

Anderson close to finish line

We're under caution, but it looks like local racing enthusiast George Anderson is close to crossing the finish line on a racetrack. And it's about time because Anderson has been going in circles it seems like forever trying to make this possible.

The energetic and persistent Anderson has tried his hardest to bring auto racing to Hastings. It started a few years ago when he tried with Delmar Friesen of Sutton to bring back dirt-track racing to the Adams County Fairgrounds. That failed.

All the rejection and opposition then and since didn't send Anderson to the pits or force him to give up his dream of bringing racing to town.

Lately, he has been in search of a site to build a track for rallycross racing, something that could bring people to Hastings who wouldn't otherwise come.

We don't know much about this sport, so we have to rely on Anderson's knowledge and expertise that it would bring new visitors to town: "The growth rate in rallycross, it's like a straight-up slope on a mountain for the next three years, and we're going to be in on the ground floor of that," he said. "We could have a regional points event here and maybe even a national championship."

While that sounds promising, Anderson first needs a place to put a track, and he has his eye on yet another site for one.

At a Hastings Planning Commission work session last week, we learned that land near U.S. Highway 6 and Showboat Boulevard just may be the ideal spot for Anderson's rallycross racing complex.

Sitting next to a major highway would be great for accessibility and visibility, and we don't think Anderson will run into as much public resistance as with other sites. Apparently there's no need for a conditional use permit to at least get the project rolling, and he likely won't hear any grief from neighbors — because there really aren't any.

Earlier, Anderson thought about using property at the airport for his racing complex. That didn't go over so well with neighbors, who, understandably, didn't like the idea of a racetrack in their neighborhood. Being the gentleman that he is, Anderson took their complaints and advice to heart. Realizing he needed more space anyway because of use and design changes, he explored other options and other venues.

Again, he never gave up.

He took land by Highway 6 and Marian Road — southwest of Brickyard Park — into more serious consideration, along with the site by Showboat that, for now, seems to have the most appeal. If all goes well, Anderson could have a dirt track in use there rather quickly.

Other parts of Anderson's proposal that could be added later include a small hotel or a recreational vehicle park, which would be needed because most of the racers and even fans bring RVs with trailers and other equipment.

There also are plans for parking for at least 300 cars, a stage and music platform for Winner's Circle presentations, a concession area, a fuel and gas station, bathrooms near the concession area, a wash area for autos and RVs, a warehouse, executive offices and an oil dump area, where oil can be saved and recycled.

He also proposes several industrial buildings for services like a machine shop, a detailing shop, car, bike or cart dealerships, and potentially a shop that Central Community College-Hastings students could use.

"Wow," you say, "I'll believe it when I see it."

First, remember who we're talking about. When someone of Anderson's caliber is involved, anything's possible. He's well connected within the racing circuit.

He's positive, full of energy and community-minded. We are in awe of his tenacity, and we like his creativity. We also appreciate his many contributions in trying to promote and grow Hastings. This racetrack would be another way of doing that.

Here's hoping he finishes.



Football's over so spring must be close

A few random thoughts while wondering since Ash Wednesday came so soon, if spring will be earlier this year, too. I saw a news item earlier this week that said not to get our hopes up for full lakes and soaking wet conditions this year. Predictions are that the drought of the past few years will continue. I just thought I should point that out in case you missed it while scooping more than 10 inches of the white drought off of your driveways this week.

If you're looking for signs of spring, though, you can take heart in one of the first early indicators — flocks of geese have started showing up around the Platte River area in large numbers within the past week. I'm sure some of them are wondering just what the heck they are doing this far north already, but it's an encouraging sign for us just the same.

Another sign that spring is near is the playing out of that fine February tradition, the Super Bowl. Once again it ranked as probably the only NFL game that I watched from start to finish this entire season. A nutshell review of the game is that it was nice to have it pretty close most of the way, but it never really seemed like the Eagles ever truly felt like they were going to win it, which, of course, they didn't. Film of the first half probably won't be submitted to the Hall of Fame anytime soon. But, again, it was close, and when you don't really have a preference of teams to



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liked the Bud Light pilot jumping out of the plane.

I liked the cartoon superheroes coming to the aid of the lady who lost her credit card, only to realize they weren't really needed. Plus, let's face it, for my age group you've got to love any ad that features Underdog. The Cedric the Entertainer beer ad that featured the tropical fantasy gone wrong was funny, but it's probably a good thing my wife wasn't in the room to see me laugh at that one.

And I did like the series of "monkeys in the office" ads. Maybe it's because I think I've been in some of those meetings, plus what's not funny about a monkey using the office copy machine to make copies of his tush. (Can I say that in the paper?)

Plus, hooray to the kids who threw M.C. Hammer back over the fence after he gets "returned" by the mean guy who keeps everything. An ad inspired by the movie masterpiece "Sandlot" that takes a shot at

win, that's all I ask.

The commercials were good, but maybe not quite as epic as I had hoped. We were warned they would be milder this year after the Janet Jackson fallout from last year. Everyone wanted to mind their p's and q's. But it was nice to have them realize that it is possible to be funny without being raunchy. I

Hammer-time: perfect.

They say the most important measure of the success of advertisements is if they sell the product. In that case a couple of the "cutter" ads may fall short since I couldn't remember the next day just what the product was they were trying to sell.

Like the animated commercial stars all in one ad (the Pillsbury Doughboy breaks bread with the Jolly Green Giant). Cute ad, but what were they selling?

Halftime was great. Give me 20 minutes of Paul McCartney over a hodge-podge of "15-minutes-of-fame-and-gone" acts anytime. Even without the flash ending to last year's show, this year's blew that away. I wouldn't walk across the street to see Janet Jackson, but if the rumors are true and the McCartney tour is coming to Omaha this fall, I'd walk all the way there if that was the only way to get tickets for that one.

But were you like me and felt just a little disappointed that he didn't take a dig or tease a little bit about last year's show?

The McCartney of the Beatles era would have. Sometimes being older is better, but other times you just want to go back a little bit.

Oh, well, football is over — bring on spring training!

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Will Howard rescue Democratic Party?

The Democratic National Committee appears set to elect former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean as its chairman Feb. 12.

That date is, of course, the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the patron saint of the Republican Party, and one's first impulse is to wonder whether the Democrats, in a burst of inter-party amity, intend his election as a sort of birthday present to the GOP. Certainly the Republicans regard it as one, intended or otherwise.

We can be pretty sure the Democrats have less cordial purposes in mind. It's striking, nevertheless, that any Democrat discussing Dr. Dean (he is, among his other talents, a physician) has to spend the first five minutes insisting that he isn't as liberal as is generally believed; that indeed he is by temperament a centrist; and that his record as Vermont's governor demonstrates this. He balanced the state's budget (as required by law), and is even on record as pro-gun.

Be that as it may, Dean came to national prominence by assuming an early lead in the race for the 2004 presidential nomination, and did so by establishing himself as the leftmost serious candidate for the honor. Alone among the major contenders, he frankly condemned the invasion of Iraq, and burnished his partisan credentials by declaring proudly that he belonged to "the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party." His performance proved pure catnip to the



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Democratic rank-and-file, who flooded his Web site with small contributions — a new experience for the party, which had long relied on big money from labor unions, Hollywood stars and liberal billionaires like George Soros.

Eventually, Dean's reputation as a frothing-mouthed leftist (deserved or not) became counterproductive, even among Democrats, and he attempted to correct matters by saying a few kind words about Southerners in pick-up trucks, and his party's need to woo them. But then came his astonishing pep talk to his followers after his defeat in the Iowa caucuses. The primal scream with which it ended simply confirmed, for many, the conclusion of one of his former union backers: "He's nuts."

Once John Kerry was nominated, however, Dean fell loyally into line, and recouped a portion of his reputation by campaigning hard for Kerry and other Democratic candidates. And after Bush's stunning re-election, Dean slowly emerged as the leading candidate for the party chairmanship.

It isn't really difficult to see why. He was by far the best-known; as an ex-governor he was the highest-ranking; he had earned credit by his loyalty and efforts during the campaign; and — perhaps above all — his

earlier passionate liberalism had not been forgotten and was exactly in tune with the private sentiments of most rank-and-file Democratic workers.

Indeed, it is in tune with the overall strategy that seems to have been adopted by most major Democratic politicians since the election: to battle the Republicans without quarter. Sen. Barbara Boxer's (D-Calif.) savaging of Condoleezza Rice in her confirmation hearings; the brutal hazing of Alberto Gonzales by the Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee; Sen. Ted Kennedy's (D-Mass.) blazing attack on the Iraq war, just three days before the national election there — all of these suggest that the Democrats intend to leave Washington knee-deep in gore, rather than yield an inch to the GOP.

To a party in such a mood, Howard Dean may look like a positive godsend. Perhaps his remark, in a recent speech, that "I hate Republicans" was a little over the top, but a bit of excess enthusiasm can be forgiven. Far better too much than too little.

No doubt an effort will be made to keep Dr. Dean's passionate nature under wraps for the immediate future. But it cannot be suppressed forever, nor would the Democrats want it suppressed forever. The man and the party have found each other, at last.

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