



Indianapolis Star-July 21st 2010

Jimmy Johnson always lurking ready to pounce

Anybody but him was the sentiment expressed by Kurt Busch after a particularly frustrating loss to him in Bristol in March (2010) and again after losing a bump-and-run duel with Johnson in New Hampshire in June (2010).

“When someone has a problem, boom, they’re there to win”, said a frustrated Busch. “They’re always putting themselves in a position to win”



Putting yourself in a position to be successful

Whether it's karting, lower formulae or Formula One, the great champions have a feel and understanding of what it means to *“put yourself in a position to be successful”*. Great teams also have a understanding of what this means. The magic is to get both worlds (drivers & teams) to intersect on race weekends. When that happens you get a Jimmy Johnson type of championship winning year. Jeff Gordon has had them, as has Dale Earnhardt Snr (7 championships), Michael Schumacher, Lewis Hamilton, Jensen Button, Mario Andretti, Michael Andretti, Fernando Alonso and Jackie Stewart etc. Some of these champions have been able to do it more that others and sustained success is therefore more prevalent in their resume.

So what does it mean to put yourself in a position to be successful?

(NOTE:This example is presuming that the driver has been positioned to be successful within the right competitive environment)

It means that you arrive at the race track absolutely ready to go with all the circuit knowledge you need (drivers responsibility to have his reference points etc), the car set-up that you need (drivers responsibility with his engineer/team) and the driver and team share real time information, make set-up balance decisions based on the real time

needs of the car and circuit conditions and execute mistake free practice and qualifying sessions. This puts the driver into the best possible position to be successful in the race because hopefully he is at the front of the grid and he gets a good start and he controls his own environment by being mistake free in a well set up car at the front of the field.

This situation puts a driver in a position to be successful even if he does NOT have the fastest car, It's highly possible that some team made key adjustments before the race and gave their driver the fastest car. However, this driver will have to make his way through the traffic which more often than not become too difficult in short races.

Now this ideal situation does NOT and will NOT happen every day and this is where the champions really shine. When a driver does NOT have the fastest car he then makes sure that he is mistake free during a race so as he gets the highest finishing position possible that day OR that he is in a position to take advantage of other drivers mistakes or mechanical misfortunes.

It is an ever changing platform that requires good technical feedback, good organization within the team, mistake free execution by the driver - and a bi-product of all of this is regular trips to the podium.

Taking yourself OUT of a position to be successful looks like this;

- * Arrive at the track with a bad set-up
- * Arrive at the track with the wrong equipment
- * Driver does not provide accurate feedback during practice and qualifying
- * Driver or team make mistakes during on-track sessions
- * Driver gets bad starts
- * Driver makes mistakes on track
- * Driver gets frustrated and therefore his judgement becomes less sharp
- * Drivers behavior becomes destructive

All or any of the above can take you OUT of a position to be successful and all of the above are **learned traits** both for the driver and the teams. Being successful is NOT a black art or some form of magic - it is a systematic development of an athlete whereby his progress is matched with the right team of people to continue his learning trajectory. When the right skills are learned and used correctly by a talented athlete, success becomes the bi-product. Always remember to **concentrate on the process not the result.**

Derek Daly