

Beat: Sports

NASCAR-GREG IVES IS DALE EARNHARDT JRS NEW CREW CHIEF

CHANGES DURING PRESEASON PHOTOSHOOT

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USPA NEWS - During a preseason photoshoot for his No. 88, Dale Earnhardt Jr. noticed the show car's nose was too high. So Earnhardt turned to his new crew chief, Greg Ives, and the two went to work lowering the car, which satisfied Earnhardt.

"Greg made a list of about 25 other things wrong with the show car and gave it to the guy that's in control of the show car program," Earnhardt said, grinning. "You know that's going to be a positive going into the relationship that he's that particular. ... He's thorough, and that's going to make a huge difference in how we're prepared each weekend."

That's not to say former crew chief Steve Letarte, who left after the season to become a NASCAR analyst for NBC Sports, didn't worry about the small things in guiding Earnhardt to five wins and four Chase berths in four seasons.

But Ives takes being a details guy to the extreme. Maybe that's because he came up at Hendrick Motorsports under another details guy -- Chad Knaus, Jimmie Johnson's crew chief. Ives was the race engineer for Johnson's five consecutive title run. And he led Chase Elliott to the 2014 Xfinity Series championship at JR Motorsports, co-owned by Earnhardt Jr.

Sitting in his office last month, Ives was still serious when reflecting on the photoshoot about it. He didn't smile, as Earnhardt did, or laugh it off. His face turned serious.

"It looked like nobody looked at the details of the car "" which kind of irritated me," Ives told USA TODAY Sports. "... I want people on this race team to have a (details) mindset, not, 'Oh, that doesn't matter.'"

That doesn't cut it. If it's 10 thousandths (of an inch) or 20 thousandths, (they can't say) 'Oh, that's not going to make a difference.' That cannot be the attitude."

No detail is too small for Ives, 35, who has a dry sense of humor but doesn't find anything funny about his relentless pursuit of winning. Earnhardt already knows his actual race cars are going to get similar treatment from Ives, and that's the best outcome he could have hoped for when Letarte broke the news last January he was leaving the pit box.

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