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by Jimmy Jones

# sprint car hall of fame

## Jason Johnson

Jason Craig Johnson, was born to parents Craig and Debra on July 7, 1976, in Eunice, Louisiana, in the heart of Cajun country, where a crawfish boil and a zydeco tune are the fabric of life.

Jason Johnson's storied rise from racing on local tracks in Louisiana, to crewing for Steve Kinser with the World of Outlaws, becoming a five-time ASCS Champion and ultimately, the 2016 Knoxville Nationals Champion, is a story of unyielding determination. Jason Johnson lived life on his terms and never accepted the easy way out. He was driven to succeed and woke up each morning with a mindset to make that day better than the day before. He lived for the moment and never focused on the past. Right here, right now is what mattered most to Jason.

Life out on the road in his early years was tough. Jason didn't have any sponsorship deals and wasn't an established driver but he had knowledge and unproven talent. He had gone to what he called the "Steve Kinser College of Sprint Car Racing" and had graduated summa cum laude.

In 2001, at Texas Motor Speedway, his determination paid off with his first career victory with the World of Outlaws. But, as great as that moment was for Jason, several years of struggles followed, marked by losing his baby sister Kayla Sue to a car wreck in 2004. It was a devastating blow to Jason and the family, but he kept himself focused and continued to race through the adversity, chasing another win on the big stage.

After running a mixed schedule of WoO, All Star, NCRA and ASCS races in 2004, winning ten times, Jason started the 2005 season in Australia, where he picked up a win at

Adelaide. Racing Down Under became an important part of Jason's preparation by keeping him sharp for his year in the States. Jason won eight times in 2005, mostly 410 races in Central Pennsylvania. After spending the winter racing in Australia,

Jason began the 2006 season running full-time with the American Sprint Car Series in the Alan and Lanny Row owned The Shop Motorsports 41. In October of that year, he won the biggest race of his career at the time when he bested the field to win the \$15,000 Short Track Nationals at I-30 Speedway in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Jason's success continued in the 360 ranks and he won his first ASCS driver's championship in 2008. It was a bold move to form Jason Johnson Racing (JJR) in 2010. Being the sole proprietors and privateers, they were certainly bucking the trends. It proved to be a career game changer... and, just as importantly, a life changer. His strategic vision laid the groundwork for future success. Jason Johnson was more than a driver, he was an incredible leader and business person. He honed those skills and displayed his talents in his ownership role at JJR. He won five straight ASCS owner's championships in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. He won a second driver's championship in 2010 and followed up with three more in 2012, 2013 and 2014, making him a five-time ASCS National Tour champion.

After winning those American Sprint Car Series championships, Jason felt like he was ready to move up to the World of Outlaws on a full-time basis. He had tested the waters a few times before but didn't feel completely ready. After gaining a lot more experience, and winning those championships, he was ready to try again.

JJR joined the WoO for the 2015 season and encountered some adversity when Jason suffered a back injury at Placerville Speedway in California and was sidelined for the rest of the season. The team continued and completed

the year with fill-in drivers as Jason continued to heal up.

On March 23rd of 2016, after recovering from his back injury, Jason took the pain and disappointment from a year earlier and turned it into victory at Placerville Speedway, where his season had ended in 2015. It was a moment of jubilant redemption for Jason but this remarkable win was just the beginning of something special for the 41 team.

Jason's 2016 Knoxville Nationals victory over Donny Schatz will forever be etched in the memory of Sprint Car fans. It was one of the most stunning wins in Nationals history. Jason went toe-to-toe with the Knoxville master and beat him.

As positive as he was about life and racing, Jason was also very real about where he felt he stood as a racer. He dominated in the ASCS ranks. There was absolutely no question that he was the best 360 driver in the world for three straight years. But, being out on the road full-time with the Outlaws was another level. Even after winning the Knoxville Nationals in 2016, Jason still felt like he was an outsider and was really honest with himself about it and felt like he still had a lot to prove in his career.

One of the lasting memories that we all share are those victory lane photos with Jason holding his son Jaxx. Jason loved his son very much and passed on his racing genes to him.

At 41 years of age, Jason Johnson was in the prime of his life when he passed away on June 24th, 2018, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, after being injured in a World of Outlaws race at Beaver Dam Raceway. His legacy lives on. He was an organ donor and through his selfless gifts, others have been able to use what God gave him to help them continue to live.

Johnson's story was that of a son, a husband, a loving father, a best friend, a Knoxville Nationals Champion and a flat-on-the-floor, cushion-bangin', Ragin' Cajun Sensation.