

Conservatives on the hunt for 'NASCAR Christians'

by [David Gibson](#)

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) Back in John Kerry's ill-fated 2004 presidential campaign, Democrats tried to attract so-called "NASCAR Dads" -- white, working-class, mainly Southern fellows -- to try to blunt George W. Bush's re-election and show folks that Kerry was not a wealthy patrician who only appealed to "soccer moms."

Now Ralph Reed's Faith and Freedom Coalition is trying to corral what might be called "NASCAR Christians" in hopes that social conservatives will give Mitt Romney a crucial boost in November.

The Faith and Freedom Coalition is pitching its voter drive on the ad space of a Ford to be driven by Reed Sorenson on Saturday (April 28) in the NASCAR Sprint Cup series race at the Richmond (Va.) International Raceway.

"There are an estimated 75 million NASCAR fans, many of whom live in battleground states like Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. This vote has significant overlap with the evangelical and Tea Party vote," Reed said. "An estimated 20 percent of NASCAR fans are not registered to vote. They tend to be pro-family, patriotic, and conservative in their values."

But will they vote for Romney? He has much the same baggage that Kerry had -- a Massachusetts political lineage, lots of money and some difficulty trying to connect with Joe Six-Pack, not to mention the evangelicals who are frequently suspicious of Romney's Mormonism and conservative bona fides.

Romney's own venture onto this turf didn't go so well. Stopping by the Daytona 500 in February, Romney made a silver-spoon gaffe by saying that he doesn't follow the sport that closely, "but I have some great friends that are NASCAR team owners."

Still, Romney can't afford to lose this demographic, and key Christian conservatives are trying to rally white evangelicals to a candidate that many have never fully embraced.

Orit Sklar, an FFC spokeswoman, did not provide figures on how much the NASCAR sponsorship cost, but said it would be worth it given the number of potential conservative votes at stake.

"We try everything and we like to see results," Sklar said. "I can foresee us, if this is a successful venture, doing it again."

The Faith and Freedom name and logo will appear on the Ford's hood and rear quarter panels, along with texting information. FFC volunteers will provide voter registration forms and voter guides to the crowd of 150,000 in Richmond, while an estimated 6 million viewers are expected to watch at home, FFC said.

This isn't the first time that the NASCAR demographic has been targeted by those looking for conservative Christians. Back in 2004, marketers behind Mel Gibson's controversial movie, "The Passion of the Christ," covered Bobby Labonte's Daytona 500 car with ads for the film, which went on to become a huge box office hit.