DALE EARNHARDT: FOREVER A HERO

Of all the heroes and colorful characters throughout NASCAR’s long history, no one inspired more devotion and passion than the late, great Dale Earnhardt.

Twelve years after his death on the last lap of the 2001 Daytona 500, Earnhardt still has a passionate fan base. Go to any NASCAR Sprint Cup race and you are guaranteed see a ton of black Goodwrench jackets — not to mention a fair-to-middling number of “3” tats, hats and t-shirts.

Now, Stanford University, one of the nation’s greatest research centers, is trying to find out just what it was about Earnhardt that inspired such fan devotion.

Stanford is doing a research project about Earnhardt — read about here: http://revs.stanford.edu/node/704 — as part of its class called “Understanding Superfans And Their Heroes.”

Here is the course description:

“Our fundamental belief is that the most successful people, brands and movements are built around a hero and by extension, its fans. Understanding the connection between the hero and their superfans is what we'll explore, a critical new skill if you want to build something of lasting value. You'll deconstruct what made that connection possible and then use what you learned to construct a prototype that a young up-and-coming hero can use as a roadmap.
“Through a radical team-based, hands-on, multidisciplinary class, you will interview superfans to come up with the design principles central to heroes. You will learn and utilize the principles of Empathy-Define-Ideate-Prototype-Test components of the d. thinking process. Why do superfans love their heroes? You’ll get to prototype and explore how superfans connect with their heroes, understanding this connective tissue works will give your own ideas a boost.”

While Shake And Bake applauds the eggheads on the Left Coast for digging into the Earnhardt mystique via a rigorous academic approach, allow us to tell you pretty much everything you need to know about The Man In Black.

Earnhardt was a blue-collar kid from a dead-end mill town who rose up to the level of superstar and champion. He always drove it like he stole it, took no crap from anyone, had an insatiable will to win and never lost touch with who he was and where he came from. He took names and he kicked asses most every Sunday afternoon. And that’s why millions of fans loved and respected him.

Of course, the above analysis lacks anything that’s team-based, hands-on, multidisciplinary or utilizes the principles of Empathy-Define-Ideate-Prototype-Test components of the d. thinking process. Whatever that is.

But it’s dead-nuts-on.

And it’s free.

Unlike attending Stanford, which costs about $58,000 a year as an undergraduate or — and this is not a misprint — $157,780 annually to attend Stanford’s MBA business program.

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