

NASCAR 500 Champ Driven by Christ

Trevor Bayne nervously held the lead on the last lap of last year's Daytona 500.

But winning the whole thing? Now, c'mon. That was the last thing on his mind.

"I can tell my friends I led the last lap of the **Daytona 500**," is about all Bayne could fathom on that final lap on Feb. 20, 2011. "But I didn't think there was any way we were going to win it."

As Bayne circled around turn 2 at Daytona International Speedway, he caught a glimpse of the field gaining on him and nearly forgot to exhale.

"I'm looking back in my rearview mirror and I've got Bobby Labonte pushing me," he said. "And then there's Kurt Busch, Juan Montoya, David Gilliland and Carl Edwards."

But Bayne masterfully managed that final lap—"coming out of turn 4, it all went perfectly"—and became the youngest Daytona 500 winner ever on the day after his 20th birthday.

The celebration was intense; the fanfare was relentless.

"It was insane," he said. "People everywhere. Cameras every time I turned my head."

Immediately, Bayne's world change forever.

But don't believe the hype. He's still the same guy who loves the same God.

Starting at 5 a.m. the day after his Daytona victory, Bayne was swept away for a two-week media blitz: ESPN; Jay Leno;

David Letterman.

"One thing after another," Bayne said. "I saw at that moment that everything was going to be different."

But you won't confuse the Knoxville, Tenn., native as someone with a swollen head.

Sincere, humble, honest—the same traits that have made him a likeable and charismatic driver in his short NASCAR career are still part of his DNA.

"Is it easier or harder to be the same Trevor Bayne as before?" he ponders the question. "It's a little of both."

Bayne's time is more limited, he explained. He was used to being at church or a Bible study up to four times a week and now it's a big commitment just to make it once or twice.

"Now, you have to make the time," Bayne said. "You have to be intentional. When you're on an airplane, you have to bring your Bible with you. If you don't, you won't ever read it."

But the opportunities for Bayne to share Christ have been exponentially greater and he is not one to shy away from stepping foot on that stage.

Months before we had "Tebowing" or "Linsanity," there was the Trevor Bayne story, which came so far out of the blue it failed to even register a universal nickname.

But just like the underdog stories of Tim Tebow (Denver Broncos) and Jeremy Lin (New York Knicks), the legend of **Trevor Bayne** is being kept alive by his devout faith in Jesus Christ and willingness to share the gospel.

"Some platforms are bigger than others," he said. "Mine's just driving a race car and I want to use that platform as best I can."

Bayne's personal testimony is not unfamiliar. Raised in a Christian home, it wasn't until his freshman year of high school that he committed his life to Christ.

"September 13, 2005," Bayne recalled his day of **salvation**. "I went to a revival at a friend's church and God used the speaker to open up my heart, the emotional side of my heart.

"On the way home I was crying. I talked to my mom about it. We kneeled down on my couch in the living room and I prayed my heart out, like I've never prayed before and just asked Him to take control."

And now it's Bayne who has to give back control on a regular basis, especially when things don't go well on the track. And the checkeredes are far and few between.

"You want to use those gifts and talents He's given you for sure," he said. "I talked to Tim Tebow a little bit and he said, 'God's given us that competitive drive and He wants us to have that drive. But just make sure you're defined and get your identity through Him.'"

If the **Daytona 500** was a Hollywood script come to life, what happened two months later was an unfortunate sequel that should have stayed on the cutting room floor.

Bayne, who is notorious for being able to sleep anywhere at any moment, woke up one morning with double vision.

That's not right, he thought, and he went back to bed, hoping to "sleep it off."

But when he awoke again, it was still there—everything in pairs.

"I'm looking at the sprinkler by my bed and there's two of everything," he said. "I'm a race car driver and I kind of need to have both eyes working."

An insect bite caused a five-week recovery from Lyme disease, effectively taking the starch out of his early-season Daytona-infused momentum.

But Bayne can now see the Lord's hand at work, giving him ample time to recover without feeling the need to rush back to keep proving himself.

"I wanted to run this thing and God told me, 'No I'm going to make you slow down,'" Bayne said. "But I look back at the Daytona 500 and He was using that to prepare me. And while I was sick the team said, 'Hey you've already proven yourself. We're going to keep you around.'"

A split second is all it takes. Not even that.

Driving at speeds hovering around 200 mph, Bayne knows racing in the Sprint Cup and Nationwide series makes him one lingering look out the window from catastrophe.

"It requires every bit of your attention. There's nothing else like it," he said. "You blink or you sneeze or you look around for a second and you're in the wall."

Bayne also knows that a decision to **follow Christ** can be an instant transformation. It can also be the difference between living a lukewarm life and one on fire for Jesus. Bayne's made it his mission to encourage other drivers to deepen their faith.

"When you start to do things to please God and want to know Him more, it changes everything," Bayne said. "It changes from you have to do this, you have to do that, to I want to do this. All of a sudden it's not work. And He's your desire."

Bayne is a big supporter in the chapel service held on race weekends, but even beyond that, he's involved in a regular Bible study with fellow racers, including Justin Allgaier, Michael McDowell, Josh Wise and Blake Koch.

"My personal relationship with Christ, that's the most important thing. It's all that matters," Bayne said. "Until we figure that out, we've missed it all."

And even for a Daytona 500 winner, who has only 14 Sprint Cup races locked in this coming season, Bayne is trying to keep the proper perspective. He did qualify to defend his Daytona 500 championship this Sunday, but Bayne's still looking for a full-time ride in 2012, in either Sprint Cup or Nationwide series.

"For me, I can get wrapped up in unimportant things," he said. "I'm worried about racing. I'm worried about what my schedule is like. Really, the only thing that matters is that relationship with Christ."

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