Cheez-It to Sponsor NASCAR Sprint Cup Race

JOHN KEKIS, AP Sports Writer

SYRACUSE, N.Y. (AP) — Watkins Glen International has signed a multi-year deal with Cheez-It crackers to sponsor the NASCAR Sprint Cup race at the Finger Lakes track.

WGI president Michael Printup and Kellogg Co. officials made the announcement of the Cheez-It 355 at The Glen on Tuesday. This is the company's first race entitlement sponsorship, though Kellogg has been involved with NASCAR since 1991.

Last year's race was run without a main sponsor at The Glen, which is owned by International Speedway Corp. This year's race is Aug. 11.

"Obviously, going 29 years in a row and then not having one — that's not good," Printup said. "This is beyond exciting for us. It's historic because of the brand level. It's like the older days when we had the Bud at The Glen, you had Winston in the sport, all of these consumer products that were really blowing up the sport in a really positive way. I trust that brand, I trust that sport. That's what we're back to.

"It's the first time since the Bud at The Glen we have a consumer product that's available anywhere — in every corner store, every grocery store, every gas station. I think that's critical for racing and the sport as a whole."

Budweiser was the title sponsor for Cup races at Watkins Glen International from 1986-98. There have been six other sponsors since 1999, including Sirius Satellite Radio for four years.

"We know this loyalty exists among NASCAR fans, so this is the perfect opportunity for us to show our support for the fans and build on our successful partnerships in motorsports," Todd Penegor, president of Kellogg U.S. Snacks, said in a release.

Printup said the last two Cup races at The Glen — both won by Marcos Ambrose — have sparked the fans' attention.

"We've seen a great renewal (of ticket buying)," Printup said of fans deciding to return to the track. "We have the highest renewal of all 12 ISC tracks, and we obviously give credit to the great racing."

Printup, a devotee of road racing, said he's talked with NASCAR about the possibility of the Sprint Cup Series racing on the long course at Watkins Glen. The Cup series has raced exclusively on the shorter 2.45-mile layout that does not include the famed "Boot" section, which adds nearly a mile and some treacherous turns to one lap.

Printup, who has watched older Cup cars compete in SCCA (Sports Car Club of

America) races on the long course without problems, said NASCAR president Mike Helton was concerned that a mostly flat left turn in the Boot would lead to too many cautions if it wasn't properly banked.

Still, Printup said the idea, embraced by five-time Cup champion Jimmie Johnson and three-time champ Tony Stewart, a five-time winner at The Glen, was still on the table.

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