

Richmond's road rough after NASCAR drug test

Justice.

Tim Richmond, a man who makes his living driving stock cars, has been forced to sit on the sidelines since February.

It doesn't seem justice is being served. Rather, NASCAR is making life difficult for him lately.

Richmond and NASCAR are embroiled in what has to be racing's biggest controversy since the 1969 drivers strike at Talladega. At question is whether Richmond is physically fit to drive, and whether NASCAR ruined his career due to the ill-fated drug test at Daytona this spring.

NASCAR contends the only thing preventing Richmond from driving is his refusal to allow them to see his medical records concerning his bout and relapse of pneumonia. The sanctioning body says this is standard procedure for any driver returning from an illness or injury.

Richmond has sued NASCAR for \$20 million for defamation caused by the drug test, and is being represented by the New York law firm of Slotnik and Baker, known for their defense of Bernhard H. Goetz.

Chip Williams, NASCAR's director of public relations, would not answer any questions regarding Richmond when contacted by telephone Wednesday — and for un-

derstandable reasons. Williams is one of five NASCAR officials specifically named in the lawsuit.

Richmond has been equally hard to track down.

Bettina Schein, the lawyer handling Richmond's case, however, elaborated yesterday on the situation going into this weekend's "The Winston," NASCAR's all-star race for which Richmond would have been eligible.

"We asked NASCAR whether Tim would be able to race, whether they would grant him entry to the race," Schein said. "They told us no, that their position hasn't changed from Daytona, which is that they're still requesting remote, irrelevant medical records from Tim, which have nothing to do with his present good health.

"We think it may be a smoke screen because, as we told them, Tim would certainly submit to any examination that they usually request of any of the entrants."

Surprisingly, NASCAR made no request for Richmond's records when he first returned to racing in May, 1987.

"We think it's in an effort to cloud the real issue, which was the false drug testing that they reported to the news," Schein said.

Schein also disputes the amount of over-the-counter drugs supposedly found in Richmond's test.

Richmond, a known health freak, would have had to consume a whole box of medication to reach the levels that NASCAR found.

"Who would take that much?" Schein said. "If one cold capsule doesn't help you, you're not going to take another."

Schein was surprised when told of a recent article that ran in *Sports Marketing News* concerning how sponsors handle scandals, and that Richmond's situation was the focal point of the piece.

Equally surprising were the following comments about Richmond that appeared in the *Auto Racing/USA* yearbook: "Richmond must understand by now that modern-day, major-league racing calls for more than talent. Whether or not the rumors about him had any foundation, the fact is that Richmond's behavior helped generate those rumors. In an era when a driver must present a public image a sponsor can embrace, Richmond may find the road back to the zenith is tougher than ever he imagined."

Those comments were written by Andy Hall, NASCAR Public Relations Coordinator, and were the focal point of the SMN article. Schein refuted the claims that Richmond had a history of not showing up for personal appearances, or that Folgers was the least bit unhappy with him.

"Richmond was one of Folgers



MOTOR SPORTS

By Michael J. Marrer

coffee's best spokespeople," Shein said. "Their sales went up dramatically in the Northeast at the time that Tim was doing promotionals for Folgers. They were very pleased with his work. Tim was vigilant about appearing and being on time, absolutely very conscientious in that way."

So what is really going on? NASCAR has never been known to make a rash decision. It's hard to imagine they would deliberately do something that would put their reputation and 40 years of work down the drain.

But for whatever the reason, when the cars pull out onto the track this Sunday, the original 20-car starting grid will be short one Tim Richmond.

And unfortunately "The Winston" will have lost some of its glitter, some of its meaning.

Shangri-La driver released

Don Pratt was released from the hospital Monday morning after his roll in last week's modified feature at Shangri-La. He suffered no injuries other than being sore all over.

Marrer is a free-lance writer whose motor sports column appears Fridays in the *Press & Sun-Bulletin*.