

In NASCAR's hometown (Daytona Beach) ...today...

January 21, 2010

ASA going racing in South Africa

**By GODWIN KELLY
Motorsports Editor**

DAYTONA BEACH -- More than a decade after NASCAR crossed the Pacific Ocean to race in Japan, the American Speed Association is taking its show across the Atlantic to Africa.

The ASA, which is based in Daytona Beach, plans to sanction a stock-car race in South Africa on Jan. 31. The event will be held at the Phakisa Freeway Circuit, a 1.5-mile oval patterned after Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

The concrete-banked oval was built in 1998 but has never held a race. The race will have an international field, including competitors from Australia, England and South Africa.

The ASA, through its affiliation with the Drivetech Racing School, has certified five drivers for competition after a series of classroom and hands-on tests at the racing facility.

"I was totally amazed by the South African drivers," Drivetech's Mark Ebert said. "From the very first lap they proved that they are very good at what they do."

The event, dubbed "Battle Between Two Continents," is part of a joint initiative of South Africa's Free State Government and the ASA, which has a five-year deal in place.

"The amount of time and energy and manpower that has gone into it is unbelievable," ASA president Dennis Huth said. "You would not believe how many people are working on this project."

"We knew it would take a year to organize an event like this, yet we've pulled it together in a matter of four months. If it wasn't for modern communications, such as e-mail and cell phones, it would have taken a year."

There is a seven-hour time difference between here and Welkom, South Africa where the track is located.

"I'm used to waking up at 3 o'clock in the morning for conference calls from Africa," Huth joked. "It's all coming together."

Huth, who worked at NASCAR when it sent teams to Japan for exhibitions after the 1996 and 1997 seasons, said 25 cars will start the event. Fifteen of those cars are on the ground in South Africa, the rest are in transit inside containers on cargo ships.

Geoff Bodine, the 1986 Daytona 500 champion, is lending his name and support to the ASA effort. He tested the track in December and has been talking up the race to the African nation.

The invitation-only race will have at least two women drivers -- Tiffany Daniels and Toni McCray. Daniels is an engineer at Earnhardt-Ganassi Racing.

After this international race, the ASA plans to sanction at least four racing events for South African drivers only in 2010.

"I'm pumped about this event," Huth said..

godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com