and we've got the next generation coming. We plan to keep it a family" (Fryer, 2019, para. 10). This same progression can be seen in many royal lineages. Should a prince not fulfill his duty as king, his uncle may assume the throne. In fact, NASCAR's leadership has followed the rules of the line of succession, similar to the British monarchy (Live Science Staff, 2019).

Founder Bill France Sr. had two sons (Bill Jr. and Jim) and turned leadership over to his oldest son, Bill France, Jr. Bill, in turn, had a son and a daughter (Brian and

Lesa). Bill Jr. abdicated to his son Brian, who stepped down and was replaced by his uncle Jim France. Whether this has been done on purpose or more likely out of coincidence is unknown, but it does show that hierarchy within leadership mimics a dynasty (Perez, 2019).

This form of leadership has often been criticized because of demoralizing effects that are associated with the followers. Many subordinates in dynasties feel that they do not have a stake in the process, and instead are simply pawns under the control of the leaders' will. When members of an organization team are ignored and dismissed, they perceive themselves with a level of inequality and suffer from hindered job performance and satisfaction. However, this form of leadership is not entirely discouraging. There are many cases and situations in which autocratic leadership can be an effective strategy. Many studies show that people have a desire (unconscious in many cases) for a structured hierarchy working relationship (Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007). These social hierarchy models show that a defined authority, like those that are in place in autocratic leadership, provide clear social interaction that promotes cooperation, structure, and build team performance to accelerated levels. Under these circumstances, autocratic leadership could be viewed in a positive light. When members accept the structure within the hierarchy, there is a lower chance of power struggle among members of the team which allows workers to have greater focus on the tasks at hand. This allows for predictable outcomes from new methods and directions (De Cremer, 2006).

The psychological rewards can be positive for the leader and the followers in certain situations. Humans have a need for certainty and structure that can be fulfilled through a chain of command. There is increased simplicity in an environment that has a formulated order (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). There is also evidence that suggests that a hierarchical structure works as an incentive-based system to followers (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). The powerful leader issues out

pay, titles, promotions, and perks that may not be as readily available for workers and team members in other organizational structures. Even lower-level employees can find motivation in this organizational system as there is a single entity to subscribe to and submit. Although in most cases, an autocratic leader typically prefers to use punishment as a motivator rather than a reward structure (Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 20).

Autocratic leadership styles can still be a successful tool in managing business, people, and especially in the world of sports as long as the leader is willing to be respectful of their subordinates by exhibiting fairness and showing respect. A leader's respect for others builds a mutual feeling that often defuses workplace issues. Most subordinates understand the expectations of such leadership, adhering to set rules and following established procedures. This means that if leaders have good communication with subordinates, they illustrate to followers the appropriate skills and techniques to carry out the mission at hand (De Cremer, 2006).

NASCAR's history demonstrates such aspects of leadership. The use of autocratic or even what Yahoo Sports writer Nick Bromberg (2018) called "France's shadow dictatorship style" has always been the typical leadership style employed. Although, other than Brian, each France has been known simply as using a dictatorship style, without the "shadow" qualifier (Branham, 2015).

Also, a leader must practice consistency in the decision-making process (Hamilton & Munter, 2013). Employees will respect fairness if they observe that decisions are made in an unbiased manner; this forms trust within the context of the organization. Hamilton and Munter recommend an open-door receptiveness and reciprocity within the organization, allowing workers to voice options and ideas. Even though decision making is done exclusively through the leader, the lack of retaliation fosters trust. Workers and competitors have never hesitated

from stating that the France family ruled with an iron fist, but these same competitors admit that it was a necessary proponent to leadership. From its earliest beginning, NASCAR needed a clear vision and a direction. An architect with sports savvy and business acumen was needed to guide the new sport into national popularity (Branham, 2015). This controlling leadership style was passed down as leadership shifted from one generation to the next.

In contrast, when the leader within the autocratic structure is challenged, there are typically feelings of resentment, powerlessness, and lower morale among all subordinates (Schaubroeck, Shen, & Chong, 2017). Without the proper context and delivery, autocratic leadership can be overbearing and demoralizing to everyone involved. These occurrences leave leadership feeling that they must establish control. This creates a hazardous working environment for subordinates, damaging the company as a whole (Anderson & Brown, 2010). Autocratic leaders are typically shown to be high in aggression when results do not accomplish the desired expectations. They often become depressed when they are unable to control a situation and seek achievement as validation for their actions. There is little motivation to consider the feelings or needs of others when making decisions. This process is often known as Machiavellianism (Adorno & Frenkel-Brunswik, 2019).

Autocratic leadership leads to accurate decisions when the leader is well-educated in the topic, as each of the Frances were. There can be an increase in work productivity out of understanding for the leader's specialization, but this is often the case when the worker is within direct supervision. Worker performance is seen to operate at a higher level in these cases, but within the frame of simpler tasks. Subordinates are afraid to make higher-level decisions or are aware that they will be met with hostility if they do (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004).

Great Man Leadership Theory and NASCAR

The Great Man Theory of leadership is often associated with autocratic leadership. The possession of particular traits and skills, which are not found in all people, enable the leader to lead where others would or could not be able to. Thomas Carlyle proposed that great leaders are “born, not made” and are awaiting to arise when they are needed in time (Spector, 2016). Some examined writings on Bill France, Sr. place him into this classification of leader. However, many of these writings are published by NASCAR itself and strive to perceive its founder in the most flattering aspects. Those close to Bill Sr. saw him as an influential man who was born to lead auto racing into the future (Branham, 2015).

Business Leadership and NASCAR

At its core sports leagues are entertainment businesses. Their existence is sustained by sponsorship through companies that hope to advertise to fans of the sport, while subsidized to a lesser extent by ticket sales and experiences that go directly to the teams and leagues. Business Leadership is a key part of the overall leadership plan of any sports league and the decision-making process (Mason, 1999).

On the surface, there is often confusion about the difference between leadership and management in business (Kotter, 2013). Management is about building order and consistency in order to raise the quality and profitability of products. Leadership on the other hand is about dealing with change. Similar to the sports world, business has become increasingly more and more competitive. As technology changes at a faster rate than ever before, there are more needs

to address within the business world (Malakian, 2015). With these ever-increasing environments of change leadership is required even more (Gallos, 2019).

As leadership has become an increasingly important element of the business world, businesses have actively set out to recruit people with leadership potential (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Many of these people often have significant challenges early in their careers that cause them to rise to the occasion. Once they have been challenged and succeed there is a desire and understanding of how to face the future.

Businesses frequently begin as a family structure. This is the case for NASCAR. Danco (1980) stated that family businesses allow themselves to fail by their own actions, or in reality their inaction, of their own leadership. These owners often fail to make changes to keep up with the world as technology and strategies evolve. Programs and strategies that once worked for family businesses in a former generation with relative success become cherished habits that, left unchanged in changing times, put economic stain on the whole company.

At the same time, inherited security and coffers of wealth can deprive next-generation family members of possessing the drive to be successful as a business leader (Ward, 1997). This is often seen as a factor in the leadership of third-generation NASCAR leader Brian France (Lawrence, 2018). These generational leaders often seek leisure and personal life over the responsibility to lead and the business suffers. In some cases, this generation of the family matures in the shadow of the business but lacks the typical and vital social skills like cooperation and shared decision-making. Unfortunately, these would-be family business leaders are ill-equipped and less capable of leading a successful business (Ward, 1997).

In many cases, even with a successful and growing business, more members are dependent upon the same source of income. Without substantial fiscal gains the added burdens

can negatively impact the family business. As these dependents increase so do conflicts and disagreements, discouraging consensus for the decision-making process. The ability to build and maintain a shared vision, while avoiding conflicts, diminishes over time (Ward, 1997).

Chapter Summary

Through the review of other sports leagues' leadership this chapter establishes the norms for leadership in professional sports. The underlying business issues that are always present in the decision-making process were also examined. The preliminary reviews of applicable leadership styles that meet those utilized by the France family were also discussed for future use.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this historical study is to document leadership styles utilized by NASCAR executives. To fully develop an understanding of specific leadership styles and the perceived outcomes exercised by NASCAR executives over time, both document analysis and interviews were utilized in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the central framework of this study:

1. How has leadership evolved in NASCAR?
2. What leadership styles are most evident in NASCAR executive decision-making practices?
3. How has leadership style impacted NASCAR's business?

Qualitative Design

In defining this research method, Creswell (2014) states, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Thus, the researcher must use interpretations of human-provided data to reconstruct events and methods to find how a social phenomenon occurred. In this study the data were from literature, as well as reports and an interview accounts regarding NASCAR leadership. An interview was conducted by the researcher to gain information related to decision making and leadership styles exhibited by NASCAR leadership. Creswell (2014) stated that the "voices" of those who provide data are reflected within the research, showing a construct of their worldview. This will be an important factor when considering the leadership styles of each of the

leaders, as cultural context impacts decisions and interactions with others. This context is important in considering the phenomenon studied: "Qualitative research is especially helpful when it provides us with someone's perceptions of a situation that permits us to understand his or her behavior" (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 230). A researcher using the qualitative method explores how the people whose stories they are interpreting, experience the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The emphasis on personal experiences allows for deep meaning to be placed on events and processes that they witnessed. Thus, the retelling of events must be considered from the interviewee's position and relation to NASCAR and its leadership.

Qualitative research methods were developed for use in the social sciences so that researchers were able to draw conclusions about social and cultural phenomena (University of Southern California, 2019). Leadership is an important construct of any social and cultural setting and context, so further understanding this phenomenon within the context of any significant event or group can be enlightening. Concerning NASCAR, the researcher examined how a regional-based entertainment business evolved into a sport known around the world and associated with some of the world's largest and most profitable companies, none of which was possible without the proper leadership styles and methods in place.

The respondent's oral and written history was used to decipher knowledge that can be used for the relevant needs and understanding of others. Analysis of qualitative data contains the process of decontextualization and recontextualization (Tesch, 2016). This process allowed the researcher to see the true leadership processes employed by the France family outside of the context of the sport. The recontextualization process ensures that the patterns that are found are still within the context from which they were originally collected. There is an important measure to ensure that reductionism does not take place and to maintain the connections between the field

of study and the respondent's historical account (Tesch, 2016). This allows for coding of the data and ensures that data can be correlated, which will ensure that the Frances' leadership is understood within the proper context.

Role of the Researcher

The subjectivity of qualitative research requires an understanding of the researcher's personal bias. As the researcher, my role will be to gather data from published literature and through interviews to determine the leadership styles and methods used by NASCAR's administration. Reflexivity processes will be used during the data collection processes in order to ensure the credibility of the study. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) state that the researcher is often seen as the instrument of measurement in qualitative studies: "In qualitative studies the investigator usually acts as an observer in the setting that is being studied, either as the interviewer, the observer, or the person who studies artifacts and documents" (p. 322).

My interest in the sport of NASCAR began in the mid-1980s when my mother began watching races. As a child, I was left with few choices for entertainment. Thus, I was planted in front of the television to be exposed to hours-long events. The actions of cars speeding far beyond that of normal speeds, sometimes making contact with each other and careening out of control, were quick to hold my attention. I especially enjoyed the bright colors of an orange car with the Tide detergent logo sprawled across the hood. I remember a conversation with family members at my grandparents' home as the race played on the TV. Someone asked me which of the cars I liked. Upon hearing my answer, there was a friendly teasing because Tide driver Darrell Waltrip was considered a *bad boy* at the time. It provided a talking-point and conversation piece for me and my older family members. It bridged a wide gap and incorporated

me into adult conversation, providing a topic that was not a faux interest in my own childish things.

As time went on, I associated with other individuals who had also been exposed to NASCAR through family involvement. We formed our own friendly and rival exchanges using the sport as a catalyst. This was not just an entertainment platform for most of us; it connected with our very heritage as Appalachians. Its connection to rural America and working-class was paramount in building NASCAR into the major sport into which it would later develop. As a boy from a small town where cars could be driven above the speed limits without worry of a ticket being issued, I was able to momentarily feel the rush I saw drivers carry out for three-hour blocks on Sunday afternoon. The friendly antagonism of what was better—Chevys or Fords—played into the personal pride that local teenagers felt, coinciding with what brand their first car happened to be.

NASCAR has provided some of the same purposes in my personal life. I developed a feeling of community with others who follow the week-to-week happenings, a reason for friends to meet and watch or travel to events, and the sense of accomplishment that comes along with following any sport. Even though we ourselves have not put forth the physical effort exerted by the athletes, we rejoice in the winning and mourn the loss of the teams we have chosen. We form a psychological connection to what takes place within sports.

The concept of team identification was developed primarily in social identity theory...Social identity theory suggests that individuals can develop a strong sense of emotional and psychological belonging to groups that they consider in-groups...Based on social identity theory, sport management researchers have developed the concept of team identification and found that individuals often

identify with their favorite team by creating greater degrees of emotional and psychological connections...Consistent with the team identification literature, the current research operationalized team identification as the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as fans of the team, are involved with the team, are concerned with the team's performance, and view the team as a representation of themselves. (Branscombe & Wann, 1992, p. 1017)

Ethics

Ethical consideration was paramount while conducting this study as it ensures validity and reliability of the study. This type of study poses no physical or health-related risks to any of the participants. An informed consent statement was read to the interviewee prior to the interview and is attached in the Appendix. This letter of informed consent follows the guidelines laid out in Frankfort-Nachmaias and Nachmis (2008) "a fair explanation of procedures, description of risks reasonably to be expected, a description of benefits reasonably to be expected, an offer of inquiry regarding the procedures, and an instruction that the person is free to withdraw" (p. 75).

Setting

The interview was conducted on-site at a location of the interviewee's choosing, the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte NC, at a time of their choosing. The interview was recorded in audio format and transcribed by the researcher. The interview was conducted on-site with the interviewee to ensure their availability during busy business schedules.

Sampling Strategy

One of the data collection processes employed in this research is interview. For this component, a purposeful strategy is being used because the participant is directly connected to the organization, events, and individuals examined (University of Southern California, 2019). The participant was chosen based on his direct involvement with NASCAR leadership and his stature as a historian of NASCAR. To foster authenticity of the interview data collected, Tom Jensen—a NASCAR historian and author—was chosen for an interview that would be assured to have knowledge of events.

Jensen was selected because he has personally held a leadership position within or directly related to NASCAR, is a published author concerning the topic of NASCAR's operational structure, a long-term insider and observer, and a historical author who has written about one or more of the France family associated with the business. Qualitative inquiry focuses on the experiences of a few in order to project aspects and outcomes when many are involved (Creswell, 2014). Since a small sample of interviewees participated in this study, the researcher encouraged the participant to engage in lengthy and open conversation.

Sample

The interview subject was selected based on his direct knowledge or substantiated knowledge of current and historical events within NASCAR and its leadership. This sampling technique was selected to assure that the participant could “offer useful that there should be a purposeful selection of the participants that are used in the study which “...offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2015, p. 46). The sample size is expected to be small due to the limited number of individuals possessing the required expertise on the study's topic. Patton (2015) also states that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative

inquiry” (p. 311) showing that good research does not expressly require a large number of participants in order to achieve validity.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with 1 participant. An interview protocol was developed to guide participant interviews (Appendix A) and allow for researcher follow-up questioning to ensure that data saturation was met. Interview questions are open-ended and organized to allow the interviewee the possibility of reflecting and expanding upon the question presented. Patton (2015) suggested the use of interview guides as a way to increase the gathering of systematic data. By consistently using the same questions for each interview, the research is better able to collect data that can be coded together. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) suggested using interview guides in a practice situation before the researcher begins to collect data. These guides were used to foster reliability during the process of data collection through an interview. This also helps generate usable data from the interview. Once the interview data are collected, the responses will be coded using the Structural Coding method followed by the Focused Coding method to develop themes and categories that can then be compared to findings from the document text.

By using biographical information from document review, interviews, and video, the researcher analyzed the decision and decision-making strategy of each leader:

The biographical approach focuses sharply on the individual leader and his or her influence on the organization and its environment. It seeks to understand how the personality, training, and previous experiences that an individual brings to an organization influence his or her performance. It analyzes the forces shaping the individual and the individual as a force on administration. It addresses how the

individual applies skills and strategies to the role of the executive. (Lambright & Quinn, 2011, p. 782)

Readings, interviews and artifacts included in this study were assessed for specific qualities: (a) they provide a historical perspective of the leadership of NASCAR; (b) they identify characteristics of each of the individual leaders; (c) they note the relevance of works of leadership in NASCAR; and (d) they examine outcomes based off of actions taken by individual leaders.

Document Analysis. The document review is the largest and primary source of data for this study. Multiple books dealing with any aspect of the organization and business of NASCAR were previewed for details that could be analyzed for leadership theory and methods. In addition, biographical information was assessed to build an understanding of the personal lives and impact on professional lives. Also, a variety of articles pertaining to policy changes, leader involvement, and competition judgements were reviewed for useful data.

Document and artifact review were the primary sources of data collection in this study. This narrative inquiry allows for understanding of events written by those who witness the events or collected the stories for inclusion in a wider volume. These narrative inquiries seek to understand the human experience and how those individuals perceive their experience. This method allowed the examination of human experience over an extended period of time, while viewing the experiences within a cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method can be well defined in the following:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experiences in which humans, individually and socially, tell stories lived. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they

interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experiences, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as a phenomenon under study. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 4)

The understanding gained through stories of lived experiences and their narratives are at their core the foundation for information transmission. There is a wide array of approaches to using narratives for data collection, but Creswell (2014) suggested that using a combination of collection strategies is most effective. This study used elements of biographical, life history, and oral history approaches to bring together the greatest possible view of the leadership skills and styles used by the subjects in question.

Data analyzed included video in the form of documentaries, sports news reports, and televised interviews. The interviews were obtained from YouTube and online subscription services such as Amazon Prime. The focus of this aspect of research was to observe other interviews, as well as hear testimony from members of the France family concerning aspects of the sports business. To document the information found in video data, I exercised active listening and took notes on the videos, noting the tone and cadence of the subject. This can be easily detected through face-to-face interviews, but not as clearly through document review. Video data—including dialogue—triangulated data to ensure validity and reliability of this study. The following videos were selected for data collection:

- American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR Vol. 1
- American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR Vol. 2
- American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR Vol. 3
- The History of NASCAR Winston Cup: 1948-1987
- TNN The Great Drivers – Bill France
- Big NASCAR names react to DWI arrest of Brian France
- 1992 Bill France, Sr. Tribute (Checkered Flag)
- Smokey Talks Bill France
- Bill France, Sr. Hall of Fame
- The Dale Jr. Download – Mike Helton
- The Dale Jr. Download – Steve Phelps

Interview. The addition of an interview to the textual research adds another view of the events. While this type of open-ended questioning can provide for rich and authentic descriptions, the methodological limitations of the design require an extended amount of time and effort (Creswell, 2013). Methods illustrate that there should be additional considerations made using this qualitative research approach because of the active role of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to reconcile this, I developed research questions to ensure that the interviewee was presented with a consistent interview experience.

The interview was conducted to provide supplemental information about the leadership decisions and styles used by the France family members while in positions of leadership. The design for these inquiries was a semi-structured interview using open-ended questions. This semi-structured interview was conducive to spontaneous and personal responses by the

interviewee, allowing for information to flow at his leisure. Using this strategy, responses are not limited by the interviewer, which allows more authentic information to be collected.

Participation in the study was purely voluntary, and the participant was notified of the right to withdraw from taking part at any time. Emails and phone calls were made to the selected party to secure his consent to participate. The email described the study being conducted and what was requested in order to participate. Mr. Jensen completed and returned the form expressing his willingness to participate. Before conducting the interview, I obtained East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board's approval.

For the interview component of research, a phenomenological inquiry was used in order to capture the personal experiences of those that witness the leadership in question taking place. Phillips-Pula, Strunk, and Pickler (2011) write that Colaizzi (1978) established a phenomenology data analysis model that describes the process that should be used for investigation.

1. The researcher reads and then rereads the transcribed interviews to become familiar with and find early commonalities in the data. This allows the investigator to gain a feel for each of the interviewees and their individual experiences.
2. Using those same transcripts, the researcher will then identify statements that they believe will be significant and relate directly with the studied episodes.
3. The investigator then forms an interpretive meaning for the statements that they found to be of significance. The investigator then rereads the protocols for the research to ensure that the original explanations still held true in the interpreted meaning.
4. The interpreted means are then arranged into groups that will allow for the underlying themes to emerge. The research still needs to ensure that there is validation present, that

the themes do not repeat, and list any inconsistencies that they were met with during this process.

5. The themes that are present are then used to make descriptions.
6. There is a concise statement written and used to provide an identification that will refer to as the overall substance of the experience.
7. Finally, the overall description can be presented to the participants in order to assure that the conclusions are correct. If any discrepancies are found then the researcher should return to the statements and reinterpret the meanings and themes so that a proper consensus can be found.

Following these steps makes it imperative that the researcher immerse himself into the data by reading it repeatedly. The data collection, notations, and coding of data should be a continued and systematic process that is repeated many times to ensure that saturation of the information is achieved. This phenomenology provided me with an avenue for discovering the actual experiences of the interviewee. As I seek to parallel the facts from the reviewed texts with the narrative of the interviewed participant, this continued review allowed for great depth and understanding (Colaizzi, 1978).

Data Management

The data collected in written form and audio recordings are stored electronically in the form of word documents and mp4 files. This information is stored on a secured flash drive with password access. At all times, the privacy of the interviewee is of utmost importance.

Measures of Rigor

Research is meant to be both informative and factual. It is important that tested methods of data collection, interpretation, and data analysis be conducted in a trustworthy and reliable manner. Patton (2015) stated, “No straightforward tests can be applied for reliability and validity” (p. 521). Patton also claimed that fieldwork is one way to enhance credibility, while McMillan and Schumacher (2014) stated that participants should be reviewed prior to participating in the study as a way to increase credibility.

Credibility. The credibility of the research process is of paramount importance in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) stated that numerous paths can lead to validation when research is conducted in parallel approaches. The researcher employed both of these methods before and during the data collection process. These methods are connected and checked through the use of triangulation of data from artifacts. The consistency of the resulting data links the statements, writings, and observed information to other aspects of trustworthiness.

Triangulation. Triangulation, or cross-checking data “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific collection method” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 93). Triangulation helps to insure credibility and contribute to trustworthiness. Research was conducted with unbiased, open-ended questions were asked of Mr. Jensen. Also, data were collected from different sources of diverse formats (text and video), in order to answer the same research questions. In addition to triangulation there has been every effort to do member checking before the interview, creditability checking for text and media sources, and planning for detailed transcription and coding (Gunawan, 2015).

Member Checking. The member checking has been viewed from every possible source in order to assure trustworthiness. The interview is included in the appendix. This process is a means to maintain the validity as the trustworthiness of the data and claims.

The purpose of this study is to study the phenomenon of NASCAR and how leadership's firm hold on policies has shaped the sport and the business. The research sought to provide as much detail as possible about context and settings for the data collection process and interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) stated that this process can be enhanced by keeping detailed notes of changes that may take place within the questions or methods.

Dependability. Trustworthiness is reliant on dependability because it establishes the research findings as consistent and repeatable. The aim of this research is to assure that interpretations and conclusions are examinable by other researchers in future studies. Thus, the research design is reliable, dependable, and transferable toward other research of similar structure. The use of artifacts is intentionally chosen for the most trustworthy outcomes. Dependable sources paired with thorough and unbiased interview guidelines stand to strengthen dependability.

Code-Recode Strategy. The primary method for coding of data is the Structural Coding method, which assigns basic labels to the data to build an inventory of the covered topics that will be assigned to specific research questions. This coding was completed during the first round of the process (Saldaña,2009). These similarly coded segments are then collected together so that they may be coded and analyzed for further detail. The second round of coding was accomplished using a Focused Coding method that seeks out the significant and frequent codes to develop more detailed categories.

Data Analysis

A transcription of the interview conducted was coded using the Structural Coding method to develop emergent themes following the inductive model. This model is described by McMillan and Schumacher (2014): “Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories” (p. 367). This process of coding will allow for the emergence of themes to develop, which will then be reported later in this study.

The document review and video analysis provided additional information which will allow for triangulation of the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) also indicated that researchers must triangulate data in order to strengthen the report of findings. Since reviewed literature will be the primary source of data for the study, an interview was also conducted for triangulation purposes along with observations made from video footage and at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. All data were coded. There was a purposeful search for information about and pertaining to decisions and the decision-making process of the members of the France family in leadership at NASCAR. The primary literature was reviewed side by side with the interview to substantiate or counter the historian’s description of events. This form of triangulation is known as method triangulation which involves the use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2017).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 describes the methodology and provides a list of data sources. Because this study was completed mainly through analysis of historical documents, along with an interview and observations, the researcher employed a qualitative method of research. For the interview

portion of the study a phenomenological research design provided an analytical framework for the investigation. This chapter also provided the theoretical basis and strategies employed to analyze the necessary data.

Chapter 4. Results

The data analysis of the study involved the collection and integration of multiple sources. The goal of the researcher was to show what methods and leadership styles were used by the head executives of the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing. In doing so the four members of the France family were chosen that have led NASCAR since its inception by William (Bill) France Sr., as the principal subjects. Since its inception on February 21, 1948 NASCAR has proven a prime example of development of business and sport origination with a strong resonance of leadership (Hembree, 2000). Through the analyses of document review, observation, and an interview the researcher investigated the different styles of leadership used by the four members of the France family that have been in the head leadership position.

The France family holds a control over a major sports and entertainment company that is not seen in any other enterprise of its level. This anomaly is what makes the leadership of the France family so intriguing. All other major sports in the United States may have begun with the ideas of a singular person in control, but none have maintained that control in the fashion of what is often done in a small business:

France's—and now the France family's—dominance of NASCAR is unprecedented in the history of American sport. While most families earn millions in other businesses and then move into an ownership role in professional sports, France arrived in Daytona Beach in 1935 virtually penniless and turned his interest in stock car racing into an enterprise worth billions of dollars. The France story is tightly woven into this account of NASCAR's history. (Pierce, 2010, p. 9)

As the investors in a major sport invest in the league, they normally expect a certain amount of control for that investment. Within NASCAR the idea of pay to play has continued in a way that no other sport has sustained:

Unlike with football, baseball, and basketball, where team owners collectively control the sanctioning body—and thus their sport—the France family ran NASCAR as a benevolent dictatorship, maintaining sole control of its finances, rules, and participants. No drivers' unions existed, nor did car owners have formal representations. “My way or the highway” was a phrase used to describe the management style of Big Bill and Bill Jr. (Miller, 2003, p. 8)

This structure sets NASCAR apart from other major sports as well as a major percentage of the existing multi-billion-dollar businesses in the world. The unique circumstances of this business development are intriguing as the conditions have not been repeated before. This makes NASCAR a prime candidate for a study concerning leadership.

The following sections (those that are left justified) need to be either centered (so they're main subheadings) or given a main subheading for them to be under.

Document Review

Document review was the most intensive and time-consuming process within this research project. The number of books, film-based sources, and articles produced about the topic is immense. Narrowing this large body of material down to information that only pertained to the leadership of the France family was an extensive undertaking. The data pertaining to each of the France family members in head leadership roles was varied in quantity as the different leadership eras have been documented and increasingly discussed as time has passed. It should be noted as Pierce (2010) states that since NASCAR is a family-owned private corporation it is able to

firmly control who has access to its historical files. They are fiercely protective of the data and do not open the archives to anyone in the public. At the same time anyone that does have a connection to the company is known to conform to the rules that no information should characterize NASCAR or its affiliates in a negative light.

Scholarship

Scholarship that exists on NASCAR exists primarily in a historical focus, as is the case with most sports. Information normally recounts the formation of NASCAR by Bill France Sr., the noteworthy participants, the transition of power of Bill France Jr., the following transition of power of Brian France, Brian's troubled personal roles that led to loss of control, and finally the current leadership of Jim France.

Memoirs

Memoirs have been written about the lives of both Bill France Sr. and Bill France Jr., both by author and former sports editor H.A. Branham. Branham currently and at the time of those publications served as Director of Written Communications for NASCAR. This position allowed Branham to have greater access to resources about the Frances but also may have influenced his writing because of the intimacy of knowledge pertaining to his employment.

Interview

An interview was conducted with NASCAR historian Tom Jensen at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Jensen was asked the prepared questions concerning the France family's leadership of the sport since its formation. Jensen was chosen because of his expert knowledge of the topic and willingness to participate in the study.

Contributor Profiles

Tom Jensen is a NASCAR historian and serves as Curatorial Affairs Manager for the NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, North Carolina. He previously served as an editorial writer for various publications, the digital content manager for FoxSports.com, and Editor-in-chief at Speed.com. Jensen is a graduate of Villanova University.

Observational Data

During the research period the researcher attended 11 NASCAR national series races as part of the observational process:

NASCAR Cup Series events:

- STP 500 at Martinsville, Virginia 3/24/2019,
- Food City 500 at Bristol, Tennessee 4/17/2019,
- Monster Energy All-Star Race at Charlotte, North Carolina 5/19/2019,
- Bass Pro Shops NRA Night Race at Bristol, Tennessee 8/17/2019,
- Bojangles' Southern 500 at Darlington, South Carolina 9/1/2019,
- Bank of America Roval 400 at Charlotte, North Carolina 9/29/2019,
- 1000Bulbs.com 500 at Talladega, Alabama 10/13/2019,
- First Data 500 at Martinsville, Virginia 10/27/2019.

Xfinity Series events:

- Alsco 300 at Bristol Tennessee 4/6/2019

- Food City 300 at Bristol, Tennessee 8/16/2019

Gander Outdoors Truck Series event:

- UNOH 200 at Bristol, Tennessee 8/15/2019

The researcher toured the NASCAR Hall of Fame on February 28, 2020 with historian Tom Jensen after conducting an interview. This allowed for the viewing of artifacts from the beginning of NASCAR until the current day.

Research Question 1: How has leadership evolved in NASCAR?

Elliott Gorn is credited with examining sports in the antebellum South where working-class males sought intense deviations from their hard lives. Even after the evangelical culture sought to tame the values of these men, there was a longing for the elements of danger as historian Ted Ownby pointed out (Pierce, 2010). This climate of danger was also connected with the traditional masculine perception of the warrior/athlete. According to Gorn and Warren Goldstein, “Southern sports were rituals of manhood...To participate, or participate, of course, demonstrated virility, but simply being a spectator—cheering lustily, wagering wilder, losing defiantly—proving one’s manhood, one’s worthiness to be accepted by peers” (as quoted in Pierce, 2010, p. 22).

As previously stated, NASCAR is a family-run business, from its formation in 1948 by founder Bill France Sr. to the official leadership change in 1972, when his son Bill Jr. took control. Third-generation leadership took over in the form of grandson Brian in 2003 and reverted back to the second generation with younger son Jim currently serving as Chief Executive Officer. Under the France family leadership, stock car racing has become a consumer-oriented marketing platform (Hagstrom, 2001).

William Henry Getty France was born to a farming couple in 1909. Living on a farm taught him a strong work ethic and how to work on the machines as needed to keep the farm running. This early life near Washington D.C. perhaps gave “Big Bill” his knack for politics and leadership (Latford, 1998).

France was called “Big Bill” because of his stature, but also because of his commanding personality (Miller, 2003). Bill France was an imposing man in stature and character. He was an intimidating man that used his natural talents to influence those whom he felt needed motivating. Bill Sr. was willing to take chances, with NASCAR it was on a rowdy lot of bootleggers, whom he molded into professional athletes. As historian Pete Daniel observed, “Big Bill France brilliantly mixed the smile, the handshake, and the clenched fist. In the history of American sports, no individual looms larger in the origins and early growth of one sport than he does” (Pierce, 2010, p. 38). This perhaps helped Bill Sr. in his personal dealing with others as well. The intimidating factor of a large imposing man can cause some to see his side of a matter in a more compelling light. The wilder association of men that France dealt with in the beginning were not the types of men to concede that they were intimidated by someone else, but this could have been the case.

Bill France Sr. is often seen by many as the sole catalyst that carried the foundation of stock car racing on his back. However, from the beginning, many people worked to turn the disorganized dirt racers of the 1940s into an ordered body. Key advisers contributed countless hours to the founding. Various portrayals of NASCAR history cast the group as almost victims of an overpowering dictator named Bill France Sr. (Branham, 2015). Haden (2016) reflected, “France did what all entrepreneurs do. He turned nothing into something” (para. 6). His work was no doubt an admirable undertaking, whether someone is a fan of NASCAR or not. His

business tactics were effective in establishing a lasting business that has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams: “If you admire people who take an idea and relentlessly execute until they turn their idea into a reality—then you *should* be a Bill France, Sr. fan. He's the quintessential American entrepreneur” (Haden, 2016, para. 25).

By all accounts, France had a passion for racing, but was not a great competitor himself. In an interview entitled “The Great Drivers” (on former channel The Nashville Network), Bill Sr. discussed his own racing career and the start of the sport: “In the strictest sense of the word, Bill France Sr. is not a great racing driver. He was a good racing driver in his early days, but he soon discovered that sanctioning and organizing were his strengths” (Coleman, 2018, p. 28). This spin on Bill Sr. allowed the media outlet of NASCAR to paint him in a positive light while still considering his shortcomings as a driver. His former racing experience although did gain him the respect of those racing in his promotions. Former driver Buddy Baker claimed that since Bill Sr. was a former driver himself, he understood what it took to run the controlling body more than others would. He believed that Bill Sr. was an authority figure who possessed an almost omnipresence about him. He knew when the competitors disobeyed established codes of conduct and enforced his rules upon them. Baker compared France to a school principal who gained the respect of all those in the garage area (Coleman, 1984).

As France worked in the Southeast as a promoter, he wanted to bring in larger crowds. He proposed the advertising of a National Championship race. In Branham’s (2015) biography of Bill Sr. he states that Jim Hunter, former NASCAR executive, gave France the idea for a structured points system. He understood that having a national championship based on only one race did not make sense. There must be points throughout the full season that judged the best over a long period of time, just like other sports, for a champion to be named. Garrison also

pointed out that there should be a monetary prize associated with championship in order to provide a greater motivation for those that are competing in each race to take the championship into consideration.

After competing at Georgia's Lakewood Speedway in front of a very large crowd, Bill France Sr. realized the potential of stock car racing to draw in viewers and then was determined to build his own operation back in Florida. But he also knew to get the financial means and star drivers on board that drew in these crowds. France achieved this by recruiting Georgia's moonshine kingpin, Raymond Parks (Lopez Vol 1, 2016, 26:00). NASCAR leader Brian France commented on Bill Sr.'s drive: "My grandfather...was, as I say, bigger than life, and right after World War II, he had an unwavering amount of passion...about building things, about doing things that seemed very difficult and impossible" (Lopez Vol. 1, 2016, 39:45).

France spoke with the Automobile Association of America (AAA), which was involved in racing at the time, about being the governing body for a stock car association as it was for the top racing association at the time. AAA was not interested. The documentary *American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR* stated that France found this as an affront and motivation for his creation of NASCAR, "This fresh insult by a sanctioning body, similar to the one France endured in 1938, both haunted and motivated Big Bill France throughout his early years as a promoter" (Edwards Vol. 1, 2004, 20:22).

There is no denying that racing took place all over the United States in the early part of the 20th century. Open-wheel race cars were centered around Indianapolis in the North and controlled by the American Automobile Association. However, stock car racing was more predominant in the South, although it has been implied that no one in the South cared about organizing stock car racing until Bill France Sr. attempted to make the sport his own. He used an

iron-fisted method of forming the loose configuration of competitors into the leading sanctioning body in the United States. Bill Sr. saw his organization surpass the AAA that had once rejected his proposals (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004, 59:50).

Even though France had earlier approached the AAA about backing his own association, he was able to not only upstage them but surpass them. Bill Sr. was able to do in the South what no other person could or was willing to do: bring all of the rough racers together under a single banner. (Coleman, 1984). He is credited by many sources as the sole catalyst for bringing the drivers under one single-points system and association. All time wins leader Richard Petty credits France Sr.'s leadership as having all the right things, "He came along at the right time. He was the right person, for the right situation, and he did it" (16:25).

Bill Sr. formed a sanctioning body on his own in 1947 called the National Championship Stock Car Circuit. This organizational body lent notoriety and credibility to stock car racing (Branham, 2015). But the stock car world was still scattered; racers competed at any race that caught their attention while opposing promoters set up races on the same weekend and hurt ticket sales. France knew he could not dominate his competition quickly, so he decided to persuade them to his way of thinking: "Bill Sr. had spoken a number of times about initiating an annual winter meeting in Daytona Beach. He was formulating ideas that would fulfill aspirations – starting with his own" (p. 63). His granddaughter and current CEO of ISM, Lesa France-Kennedy knows firsthand how captivating Bill Sr. could be, "He saw a real need to organize the sport. There were a lot of people that were fragmented. I know what a compelling person he was, and when he had a vision, and he had the best ability to articulate it, people really wanted to rally behind him" (Lopez Vol. 1, 2016, 54:00).

France called for a meeting of all the premium players in the stock car and modified racing courses on the American east coast. France designated the meeting place in his own town so that he may exercise more control of the event: “Bill Sr.’s power of persuasion was able to draw many people to the Streamline meeting. His personality got them to Daytona Beach. His sheer will got them to agree with his vision” (Branham, 2015, p. 64). Pennell (2015) wrote that France thoroughly prepared to govern the situation:

France brought in local girls to keep the gentlemen entertained and at ease through the course of the three days. France opened the meeting and set the tone by making it clear that stock car racing needed to be organized if it wanted to grow and flourish. “Nothing stands still in the world,” France said. “Things get better or worse, bigger and smaller. I believe stock car racing can become a nationally recognized sport by having a national point standing. Stock car racing as we’ve been running it is not, in my opinion, the answer...We must try to get track owners and promoters interested in building stock car racing up. We are all interested in one thing that is, improving present conditions. (p. 10)

Some sources reported that the meeting which took place at the Streamline hotel in Daytona Beach was primarily France’s associates. There was free alcohol available, and France enlisted attractive young girls from a local charm school to be in attendance. These same sources say that France had held a similar meeting the year before in the off season in order for the next year’s season to be planned. In fact, France and Tuthill knew that many of those who joined the meeting also had no interest in signing on with France’s pitch this time but saw the good time as an excuse to attend. As Tutlhill remembered years later, “That first meeting included guys from rival groups. And we knew they were there just to see what we were going to do. They never

would have come with us. There was no way we could ever bring this entire group together” (Pierce, 2010, p. 100). At the same time, France and his men honestly had no interest in the ideas that those in attendance had. France already knew that he did not want to capitulate power to anyone else in his new venture. As Tuthill recalled, “We [he and France] had made a study of every racing organization that had ever come along, so I told Bill that the democratic method, where the board voted on everything [,] had never worked” (p. 100).

These factors allowed France to dominate the rivalries and used this to his advantage. He was able to almost immediately claim leadership of NASCAR as the shares of the new enterprise were divided among those that they saw fit to bestow them to (Branham, 2015). There were 35 men, many from different backgrounds, who came together for a common purpose. Bill France Sr. is credited with the foresight and strength that was able to bring them together (Lopez Vol. 1 2016). Many of the participants were wary of France’s motivations; he choreographed his leadership role in the organization before anything had been established. Bill Sr. understood what motivated men as all great leaders do. As for those that still did not see eye-to-eye with France, he hoped that his working body of cooperators would still out-number and thus out-do those that choose not to join the fold. What many failed to predict was that Bill had planned to retain control for himself (Thompson, 2006). Team owner and meeting attendee Raymond Parks remarked with surprise, “The next thing we know, NASCAR belongs to Bill France” (Pennell, 2015, p. 13).

By examining the minutes of the 1947 Daytona Beach meeting, the men in attendance were able to see that Bill France had envisioned and pitched a sport that would be appealing to the common man. He posited that there would be a big draw for Sunday races as working-class men were usually off work that day more than any other day of the week. France distinctly said

that he believed that NASCAR can be big, if the formation and day-to-day operations are run properly. Raymond Parks, along with many of the original men in attendance and competitors, have argued though that France did not handle things in a proper fashion (Thompson, 2006).

However, in an episode of TNN's "The Great Drivers," Bill Sr. was quick to give credit to others in building NASCAR:

We brought a points system, and they helped. We all worked together on it. I can't take all the credit for it. We brought a points system together and a guaranteed purse and rules, specific rules to go by. And as far as I know, when a NASCAR race is over with, I know there was times in the olden days when a race organizer, you went looking for him after the race, you couldn't find him.

It hasn't been any one man show, I've had a lot of help. (Coleman, 1984, 17:43)

By the time NASCAR came along, France was promoting most races in the Piedmont region of North and South Carolina and made sure the purse was paid to the correct teams. But when France was interviewed by Sylvia Wilkinson in the early 1980s, he made no mention of purses being a reason for the creation of NASCAR, which many contend was a narrative France added after the fact to better his own image (Pierce, 2010, pp. 99-100).

On episode 250 of The Dale Jr. Download entitled "Steve Phelps: We've Made Some Mistakes," Dale Earnhardt Jr. cited a quote from Bill France on an episode of his podcast:

Let me give you a quote, one of my favorite Bill France quotes. When NASCAR was formed all the car owners sat down to make the rules. After many hours they came out with no agreement and I learned there had to be one man who told the people what the rules were going to be. "If they didn't like it, they could go home." That to me was how the sport was ran, even in my father's last few years.

That approach, I feel like, worked so well. A lot of respect to Bill France. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Phelps, 2019, 33:50)

What became known as the “first cabinet” of NASCAR included four men (Pat Purcell, Ed Otto, Bill Tuthill, and Louis Ossinsky) who carried weight in the leadership of the organization and some ownership. Since the original meeting at the Streamline Hotel, Otto retained 40% of the stock in NASCAR ownership, having picked up Bill Tuthill’s 20% when he departed the company. Bill France Sr. had his original, controlling, 50% and Ossinsky had an original 10% (Branham, 2015). France would eventually come to own all of the original shares of NASCAR. What has come to be seen as his family’s iron-fisted hold on the sport was finally secured when Tuthill transferred his shares to another promoter who, after many disputes with Bill Sr., finally sold them to France. Upon Ossinsky’s death in 1971, France took control of his stake in the company as well. From that time forward NASCAR has remained a solely-owned and -run family business.

No one could have imagined in 1948 that NASCAR would grow to become the world’s largest privately held sporting enterprise, nor that France would become a billionaire, ranking—as Henry Ford had—among America’s wealthiest men. At the time, stock car racing was hardly a guaranteed moneymaker. But there were a few early suspicions that France was setting NASCAR up as his own personal cash machine. (Thompson, 2006, p. 242)

Even though France had always had controlling interest, these transactions solidified his place as solo commander.

Many of the men who attended the historic hotel meeting felt that they had been promised one thing yet given another. France had made the plans sound as if all those in

attendance would play a role in the newly-formed organization. But in truth, it appeared as if those promises were more bait for their cooperation than their actual partnership in the enterprise. Raymond Parks did not mince words about Bill France's gaining control of NASCAR. "He used his lawyers to draw up legal papers giving him all rights to our organization...That's how Bill France stole NASCAR from the [rest] of us that were there" (Thompson, 2006, p. 243). Long time competitor Smokey Yunick said it best, "NASCAR is the Frances'" (Yunick, 2001, p. 4).

Throughout Bill Sr.'s leadership, NASCAR went from a loose organization of backwoods daredevils to a respected organization selling tickets to attracted fans. Bill Sr. had taken the group of men who drove their own cars to corporate-backed teams working with the largest car companies in the world. He had established a successful company that would endure beyond his own life and into the future. Even at the end of his role as a leader in the company, he held on for some time advising his son and ensuring that the proverbial ship did not go off course.

One of the most powerful men within the NASCAR ranks outside of the France family is former NASCAR president Mike Helton. Helton spoke about the end of Bill Sr.'s leadership:

I don't know that anything really wore him out. I think Bill Sr. just had a sense for "seeing around the corner," which is something that Bill Jr. and Jim France both inherited, quite frankly. I think Bill Sr. had that sense...and in the 1970s, after all he had done... I'm sure part of it was he was wore down some, but I think he saw that Bill Jr. was going to be the right catalyst, at that moment, for the future of NASCAR. (Branham, 2015, p. 148)

There was an outcry from many fans and those in the garage area that the sport could not go on without Bill Sr. at the helm. Much of this had to do with Bill Jr.'s age and the idea that he did not have the experience necessary to do what would be required. But as Mike Helton points out, Bill Sr. would not be going away on an extended fishing trip; he still ran International Speedway Corporation and stayed involved with NASCAR's operation (Branham, 2015).

In 2004, Bill Jr. spoke of his father's leadership as the foundation for his own leadership:

He laid the groundwork for everything I've been able to accomplish...You can't build anything successful without a solid foundation—be it a house or a business. What my father did was make sure that NASCAR would have a solid foundation. He knew the importance of that because right from the start of this thing...He knew we were headed toward something big. He knew that from the very beginning. (Branham, 2010, p. 7)

Lesla France-Kennedy stated that the power change was not an overnight process:

As I recall my father had a lot of responsibility already. I don't think it was overwhelming for him. The transition over time had been handled pretty well. I think that it's always difficult for someone in a control position, and especially a strong personality like my grandfather, to totally let go of anything, I think that's human nature. I wouldn't have seen it as anything but just normal growing. (Edelstein, 2000, p. 229)

In the memoir of Bill Jr., Branham says “Bill Sr. *created* NASCAR. Bill Jr. *made* NASCAR” (2010, p. 7). On January 10, 1972 a photo was taken of Bill France Sr. passing a set of keys to his son Bill Jr. as a symbolic passing of the leadership to the next generation. Bill Sr. was said to look older than 62 years old while Bill Jr. appeared younger than his 38 years

(Branham, 2015). Reporter Johnathan Ingram wrote that the time for the change had come: “I would suggest Bill Jr. was ready, and that Bill Sr. was confident that he had the ‘Horse sense,’ as he called it, to do the job. And I would also say that the 1960s (in general) just wore him out. He got Daytona up and running and into the black fairly quickly, which was good” (Branham, 2015, p. 154). Bill Jr.’s daughter observed the differences in the two leadership styles: “My father and my grandfather had two very different styles. My grandfather was an entrepreneur. He had a vision. And my dad was very, very capable of taking that vision and executing it. He was more of a detail person. He could look at the need to get it right and to execute it” (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016, 53:28).

Bill Sr. understood that maintaining control meant that he must have plans in place that allowed him to be completely self-sufficient. As a promoter and sanctioning body, France was able to oversee control of what happened in the races, but with ownership in Daytona and later tracks, he was able to control every aspect. Because the France family owned the track, they were able to have even more control over what happened in the sport. This led to a leadership monopoly in which the France family has the most control over a sport than any one single family in America. This power resulted in the Frances not only establishing ownership as the controlling body, but over the sport venues themselves in most cases (Pierce, 2010).

NASCAR Hall of Fame curatorial affairs manager Tom Jensen stated in an interview conducted on February 28, 2020 what he believes were Bill Sr.’s greatest strengths:

I think Bill Sr.’s greatest strength as a leader was...actually there were several of them. He was a great organizer. He was able to get people to support him. I think one of the most important things that he did in the early days of this sport was he did what he said he was going to do. If he promised \$5,000 dollars for a race

purse, \$5,000 was paid out. And that was at a time when there were a blue zillion fly-by-night promoters and organizers. The sport was very disorganized and France was somebody who his word was solid. He also had a tremendous work ethic. He would do anything. He nailed flyers up to telephone poles. He did media interviews. He teched the cars. He waved the flag. He was tireless. He worked seven days a week and there was nothing he wouldn't do. Part of the reason for his success, and you will find this with almost every successful person, is a willingness to do what others who are less successful won't do. He was very, very good at getting things done and worked really hard...He was a great salesman. He was very charismatic. He was very successful at what he did. He was one of those guys who could get people to follow him. Once it became obvious that he was delivering his promises to people, that made it easy for them to follow him. I'm sure when he got started, there were some people who were skeptical. He definitely could command an audience and get people to follow him.

Bill Jr. spoke about this working relationship with his father on the special *Checkered Flag: A Tribute to Bill France, Sr.* produced after his passing. He stated that they had a great rapport that allowed Bill Sr. to trust Bill Jr. to a point that he would let him act without micromanaging him. This freedom allowed Bill Jr. to learn by making mistakes on his own, which built an understanding for the future. When bigger issues arose, he understood from the small failures the results that could be expected before acting. Bill Jr. felt this method of learning made the result stay with him better in the long run (Charles Intestine, 2014).

Bill France Jr. reflected on his father's leadership:

When I look back on everything we've been able to do, in many cases, I guess you could say I simply followed the lead of others. Well, let me tell all of you something: There is no one I followed more than Bill France Sr... (He) was not real big on waiting. He knew what he wanted for the great sport of stock car racing. He went out and made it happen and didn't wait...I think I've tried to follow his style along the way. That being the case, I feel like I've served his memory well. I hope that, in the process, I've also served our sport well.

(Branham, 2010, pp. 11-12)

Many accounts collect the whole France family together under the dictatorial label, but each had their own way of approaching that leadership style. Bill Jr.'s wife compared the two leaders in Bill Jr.'s memoir *Bill France Jr.: The Man Who Made NASCAR* stating that Bill Jr. loved the operational aspects of the tracks, like working in the dirt more than being at a social gathering. However, she does state that she believed that in later life they were much more alike in their actions. Perhaps this is because she did not know Bill Sr. in his earlier years personally (Branham, 2010).

Bill Jr. understood that for NASCAR to expand and thrive, the next generation would have to be effectively developed. Mike Helton stated,

He knew the transfer of responsibilities, the transfer of leadership, of knowledge, of experience, and of ideas was critical because, as he often said, "Man's the only animal that walks the face of the Earth who knows he's gonna die." He was very committed to the responsibility for what his father created and what he has built and grown for the next generation. He wanted to be sure that 10 generations from now, everything was still right with NASCAR. (Branham, 2010, p. 106)

Brian, as a young man, was said to sit behind his grandfather's desk with his feet propped high telling everyone how he would one day be their boss. His mother was quoted as saying "He pushed all the buttons. He was just full of it, too...He always just knew what he wanted to do, and boy, did he ever defy his dad" (Branham, 2010, p. 56). As a young man, Brian was appointed to many jobs within NASCAR to learn the family business just as his father had before him. He found himself fired from those same jobs just as many times, stating that he "got fired more than any employee in the history of NASCAR" (Branham, 2010, p. 57). NASCAR Vice President Jim Hunter concurred, saying that Brian was his own man more than his father had ever been when working under his father. Brian would tell Hunter that he had been fired from his responsibilities with NASCAR several times. Hunter stated that he would instruct Brian to simply stay out of the way and give the event time to blow over so that his father would make peace with the events. This allowed Bill Jr. distance to consider more thoughtfully Brian's place as his successor and eventually forgive him a few days later (Branham, 2010). Brian was sent west to help establish a local track and a small series by his father. His father wanted Brian to experience the building process in a way that he had by his own father's side. With NASCAR now a national sport, Brian would not be able to learn in a grassroots manner as Bill Jr. had by going directly into one of the national series. Thus, he had to be able to make mistakes on a small scale that would not carry the same implications as when dealing with multi-million-dollar sponsors and teams. When questioned why Bill Jr. did this, he replied, "There's nothing wrong with Brian wanting my seat. But he wants my job now." Brian was about 30 years of age at this point and is said to "know everything" and was constantly arguing with his father, but Bill Jr. was still proud of him. After all he was his son, and one day he would run NASCAR (Branham, 2010).

As Brian matured and found his place within the world and the company, his father kept NASCAR moving forward. As the 1990s passed, attendance, television ratings, and merchandise sales grew to heights that had never been seen before. Brian had been placed in leadership positions by this time and created the NASCAR Truck Series, which is seen as NASCAR's third-highest tier. After this success, he was made head of the marketing department. In the late 1990s, Bill was facing failing health and saw that it was time to empower his son Brian in leadership. NASCAR Senior Vice President Paul Brooks believed there was a healthy tension while Brian waited in the wings to take over leadership. Under Bill Jr.'s leadership, NASCAR was flourishing like it never had before. Brian was working in the marketing department, building his understanding of sponsorship and licensing, while his father was still fully running all connections with the television aspects of the sport (Branham, 2010, p. 115). When Brian France replaced his father, they essentially swapped offices. Bill Jr. continued to keep regular office hours and make himself available just as his father had for him (Branham, 2015).

Up to the present day, NASCAR has shown a growth from its origins that any business would be happy to claim. From rowdy backwoods rascals to becoming a powerful entertainment industry, NASCAR has grown beyond what those first men ever dreamed. Championship crew chief and broadcaster Jeff Hammond summed up the current position of the sport as something that became so corporate that the old family aspect was gone for competitors. Even though the France family still controlled everything, NASCAR was now listed on the New York Stock Exchange. This illustrates just how much of a change had really taken place (Hammond, 2005).

Research Question 2: What leadership styles are most evident in NASCAR executive decision-making practices?

When considering NASCAR and the leadership styles of the France family, authoritarian style (called a "dictatorship" by some) resurfaced frequently in the research. The overwhelming

conclusion pointed to an autocratic form of control. There are many uses of authoritarian methods within the leadership that drew parallels to a dictatorship. Bill Sr. was willing at times to hear the advice of those he felt he could trust, but ultimately the final say aligned with his desire and ideas. There has never been a doubt that the France family was fully in charge from the beginning of the sport. The drivers were independent contractors, and not employed by NASCAR. There would never be a union or any aspect of control delegated to drivers and owners under France's leadership. Bill Sr. made threats of closing tracks, banning drivers, and even brandished a pistol to reinforce his official stance on the topics (Pennell, 2015).

Bill France Sr. was known by all as a man that "was one tough guy" (Branham, 2010, p. 9) and "was all about process, about rules, about order" (Branham, 2015, p. 11). It was this strong will that defined his leadership as autocratic. No one told him what had to be done, perhaps except for his wife Anne, who handled the money of the organization early on. She even made Bill promise that he would not schedule races on Easter or Mother's Day so fans would be home with their families. His stubborn nature became the overarching trait of his decision-making process. Because of his dictatorial leadership style, Bill Sr. expected those who worked for him and with him to follow orders without question. During a speech given when Bill Sr. was inducted into the Hall of Fame, friend and lawyer Jim Cassidy claimed that Bill Sr. was a visionary and a dreamer who turned his dreams into reality (Branham, 2015).

Bill Sr. possessed the idea that his understanding was flawless, not only for himself but anyone associated with him. Grandson Brian France states "He had an unwavering amount of confidence that entrepreneurs have to have when they embark on the impossible" (Lopez Vol. 1, 2016, 1:18:50). Just as Henry Ford was compared to Mussolini for his suffocating demand of those who worked for him, Bill France wanted unquestioned loyalty. Anything less bordered on

subordination. He did not care *how* things were accomplished; France was satisfied if tasks were completed to his exact specifications. His favorite expression was, “Load the wagon boys, the mule is blind” (Yunick, 2001, p. 168).

1960 NASCAR champion Rex White saw Bill Sr. as a special person who had skills that others did not possess. “Anything Bill France Sr. wanted to do, we knew he’d deliver the goods. He had the knack of putting things together and making things work” (Branham, 2015, p. 109). Betty Jane France (wife of Bill Jr.) echoed the same sentiment. “But when it came to Bill France Sr., everything was always going to work. It was just going to work. That’s the way it was with him” (p. 109).

Hagstrom (2001) summed up the common view of Bill Sr.,

If asked to describe Bill Sr., most would say he was tough, autocratic, and not afraid to play hardball. Still, he was able to command respect mostly because of his consistency...His close friends would also say he was compassionate, even though it was a side that only a few ever saw. But everyone would agree that Bill Sr., more than anything else, was a visionary. (p. 41).

This is not just an idea that is proposed by those who observed him from a distance. Longtime secretary Betty Faulk stated that when Bill Sr. would walk into a room, people were immediately attracted to him and anxious to do what he wanted them to do. She makes comparisons between Bill Sr. and former President Kennedy for the amount of charisma that they both emitted (Branham, 2015). The common idea for western civilization is that an elected leader or even a democratic council must be established to balance power out. Many of those who attended the original meeting at the Streamline hotel left believing that NASCAR would become a “democratic” organization. However, as they soon realized, there would be one

controlling power over stock car racing. Richard Petty stated, “Being NASCAR was a new business and all, it needed a strong dictatorship, per se” (Branham, 2015, p. 1).

Car owner and crew chief Smokey Yunick wrote that the dictatorial leadership worked in part because those that took part in the sport were unable or unwilling to be led by any other method:

The buzz words are, “NASCAR was run as a dictatorship”... and that’s why it worked, maybe. How you gonna prove otherwise? I’ve been around quite a bit of this world and many of life’s problems. My experiences lead me to conclude that we were an ignorant bunch of lower-class society all right. ’Cause the only place a dictatorship works is when the subjects are uneducated, and if they have a wise and fair dictator, he manages their lives for them. France never had our respect and cooperation. If you questioned a stupid call by the chief inspector, and asked why, the standard answer of one of the ignorant assholes France had for chief inspector (Norris Friel being one of ’em) was, “Because I said so.” (Yunick, 2001, p. 198)

Bill France Sr.’s authoritative style has been met in retrospect with praise from many of those that worked closely with him. All-time race win leader Richard Petty is quoted as saying, “In the long run, when you look back, everybody knows that things had to be that way to keep NASCAR operating smoothly” (Branham, 2015, p. 1). H.A. “Humpy” Wheeler, one of the foremost race promoters and former President and General Manager of Charlotte Motor Speedway states, “In those days we needed a strong-willed person running the show” (Branham, 2015, p. 49) and as Petty echoes, “Bill Sr. always made sure you knew it was his show” (Branham, 2015, p. 85). Many of those familiar with early days of NASCAR saw no separation

between the man and the organization, “Bill France was NASCAR and he made the rules as to what was legal and what wasn’t legal” (Edwards Vol. 2, 2004).

France’s dictatorial style also meant that he could alter the course of events if he saw fit. One account of events shows the lengths Bill Sr. would go to in order to see his desires carried out. Driver Guber Sosbee was once disqualified for a bogus infraction, resulting in Sosbee’s strong dissatisfaction. He entered Bill France’s office following the notice and called France a “self-made son of a bitch.” France reportedly did not overreact. At the next race Sosbee found that his gas tank had been clogged by an errant rag which left him unable to refuel the car. In a hurried fashion, his pit crew member jumped into the backseat of the car and managed to free the rag from the tank while the car sped around the track. He also managed to refill the car with gas before being dropped back off in the pitstall. Sosebee went on to win the race after this ordeal but was again disqualified for having the extra rider in his car. When he pointed out to France that there were no rules about having an extra person in the car, France grabbed a pen and wrote, “No riders shall be allowed in the back” (Thompson, 2006, pp. 302-303).

Tim Flock’s 1952 Daytona Sportsman series race win was disqualified for having wooden roll bars installed instead of metal ones. Flock felt that France was pandering to the Chrysler Corporation to add financial support to NASCAR, because Chrysler driver Lee Petty was then awarded the win. Flock claimed that France himself had allowed for the wooden roll bars to be used and had his own track workers help in constructing them for Flock (Pierce, 2010).

There is no doubt Bill France Sr. had the ability to take control. Journalist and historian Jonathan Ingram wrote, “Big Bill sometimes had this soft-spoken way of making sure NASCAR was recognized as being in charge, that it wasn’t the inmates running the asylum” (Branham,

2015, p. 86). NASCAR Hall of Fame historian Buz McKim says, “Bill Sr. was the spin-master. He could hit the ground running while making chicken salad out of chicken manure and never miss a beat” (Branham, 2015, p. 93). Brian France believed that his grandfather's ability to persuade others to follow his direction was his strongest quality. He saw Bill Sr.’s salesmanship as not only a compelling trait but as the ability to fully convince others fully to his desires (Lopez Vol 2, 2016, 52:00). France’s methods may seem harsh to many, but they produced results. Despite the fact that his style of leadership was often criticized, it was effective at accomplishing his goals. This is evident from those that worked and competed under him such as three-time champion Cale Yarborough, who saw France as someone who could lead people effectively: “Bill France had what it took, as you say, put people together and make things work. And that’s what’s made stock car racing as big as it is today. It just bowls down to, Bill France took nothing and made something out of it” (Coleman, 1984, 16:00).

France knew immediately that he could not employ a diplomatic approach to running the organization. He would thus have the upper hand when shifts in plans and discussions took place.

France never said so publicly, but he believed stock car racing could not survive with democracy. There’d be too much infighting and what he called “dissidence.” Bill Tuthill agreed with him and before the meeting told France, “The democratic method...never worked.” France and Tuthill had therefore schemed beforehand to prevent representatives of rival organizations from taking a lead role in any new organization. To avoid getting into detailed debates over bylaws and definitions, France and Tuthill hoped to set themselves up as the new organization’s top dogs. That way, they could afterward make the rules themselves. Only such an

autocracy, they truly believed, could survive. Other participants in the Ebony Room meetings wouldn't realize until later that they'd given France the power he'd always wanted. Raymond Parks was among those who later grumbled, "The next thing we know, NASCAR belongs to Bill France." Which, of course, had been France's plan all along. (Thompson, 2006, p. 235)

Jonathan Ingram posited, "I do think it is a very good perspective to go back to the [Horatio Alger analogy] to see that Bill Sr. was an amazing man. He wanted them to see him standing above them at times, as a leader" (Branham, 2015, p. 154). Ingram considers Bill Sr. as a self-cast, leading character in a real-life Horatio Alger story. He claimed that Bill Sr. propagated an image that would have fit snugly into an Alger manuscript. Ingram continued,

And I think it tells you something about Big Bill's sophistication that he knew a Horatio Alger type of story would play well. He was just trying to be one of the guys and he came up with a Horatio Alger type of rendition to portray himself in that manner... just another working guy who liked cars who got lucky, as opposed to a very ambitious, shrewd guy who thought he could make a lot of money in racing and had the ability to make big things happen in the sport. (Branham, 2015, p. 87)

Hall of Fame driver Bobby Allison saw the need for dictatorial leadership in NASCAR. He thought that the beginning era of the sport required what he called a "benevolent dictatorship." Allison believed there was a need for Bill Sr. to call the shots and everyone else to follow. (Coleman, 1984, 11:05). Bob Jenkins, host of the special *Checkered Flag: A Tribute to Bill France Sr.* spoke of Bill Sr.'s character:

He was truly a unique individual. He was a man that created a sport and then created an empire. When comparing him to other legends in sport it's tough to draw a parallel with any one individual. He was on a first name basis with presidents, royalty, and chief executive officers of major corporations but he never forgot the fans that paid their way to make stock car racing go and grow. The world of motorsports will never know another figure like him. (Charles Intestine, 2014)

Any leader is influenced by those closest to them. Bill France Sr. was no different. His wife Annie played an important role in his leadership and how he formed NASCAR from the start. Their granddaughter, Lesa France Kennedy, who now holds a leadership position with NASCAR sister company International Speedway Corporation (now merged with NASCAR), knows first-hand that influence:

I think that if you put the qualities of each individual on a sheet of paper, they would be totally different, totally complementary. And it would make up probably ninety-nine percent of all the quality you'd need in a perfect person to transact business--or do anything else, really. It was amazing. My grandfather was a visionary and my grandmother made sure that it all stayed right on track. And I think they trusted each other, they trusted each other's instincts and so they were willing, if you will, to compromise in some situations. There was a lot of give and take from the business relationship standpoint. It wasn't, "Well, he wants to go do this and I'm sure that's fine." It was, "Well, I'm gonna explain all my points first; if he's gonna listen to all of them, then we'll see what he thinks." (Eldelstein, 2000, pp. 4-5)

Bill France, Jr. concurred with this assessment,

My father had a pretty good knack for analyzing the short-term benefits against the long-term negatives—or a short-term negative that would turn into a long-term benefit. He had a pretty good knack of picking and choosing and sorting that out. My mom—somebody told her [this] one time [and it] became her creed almost, and this is, “Don't let your business run out of cash.” (Eldelstein, 2000, pp. 4-5)

Bill France Sr. was at the helm of every decision made and was known as a master personal relations and marketing. France planned a race outside of the normal Southeastern region in Detroit so automakers could see their automobiles in use. In the documentary *American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR Vol 2*, it is noted that “Big Bill made sure that every make of car available to the public was represented in the race” (Edwards, 2004, 9:57). He knew that if the common man could relate to what he saw, he could take a personal stake in the matter. By seeing a Ford win the race, a man found pride in the fact that he had selected a Ford and thus felt he had accomplished something as well.

However, behind the scenes, things were not well within the organization. Drivers of that era were upset with France's dictatorial actions and commands. Since the very first meeting at the Streamline Hotel in 1947, France had made it known that he was exclusively in charge of the organization (Pennell, 2015). This overriding power presented him as being two-faced, able to present himself as whomever he wished when needed: “France divided himself into two people. The one the racers knew, and the one the ‘money people’ knew. France could manipulate people like the pied piper” (Yunick, 2001, p. 330).

The roots of NASCAR have been connected to fast driving outlaws since its inception. The drivers that Bill France Sr. organized into his racing league were reported to be moonshine runners. Many sources list details of the drivers' criminal records and illegal exploits. However, France himself redirected his answer about the involvement of the drivers with illegal activities. In an interview for the TNN program *The Great Drivers - Bill France*, France Sr. stated that he was not personally aware if any of the men was involved with moonshining. He then went on to change the subject quickly about how NASCAR published the rule book and technical specifications (Coleman, 1984).

Pierce (2010) writes that, "NASCAR founder Bill France Sr. regularly downplayed the alleged connection between moonshining and NASCAR's founding, and NASCAR itself has consistently ignored accounts that attempt to show a link to the illegal alcohol business" (p. 8). He also points out that Bill Sr. was anything but "puritanical" and celebrated irresponsibly when the opportunity occurred.

Bill Sr.'s claims that NASCAR was built on a more respectable foundation are all in part a credit to his salesmanship and marketing. Sources outside of NASCAR-sponsored publications often cite the influence of others on NASCAR's creation: "France is often referred to as NASCAR's 'founder,' which is oversimplification bordering on fiction. Largely forgotten from the NASCAR story is this: Bill France used to race for, borrow money, and seek advice from a moonshine baron and convicted felon from Atlanta named Raymond Parks" (Thompson, 2006, p. 8).

Thompson (2006) wrote,

Even a dictator has a sense of history. Abraham Lincoln once said, "No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent," and Winston

Churchill said, “Dictators ride to and fro upon tigers which they dare not dismount.” In the end, France had to know that even if they didn’t always go along willingly, NASCAR’s moonshining co-founders were indeed his heroic tigers. (p. 354)

Clay Earles established Martinsville Speedway, the oldest NASCAR track still in use today, prior to meeting Bill France. Earles received a call from France, whom he had never met, before the first race asking what he could do to help him. France told him he would park cars for him if needed, which he did at the first race. This willingness to help build a connection for France that would be beneficial for years to come (Golenbock, 2004).

Bill Sr. drove to Martinsville and helped Earles get the track up and running. In return, he asked that Earles help with his sanctioning body. France turned this relationship into a commodity that delivered every track in Virginia to fall under the NASCAR banner. His natural skills of leadership produced dividends at every turn (Golenbock, 2004, p. 5).

The racers of the early days wanted the sport to succeed, by proxy they themselves would succeed. Although, many of them did not have the skills or connections to do so on their own. The idea of a new organization that would pay out larger paychecks to drivers and owners was a welcome idea, but many were still wary of France’s ambition to exert complete control over the young sport. Most of these men were the self-made men who protested against the idea of absolute power. At the same time, there was a noted lack of individuals volunteering to organize the business side of stock car racing. Most of the men involved were school dropouts who didn't have the needed skills for the position if they did have the desire. This allowed France to step into the position and create the organization as he saw fit (Thompson, 2006).

The first competition under the NASCAR banner met with some controversy. Driver Glenn Dunaway crossed the finish line first but kept going. He was later found at a local garage working on the car which was found to have illegally modified springs. The car owner Hubert Westmoreland sued for the win in court, but the case was dismissed by North Carolina judge John J. Hayes. Everyone now knew that Bill France's word could not be challenged. NASCAR historian Buz McKim recalled Bill Tuthill telling him that France loved the dispute because it created a controversy: "That first race established immediately how NASCAR was going to do things. It let everyone know that this was NASCAR's deal, NASCAR's rules and that's the way it was going to be" (Branham, 2015, p. 75).

Thompson writes that,

France had worried aloud that losing the Dunnaway case would "put a crimp" in his plans by setting a precedent in which race results could be disputed in court. But having a judge declare NASCAR's way of doing things to be legitimate only proved to the racing world that NASCAR was becoming, as France put it, a "stabilizing influence in racing." Hayes's ruling also verified, in a court of law, that France was legally empowered to lead NASCAR as he saw fit, which only engorged his existing sense of authority. (Thompson, 2006, p. 294)

The authoritative power of Bill France was felt from the very beginning of the company. France had a tight grip on the order of the sanctioning body and was not about to relinquish it. France ultimately acted as "executive, legislative, and judiciary branches without all the messy checks and balances...France believed strongly that for stock car racing to thrive, it couldn't be a democracy" (Thompson, 2006, p. 287).

Since Daytona International Speedway's opening in 1959, the Daytona 500 has been perceived as the biggest race of the season. Up to this point, Darlington was viewed as the most prestigious each year. The overwhelming size and speed of Daytona brought with it a new appreciation. Since 1982, the Daytona 500 has been the first race of the season, but the first race held there was the second of the 1959 season. Bill France Jr. says that Bill Sr. knew that the beach races could not go on forever. He claims that Bill Sr. had the foresight early on that large modern race tracks would be needed for the sport to grow. At the same time, Sr. knew that paved tracks would be preferred rather than dirt tracks that were "the norm" (Pennell, 2015).

France envisioned a track of his own that would rival the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. He mortgaged his home and borrowed what money he could from family and friends in order to get enough to start the process. He created strategic partnerships with companies like Pepsi who could then sell its products in the venue. The rest of the money was raised by selling shares of stock to finance the building of Daytona International Speedway. Once all of those funds had been used, France began the process of selling tickets in advance (Haden, 2016).

With his new superspeedway completed and the premier event of the NASCAR season planned—the Daytona 500—Bill France knew how to keep the focus on his event. When the race ended Johnny Beauchamp won, but Lee Petty quickly contested the results. Bill Sr. saw this as an opportunity. In an interview for television, author and NASCAR Historian Greg Fielden believes that Bill Sr. did the right thing by delaying the question of who the winner really was. The suspense built more and more each day allowing France to have a bigger and ongoing story in the papers. A local writer, Betty Kaan, of the *Daytona Beach News Journal* at the time, says he "milked" every moment out of that race (Edwards Vol. 2, 2004).

In the early 1960s, as drivers wanted more rewards for the risks, they discussed the idea of forming a union. One of the leaders of the movement was Hall of Fame Driver Curtis Turner: “Turner ran into fierce opposition of Bill France, who declared he would never allow union activity in NASCAR and use a pistol to enforce it” (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004, 10:10). When France’s authority was challenged, he was willing to go to any means necessary to retain power:

A man with imagination and nerve, Turner contacted the Teamsters Union and proposed a deal: The Teamsters would loan him \$800,000, and he would unionize the drivers and work to allow pari-mutuel betting on the races. Turner was desperate, and he was making a deal with the devil. (Golenbock, 2004, p. 95)

Once Turner made the union public, France immediately flew to Winston-Salem to confront all drivers before the start of a 1961 Bowman Gray race. In an hour-long meeting France told drivers “Gentlemen, I won’t be dictated by the union” (Pierce, 2010, p. 216). He swore he would shut down all tracks and tear them down. He told drivers that anyone joining the union would not be allowed in NASCAR and supported it by saying, “And if that isn’t tough enough, I’ll use a pistol to enforce it. I have a pistol, and I know how to use it. I’ve used it before” (p. 216). France defended these actions by saying that banning the union was a safety measure. At the same time, the Teamsters Union was pushing drivers to apply pressure NASCAR to allow betting on the race outcomes. They had seen betting on horse races as a successful money-making strategy (Pennell, 2015, p. 48). Bill France, like many of the people living in the South during this time period, was distrustful of unions. This cultural norm meant that the idea of the union coming into NASCAR was not only a challenge of Bill France’s leadership, but a challenge to the norms of the southern sports fan base (MacGregor, 2005).

Reigning champion Rex White refused to join the union. White understood that many of the drivers had legitimate complaints and wanted a larger cut of the ticket sales. But he also claimed that the board appointed by France could sufficiently decide what was the best for NASCAR, the owners, and the drivers. Although White was intrigued by the idea of a retirement plan that the Union would offer, he still decided the ramifications from France would win out in the end (Pierce, 2010). At the same time, Bill Sr. tried to backtrack from his upset rant to the meeting:

A recent newspaper story suggests that I might be some rootin', hootin', shootin' cuss, waving a pistol and itching to shoot up anyone who might disagree with me. Honest, I'm nothing like that. But I am an American who believes our constitution and our laws—and that bearing arms to repel invasion is a part of our great American...I don't think people realize the seriousness of this Teamsters move. There is only one promise I'll make. And that is that I will always do everything I can to keep them from taking over the country. The ultimate aim of that man that's heading the Teamsters [Jimmy Hoffa] is to control the country. (Pierce, 2010, p. 217)

Bill France was determined that he would never allow a union to take a hold and challenge what he had built. If the drivers joined together and had outside support, this dictatorial grip would be weakened or even lost. Fireball Roberts stated, "We must have grabbed Mr. France where it hurts, though, from all the things he's said in the papers" (Pierce, 2010, p. 217). Although, Pierce reported that it would have been in the drivers' best interest to choose the Teamsters Union. This would give the FPA the leverage and backing it needed to gain concessions from NASCAR. Without this France was able to gather his forces behind him and

overcome the already weakened opposition from the drivers (p. 217). Clay Earles remembered this time as being tense for Bill,

I went to every race...the Frances were afraid to go to the races. Back in that day, the Teamsters Union had a real bad name. They had some rough people. And so I went to every race fully dressed [packing a gun] though they never did confront me. (Pierce, 2010, p. 218)

With Fireball Roberts choosing to remain with NASCAR, Curtis Turner and Tim Flock stood alone against France. France banned both from NASCAR racing “for life,” again wielding this unlimited power of leadership (Pierce, 2010, p. 219). A few years later, in 1965, NASCAR experienced lower attendance problems due to Chrysler forfeiting over a decision by Bill Sr. In a ploy to draw fans back, France reinstated Turner rescind his “lifetime ban” to reporters—well accustomed to his repeated reversals: “We feel Curtis Turner has paid the penalty for his actions by sitting out four years of NASCAR racing” (Pierce, 2010, p. 249).

The relentless desire to move the sport out of the American Southeast was a prime motivation for France Sr. Branham (2015) stated, “Bill Sr. possessed an inherent international sensibility that could be traced to his upbringing, amid one of the United States’ true internationally flavored populaces, the District of Columbia” (p. 128). Veteran road racer David Hobbs says “He [Sr.] was keen on the international aspect of racing. He wanted to open up the race to the world and show everyone it was not just a bunch of good ‘ole boys racing [at Daytona]” (p. 130). Bill Sr. took on roles that would gain him influence with those who would allow him to move his dream in the direction he saw fit. He led the creation of the Automobile Competition Committee for the United States so that he may join a Paris based organization called Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile that governs auto racing throughout the world.

In 1971, six different races were scheduled to be broadcast from start to finish. France and the producers from ABC chose Greenville-Pickens Speedway as one of those races. The speedway's owner Tom Blackwell spoke about the vision Bill France communicated to others. He stated that Bill France Sr. had such a vision for the sport that tried to prepare them by claiming that "one of these days it's going to be the largest outdoor sport in the country" (Edwards Vol 3, 2004, 52:02). First round Hall of Fame Driver and Owner Junior Johnson expressed admiration for France. "You gotta admire somebody that can foresee something like that and France, he has always been able to foresee the stuff other promoters, track owners, and stuff like that has not been able to see" (Coleman, 1984).

France Sr. himself believed that fans could relate to the race if he used cars that were available at local dealerships. He knew if the common man could afford a car, that made him think he could go out and race as well and thus he would take a personal stock in the sport (Coleman, 1984).

Ralph Seagraves, former Special Events Director for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, saw Bill Sr.'s vision for event building firsthand. Bill Sr. believed that if the sport had 30 races a year, they could be comparable to the Super Bowl each time. This vision, which France held in the mid-1970s, came to fruition when it was realized that fans would have to buy a ticket to the Daytona 500 in the current year just to be able to attend the next year (Charles Intestine, 2014, 9:08).

France allowed women drivers to enter races before others seriously considered the participation of women in organized sports. Louise Smith was one of those early drivers:

I owe him a lot because France arranged for me to race with his promoters up in New Jersey, New York, Ohio, everywhere...I would go all throughout the country

and drive. I'd drive four, five times a week and on Sunday. And if you won a race, you didn't win but a hundred, a hundred twenty-five dollars. There wasn't nothing. We'd spend more than that trying to get there and back. But like went to New York they gave me a hundred and fifty dollars appearance money plus what you could win. I usually won a little bit. But I got more money than the other drivers, because they didn't get appearance money. (Golenbock, 2004, p. 16)

France included women drivers in NASCAR far before any other sport would consider mixing the sexes. Although as Pierce (2010) pointed out, this was not a progressive political statement from Bill France. The women were included for one reason only: as a gimmick to attract ticket sales. Once Bill Sr. saw that the women drivers were no longer attracting fans, the women were no longer welcome. By the mid-1950s, there were even signs posted in most pit areas reading, "No Women Allowed" (pp. 118-119).

Bill Sr. wanted to ensure that the drivers of whom people became fans were only available to be seen racing in NASCAR races. This way France ensured that he had the appropriate amount of money when races took place. Bill Sr.'s dictatorial leadership style surfaced here like never before.

In addition to the safety challenges drivers faced, they chafed at the increasingly dictatorial actions of Bill France, whose power over the drivers only increased with the growing popularity of NASCAR and the elimination of most of its viable rivals. France primarily used his powers--especially his ability to fine, take championship points away from, suspend, or ban drivers for "actions detrimental

to stock car racing”—to attempt to prevent drivers from racing in competing series. Lee Petty lost the 1950 points after he drove in a so-called outlaw event.

(Pierce, 2010, p. 149)

In August 1957 reporter Max Muhleman of the *Charlotte News* wrote that NASCAR star Curtis Turner planned to begin promoting United State Automobile Club (USAC) open-wheel racing that would even include the Indianapolis 500. France expressed how the open wheel racing world had insulted and pushed him away by rejecting him. France angered Curtis Turner by fining him \$50 for rough driving and wrecking another driver during a race at a track in Hickory, North Carolina. The report also stated that driver Paul Goldsmith and mechanic and owner Smokey Yunick made plans to level NASCAR along with another driver, Buck Baker. With Turner and Goldsmith planning to run USAC races, NASCAR would take a major hit, as the two were a primary draw to fans at the time. France knew that he could not afford to lose star power anymore. He had already seen Junior Johnson taken out of competition in 1956 when Johnson was arrested and sent to prison for producing moonshine. France’s inability to persuade the law into releasing Johnson meant that he had to do what was necessary to keep these drivers in his races. He repaired his relationships with those who wanted to leave his control, but there were now clear signs that the iron-fisted authority over those that took part in NASCAR was at a breaking point (Pierce, 2010).

Other drivers quit racing completely in disgust with how Bill Sr. was running NASCAR. Major star Fonty Flock stated, “I’m sick of racing as it is today. It is run by promoters who are out for the almighty dollar and they couldn’t care less for the welfare of the drivers” (Pierce, 2010, p. 190). Drivers knew that Bill Sr. held all the power and more so than that, Bill Sr. knew he held the power and control. Pierce highlights Bill’s over-lording leadership:

Bill France's dictatorial powers and the seeming capriciousness of many of his decisions topped the list. Few drivers had not experienced some sort of penalty from NASCAR, with the catch-all charge of 'actions detrimental to auto racing' frequently coming into play to cover any penalty NASCAR and France wanted to assess. In a 1959 *Charlotte News* article on France's unquestioned power within NASCAR, reporter Max Muhleman quipped that since deposed Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista had moved to the Daytona area, 'now there are two dictators in Daytona Beach.' France seemed intent on demonstrating the accuracy of Muhleman's assessment when he flew his airplane to Charlotte and unsuccessfully attempted to convince the editor of the *News* to fire the reporter. (Pierce, 2010, pp. 213-214)

When drivers and owners asked for a larger cut (40%) of the profits, France refused to negotiate. He felt the drivers were being disloyal to the great thing he had built for them. Rather than diplomacy, France chose to use force. Bill sent a telegram informing personnel. "Drivers who fail to race exclusively for NASCAR will be barred...for a period of one year" (Thompson, 2006, p. 243).

As Sr. tried to move his reach beyond its regional appeal, he needed to step outside of his established territory. France Sr. wished to build another super track. France set his sights on the Talladega project (Branham, 2015). John Cassidy, former Department of Justice Trial Attorney and Special Assistant to Robert "Bobby" Kennedy commented on why expansion of large tracks made sense for what Bill France was building: "...it made sense to Senior because of his vision of making NASCAR a national sport. Talladega was part of his planned march across the country...Bill Sr. had developed quite a good relationship with Alabama Governor George

Wallace [“King of Alabama”]” (p. 139). France assured others that he always maintained control. He took on the great pains of building the International Motorsports Hall of Fame at Talladega so that officials in Volusia County knew he would move NASCAR’s base of operations there if his demands were not met. This connection to George Wallace led to Bill running the Florida campaign for Wallace’s unsuccessful presidential run.

France used his strong-arm tactics to stop incorporation of the speedway into the city. He gave an interview with the *Talladega Daily Home* where he made it known that he did not care what the locals thought of his project. He cited a story of a dog that returned to his home with a bone and saw his own reflection in the water. As the dog tried to grab the bone in the reflection, he lost the real one he had in his mouth and was then left with nothing (Pierce, 2010).

When it came time for the first race on the new Talladega track in 1969, problems arose. The speeds were so fast that drivers were not sure that the tires would hold up. Humpy Wheeler states, “Then I told him that I didn’t think the drivers would run the race and, man, he lit up; he was hot as a pistol” (Branham, 2015, p. 143). At this time, drivers had semi-organized a driver’s union for the second time, this time called Professional Drivers’ Association with fan favorite Richard Petty in the leadership role. The drivers saw this as an opportunity to test their new unification. France took this just as he had the first-time union talk surfaced. Jim Hunter recalled, “When faced with the possibility of the PDA boycott, he told the drivers to basically not let the track gate hit them in the ass on their way out” (Branham, 2015, p. 143). France stuck to his autocratic style; it would be his way or no way. Racing legend A.J. Foyt posited,

I really admired that he told everybody to kiss his ass, that race was going to run. You could not back Bill Sr. into a corner, without him coming out swinging. That was something I really respected about him. When he made up his mind about

something, that was the way it was gonna be – period, no deviation. I wish we had more people today in the world like that, like that, like with our politicians. I think if we did, the world would be a better place. (Branham, 2015, p. 145)

France used his determination and public relations knowledge to influence to his core fan base. The Piedmont working class had been influenced by many union busters before, and France played on that distrust and suspicion in a way that always favored his position (Pierce, 2010). This caused the drivers to finally understand that they had little to no room to gain concessions from France now. Sr. had told the drivers that any of them who forfeited the race would not be held to any penalty, but he did so in a way that made it known that those drivers persuaded to form the Professional Drivers Association would be discouraged from doing so again. He stated that those who did run the race that day not only saved NASCAR but saved the jobs of those who forfeited the race. Following this the PDA issued a statement defending the boycott, and France added a new clause to the entry form for races ensuring that the boycott would not be repeated again (Pierce, 2010).

Tom Jensen stated that Bill Sr. used that influence and public relations knowledge to his favor whenever possible:

He was a great salesman. He was very charismatic. He was very successful at what he did. He was one of those guys who could get people to follow him. Once it became obvious that he was delivering his promises to people, that made it easy for them to follow him. I'm sure when he got started, there were some people who were skeptical. He definitely could command an audience and get people to follow him. (Interview, February 28, 2020)

Driver Bobby Allison said, “Bill Sr. knew we had to go racing and we knew we had to go racing. We knew we didn’t want to have to go out and get newspaper routes or gas-station jobs, that’s for sure” (Branham, 2015, p. 146). While France had his authority and leadership challenged once again, he reacted in a manner most common of those in a dictatorial style, he refused to be threatened and continued unabated. *Charlotte News* reporter Bob Myers stated “France retaliated by loading the field with drivers from his Grand Touring division. He thought the organization was a threat to NASCAR...he despised threats to his organization worse than anything I had ever seen. He just won't tolerate it” (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004, 49:16). The race went on as scheduled but without its star drivers. *The United Press International* headline read, “Brickhouse Wins Talladega as Czar’s Empire Crumbles.” France had been dealt a blow to his heavy-handed direction. Branham wrote, “It was the anguish of seeing the second-most anticipated event of his career fall apart right before his eyes... and have his garage treat him with the sort of disrespect he never could’ve imagined back in December 1947...” (Branham, 2015, p. 148).

Driver Cale Yarborough was also upset that Bill Sr. and the NASCAR officials were up in glass- encased towers looking down on the participants, talking about safety without taking risk and then act as if they encouraged danger. Driver Charlie Glotzbach complained that France ran NASCAR “like a Communist organization.” The drivers were afraid to say anything about the way that they were being treated for fear that there would be retribution. Glotzbach highlights a breach of safety protocol when NASCAR proceeded with a Sportsman Division race at Daytona in 1969, even though there was a clearly wet track. Driver Don McTavish was killed in an accident that took place due to poor racing conditions. “I don’t know how those NASCAR officials can sleep at night,” Glotzbach said (Pierce, 2010, p. 269).

NASCAR official Jim Hunter said that he felt that the event took the driving force out of Bill Sr.: “It had to. What a letdown... it had to be a tremendous letdown and it might well have triggered him to turn things over to his son when he did” (Branham, 2015, p. 153). Driver Jonathan Ingram said,

In his heart, Bill Sr. believed in himself as “the guy” who was “one of them,” who wanted to make the sport of stock car racing better for the people who participated and the people who bought the tickets. That’s what ultimately drove him...Again, with the NASCAR garage, he saw himself as a guy who really thought he was one of them and then, all of a sudden, he was on the outside looking in. Of course, whenever someone wields that much power like he did, over time.... It said a lot about Bill Sr. to say it was time to take a back seat – after being “Big Bill” all the time. That wasn’t an easy thing to do...Bill Sr. did, though. (Branham, 2015, pp. 154-155)

During an interview on the Dale Earnhardt, Jr. podcast titled “Mike Helton: Both of Y’all Hush,” Helton notes the need for France to take action and seek control. He explained that it was a necessary step for France to take control because the family made its primary living from racing. He says that everyone else—owners, drivers, and officials—had other businesses to fall back on, as where Bill only had NASCAR at this point as a primary source of income. “The France family depended on racing. NASCAR had to work right, Daytona had to work right, Talladega had to work right,” Helton stated (Davis, Earnhardt Jr, Helton, 2019, 1:14:28).

In the documentary *American Stock: The Golden Era of NASCAR, Vol. 3, 1960-71: The Wild, Wild 60s*, Tom Jensen says, “Big Bill’s philosophy first and foremost was put on a good show [that] requires having close competition. And the way you have close competition is if

somebody to dominate you crack down on them and reel them back in” (Edwards Vol 3, 2004, 32:40). Throughout the history of NASCAR, car manufacturers have played an important role. Different developments have caused manufacturers to withdraw their support at different points in time. France spent an increased amount of his time trying to lure the car manufacturers to support NASCAR. NASCAR even had PR personnel in racing publications trying to use the format as a lure. In 1953, France had convinced The Nash Motor Company to give \$10,000 to the NASCAR points fund. This led to a major event being hosted by Chrysler in order to show off their new models at Daytona Beach for executives, dealers, and salesman with special guest, 1954 Grand National champion and Chrysler driver Lee Petty. Throughout the early 1950s, these events would not amount to major support from the factories outside of Hudson’s (car company) money, but the courtship of France during this time laid the groundwork for the relationship the cars companies would form with NASCAR in the future (Pierce, 2010)

The funds and support of the auto industry were significant changes for NASCAR. Instead of dealing with men that many would perceive as less reputable, Bill France was now meeting and dining with top executives of some of the world’s most powerful companies. France often would fly to Detroit to meet with top executives including Ed Cole of Chevrolet, Bunky Knudsen of Pontiac, and Jacques Passino at Ford. In 1957, during the Daytona Beach Grand National race, France hosted the most influential individual in Detroit during the 1950s—Harley Earl who was the head of General Motors’ Styling section and known as the father of the tail fin (Pierce, 2010).

Junior Johnson constructed cars that usually fell within the parameters of being “illegal,” but France allowed the cars to race so that he could convince Ford to return support to the series (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004). Many racers, as long as it met the needs and interest of those France, “...

continued to operate outside the boundaries set by the authoritarian France” (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004).

In 1957, with the concern for auto safety becoming an important issue, the manufacturers withdrew support. They did not want to be associated with the wrecks, injuries, and deaths that NASCAR produced. The Automobile Manufacturers Association issued a ban on its members—all the Detroit automakers — “participating in or engaging in any public contest, competition event or test of passenger cars involving or suggestion racing or speed” (Pierce, 2010). Bill France and NASCAR publicists tried to spin the manufacturers’ withdrawal as a positive and said that it would have “little to no effect” (Pierce, 2010, p. 186). France would give money to the struggling teams when they may not be able to continue. When the Environmental Protection Agency complained of noise pollution, France set out to make changes that would offset their efforts. In 1974, when a national energy crisis was threatening the possibility of interfering with NASCAR, Bill Sr. negotiated for races to continue with shorter lengths, 90% of the normal distances. France’s sheer charisma and determination created the sport of stock car racing as it is today (Hagstrom, 2001).

In the 1971 season, the auto industry met and agreed once again to withdraw support from NASCAR. They all felt, even from their outside view, that France had too great a grip on the sport as a whole, which hindered them from featuring their products as they wished (Edwards Vol. 3, 2004). Normally, France would speak up when it did not meet his desired course of action. But in this case Bill Sr. was extremely quiet on the topic. Perhaps because France realized NASCAR was truly dependent on the automotive industry (Pierce, 2010, p. 282).

Bruton Smith and Bill France Sr. both wanted the same thing: to rule stock car racing. Humphry Wheeler said, “Both, strong-willed of course, their competition got started because of

them being dirt-track promoters. Bruton no doubt wanted to own NASCAR. He still does” (Branham, 2015, pp. 121-122). Smith was known, just as France, for having a controlling style of working with people. Both had the same goals, to make stock car racing their own playground. “Smith was looking to take control of stock car racing, and France was doing all he could to maintain and ensure dominance. Both men were looking to the future” (Pennell, 2015, 13). The natural rivalry was heated at that time. Both men knew how to promote racing, and both men knew anyone else doing so meant lost money for them. At the formation of NASCAR, France and Smith were said to be the two largest promoters of the time. Perhaps had Smith been willing to expand beyond his own region, he may have been able to muster enough support early on to surpass France. At the historical Streamline Hotel meeting before there was time to debate the issue, France was already in control:

Early in the meeting Bill France was elected president. They picked France because he lived in Daytona and was more active than anyone in the field of promoting races. With the exception of Bruton Smith, who would only promote races in the Charlotte area, where he lived, no one worked at promoting races the way France did...France tried to put wheels under him, didn't want the competition and tried to knock him out. But Bruton had an independent source of income, his car dealerships. Bruton was the only competition France ever had promoting races. (Golenbock, 2004, p. 26)

Smith began promoting races in direct competition with France in 1949. Because of France's leadership style, many drivers were compelled to join Smith's National Stock Car Racing Association (NSCRA). Bill France's autocratic style and low pay discouraged drivers when there was an opportunity available to them to race somewhere else. Driver Marshall

Teague led a group of drivers demanded that France began to payout 40% of the gate intake as prize money, which was the standard being offered by France's rival, AAA. France refused to do so and charged Teague, Jimmy and Speedy Thompson, Ed Samples, and Buddy Shuman with "conduct detrimental to the best interests of the National Association of Stock Car Racing," (Pierce, 2010, p.112) which as always served as a catch-all charge that he would use to discipline drivers. There are many accounts of the first strictly stock race that assert that France Sr. suspended Shuman, Speedy Thompson, and Ed Samples for throwing thumb tacks on a track before a race a couple of weeks earlier. In truth, their real offense was that Teague and Jimmy Thompson had signed to run in the NASCAR race and refused to attend, then ran a race in another sanctioning body's race which happened to belong to Bruton Smith (Pierce, 2010).

Former driver Frank "Rebel" Mundy witnessed the power struggle for stock car racing first hand:

Most of the guys had already signed with Bruton, had already sent in their entry fees. And France came up with the rule that if he had a race, you had to race with him or he would outlaw you. In other words, you couldn't run in any other races but his. One year, Time Flock decided to run for Bruton, and France outlawed him, took away his points, and cost him a championship, which was totally unfair. But France wanted to rule it and dominate it, he'd step on anyone to get ahead, and that's what he did to Tim and I felt sorry for Tim, because Tim was making a living and had three or four children to support. Bruton had spent money to advertise, but France decided to try to hurt him, and so he came up with his week and a half promotion, with his own advertising, to get a crowd. (Golenbock, 2004, p. 27)

Smith never thought twice about taking drivers out from under the NASCAR umbrella:

Smith regularly siphoned off both talent—particularly among drivers who chafed at France’s increasingly dictatorial ways—and fans from NASCAR, drawing them to his promotions. In 1950, however, Uncle Sam did what Bill France was unable to do and indirectly killed the National Stock Car Racing Association. In that year, with the Korean War underway, the U.S. Army drafted Smith, putting his career as a stock car racing promoter on a two-year hiatus. NSCRA was dead. (Pierce, 2010, p. 136)

This is most likely what solidified Bill France as the ultimate power in the stock car racing. It is very possible that he and Smith would have battled it out over the years with France dominating, but most likely had Smith not been called away, they would have drained funds from one another until either of them went out of business or eventually realized that they needed to combine forces to survive. This is what ultimately happened anyway: “When Smith got back for the war effort, his focus returned to racing. With the NSCRA out of the picture, Smith was forced to work with France to promote NASCAR events” (Pennell, 2015, p. 59).

Critic and friend Smokey Yunick “...knew Big Bill as good as anybody did from 1946 till 1975” (Yunick, 2001, p. 4). Yunick recounts the showmanship France would put into the production of NASCAR and how he treated those involved as a result:

I got the same deal every other racer got back then ... France Sr. just shit all over all of us. Now, let’s really look at NASCAR, Bill France Sr., and his treatment of the original gang. It’s very possible we were such an odd lot of humanity that any method other than the one he chose would not have worked. We will never know. France ran NASCAR like a dictatorship. Some he crushed (like Curtis Turner,

Marshall Teague, Frank Mundy, Herb Thomas, Tim Flock, and Fonty Flock). He had to be something special, 'cause I don't know of any racer that liked him, but we kept going back for more. (Yunick, 2001, p. 4)

Yunick was known for his blunt manner and his incredible intelligence as well. Where many people have chosen to cast Bill France's stronghold on the sport as a necessity, Yunick chose to use his blunt manner to critique Bill Sr.'s leadership:

France was a world class bull-shitter, and had the balls of an elephant with regards to gambling with finances, and he'd work 20 hours a day, seven days a week if necessary. The Detroit and Akron money and manufacturers loved him. He had some Barnum [a reference to Barnum and Bailey Circus] in him. I remember Champion Spark Plug (one of the very first to put money in NASCAR). France met Champion's executives at the Eastern Air Line plane with an elephant. The elephant had a thing like a pickup box strapped on its back for them to ride in and came equipped with two hookers and booze. The two Champion "big shots" (Dick McGeorge and I forgot other cat's name) rode elephant to the Streamline Hotel, a trip of 'bout three or four miles. I'll let you guess how that ended. Well, Champion put lots of money in NASCAR for 'bout 40 years and in the end they got screwed out of a building they built and paid for at the Daytona track. But don't cry many tears for Champion. During the last 40 years it's been run by a bunch of incompetent assholes, and maybe that's best way to purge a defective outfit. Sometime late in 1947 Red Vogt and Raymond Parks came to Daytona to see France 'bout using a Georgia charter Raymond and Red had formed and called the National Stock Car Racing Association...they

couldn't use that name so they copied it. Yup, that's where it come from. Next thing I knew France's lawyer, Lewis Ossinskey, has changed the deal to a Florida corporation with France as president. Marshall Teague is secretary, but Vogt or Parks ain't there. (Yunick, 2001, pp. 165-166)

Research Question 3: How has leadership style impacted NASCAR's business?

Richard Petty, known as The King of NASCAR because of his 200 wins, said of France Sr., "He was one forward-thinking, future-thinking individual" (Branham, 2015, p. 2). Petty went on to say that France "had complete control of what he thought was going to be the best things for NASCAR" (Branham, 2015, p. 3). Despite the negative responses to France's iron-fisted approach to leadership, Thompson (2006) quoted Petty as saying that, "NASCAR got this big by being a dictatorship" (p. 353). Writer Jim Foster said of Sr.: "His philosophy was, you have to take chances and learn by your mistakes" (Branham, 2015, p. 48).

Any entrepreneur who starts a business hopes that what they build and dedicate their lives to will thrive long after their absence. In 1972, Bill Sr. turned what he had built over to the control of his oldest son, Bill Jr.; in 2003, the business passed on to third-generation Brian France. These changes also encompassed many other family members working in holding senior positions within NASCAR and sister company International Speedway Corporation (Haden, 2016). Bill France wanted to ensure that NASCAR lived far beyond his life. "He continued building the sport by talking, cajoling, twisting arms and shaking hands. He employed his warm personality or his stern taskmaster approach as a situation might dictate. He could be a charmer or a czar, but he got it done" (Latford, 1998, p. 39).

Many critics claimed that France negatively impacted the racing business by lowering standards from those established by other governing bodies. AAA and USAC had always paid

40% of the gate out as a purse. Bill Sr. had never meet this same standard. Former driver Marshall Teague, acting as NASCAR's first secretary and treasurer, tried to get Bill Sr. to meet this standard, but found himself suspended and relieved of his official position (Pierce, 2010, p. 214). Neal Thompson stated that the negative aspects of Bill Sr.'s leadership have been whitewashed through the years. As the old adage says "History is written by the victors":

Bill France, for better or worse, commandeered stock car racing, declared himself its king, appropriated its coffers and history, leaving the real but untidy story behind. He transformed an unruly hobby into a monopoly, then rewrote the past.... Raymond Parks, his moonshining cousins, and their four-letter-word-using friends from the red-dirt hills of North Georgia helped create the sport that Bill France ultimately made his own. (Thompson, 2006, p. 9)

Bill France Jr. has been described as a leader who followed in his father's footsteps. His autocratic style was a hallmark of the leadership practiced since the start of NASCAR. Although, unlike his father Bill Jr. seemed to show signs that he was more enduring to those around him. Bill Jr. joined in the work as needed, he is famously seen in photos driving tractors and graders during the building of Daytona International Speedway (Branham, 2015). Former NASCAR Hall of Fame historian Buz McKim stated that Bill Jr. was fully born into the sport, and that everything he did in his life was a product of ensuring that it continued. He did every job in the sport, just as his father had before him worked his way up to the unquestioned leader position. (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016, 4:45). Jim France said that his brother was "going to school" every day. The subject: NASCAR 101 (Branham, 2010).

Bill Jr. understood that everyone involved needed to see value in what the company was doing in order to fully follow leadership. France Jr. claimed that, "Everybody involved in this

deal has to benefit, or else it won't work. That's always the way it's been. It's the way it has to be" (Branham, 2015, p. 116). Jim Hunter reflected on the transition of leadership: "It was a different time in the industry, without a doubt, requiring different people skills, when Bill France Jr. took over" (p. 156). Bill Jr. was a far better listener than his father had been during his tenure of leadership. He was perceived as more democratic than his father had been, which was more of a necessity when dealing with the major corporate world at the level Bill Jr. did (p.156).

Jim Hunter, quoted in Branham (2010):

Bill Jr. took a lot of things to the next level...He knew so much. He had so much intuitive knowledge. For instance, one of the things Bill instilled in us when we were dealing with potential sponsors was the need to really study a company to understand what it might want to gain from a relationship with NASCAR. Get this: He wanted us to try and get copies of their marketing strategy plans so we could pick out our strengths within the context of those plans, finding common denominators that could seal a deal, so to speak. (p. 87)

Bill Jr. saw the things that made his father successful and incorporated them into his own management plans. "Bill France, Jr. would use some of his father's tactics for running the sports based on personal relationships and with drivers and crewmen" (Pierce, 2010, p. 291).

Bill Jr. stood side-by-side with his father as NASCAR was established; he was almost an extension of him as the company formed. There is one point that emerged every time that someone discussed Bill Jr.'s leadership in comparison to the leadership of his father: Bill Jr. considered the input of a variety of sources and people he trusted. This did not change the fact that he still had a "no-holds-barred" attitude when he had made up his mind. There was no doubt that Bill Jr. was a taskmaster who would be unyielding in the end (Branham, 2010).

The competitors in the sport were typically blunt about the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership styles that they witness. The cost to own a NASCAR team is extraordinarily expensive. The owners are normally businessmen that understand what it takes to lead a large and successful company. Team owner Felix Sabates stated it bluntly, “Bill Jr., he would listen to you; Bill Sr. would not.” (Branham, 2010, p. 88)

Hall of Fame Driver and owner Junior Johnson stated:

It was just an opinion I had. I thought he can't do it...he doesn't have the charisma...he can't stand up to people in the sport...the sport will be ruined. Well, as time went along, he proved me not 100 percent wrong but 1,000 percent wrong. I was thinking it would never happen. And when it came down to making big decisions, I don't know of one that he missed, not one. I can't think of any leader of a major corporation who has done a better job. People were thinking he was gonna be behind his father [as a leader]. He was so far ahead of his father, in terms of technology, reaching out to everyone. It was amazing to see him take the sport to the next level, just amazing. (Branham, 2010, p. 94)

Although he was willing to consider other perspectives, Bill Jr. was still a stern leader. The drivers knew that Bill Jr. would also have the last word, but they felt he was at least willing to hear them in a way Sr. was not. Bill Jr.'s daughter spoke of the new ideas being implemented with NASCAR that required the approval of Bill Jr. She characterized him as someone who would make an individual go out of their way to prove a point. In fact, he normally said “no” to any discussion upon the first try (Branham, 2010).

Longtime mechanic and team owner Smokey Yunick did not see Bill Jr. as the great leader and idea man that others perceived but recognized his success:

The last I knew of Bill France Jr., he would have had to go to the fourth grade three more years to get an idiot's license, but what's happened here now is that he's controlling a billion-dollar business very successfully. So apparently since I last had anything to do with Bill France Jr. he got educated. (RacinwithDO, 2008)

As a relatable leader, Yunick comments,

My experiences with Little Bill were with a snotty, shit-head, rich and powerful man's son. Remember, I left NASCAR in 1970. There's no question in my mind Bill Jr. is no Smokey fan. And I can tell you I don't light up with happiness every time I see him. Matter of fact last I saw him I got thinking, "If that dumb ass don't lose some weight and quit puffing on all those cigarettes he ain't gonna be here much longer." But obviously my opinion of him in 1970 was way off the mark. He's running a billion-dollar circus and apparently doing it well. (Yunick, 2001, p. 4)

Vice Chairman of NASCAR Mike Helton spent a lot of time serving under Bill Jr.'s leadership. He credited his own leadership style with observing how Bill Jr. led:

I learned it from Bill Jr. Bill Jr was a pretty stern leader, when it came to making sure the athletes understood how it all fits together. I remember walking in a couple of haulers with Bill Jr, early in my NASCAR side, this would have been '93, and I felt sorry for the ones on the other end. There was one in particular, Tony Glover, and he works for us now, we talk about this every now and then. We walk in there and there's a whole host of people in there but Tony would be one of them and he was the crew chef of the car that day. He was sitting on the

end of the sofa and Bill Jr and I walk in. Tony says, "Now let me try to explain..." Bill says, "Just shut up and get out of here, it ain't about you".... so we got that conversation over with. He was a stern leader, it was his sport. He worked hard to make everyone do well in it. He was going to do his job teaching people how it all worked up. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr, Helton, 2019, 58:20)

When his father hosted the beach races in Daytona, he put his teenage son, Bill Jr., in charge of signage. The races had previously suffered from non-paying customers and the young France devised an ingenious fix. He had large signs made up and placed strategically in the dunes separating the river from the beach, with a clear warning: "BEWARE OF RATTLESNAKES." This type of resourcefulness proved essential to Bill Jr. as a leader (Branham, 2010). Said Jim Hunter, "Bill Jr. learned it all from the ground up—just by being around the whole deal...Throughout the 1950s and a portion of the '60s, Bill France Jr. worked without drawing an actual salary from NASCAR. The wealth of knowledge he was accruing more than sufficed, as it put him in good stead of a boundless future" (Branham, 2010, pp. 33-34).

The fear of change is a normal experience in life in most cases. This is especially the case when there is a change in leadership simply because the leaders alter the complete climate and direction of how an organization and group of people work together. Reporter Al Pearce stated that many of the drivers and owners were not worried when the leadership transferred to Bill Jr. Richard Petty said, "We watched Billy grow up. He's been around basically since Day 1. He's been right down in it all along, selling programs, doing all sorts of things. He was trained for the job all his life" (Branham, 2010, p. 83).

Perhaps the biggest commercial venture in the history of NASCAR was the partnership with R.J. Reynolds and their brand Winston. It was a relationship that was established by Bill Sr. but handled more by Bill Jr. Junior Johnson states that, “Bill Jr. did a tremendous job with Winston...They helped him, and he helped them. And no way could he have done all that he did without their help” (Branham, 2010, p. 77).

R.J. Reynolds Vice President Cliff Pannell spoke candidly of the deal,

You know, the RJR thing was handed off to Bill Jr. as his first major initiative that involved him with the business side of NASCAR, and he certainly, from my experience, thought the relationships we shared...that’s what it was all about. But I would say there were two additional things beyond the relationship part of it. Secondly, RJR brought a more disciplined business approach to the sport, for many years providing most of the marketing and public relations support for the sport. And third, the loyalty and commitment from NASCAR to RJR and Winston that started with Bill Jr. and permeated throughout all of the organization.

(Branham, 2010, p. 79)

Many people felt that it was a deep expression of loyalty for Bill Jr. to remain with RJR for as long as NASCAR did. There had been many companies ready to take over the title sponsorship that did not come with the stigma that the tobacco company had. France felt a sense of allegiance to R.J. Reynolds for all they had contributed to the sport and did not take their partnership lightly (Branham, 2010).

Tom Jensen stated that Bill Jr. had the vision to take NASCAR beyond where Bill Sr. had:

I think he had the vision to take this sport...his father built a great foundation for this sport, but it was Bill Jr. who saw the vision of taking it from a primarily from a southern sport to a national sport. He incorporated the latest use of technology, which in the 60s and 70s was television and radio. So he took the sport from southern word-of-mouth, “Hey, let’s go from town to town,” to “Let’s put it on the national stage.” (Interview, February 28, 2020)

Bill Jr.’s daughter Leza observed firsthand his decisions to increase the size of NASCAR: “He saw the need to branch out beyond what were traditional Southeastern roots. He had a firsthand knowledge of everything that it took to put on the events, and he knew all of them very well. He had great relationships” (Lopez Vol 2, 2016, 59:05). From the start of his leadership tenure, it was evident that Bill Jr. was media savvy. He understood that the media could influence the perception of the sport in a positive or negative way. It was also a new way to deliver content and make revenue. Championship driver Brad Keselowski says that Bill Jr. understood the importance of media in the sports future: “Bill France (Jr.) understood that the sport had to capitalize on its strong fan base and a new media presence with TV and radio and took that to the next level” (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016, 59:50).

The media was the most powerful tool for expanding NASCAR into new frontiers. Bill Jr. was learning lessons from the marketing team of R.J. Reynolds that proved to be invaluable: “NASCAR’s courtship with the media that began with Bill France Sr. blossomed into a full-fledged romance under Bill Jr.’s leadership” (Branham, 2010, p. 138). His son saw first-hand his father's relationship with the media and how he used it as a tool to lead. Brian France claims, “Despite my father’s reputation for being a little contentious at times, he actually like the media, especially the writers—although he sometimes did a good job hiding it...He absolutely loved

sparring with the writers” (Branham, 2010, p. 139). One of Bill’s Jr.’s old sparring partners, reporter Al Pearce, concurred. “I think there was a time where it was fair to say he was as accessible to the media—or more so—as any head of a major sport...I don't know if any other major sports leader interacted with media like that. It was always refreshing” (Branham, 2010, p. 140).

France had such an appetite for control that he would expect answers from even the reporters about their writing. Al Pearce of the *Newport News Times-Herald* wrote that he was interrogated about his NASCAR articles many times. According to Pearce, France had a large yellow marker that he would use to highlight things he did not like that had been written about NASCAR. He would even call the writers in to the NASCAR hauler, which was used as a conference area at the track and request a private meeting. He would then demand an explanation about news reported in the article (Branham, 2010). Bill Jr., ever on the cutting edge of resources that would advance NASCAR into the future, would go online and use the information on the internet to do research before he did an interview. He would research the writer’s past stories about NASCAR and the writers themselves. In one case in 2005, a freelance writer that worked for leading newspapers met with France for an interview and found himself on the defense before he could even ask a question. Bill Jr. made note that the writer was a freelancer to him in order to establish his dominance of the writer mentally (Branham, 2010).

Bill Jr. understood the intricate details of running NASCAR from all of the angles. When dealing with NASCAR, he was able to remove himself from his role with International Speedway Corporation. According to former Watkins Glen PR Manager J.J. O’Malley, Bill Jr. would look at data like TV ratings to determine how to build the sport. But he was also able to

shift gears and look at ticket sales when dealing with the ISC side of the business (Branham, 2010).

Just like his father before him and many other leaders that followed the autocratic style, Bill Jr. required a certain level of perfection and dedication from all those around him. President of ISC John Saunders stated,

Bill always kept expectations high of not only his family but everyone who worked at ISC...He would pick up the phone and call mayors of cities with racetracks to make sure the track managers there had been in contact with them. He wanted his employees to know that he was checking on them, ensure their compliance to his wishes. (Branham, 2010)

Bill Jr. had a set idea of the goals that he wanted to obtain. It was not about looking good to people necessarily, but about satisfying items on his own list. His brother Jim understood his brother's leadership in a candid way: "With him it was not an ego thing," Jim France said. "Naysayers did not affect him solving problems. For Bill, it was all about trying to run the business, grow it, and build the awareness of NASCAR" (Branham, 2010, p. 82).

Driver A.J. Foyt was upset with Bill Jr. in the pit area before the 1976 Daytona 500. He found Bill Jr. and began treating him with little respect. Foyt had his finger in Bill Jr.'s face, having words with him. Long time NASCAR reporter Ed Hinton recounted the incident between Bill France Jr. and Foyt, after Foyt was disqualified from the pole position for violations (Branham, 2010). Hinton stated that Bill Jr. was not shaken by the intimidating Foyt when the two had a contentious conversation:

To me, it felt like from that moment forward, Bill France Jr. became a stronger leader. You know, when I came into NASCAR in 1974, I was led to believe by

some of the more experienced people in the garage and in the press that Bill Jr. was not likely to be up to the task of replacing Bill Sr. over the long haul. Well, by the time he stepped down in 2003, at that point I wonder if there was anybody who could've done the job better during those years than he did. He grew to be a tougher and tougher individual as the job demanded. He made tough decisions. And while he may have seemed heartless toward some people at times, he was also heartless toward himself. When he chewed out a driver and told him NASCAR could get along without them, in the back of his mind, he also knew that NASCAR could get along without Bill France Jr., as well. (p. 85)

Mike Helton recounted the occurrence also:

Well, throughout that whole episode, Bill France Jr. never blinked. And as far as I know, he never blinked again, either. At anything or anybody. To me, it felt like from that moment forward, Bill France Jr. became a stronger leader. You know, when I came to NASCAR in 1974, I was led to believe by some of the more experienced people in the garage and in the press that Bill Jr. was not likely to be up to the task of replacing Bill Sr. over the long haul. Well, by the time he stepped down in 2003, at that point I wondered if there was anybody who couldn't have done the job better during those years than he did. He grew to be a tougher and tougher individual as the job demanded. He made tough decisions. And while he may have seemed heartless toward some people at times, he was also heartless toward himself. When he chewed out a driver and told them NASCAR could get along without them, in the back of his mind, he also knew that NASCAR could

get along without Bill France Jr., as well. That was the essence of Bill France Jr.

He was impressed by no one--starting with himself. (Branham, 2010, p. 85)

There was always a view from those taking part in the sport that NASCAR moved too slowly. That was done by design. Bill Jr. wanted to take the time to think everything through (Branham, 2010). Promoter Humpy Wheeler knew how hard Bill Jr. was to deal with. According to Branham, “He was a great negotiator, dead-panned, never showing his hand. He became very stoic when the cards were on the table and had great endurance” (p. 155). This was normal for Bill Jr. He knew he was in charge and used that perception to his advantage. Such leaders are fully in charge without a system of checks or balances. Team owner Rick Hendrick saw the commanding style that Jr. portrayed as his signature approach. Hendrick said that he learned early on that Bill Jr. was best in a one-on-one discussion. If an individual challenged him in front of others, Bill Jr. felt the need to assert his dominance and defend NASCAR no matter what. At the same time he would “trash your ass in front of people!” (p. 157). Michael Smith of Street and Smith’s *Sports Business Journal* commented that Jr.’s leadership never let a personal relationship get in the way of doing business. Bill Jr. had the ability to be as resolved or compassionate as he saw fit in any situation. He was able to intimidate those he wished to with just a look or a gesture. “The man was just as comfortable eating a hot dog in an old gas station or signing autographs on pit row as he was lobbying sponsors on Madison Avenue or dressing down a driver in the garage” (Branham, 2010, p. 180).

Dale Earnhardt Jr. discussed his involvement with establishing the drivers’ counsel and working to give teams the opportunity to provide more contributions in the sport:

As I got out of the sport, I don’t feel that way anymore. I’ve changed the way I think and I don’t think all the collaboration is helpful, and it just slows and drags

the sport down. It felt like it was better when it was one, or a few, one or two guys. A couple trusted drivers, a couple trusted owners, and there was a stern Bill Jr. or Mike Helton style guy at the top of the heap, telling everybody this is how it's going to be. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Helton, 2019, 1:23:35)

The first race (1969) at the new Talladega Speedway was one of the biggest challenges of leadership in NASCAR history. Bill Sr. was still in the head leadership position, but Bill Jr. was being groomed for his future leadership role. As the drivers threatened to leave, the Frances had to act. Brian France had been told of the event by his family during his own grooming process saying that his father was still young when he assumed control. There had to be contingencies in place should something happen like a big-name driver leaving the series (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016).

Jim France spoke of his brother's involvement with the first Talladega situation:

There was a lot of political stuff going on in the background with the PDA. It was complex, and Talladega was the point where people decided to bring it to a head. I think what my brother took away from that experience was that he reached out and started getting a better working relationship with the drivers and the teams. That way going forward, if issues came up he would work with them. I think Richard Petty and a bunch of the guys came to have a comfort level with Bill Jr that they didn't feel with Dad. Bill Jr. was able to really listen to the teams and drivers and then come back later with solutions that worked for everybody. Bill Jr. was able to really create good lines of communication with the teams and drivers that really helped advance the sport. Bill learned from that first Talladega race was that there's a better way of solving problems. I think he proactively worked to get involved with people. He listened to what people had to

say. Now, those same people might now always agree with the decisions he made, but people came to respect him because he would take in everybody's input and then make decisions that were ultimately good for the sport and good for everybody who was trying to make a living in the industry. (Branham, 2010, p. 70)

Just like his father before him, Bill Jr. did not see eye-to-eye with rival and track owner Bruton Smith. Jim Hunter claimed, "I can remember Bill Jr. talking to me about Bruton...He would say, 'Hunter, he is a *bad* person—period. His word isn't worth anything and for that reason, I don't talk to him'" (Branham, 2010, p. 89).

Jim France saw the division as well:

I think the issue Bill Jr. probably had with Bruton was that Bruton has a natural tendency to put his self-interest ahead of others...That can be a successful trait sometimes in business. But when you're running a sanctioning body where you have to balance numerous interests, that won't work for long. My brother's approach was to try to understand where everybody's interests lay and then to make decisions in everybody's best interest. My sense was—and I might be totally on this—that my brother did not think Bruton had that trait or ability. (Branham, 2010, p. 89)

Bill Jr. was determined to use the media of television in order to grow NASCAR to the next level. He enlisted broadcaster Ken Squire and driver Darrell Waltrip to help convince the president of CBS Sports that NASCAR had the drawing human qualities needed to capture an audience. The Daytona 500 of 1979 would be the first NASCAR race broadcast from flag-to-flag (Pennell, 2015). Even though Bill Jr. led the way in the CBS deal, Bill Sr. required that the race

be blacked out in the surrounding states to ensure that the stands are full. Ken Squire said that it rained in the morning before the race which made the broadcast team wonder if the race would actually be shown at all. Motorsports reporter Dick Berggren was walking across the infield and heard Bill France Sr. make an announcement that the skies were going to clear, and the race would occur but may be late getting started. Berggren stated that his tennis shoes were sinking into the water in the infield. He said, "Honest to God I looked up and the sun was coming through. France Sr. could get it done." (Pennell, 2015, p. 91). Bill Jr. had a talent for predicting with astounding accuracy the events and even the trajectory of the sport. Ken Squire admitted that when he went to work for France, France bragged that NASCAR would be a major league sport by the year 2000. "Well, he was wrong. He missed it by about six months," Squire stated (p. 97).

When Dale Earnhardt Sr. was killed in the 2001 Daytona 500, the sport found itself with a loss that carried the weight that others had never before. The seven-time champion was a folk hero that was at the forefront of NASCAR at its highest popularity. His death on track demanded a look at the safety of the cars being used. Because of the control always exercised by leadership, the demand for an investigation did not sit well with Bill Jr. (Branham, 2010, p. 121).

The shadow hanging over the sport from Earnhardt's death was one of safety. If safety had been addressed by NASCAR before the accident, perhaps the driver would have survived. A reporter asked Bill Jr. for a comment on an upcoming story about the seatbelts in the car, France fired off in a controlling manner, "I'm not going to talk to you about any of that stuff...So just mosey on back to the media center, because we've got a lot more to do than mess with that goddamn shit" (Miller, 2003, p. 120). NASCAR conducted a clear and thorough investigation, perhaps because of public pressure. Many racers praised NASCAR's response. Driver Jeff

Burton responded, “All in all, I thought it was very well done and very thorough...They have over the last—really I want to say twelve months—but especially the last five months, bit by bit, given us information and made themselves available so that we can make our cars better” (Miller, 2003, p. 196).

The death was hard on the NASCAR community as a whole. The fans had looked to him as a hero while those that knew him personally had lost a friend. Earnhardt’s role as a senior driver meant he was a voice of the garage to Bill Jr. Jim Hunter believed that the incident may have hastened the end of Bill Jr.’s leadership: “Yes, Hunter agreed, the death of the great champion could've been very well had something to do with Bill Jr. stepping down...[but] the business of NASCAR was changing drastically—and daily” (Branham, 2010, p. 124). The social aspect of the nation itself was in a state of change. The world of the internet was opening new business, communication, and media forefronts. With these major changes, NASCAR would have to change as well or be left behind. Branham wrote, “Perhaps. And if that last assessment is more accurate, then maybe it’s just safe to say that Bill France Jr., ever the pragmatist, likely assessed all the changes and saw that it simply was time for the sport’s leadership to change, as well” (p. 124).

Like many leaders who utilize a dictatorial style, Bill Jr. did not easily abdicate power as his time in leadership was coming to an end. For example, in 2003, Brian was making presentations that were an unofficial “state of the sport.” In the middle of Brian’s sentence, Bill Jr. arose from his seat and called for a microphone and said, “Brian, let me help you out,” Bill Jr. then began what turned into a lecture on a concept called “Realignment 2004 and Beyond.” He laid out a plan that was hazy but with points. He also stated that this was to serve as an across-the-board warning to all race tracks involved in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race dates are

subject to change based on how NASCAR saw fit. But Bill Jr. also made a statement directed to the various track ownership groups dispelling the myth that NASCAR use an autocratic approach and would adjust the schedule without any input: “We are not going to take International Speedway Corporation races and give them to Speedway Motorsports Incorporated tracks, or vice versa,” he said (Branham, 2010, p. 167)

When asked about Bill France Jr, Richard Petty stated, “He saw things Bill Sr. didn’t do and acted accordingly; and he also saw things that Bill Sr. did do and kept them intact. But Bill Jr. took the sport from Step 1 to Step 2, for sure” (Branham, 2015, p. 2). Bill Jr.’s daughter and Chief Executive Officer of International Speedway Corporation and Vice Chairperson of the Board of Directors of NASCAR, Lesa France-Kennedy, agreed that Bill Jr.’s leadership moved NASCAR beyond what Bill Sr. was able to do, “I can imagine that my grandfather was particularly proud of my dad. First of all, if you have a vision, and you start something like NASCAR, and your son takes it to the next level, I think that that must mean all the world” (Lopez Vol. 3, 2016, 6:09).

Hagstrom (2001) wrote while Bill Jr. still sat in the leadership position he fervently argued that the Frances were the most analytical group in sports. “Skeptical business leaders are favorably impressed when the France family shows up. The Frances translate so well what is special about this industry” (p. 118).

Bill Jr.’s dedication to the sport is not questionable to many who directly worked with him. His son Brian said this firsthand experience with his father showed him that Bill Jr. was the sort of person that was married to his job. He believed his biggest thrill was flying out to races on Sunday mornings and holding meetings with all the drivers (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016). Even his

harshest critics praised him for mandating that driver safety be made a paramount issue, worth the greater liability should an accident happen (Miller, 2003).

Bill Jr. possessed his own way of thinking about the direction of NASCAR after his leadership came to an end. He was more detail-oriented than his father so there was a more defined trajectory of where things were headed. Brian argued that his father had a different vision than his grandfather. Bill Jr. aspired for NASCAR to mature from local entertainment to a professional sport and business (Edelstein, 2000).

Part of this discipline was perhaps a product of the marketing and business practices that France was introduced to by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco company, and as Branham points out there is no way to express the importance that RJR had to NASCAR's growth as well as Bill France Jr.'s leadership. The deal was also the first major deal to involve Bill Jr. more than it did Bill Sr. (Branham, 2015). This monumental business deal with RJR has been seen historically as the changing point for NASCAR transitioning from a regional sport to one that carried national interest. The marketing strategies and years of corporate growth allowed the R.J. Reynolds to pass on lessons learned over its long existence to France and the NASCAR corporation: "Bill France Jr. brought NASCAR into the corporate world, and into the world of media and major sponsorships. He took it from a nice little regional sport...into this major corporation. The growth that Bill Jr. oversaw was unprecedented" said historian Buz McKim (Lopez Vol. 3, 2016, 7:22). This growth was not an accidental occurrence. It required calculated planning and understanding how to deal with people in different situations. The same can be said of any successful leader. The authority and guidance of a good leader does not happen by accident; it is purposeful and intentional. Edelstein (2000) cited what he sees Bill Jr.'s greatest strengths in leadership from his research, "Bill France's ultimate skill is in how well he works with people, both on his side of

the table and across it. He can at times be warm and sentimental, or brilliantly shrewd and purposeful” (p. 234).

Bill Center of the *San Diego Union-Tribute* stated, “He was a leader with unlimited power who wielded it for the universal good. The good of NASCAR was always paramount in his mind. No team, no driver, was bigger than NASCAR. Nor was France” (Branham, 2010, p. 181).

The far reach of Bill Jr.’s work and understanding impacted the highest levels of American society. Upon his death, a statement was issued by then President George W. Bush: “Bill brought racing’s excitement to millions of new fans through his steadfast and innovative leadership. Bill also helped ensure that the NASCAR community found many ways to support the men and women of the U. S. Armed Forces” (Branham, 2010, pp. 181-182).

More than anything in his life, Bill Jr. is remembered for his leadership. His life is synonymous with the sport of NASCAR. His biographer described his leadership: “His style touched all aspects of NASCAR, having the sum effect of both expanding Big Bill France’s original vision for stock car racing while also leaving that vision in the dust” (Branham, 2010, p. 86). There is no completely definitive way to judge if Bill Jr. could be viewed as a better leader than his father, but it is without doubt that his leadership has had long-term positive ramifications for NASCAR as a sport and as a company. There is no doubt that his leadership was effective. Not only did he lead effectively but, “Bill Jr. created an environment for Brian and others to succeed in areas like this,” said NASCAR senior vice president Paul Brooks (Branham, 2010, p. 169). It was a mix of demands and drawing in those that he controlled by hearing them out before commanding them. In many ways, this would still seem like a very negative style when relating to people. Although, where his father had been even more brash, Bill Jr. was viewed by

those he worked with as a fresh take on implementing how things were done. Reporter Bob Lipper of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* perhaps summed it up best: “He was used to getting his way. But he didn’t act high and mighty. He could be a steamroller. But he was a good listener, too...For a dictator, he was a pretty good guy” (Branham, 2010, p. 179). Even those who took part in NASCAR more after his leadership were able to see the effects that his ideas and guidance had on the sport. Dale Earnhardt Jr. saw Bill Jr’s leadership as a high point for the sport: “I always thought it was better when Bill Jr was at the top, going, here's what we are doing. Everybody fall in line. Now it's like everybody has an option. Or they are entitled to it, and voicing it” (Davis, Earnhardt Jr, Helton, 2019, 1:24:40).

Perhaps Bill Jr. was able to exceed expectations as a leader because the expectations were low for his performance in the position:

NASCAR management—particularly under the leadership of Bill France Jr.—has drawn wide acclaim as a major key to the sport’s success. While many observers doubted Bill Jr.’s ability to do the job—Smokey Yunick told France Sr. that his son “didn’t have enough sense to pour piss out of a boot”—he proved an able replacement. Years later Yunick asserted, “Billy’s probably out-did the old man three on one in profit and status.” Bill Jr. brought new talents to NASCAR in a new era. As business writer Robert Hagstrom observed, “What was needed was not a sheriff but an ambassador, someone who knew stock car racing and could communicate its attributes to an increasingly sophisticated audience. (Pierce, 2010, pp. 295-296)

Under Bill Jr.’s leadership, NASCAR rose to heights that perhaps Bill Sr. could not have imagined. In a *60 Minutes* profile on driver Richard Petty from 1989, the reporter, Harry

Reasoner, said, “If the aim of a professional sport...is to operate as a successful business, the most successful business in American sports is stock car racing” (as cited in Pierce, 2010, pp. 295-296).

Under Bill Jr’s leadership, NASCAR grew in popularity and size. Hall of Fame driver Jeff Gordon observed first hand Bill Jr.’s leadership efforts: “Bill Jr. continued to take that vision and say how can we constantly make the sport better and bring it to more people and keep it exciting and fun and see it thrive” (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016, 54:48).

On September 13, 2003, Brian France was announced as the new Chairman and CEO of NASCAR. He was 41 years of age. He would not take over the role fully until the following month. When asking about Brian’s leadership capacity, Bill Jr. said that he had no doubts as to Brian’s potential. It was very much a case of history repeating itself; for many, it was 1972 again. The next generation took over the family business and began to incorporate their own ideas. NASCAR’s end was predicted by critics who feared change. Also, just like in 1972, many began to question if the new leader had paid the proper dues or if he had simply been handed the job, mainly because his last name was France. “It goes with the territory,” Brian said several years later. “You know you’re going to get some criticism, partly because it’s a family business and also because we’re talking about a sport where people have a lot of opinions” (Branham, 2010, p. 125).

Two-time Daytona 500 winner Dale Earnhardt Jr. finds comfort in the sport passing leadership within the France family: “I feel like, everybody feels better when there's a France behind, pulling some of the strings. Kind of looking over this whole thing they’ve created” (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Phelps, 2019, 41:22).

Prior to Brian assuming leadership, he was asked about the possibility. He discouraged the idea that he would be handed the reins of the company simply because of his family name: “He is just real clear that we've got a big constituency now of teams and tracks and licensees and sponsors, television networks, everybody else who relies on our sport to be managed correctly,” (Edelstein, 2000, p.235).

Brian says of his father.

He’s not gonna just [turn the company over] because your last name is France. Some businesses work that way, you automatically get it. He’s not gonna do that and I respect that. The question is, who’s the best person to operate the business. Not necessarily who owns it, ‘cause I don't think he’s planning on giving his ownership to anybody other than his family—I mean, I hope he doesn't do that. But on the other hand, there are things you’ve got to do to operate it day in and day out. And depending on who has the best resume for that and who he feels is the best, I’m sure that’s the decision he’ll make. (Edelstein, 2000, p. 235)

When Bill Jr. felt confident that Brian could lead NASCAR into a new era. Bill Jr. continued,

The fact of the matter is, the NASCAR board would not have selected Brian for this role if we didn’t think he was capable. There’s too much at stake. In the past few years, we have seen a lot of changes for the betterment of our sport. We’ve seen a lot of innovation and new thinking. Many of these innovations happened because of Brian’s prodding and passion for our sport. The role of a CEO and chairman is to be forward-looking, anticipating the challenges of tomorrow. Brian

fits that role for NASCAR, and that's why I am recommending him to take on this new challenge. (Branham, 2010, p. 127)

Through the process of bequeathing leadership to the next generations, the Frances of the last generation did not simply surrender the power. They stayed involved in the day-to-day operation as they had before. They served as advisors and counsel to the next generation of leadership lending their expertise to current issues and problems. Brian France describes serving as leader during a time of transition after he took over and before his father's health worsened:

You had the normal give and take between two people in that sort of...After all, he'd run the business for 30 years, and even though I was coming in, he still had a lot of input to share. But at the same time, he realized I needed some autonomy. Still, something like that is going to be an awkward time if you're trying to do things right—which he was. He still had the tendencies to want to go back to the way things used to be and was pretty explicit that something needed to be done that way or that way. I mean, he'd been involved in the sport his whole life. We got a lot done together, even though we may have differed on how to get things done. Probably every major decision I had to make, I would check with him in some way, not necessarily for his complete approval but at least for his point of view, even if I knew he was going to have a different point of view than I did. Certainly, if I was ever in trouble with something or had a big problem, he would be the first call I'd make. Yeah...I relied on him a lot. (Branham, 2010, p. 166)

Brian did have his own manner about him that set him apart from his father and grandfather. Unlike Bill and Bill Jr., he was a quiet executive, who was not a prominent figure week-to-week at the racetrack. (Pennell, 2015, p. 165)

Brian did command respect from those who competed in the sport. However, it may not have been equal to the level of respect that his father and grandfather received. Dale Earnhardt Jr. states that Brian was not simply handed the leadership role because of his last name.

Lots of today's fans don't know Brian's history. In that he had so many different jobs, it seemed like he worked in every department at some point. I can see Ben sort of going through that same route and maybe there's some lessons learned from Brian verses Ben, whereas a lot of the fans today don't know that about Brian and didn't have that respect for Brian when he was given the reins of the sport. Didn't have respect for the history that he had and the time, the dues he paid if you will. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Helton, 2019, 1:07:50)

Brian stated this was the basis of the leadership training he had received from the other generations of his family, "We've always had a management philosophy that you can't manage something that you don't understand. And so, you know, starting out at the bottom, understanding what every job does" (Lopez Vol. 3, 2016, 1:01:16). This has always been the case with the leadership of NASCAR. Bill Sr. himself learned the business as he built it, his sons grew up doing every job there was to do in the process. Brian was the first to be born into a position that the company was national and had to be purposefully placed into jobs along the way to find out what it meant to make a sport.

Bill Jr. assured that Brian understood the business at all levels. He was placed into purposeful roles so that he would have an understanding of every aspect. "Brian worked in all phases of NASCAR from inspecting cars at short tracks to running a weekly oval in Arizona. He, too, has picked up trash, directed traffic, flagged and sold tickets" (Latford, 1998, p. 41). Bill Jr. hoped that his son would develop an understanding of the business the same way that he had,

through completing the everyday tasks of running the sport. He wanted Brian to see the small interpersonal details that lay at the foundation of the national multi-billion-dollar business.

Brian continued, “When you’re coming into a new situation like I was, you want to establish yourself and try to get some accomplishments that are your own. I know my Dad felt the same way back in 1972” (Branham, 2010, p. 126). Brian wanted to show his father and the world that he was his own man. He did not simply want to coast along on what his family had already established. Bill Jr. claimed, “Brian’s got pretty good latitude—in the financial, expenditure area, he’s not second-guessed every time he turns around about his son” (Edelstein, 2000, p. 234). Although, many would argue this point. The media and fans were very vocal of Brian’s leadership throughout his tenure.

Brian’s sister, Lesa Kennedy-France, pointed out that he can be strong-willed when he has made a decision. “We have the same common goals in that we want the sport to grow, and we want both companies to grow” (Edelstein, 2000, p. 232). When inquired about the working relationships she had with her brothers, Kennedy responded, “I can’t really define it; we both have very strong views, and we’re not shy about expressing them. I think people that have been around us for a while are very comfortable with that, but it’s okay in that we know what our end goal is” (p. 232).

Brian instituted a major change in the format of NASCAR by installing a playoff system where a season long points system had always been in place before. Many questioned if NASCAR had changed too much with the new format.

My Dad thought it was really radical...I remember when I first told him about the idea, he told me to let him sleep on it, and we’d talk the next day. He acknowledged it was radical, let’s say, in his *own* way. But I think he knew it was

something I wanted to do. He was trying to be supportive of my leadership, and in the end he was always supportive--not only of me but of anybody who was trying to lead and trying to have responsibility and expectations attached to them. He knew you had to give people some room to fail or to succeed. He was pretty good about that...no, he was *really* good about that. (Branham, 2010, pp. 126-127)

As once before in NASCAR's history, the drivers and owners sought to organize in order to claim more power for themselves under Brian's leadership. The Race Team Alliance (RTA) was founded in 2014 with the goal of increasing revenues and budget efficiency for the teams. Brian France did not like the idea of a union forming: "We didn't think it was necessary," France said of the formation of the RTA during an interview with SiriusXM NASCAR Radio on July 21, 2014: "We think the benefits they will arrive at with this association will be much smaller than they do" (Pennell, 2015, p. 56). However, Brian did not meet with teams and drivers with a pistol in hand as his grandfather once did. His strategy was to let the organization exist, taking input into consideration.

In Brian France's tenure, there were positives and negatives. Brian was at the forefront of establishing the NASCAR office in Los Angeles when he was appointed Vice-President of Marketing (Branham, 2010, p. 58). However, his leadership is stained by the controversy of criminal activity. The end of Brian's leadership came prematurely when he found himself in legal troubles. Longtime rival of Bill France Sr. and owner of Speedway Motorsports—Bruton Smith—issued a statement following Brian's arrest: "NASCAR needs friends and people that will help. I like Brian OK and it's a rotten shame he did this, but people sometimes do things that they shouldn't do" (Big NASCAR Names React to DWI Arrest of Brian France, 2018, :55). Long-time team owner Felix Sabates told the Associated Press, "We need to find it in our hearts

to forgive Brian for his mistakes. Whenever he finishes what he needs to do, we all at NASCAR need to welcome him back with open arms” (Big NASCAR Names React to DWI Arrest of Brian France, 2018, 1:16).

At the same time, a fan speaking to the reporter covering the story stated, “They’ve been talking about that lately, where he's not been leading it the right way, and they have been talking about selling, so maybe it's a good time to go” (Big NASCAR Names React to DWI Arrest of Brian France, 2018, 1:40). At this time, those reports seem to have been only rumors. Although current leadership could be working to position the company in better standing before exploring the option again. The removal of Brian France from the leadership position seems to have had a positive effect on the companies standing. Reporter Rob Hughes said that many of the fans he spoke to that day believed Brian stepping down was the proper time for NASCAR to move on from the France family in the leadership role (“Big NASCAR Names React to DWI Arrest of Brian France,” 2018, 1:30). But the departure of Brian did not affect the ownership of the company. Brian had previously sold his interest in NASCAR and ISM to his uncle Jim France and sister Leza France-Kennedy (“Big NASCAR Names React to DWI Arrest of Brian France,” 2018, 1:55).

NASCAR report Steve Waid released a tweet saying,

Wish Brian the best if he seeks treatment. If so, he deserves support & encouragement. But he cannot lead. No CEO with the same circumstances should. Note to NASCAR: New leadership does NOT have to come from family. Suspect it knows that. (stevewaid, 2018)

Brian opened a NASCAR marketing office in New York City in order to serve the needs of the Fortune 500 companies who wished to partner with the organization. A chain of

restaurants called NASCAR Cafe, a chain of stores called NASCAR Thunder, and NASCAR SpeedParks family entertainment facilities emerged in major cities and tourist areas under Brian's reign. All have now been closed, with the exception of NASCAR SpeedPark in Sevierville, Tennessee.

In his first interview after leaving NASCAR, Brian France stated that he had already been working on leaving his leadership with the company. He also addressed complaints about his level of involvement with the sport while in leadership, claiming that other sports did not receive the same criticism. He made a comparison to serving as a football commissioner, citing that people in that position are not asked how many games and practices they have attended. This comparison does parallel leadership responsibilities but is not the same. The NFL for example has 32 teams playing each week in 16 different games across the country. NASCAR has all teams competing at a single location for a series, which allows all leadership and staff to be present at events. Brian mentioned that his uncle Jim attended nearly all events since taking over leadership because it is one of his objectives (Long, 2020).

Jim France, son of founder Bill France Sr. became the fourth leader of the company upon his nephew Brian being placed on a permanent leave of absence. Prior to this, Jim never considered that he would never serve in this position; the role of leadership had moved on to the next generation of the family. He was satisfied with this previous arrangement. Like many leaders, Jim found leadership thrust upon him rather than by choice.

Being born into racing made Jim a prime candidate for more reasons than his last name being France. Jim was introduced to the life of being at the race track while still a toddler:

I basically grew up around racing and racetrack...From my earliest recollections, I enjoyed the flavor of being at the racetracks. When I was young, we would move

up to the Carolinas every summer and I can remember sliding up and down the red clay dirt banks with [NASCAR's one-time chief score] Joe Epton's kids at the old Raleigh Speedway behind their grandstand there; every Saturday night at Bowman Gray Stadium in Winston-Salem--it was a natural part of my rearing. (Edelstein, 2000, p. 8)

Jim France, like his brother, began his life's work of NASCAR at a young age. At 15, he was working in the mail room, parking cars at races, or any odd job his family may assign to him (Latford, 1998, p. 40). He became president of ISC in 1987 and later served as secretary on the NASCAR board of directors under his older brother's leadership (McGee, 2007, p. 112). Unlike his father and to a lesser extent, his older brother, Jim grew up with a functioning sports business already established in its roots. The France family earned their income from TV rights, licensing fees, and their controlling interest in ISC. They also hold a radio network, merchandising business, and thirteen different race tracks. "*Forbes* magazine described Bill Jr. and his brother Jim as billionaires, tied at 236 on its list of America's 400 wealthiest people" (Miller, 2003, p. 9).

When asked about what he perceived his future role to be in NASCAR as a youth Jim France said, "When I was a kid, I quite frankly thought this would not be an opportunity that would even be available to me. I didn't think it was any kind of big business" (Edelstein, 2000, p. 230). Smokey Yunick writes that he appreciated Jim's honesty and humor when Jim once said, "I'm 42 years old now. I never worked a day in my life and don't intend to start now." (Yunick, 2001, p. 5).

The leadership style developed by Bill Sr. was learned by his sons, and even though they have done things in their own ways, they have retained the authoritarian style of their father.

Former driver Jeff Gordon stated, “The France family, throughout all the generations, they learned from, Bill Sr....And they continued to take that vision and say “Hey, how can we constantly make this sport better?”” (Lopez Vol. 2, 2016, 58:37). It is said that Bill Jr. found his leadership experience to be easier because his brother’s presence and ability to serve as a sounding board. “The brothers' relationship—with a fifteen-year age difference between them—had been dominated by cooperation; as France children, they grew up with the goal-oriented sense of purpose their parents taught them by example” (Edelstein, 2000, p.230). Jim spoke of that working relationship with his brother and how it has bridged NASCAR for so many years:

You've got to go through the process of your career development up through the ranks, to where you get into the role where you actually are in the decision process. the way our company works is no different than any other company. You had to come through the process. It required developing the same patience and understanding is of things I went through and Bill went through. Our business has never been a one-man show, even when they started putting on an event; it requires a lot of people and a lot of skills, and Mom and Dad were able to organize those But those people and skills were important to the growth of the thing and just because you're a family member, you didn't just automatically come in at some level...I think because of our training and rearing, [Bill and I] have pretty interchangeable views on things. It's made our working relationship extremely smooth. (Edelstein, 2000, p. 230)

Fifteen-time winner of the most popular driver award Dale Earnhardt Jr. talked with NASCAR president Steve Phelps about how Jim France has assumed the leadership role. Dale said,

With Brian France and his troubles last year, Jim has stepped in. I think he's done an incredible role, of a, in a difficult situation. Being the face of the France family. Taking ownership of the sport.... I imagine you highly approve of his increased involvement and visibility. What is Jim doing? Is Jim in contact with you consistently? Is he in the room with you? Is he helping you to understand what he'd like to see in every direction you turn?...Jim was over the IMSA deal and NASCAR's involvement there. And how much of a turn has he made to be helping you? And over NASCAR as a whole?

Phelps responded,

Well, I think I start with your first statement, I think he's doing an incredible job as well...You know when you have the founder's son, the founder of NASCAR's son running NASCAR, that's pretty cool. He is a really really good guy who loves racing. Loves racing of all kinds. He's been a racer himself. Motorcycles, cars, you know if it's got wheels he's been on it. He's a thoughtful, smart, caring guy who loves this sport. So how involved is he? He's involved every day. You know he is not...out in front, kind of in your face, on the microphone, granting 50 interviews. Not kind of his style. But he knows exactly what's going on, and it has his guiding hand on it. So we talked about Gen 7, Jim France knows all about Gen 7 and how to get there. And it's important to him. But Jim France also knows about, hey we need to grow our database, and we need to understand who our fans are...Jim France is involved with something we call Project Horsepower, to try to increase ratings and attendance and that has been at the heart of our marketing efforts that Jill and her team are doing. Jim France asking all the time, "Hey

what's Jill doing? How they doing? How'd we do on the ratings?"...He's at every single, been at every single event but one and that was some circumstances, you know, he and I needed to be at Daytona, and so we couldn't be at Auto Club. It's been, it's fantastic. And to me I see it with all the different people that work in this sport, starting with the people that work at NASCAR. So if you work at NASCAR, and you see Jim France, you know he may not know 800 names, but he's going to shake a hand and say thank you. He's going to be involved and say "Hey, what do you do? What can I do to help you?" That's who Jim France is. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Phelps, 2019, 57:45)

In another interview with Mike Helton, Dale Earnhardt Jr. noted the respect that Jim France commands as the current leader:

You talked about Bill [Jr.] being the guy that controlled the sport, demanded respect, sort of keep everybody in line. You've been that guy, you're the only guy that could get up at the podium of the drivers meeting...everybody stops chattering, and he restores order. And tells everybody, "This is how it's going to be, this is how it's going to happen." And you're the only guy in the room that could do that, that had that ability. I think Jim has it now, when he gets up there and talks, everybody listens. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr, Helton, 2019, 1:01:23)

Jim France himself said in an interview prior to taking on the leadership position that he saw the need for a vision for the future, which was how he believed his father ran the company,

I go back to what my dad always said--things either get bigger or smaller, they don't usually stand still. [My parents] worked their whole life to try and make

things bigger; I don't think he would put any boundaries on how big something would get. [My father] was a pretty good visionary, looking down the road or or seeing around the next bend. If he was here today, he would be looking not where we are today, but where he things we might be at ten, fifteen years from now. It's kind of the way he was, and I think he would be the same way today. He'd be thinking that this thing is still pretty small. (Edelstein, 2000, p. 235)

In episode 257 of the Dale Jr. Download titled "Mike Helton: Both of Y'all Hush" host Dale Earnhardt Jr. stated:

I was talking about Jim France. He's taken over the reins, if you will. How important is it to have a France Family member plugged into the everyday workings of the sport, and obviously at the race track? Jim's been around forever, but he's sort of taken the reins visually, I can't say I know what he's doing behind the scenes. But from being at the race track and being at the drivers meeting, and so forth its awesome. And he gets up to the podium, he talks, he's genuine, you believe what he's saying, but like I say he's been around forever. What is his future? Do y'all talk, do you discuss? What is the potential for his future moving forward in the sport?

Mike Helton:

I think Jim will, has taken responsibility that he had to take, and he will manage that responsibility for as long as it takes to get the right next leader, of that caliber. I know he and Leza are very close. He and Ben are getting really close. If Ben were 10 or 15 years older, maybe 10 or 15 years more experience, as sharp as Ben is, the different things he's done in the sport. But Jim was always our best

kept secret, because no one would see him. But he knows this sport inside and out. I mean, he's a son of the founder, he's been at it his entire life, in some form or fashion. Whether it's as a kid sitting at the dinner table listening to his mother and dad talk about the business or being involved at it at every level you can possibly be involved. Driving a race car, racing motorcycles, and running the companies and what we've got right now is Bill's brother that has a lot of the same characteristics to Bill. Certainly, he has the mind that can see around corners and see how pieces of puzzles go together. And is as studious of the sport as anybody I've seen, and that works for us. That helps us a lot, putting the pieces together. He's going to stay in that role for as long as he feels like he has to. He's fully committed to it. I'm proud of the way he's stepped in. He's running hard on both sides of the fence. Right now, like in Bill Jr.'s day, we have a guy that's running both the race track side and the sporting side of the business. Well, we're back into that. Jim's the CEO, or Chairman of the board of ISC, and he's chairman of NASCAR. And so that helps the sport, that will make the sport stronger, better, quicker. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Helton, 2019, 1:03:54)

Jim France's assumption of control of NASCAR provided a catalyst for the sport to make changes that he saw fit. The ideas and methods that had not worked or were not popular with fans for the last 15 years could be ushered out along with Brian's tenure. NASCAR President Steven Phelps sees Jim France's transition of leadership as a positive change for the company.

Jim France, from the time he...stepped in to become the chairman/CEO of NASCAR, he's been at every driver counsel, every OEM counsel, if there's a counsel he's been there. He went to every race last year. He's

only missed one race and that's for circumstances that I talked about just a little bit ago. Every race. And, he loves racing. And as I said, he's a steady guiding force to where NASCAR is going. And he's not passive, I can assure you that. He is a detail guy. You better bring, you better have done your homework because he's going to ask you every question in the book about why and how we get better. And he'll celebrate the wins with us and he'll give a, you know, "Hey, we need to do better on that" if we're not doing it the right way. (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Phelps, 2019, 1:01:36)

Mike Helton agreed, Jim France's leadership has a positivity to it that has been needed for some time: "What you're going to see is a confidence in Jim France, from the owners' side" (Davis, Earnhardt Jr, Helton, 2019, 1:25:09). Those in NASCAR know that, like most things in life, the connection with people is a significant aspect of successful leadership: "The France family has always been really conscious of its the relationships in our business that keeps us glued together" (Davis, Earnhardt Jr., Helton, 2019, 1:32:36).

Tom Jensen echoed this sentiment,

He commands tremendous respect. He has been around since the beginning of NASCAR. He has been involved in motorsports his entire life. He started out as a kid parking cars at Daytona, taking tickets. He is a tremendously smart man. One of his biggest strengths is he's at the racetrack every week. Team owners, drivers feel like they have someone they can go to. They might not always get the answer they want. In fact, sometimes they don't get the answer they want. But they get *heard*, and that's really important to them. They want somebody who is in charge,

who is capable of making a decision, who will hear what they have to say. He is that guy. (Interview, February 28, 2020)

When asked about Jim's capacity to influence others, Tom Jensen made note of Jim's level of involvement:

He is so involved and he understands every aspect of this sport. There is nobody in the garage who will go, "Hey, I wonder if he gets this." He gets it and they know he gets it. He's got the respect of the car owners. He's got the respect of the drivers. When he says something, it's intelligent and it is well thought-out. People go, "Oh yeah. He's right about that." I think he's not as demonstrably loud as maybe Bill Jr. was, but he has a quiet dignity and respect that people follow him...A lead-by-example guy. A guy who has been there. A guy who has done that. A guy that people know who has been there and done that. He commands a tremendous amount of respect with all of the constituencies in NASCAR, with team owners, with manufacturers, with sponsors. They all respect Jim France. (Interview, February 28, 2020)

Jim gave an interview prior to the beginning of the 2020 season with a positive message about the future of the sport: "We're coming off of a very good year I felt like last year where we're really getting some momentum back...It's exciting now going into this coming year" (Ryan, 2020, para. 3). The merger of NASCAR and sister company International Speedway Corporation will allow Jim and his team to make changes to the NASCAR schedule that can move more quickly with trends and fan support. Jim is able to adapt more to fan requests without appearing as if NASCAR is headed in a bad direction due to its changing leadership. Jim uses

Brian's departure as a true transition in the fans' and sponsors' minds. Using the merger of the two companies together as a catalyst, Jim speaks of the changing nature of the sport:

It makes a big difference. It gives us an opportunity to respond quicker to the changing environment out here with the economy and all the things that are going on that impact motorsports. It was a major big step that we needed to make probably for quite a while. (Ryan, 2020, para. 7).

Chapter 5. Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Through an exhaustive investigation of the leaders of the NASCAR organization, (William “Bill” Henry Getty France, William Clifton "Bill Jr." France, Brian Zachary France, and James “Jim” Carl France) this study explored the leadership style used throughout each of their individual tenures. Each seemed to lead to the same conclusion: that NASCAR, since its formation, has been led under an autocratic leadership style. Data from multiple sources on the topic of autocratic leadership consistently show the traits and methods used by the France family as they served in the roles of leadership. This study adds to the body of work on autocratic leadership, sports leadership, and business leadership, but adds new information to the fields by examining the topics through the lens of each of the others. This is also the first study conducted on leadership styles of the National Association for Stock Car Automobile Racing and the study of leadership styles of a major U.S. sport throughout its entire history.

The purpose of the study was to complete a thorough review of NASCAR’s leadership throughout its existence in order to discover the style used in the decision-making process. Using historical texts, media, and interview, I examined the events and actions of leaders to detect the qualities of leadership. No studies of sports leadership encompass the full history of the sports leadership or involve leadership being passed from one family member to another. I also considered the cultural and historical context in which each of the leaders lived and lead.

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. How has leadership evolved in NASCAR?
2. What leadership styles are most evident in NASCAR executive decision-making practices?

3. How has leadership style impacted NASCAR's business?

The challenges and attractions of this qualitative research investigation were in answering the questions through qualitative design while removing perceived bias of those reporting the events and decisions based on relationships with the studied persons. A process of document review over 10 months ensured proper evaluation of all applicable work. In addition, resident NASCAR Hall of Fame historian Tom Jensen consented to participate in the research through the process of interview.

This chapter summarizes the findings and synthesizes the data obtained through the document review, interview, and observations. The chapter presents conclusions drawn from the findings and research questions and offers recommendations for future research.

Summary

The first recorded leadership study to include the autocratic style was conducted in an article that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. The findings showed that the autocratic style was encompassed by these characteristics. The leaders

- Generally did not solicit or accept input from others for decision-making purposes
- Make all company or group decisions
- Mandate all workplace methods, policies and procedures
- Can exhibit a lack of trust in the advice, suggestions, ideas and decision-making ability of others

While this leadership style can be viewed as having positive and negative effects, the general perception is a negative one. Regardless, great leaders adopt a style that will fit their own personality and vision. While this style of leadership is often effective and successful on many fronts, there are disadvantages associated with it as well. Subordinates who do not like this style

of leadership often cite democratic and transformational leadership as styles that incorporate multiple levels of the decision-making process, and thus make them superior. This is not necessarily the case; autocratic leadership has its place and is effective when used properly (Schaeffer, 2002).

Since its formation, NASCAR has had a strong leadership presence. Bill France Sr. began the sport with the cooperation of others but retained a majority control from the beginning. As time passed, those who had a minority stake in the sport were moved out of those positions until France had gained full control. This allowed France to act without question from any other person. The only time Bill Sr. was beholden to other powers outside of his own company was when an outside company, such as an automaker, wanted him to make changes. Of course, this ultimately still benefited France as these outside companies brought in more revenue. Thus, a begrudging cooperative effort still ultimately served France's own desires and interests. Any competitor or team owner who did not want to follow France's command and lead were told they could leave. These were consistently the policies and procedures across the board under the leadership of Bill France Sr.

Once Bill France Jr. took over the leadership role, the company was secured under family control. Bill Jr. continued controlling NASCAR in a firm, matter-of-fact, manner as his father had operated the business before him. Although, Bill Jr. was willing to listen to team owners, drivers, and others to a small degree, his willingness to do so did not change the established leadership protocol. Bill Jr. made sure to establish himself as the last word on any topic concerning the sport.

Brian France's leadership tenure is the most tumultuous of the sport's history. He, like his father and grandfather, led with authority that did not allow for those outside of the family to

question his decision-making process. Brian was the first leader who did not participate in building the sport “from the ground up.” Once Brian was a teenager, NASCAR was being broadcast nationally on TV and radio. Thus, his beginning perception of the sport is different than those before him. His father attempted to position Brian in roles that would teach him the more interpersonal parts of leading the business, but these positions were problematic for Brian who seemed not to take many of the assignments seriously. Brian suffered from personal turmoil that affected his leadership and finally brought it to an abrupt ending.

Jim France assumed leadership of NASCAR on August 5, 2018. Jim, like those who have served in the leadership role before him, has the last word on what takes place in the company. He is in a unique position as he has served as the most trusted advisor to the previous leaders, his nephew Brian and his brother Bill Jr. He also, like his brother, was able to observe his father's leadership firsthand. In his short term thus far, Jim has shown himself as the most receptive leaders in the history of NASCAR. He has met with competitors and sought input from outside sources in ways that none of his predecessors did.

Throughout NASCAR's existence, the overarching leadership style has been autocratic. Each of the four leaders examined practiced this style based on learning its methods from the previous administration. NASCAR is in a unique position when compared to any other sport, as it is a family-led business. The line of progression must make decisions based on what is best for them rather than produce results in order to retain their position. By owning the company, the leaders do not have to worry about being fired should their decisions have detrimental effects on the company as a whole. Of course, this was not the case when Brian was replaced, as he had previously sold his inherited interest in the company to his uncle Jim and his sister Leza. Once his behavior placed the company in a poor light, he was removed in favor of Jim.

The autocratic leadership style has been effectively used in NASCAR. Should a democratic method had been implemented at the beginning, internal turmoil could have hindered the development necessary for the sport to reach a national level. Many participants have stated that the dictator-like style of the France family was essential in order for the sport to flourish and regulate its competition elements.

The autocratic style practiced by the France family over the history of NASCAR has shown to yield an overall positive effect on the company. Many of those who participated in NASCAR testified that the sport could not exist in its current form without the autocratic leadership present. Richard Petty stated that the sprouting sport needed a strong hand to guide it. His sentiments were echoed by modern competitor Dale Earnhardt Jr. who declared that the system worked best when there was one overarching voice in control of all aspects of the sport.

There is no doubt that NASCAR has been a successful business, entertainment source, and sport. The millions of fans around the world, as well as the investment of companies of all sizes, illustrate the impact it has had. The successes of the company can be attributed to two things: the leadership of the France family and, to a lesser degree, the action and drama produced by the racing product because the product is contingent upon the leadership and their decisions.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on my study I suggest the following recommendations for future research:

1. Revisit the leadership of Jim France after his tenure in the position has ended. At the time of this study, Jim has served in a NASCAR leadership capacity for less than 2 years. This limited amount of time does not produce sufficient data to make a determination of his leadership.

2. Reconsider the long-term impact of Brian France's leadership after a longer interval of time has passed since his removal from the leadership position. Brian made major changes to the sport's scoring and championship structure as well as introducing foreign automaker Toyota. Previously, he courted other automakers from around the world. Perhaps Brian's negative exit from the leadership position diminishes his accomplishments because of the close proximity in time to the events.
3. Explore physical plant infrastructure, such as competitive facilities, throughout the history of the sport and how those changes were influenced by leadership.
4. Explore resource allocation throughout the history of the sport and under the tenure of each leader.
5. Study in-depth the actions taken by leadership concerning safety and structure immediately following and as a result of the on-track death of Dale Earnhardt Sr.

Conclusions

The National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing began with one man seeking to bring control to unorganized and chaotic events taking place where men sought to best one another using machines they had built and bought. Over the 72 years since its inception, NASCAR has grown to a sports powerhouse that hundreds of millions of dollars for itself, teams, television broadcasters, and partnering companies. All of these things are poised to fluctuate based on the guidance of one man who sits in a position of leadership in the organization.

Autocratic leadership style has been the driving force at every point throughout NASCAR's history. A democratic style could very well serve NASCAR effectively today by allowing team owners to set policies and direct day-to-day operations to a commissioner just as the National Football League does. However, this would mean ownership of NASCAR would

have to first change hands, and the new ownership structure would have to be formatted. Today, any individual with the proper funds and ability is able to start a team, gain approval from NASCAR, and compete.

Perhaps the only other leadership that could be effective in the case of NASCAR would be Transactional Leadership or Bureaucratic Leadership. Both types of leadership models present methods in which the leadership establishes set roles and rules that must be followed for the enterprise to be effective. However, because of the changing nature of the technology associated with NASCAR, there would again have to be structural changes to the way NASCAR currently operates.

To be effective in its current form, NASCAR had to become a dictatorship. Without these strategies of stern, uncompromising leadership, NASCAR would not have developed into one of American's most popular entertainment ventures. The loose association of competitors and venues required an overarching force to be in place to achieve success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

“Leadership Styles of Head NASCAR Executives: A Historical Perspective”

Joseph Aaron Hurd

This study is focusing on the leadership of NASCAR under Bill France Sr., Bill France Jr., Brian France, and Jim France. Each of the four questions were asked about each of the four leaders.

1. What do you believe each of these leader’s greatest strength was/is?
2. What area do you believe they could most improve?
3. How did/do they get others to accept their ideas?
4. What sort of leader would you say they were/are?

APPENDIX B: Interview Responses

Tom Jensen

Bill France Sr.

1. What do you believe each of these leader's greatest strength was/is?

I think Bill Sr.'s greatest strength as a leader was...actually there were several of them. He was a great organizer. He was able to get people to support him. I think one of the most important things that he did in the early days of this sport was he did what he said he was going to do. If he promised \$5,000 dollars for a race purse, \$5,000 was paid out. And that was at a time when there were a blue zillion fly-by-night promoters and organizers. The sport was very disorganized and France was somebody who his word was solid. He also had a tremendous work ethic. He would do anything. He nailed flyers up to telephone poles. He did media interviews. He teched the cars. He waved the flag. He was tireless. He worked seven days a week and there was nothing he wouldn't do. Part of the reason for his success, and you will find this with almost every successful person, is a willingness to do what others who are less successful won't do. He was very, very good at getting things done and worked really hard.

2. What area do you believe they could most improve?

Interviewee chose not to answer

3. How did/do they get others to accept their ideas?

He was a great salesman. He was very charismatic. He was very successful at what he did. He was one of those guys who could get people to follow him. Once it became obvious that he was delivering his promises to people, that made it easy for them to follow him. I'm sure when he got started, there were some people who were skeptical. He definitely could command an audience and get people to follow him.

4. What sort of leader would you say they were/are?

Charismatic

Bill France Jr.

5. What do you believe each of these leader's greatest strength was/is?

Vision. I think he had the vision to take this sport...his father built a great foundation for this sport, but it was Bill Jr. who saw the vision of taking it from a primarily from a southern sport to a national sport. He incorporated the latest use of technology, which in the 60s and 70s was television and radio. So he took the sport from southern word-of-mouth, "hey, let's go from town to town," to "let's put it on the national stage."

6. What area do you believe they could most improve?

Interviewee chose not to answer

7. How did/do they get others to accept their ideas?

He was a very strong-willed personality. I think with all of the NASCAR leaders, the advantage they have is they own the sport. If you look at other forms of racing that have tried to be democratically-run by like the car owners and things like that, it tends not to be successful. You need a strong, the-buck-stops-here-with-me figure. Both Bill Sr. and Bill Jr. were that guy.

8. What sort of leader would you say they were/are?

He was a strong leader and somebody who could get people to understand his vision.

Brian France

9. What do you believe each of these leader's greatest strength was/is?

I think Brian was interested in expanding NASCAR's reach. He created a number of initiatives: The Drive for Diversity program, the NASCAR Green Program. He instituted things like the Driver's Council and various subcommittees to give more people voice to NASCAR. He tried to be very inclusive.

10. What area do you believe they could most improve?

Interviewee chose not to answer

11. How did/do they get others to accept their ideas?

I think basically the same way as his father and his grandfather: he was in charge.

12. What sort of leader would you say they were/are?

I think he was an innovative leader in that he was willing to try new strategies and new techniques that maybe hadn't been tried before.

Jim France

13. What do you believe each of these leader's greatest strength was/is?

He commands tremendous respect. He has been around since the beginning of NASCAR. He has been involved in motorsports his entire life. He started out as a kid parking cars at Daytona, taking tickets. He is a tremendously smart man. One of his biggest strengths is he's at the racetrack every week. Team owners, drivers feel like they have someone they can go to. They might not always get the answer they want. In fact, sometimes they don't get the answer they want. But they get *heard*, and that's really important to them. They want somebody who is in charge, who is capable of making a decision, who will hear what they have to say. He is that guy.

14. What area do you believe they could most improve?

Interviewee chose not to answer.

15. How did/do they get others to accept their ideas?

I think through involvement. He is so involved and he understands every aspect of this sport. There is nobody in the garage who will go, "Hey, I wonder if he gets this." He gets it and they know he gets it. He's got the respect of the car owners. He's got the respect of the drivers. When he says something, it's intelligent and it is well thought-out. People go, "Oh yeah. He's right about that." I think he's not as demonstrably loud as maybe Bill Jr. was, but he has a quiet dignity and respect that people follow him.

16. What sort of leader would you say they were/are?

A lead-by-example guy. A guy who has been there. A guy who has done that. A guy that people know who has been there and done that. He commands a tremendous amount of respect with all of the constituencies in NASCAR, with team owners, with manufacturers, with sponsors. They all respect Jim France.

Tom Jensen

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