

## NASCAR spotter, UWO alumnus goes “flat out” in new book

by Alyssa Kadansky - Monday, February 17, 2014

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As the 2014 season gets underway, the thrill and excitement of the race is enough to keep NASCAR fans glued to the racetrack, cheering on their favorite driver from the sidelines.

But University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus John Close '76, of Charlotte, N.C., gets up close and personal with the sport he loves.

While growing up in Manitowoc, Close's family owned race cars and exposed him to the sport as a youngster. While some boys were idolizing Johnny Unitas, Muhammad Ali and Superman, Close's childhood hero was NASCAR racer Richard Petty.

Close took his love of sports and communication with him to UW Oshkosh, where he pursued a degree in radio-TV-film. Throughout his studies, he was profoundly affected by the late professor Robert “Doc” Snyder.

“He was an excellent educator and made learning a lot of fun,” Close said. “He showed me that the real joy was in the work, not in the result. The result would follow if you worked hard.”

Close immersed himself in campus life, covering sports for the Titan radio station, WRST, and joining the Delta Sigma Phi fraternity. He also served as president of the UWO Interfraternity Council.

After graduation, he worked at the *Capital Times* newspaper in Madison as a motorsports writer. He also went on to write for the *Daily Jefferson County Union* in Fort Atkinson and other race-related publications.

In 1986, Close covered his first NASCAR race at Bristol. He worked hard as a freelance reporter, covering every NASCAR event that he could. In 1994, he had the opportunity to move his family to Charlotte, where he worked in public relations and marketing for NASCAR driver Bobby Labonte and the Maxwell House Coffee NASCAR Winston Cup.

He also had the opportunity to work for his childhood hero, Richard Petty, for a year.

“I never really anticipated that I would be able to work for NASCAR,” Close said.

Close's experience in both communications and the world of racing advanced his public relations career and helped him secure positions overseeing programs for NetZero, Power Stroke Diesel, Popeye's Chicken and more.

When Close was asked to participate in his favorite sport as a spotter, he could not pass up the opportunity.

NASCAR spotters are crucial for the safety and success of the drivers. Assuming a position high above the track so that they have a bird’s-eye view, a spotter is in constant contact with the driver to alert him to what is coming up next on the track.

“I like to think you’re the second most important person in the race because you’re with the driver every second,” Close said. “You have to have the attitude that there’s nothing out there that can happen that you can’t get your guy through. At the end of the day, win or lose, if you can get your driver home in one piece, it was a successful day.”

With 14 seasons under his belt as a spotter, Close took on his next challenge: writing and publishing books.

“I started out as a sports writer and as your career progresses, you always want to set new challenges for yourself,” Close said. “I was fortunate enough to be a sports writer and then a sports editor. I got to write for trade publications and magazines until the book was just the next step, the next challenge.”

In 2005, Close published his first book, *Tony Stewart: From Indy Phenom to NASCAR Superstar*. His second book, *The NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series: Desert Dust to Superspeedways*, was published in 2007.

Close’s most recent book, *On the Spot: Life in the Fast Lane as a NASCAR Spotter*, released in December 2013, details Close’s career as a NASCAR spotter. *On the Spot* is available as a free electronic book at [www.closefinishes.com](http://www.closefinishes.com).

“At this stage in my career, it’s more important for me to get my work out there than to get paid for it,” Close said. “You get to tackle a subject that you like and put it out there.”

Close had the opportunity to form a successful career around the sport that he loves. His experiences at UWO, both academic and social, are what he believes helped him get where he is today.

“I think the lessons that I learned at UWO have served me well over the years,” Close said. “Going to school there was a really great community experience. The campus is very vibrant, and there’s a lot of interaction. The academic part was exceptional.”

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