

GM To Cut Back NASCAR Support

BROOKLYN, Mich. (AP) -- General Motors has told NASCAR teams it is cutting back on its support in all of the sanctioning body's professional series.

Among the teams already notified that they will lose funding are JR Motorsports, owned by Sprint Cup star Dale Earnhardt Jr., and Kevin Harvick Inc., co-owned by Cup star Harvick and his wife, DeLana. JRM races in the second-tier Nationwide Series, while KHI has entries in Nationwide and the third-tier Camping World Truck Series.

Cuts are also expected in the top-tier Sprint Cup series.

Chevrolet spokesman Terry Rhadigan said Friday that GM, reorganizing through Chapter 11 bankruptcy, said cuts would be made soon.

"Our discussions are indeed NASCAR-wide," he said.

Rhadigan would not say if one series would be affected more than others, nor would he say the size of the cuts or how much GM spends on NASCAR. The automaker, through its Chevrolet brand, provides cash and other support to teams, including engines and parts.

Rhadigan, however, said GM has no plans to withdraw Chevrolet from the stock car sport.

"Racing is still in Chevrolet's DNA, and I don't think that's going to change," he said.

Both JRM and KHI issued statements, acknowledging they must adjust their business models to address the funding cuts.

"We are fully capable of adjusting our business model to accommodate this change, and with the backing of Hendrick Motorsports, we will continue to lend our full support to Chevrolet," Kelley Earnhardt, general manager of JR Motorsports and Earnhardt's sister, said in a statement.

"The manufacturer support GM provides at the NASCAR Sprint Cup level is more critical in nature than in the Nationwide Series, and I hope Chevy is able to continue supporting that level, as the promotion of NASCAR works well for its demographics."

The GM cutbacks are the latest in a series of economic blows to the sport.

The global economic crisis led to more than 1,000 team members being laid off at the end of last season, and Chrysler, which just came out of bankruptcy, has cutback its funding of Dodge teams this year. Earlier this week, Richard Petty Motorsports laid off nine employees and reduced salaries throughout the company,

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a byproduct of Chrysler's Chapter 11 filing.

Ford, also facing financial problems, cut back its support in the truck series heading into this season.

"Obviously, Chevrolet has millions of fans, and they want see Chevrolets on the track," NASCAR spokesman Jim Hunter said. "At this time, we don't have any reason to believe that that won't be the case, at least in the short term."

AP Auto Writer Tom Krisher contributed to this report from Detroit.

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