

THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

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Spring Has Finally Sprung



Vol. XXVI Issue 1 May 2022

Inside...



Stop & Go Freddy



New Dirt



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Publisher's Note

Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

I've said before and I think it needs to be said again. We've got it really good up here when it comes to pavement short track racing. With all of the streaming options available these days with services like Floracing and Racing America I've had plenty of opportunities to witness Spring "special" events in the South and Eastern parts of the country. Many of these

We've got it good

events have just one race for each class, several classes that number in the single digits and a "big" field is in the low to mid-teens.

The Icebreaker at Dells Raceway Park was first run seven years ago in 2015. In this short time frame, it has become a Springtime marquee event in the upper-Midwest. It's a one-day show, with just three divisions on hand. Each division (UMA 602 Late Models, Midwest Trucks and Super Late Models) had heat races in addition to a main event. The Midwest Trucks and Super Lates even had enough entrants on hand to run last chance races.

Along with the great car counts we typically get, the racing we have is more traditional. While some people prefer seeing contact determine the outcome of a race, I'm still a fan of a clean side-by-side battle for the win.

From my point of view, most of the cautions at the Icebreaker were caused by hard racing and not intentional contact. The intentional contact in the battles for position at the Icebreaker were few and far between. James Swan and Chester Ace ran countless laps side-by-side in the Midwest Trucks. Tom Carlson and Brad Warthan ran door-to-door for several laps behind race winner Dennis Prunty in the 602 Late

Publisher's Note continued on page 4



Bruce Nuttleman photo

The Midwest

RACING

Connection

May 2022

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**THE MIDWEST
RACING CONNECTION**



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Publishers note from page 3

Models, and Jordan DeVoy simply worked his way to the front without a scratch on his car and ran away from everybody at the end of the Icebreaker event.

I had similar thoughts last year on the long drive home from the Joe Shear Classic at Madison International Speedway. Luke Fenhaus and Rich Bickle also showed everyone on hand at Madison last year, a clean race can still be an exciting race. Fenhaus gained respect from a veteran driver, and both knew they tried their best without wrecking each other. That's short track racing at its best.

It appears that in other parts of the country, dumping the leader is the rule rather than the exception. More and more these days, it seems like fans that prefer clean racing are in the minority. I'm glad the pavement racing in our back yard still has a clean race as the rule and wrecking for position is the exception. I sure hope it stays that way.



Bruce Nuttleman photos

Jordan DeVoy (top photo) won the Super Late Model portion of the Icebreaker and Chester Ace won the Midwest Trucks main event (bottom photo)



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Racing Nuggets



PJ "Jacklyn" Nuttleman

The exit of pit road will never be the same again at so many racing events after the passing of Freddy Mehlum on Monday, April 4th, 2022.

Since the mid-seventies, Fred Mehlum has been a fixture at racetracks across the country, particularly in the Midwest. He loved racing and the people who make up the show. And he was loved back by many for his sense of humor and genuine care for others.

Fred always had an intense love of racing. He started working for Larry Detjens after graduating from Westby High School in 1974. With Detjens' untimely death in 1981, Fred was left with a void in his life. His passion for racing continued and it ended up putting him closer to his hometown roots when he

started working at La Crosse Speedway for then promoter, Larry Wehrs.

He continued to develop relationships with the characters at the track and making a name for himself as a fun, reliable, and hard worker. He did stints as the Pit Steward, helped on the safety crew, and eventually

started working with the American Speed Association.

In 1995, Fred started as the "Stop and Go guy" at the ASA race at Jennerstown Speedway in Pennsylvania. It would give birth to his biggest claim to fame—over 35 years of flipping that sign back and forth to control the flow of race cars back onto the racetrack from pit road.

The job could be a bit hairy at times. He had one close call with a race car in Buffalo, NY when it came flying off the track, right toward him on pit road. Fred managed to get safely out of the way, but he once confessed to me that it was definitely the most scary situation he ever experienced at the track. Nonetheless, it never deterred Fred from continuing to work pit road.

He enjoyed traveling for races. I was once on the same flight with Fred, headed to Pensacola for the Snowball Derby. I teased him, asking why he didn't have a special case handcuffed to his wrist for the famed Stop and Go sign. While I was just joking, I had to admit I was shocked when he shared that he packed the sign right in his suitcase, along with his belongings. Kind of a scary thought if his luggage was ever lost by the airline—but he never did have an issue with that.

Racing Nuggets continued on page 6

Stop and Go Freddy



Kim Kemperman photo

PJ Nuttleman photo



Racing Nuggets from page 5

While Fred enjoyed working big races like the Snowball Derby, he truly loved being around the local racing scene in the Midwest. He spent many race afternoons and evenings at La Crosse, Madison, Oktoberfest Race Weekend, and traveling with the ARCA Midwest Tour. He was everybody’s friend and would give anyone the shirt off his back. He was so kind-hearted.

Racers have their Hero Cards to hand out to fans. Fred had Stop and Go magnets of himself with the famous sign he flipped back and forth for so many years. I’m proud to say our refrigerator has two different sets of those unique magnets. The die cut version is my favorite.

I joked with Fred that I put the “Stop” one right at eye level on the fridge in the hopes it would prevent me from sneaking treats out of the fridge. He asked me if that worked. When I told him, “nope,” we both laughed pretty hard together, while noshing on fries in the pits. Fred was always quick with a laugh or a joke.



Kim Kemperman photo

His presence will be sorely missed at the race-track. But he will continue to brighten my day every time I open my refrigerator and see his smiling face looking back at me. Who knew magnets could become such a treasure?

God speed, Freddy.



Stop & Go Freddy in action at Pensacola
(Kim Kemperman photos)

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Dangerous Dan**Dan Margetta**

Another month is in the books and after struggling to come up with a single topic to write about this time around, I finally settled on a mixture of what folks in the racing world were talking about in April.

Before we get too far though, I will say it was nice to finally get back to a track in person as the Dells Raceway Park kicked off the Wisconsin racing season with the Ice Breaker 100. The weather wasn't ideal but hey, we'll take sunny and windy any day during Spring in Wisconsin and the race fans turned out in strong numbers to take in the first on-track action of the season. Jordan DeVoy bested a stout field of super late models to capture the first major super late model win of his career and Dennis Prunty and Chester Ace were victorious in the 602 Outlaw Series and Midwest Truck Series respectively. It felt good to see many familiar faces I had not seen since last October as we all came out of our winter hibernation to gather at the racetrack.

Last lap protocols and fighting etiquette lit up the social media sites as the NASCAR series traveled to the smaller circuits with three straight short track events. After Ty Gibbs muscled John Hunter Nemechek to win the Richmond Xfinity Series race, Sam Mayer returned the favor by shoving Gibbs the following weekend at Martinsville as they battled for a \$100,000 bonus. That led to some car fights down pit road between the two before culminating in a physical confrontation in the pits afterwards. The scuffle was brief and punches were thrown and yes, Mayer even got a shiner as Gibbs kept his helmet on throughout the melee which triggered a debate on whether drivers should remove their helmets before they decide to fight. Many fans and those who have never driven race cars competitively, like myself, chastised Gibbs for throwing down with the protective head ware, saying it made him look weak. While that take received a lot of social media likes, just about every driver weighing in all said the same thing: There's no way they're ditching the helmet if they are going to get in a donnybrook, citing the obvious smart reason that

any punches received aren't going to hurt as much. In the end, the driver's were probably right although the whole deal was a fun debate to follow. The bigger point to ponder throughout the ordeal was when aggressiveness is acceptable on the last lap while racing for the win (or a big bonus like say, \$100,000). There are some that feel all contact is off limits while others, like me, feel some fender rubbing is fair game on the final lap. It's a very fine line between moving someone on the last lap versus flat out wrecking them and some drivers have finessed the "rubbing is racing" protocol into an art form. I also feel that certain circumstances, such as a driver going for his or her first win earns a bit more leeway on the aggressiveness front. You still can't just run over the other guy but a driver staring down a first win almost always needs to seize the opportunity that first win presents especially in today's 'what have you done lately?' atmosphere. If Matt Kenseth doesn't move Tony Stewart for the win at Rockingham back in 1998, he probably doesn't have the Hall of Fame worthy career he had. The last lap drama continued in the NASCAR world a week later at the Bristol Dirt Race when Chase Briscoe got into Tyler Reddick while racing for the win, allowing Kyle Busch to steal the victory. Many people couldn't believe that after being denied his first win due to Briscoe's mistake, Reddick wasn't seething mad and the two engaged in a cordial conversation afterwards instead of a fight. I think the two have raced together a long time and have a mutual respect between them to know Briscoe's move wasn't intentional and I thought Reddick's interview afterward as classy. The very first time I remember drivers wrecking for a win was when I was six and glued to the TV watching Richard Petty and David Pearson crash while racing for the Daytona 500 win in 1976. I also remember Chris Economaki surprisingly asking Pearson "There's no hard feelings here is there?" and Pearson responding "No because I don't think he meant to do it, I really don't." I also remember Dale Earnhardt Jr. getting loose underneath a dominant

Spring has Sprung

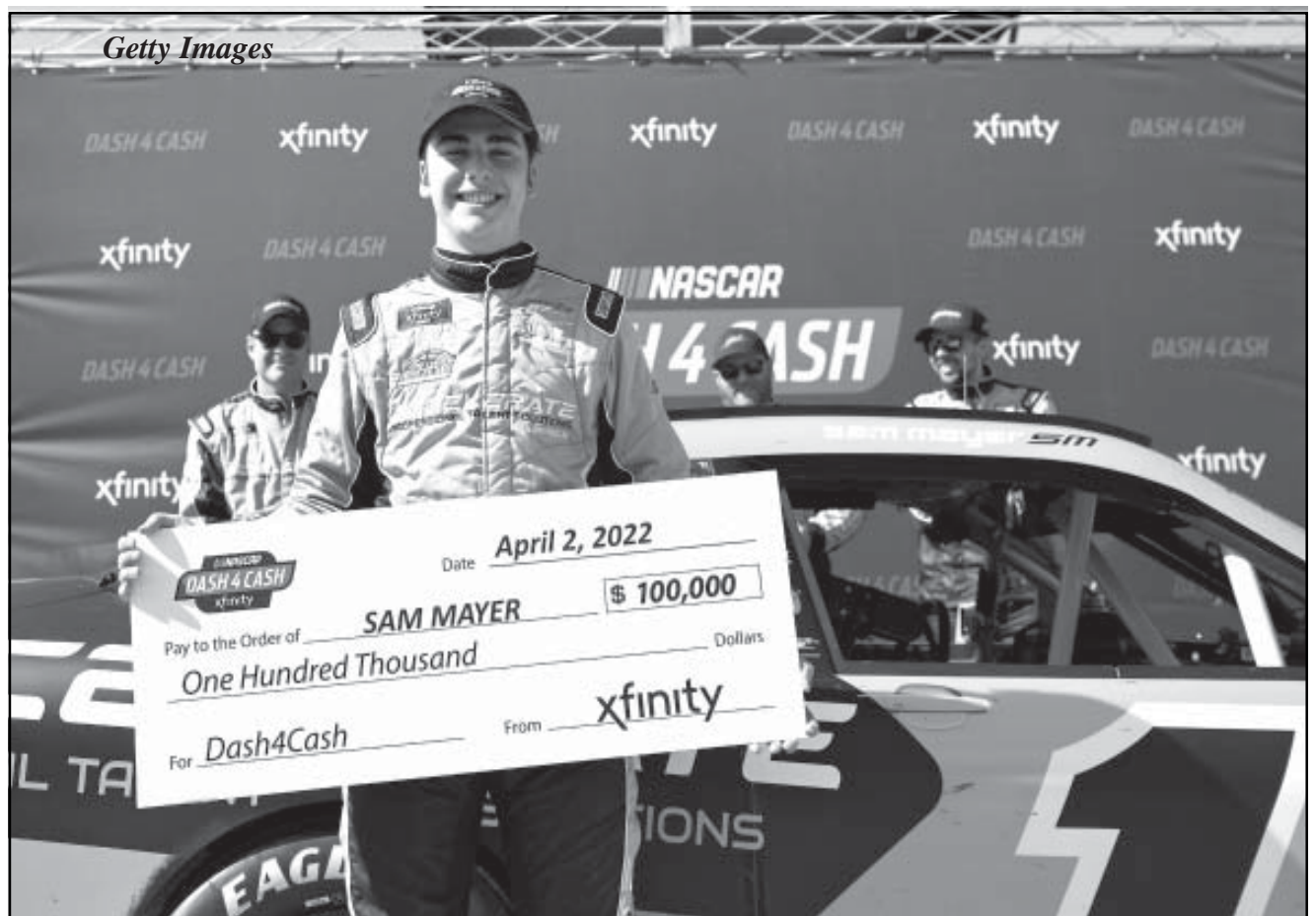
Matt Kenseth in a Busch Grand National race at Dover in 1999 resulting in Kenseth crashing out of the event and losing valuable points to Earnhardt as they fought for the championship. I was raging mad at the television that day and called Earnhardt just about every cuss word I could think of. Until they talked to Earnhardt afterwards and he gave probably the most genuine apologetic and remorseful interview I ever heard which left me thinking, 'how can anyone be mad at the guy after that?' While it's probably more rare now than ever, but believe it or not, drivers can race and even wreck together without it turning into a clown show afterwards.

The month of April also brought about the news that the North Wilkesboro Speedway would see racing return later this year as part of a revitalization of the legendary speedway. Current plans call for a full slate of both asphalt and dirt events as the old speedway gets brought back to life. North Wilkesboro has always held a special place with me as it is the site where I first crossed over through the gate and into the hallowed grounds of the NASCAR Cup garage in 1993. A year earlier shortly after graduating from college, my buddy John Shea who I worked with at the old Midwest Racing Newspaper, and I made an impromptu trip to North Wilkesboro just to get out of Wisconsin. We had always thought it would be a neat place to see a race ever since watching on TV as Ricky Rudd and Dale Earnhardt Sr. tangled in the 1989 fall race there. You know the one, with the famous straight-faced Rudd quote, "I think we were discussing the weather, it was a pretty warm day out there," when asked what was said between the two. Earnhardt was a bit more blunt with his response which was "I gave him the whole bottom lane and he knocked the sh*t out of me." Anyways, fast forward

Dangerous Dan continued on page 9

Dangerous Dan continued from page 8

to 1992 and we were watching the rain delayed to Monday Martinsville race and just out of the blue decided we should go to North Wilkesboro for the next week's race. By Thursday we were on the road and drove all night to pull into North Wilkesboro just in time for Winston Cup qualifying on Friday. There were kids there that got out of school early so they could see qualifying and I thought how cool was that? The townspeople were super nice and even though we probably looked like dorks wearing matching Basset Wheel polo shirts as we waited to eat at the Western Steer, they thought we must have been important and pulled us out of line and took us to the section of the restaurant where the drivers got to eat. We talked to Bobby Hamilton and Dale Jarrett in the buffet line and just tried to look like we fit in despite being nobodies. The Fall Wilkesboro race became a yearly stop until 1995 and my Dad and I even took a father-son road trip to the Spring race in 1995 as well. We sat in the old Junior Johnson grandstand for that race in a section that was filled with Carolina Highway Patrol personnel who got to watch the race after working the traffic control beforehand. Harry Gant's steakhouse in Taylorsville was always a dinner stop during the Wilkesboro trips and there was a go-kart track out back that had really fast karts. It's where I was first introduced to 'racing in the South' as our first go around with the locals resulted in me being spun out and my dad being stuffed in the tires while another friend Dave who was with us, got hit so hard his brand new Mark Martin hat got knocked off and was dragged around the track by the go kart behind him, leaving in torn in half with a black skid mark down the middle. For our second round, once we knew the rules of engagement, we raced the locals like they raced us



and Dave won while I finished second in a pretty aggressive five minute go-kart session. All in all, it was some good times at that track in an area that truly loved racing and it felt like you discovered some place special that few people really knew about. I hope with the current revitalization plans, race fans of today can experience all that area has to offer.

Next month the racing season really kicks in as I plan to attend the ARCA Midwest Tour and Slinger opener followed by the Joe Shear Classic at

Madison where Matt Kenseth returns. My first trip to Mississippi Thunder Speedway is also on tap in May for the World of Outlaws Late Model weekend as well as All Star Circuit of Champions Sprint Car shows at Wilmot and Plymouth. A vintage weekend at Road America and the ARCA Midwest Tour event at Jefferson as well as the Memorial Day weekend special at Slinger and the Trickle 99 at Golden Sands will wrap up a busy month of racing. I'm sure I'll see you all there!

UPCOMING 2022 SCHEDULE
MAY 7TH
MAY 14TH
MAY 20TH
MAY 21ST
MAY 22ND
MAY 28TH
MAY 29TH

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Rockford Spring Classic



Jeff Taber photos

Rockford Speedway kicked off their 75th season with the annual running of the Spring Classic.
Max Kahler topped the field of Big 8 Late Model competitors on hand for the event.

2022 EVENT SCHEDULE



23 EVENTS AT 13 VENUES IN 10 STATES HELD IN AMERICA'S HEARTLAND

| Date | City, State | Venue | Series | Date | City, State | Venue | Series |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Fri.-Sat. Jan. 28-29 | Cordele, GA | Watermelon Capital Speedway | Supers, Pros, Mods, Streets, & Legends | Sat., July 9 | Nashville, TN | Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway | SRX Racing + JEGS/CRA All Stars Tour |
| Fri., March 18 | Pensacola, FL | Five Flags Speedway | Season Opener Outlaws, Sportsman, PS | Sat., July 16 | Pevely, MO | Federated Auto Parts I55 Raceway | SRX Racing + DIRTcar Modified |
| Sat., March 19 | Pensacola, FL | Five Flags Speedway | ARCA Menards East & Vore's Compacts | Mon., July 25 | Indianapolis, IN | Circle City Raceway | USAC Sprints + DIRTcar Modified |
| Sat.-Sun. Apr. 2-3 | DeGraff, OH | Shady Bowl Speedway | Modifieds, LMS, SS, Vore's Compacts | Sat., August 20 | Springfield, IL | Illinois State Fairgrounds | USAC Silver Crown + Sportsman |
| Sun., April 24 | Salem, IN | Salem Speedway | CRA SLM, JEGS/CRA PLM, CRA Streets | Sun., August 21 | Springfield, IL | Illinois State Fairgrounds | ARCA Menards Series + Sportsman |
| Sat., May 7 | Nashville, TN | Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway | ARCA Menards East + Supers & JEGS | Sun., August 28 | Milwaukee, WI | Milwaukee Mile | ARCA Menards Series + Big 8 Series |
| Wed., May 25 | Indianapolis, IN | Circle City Raceway | USAC Sprints + DIRTcar Modifieds | Sat., Sept. 3 | Du Quoin, IL | Du Quoin State Fairgrounds | USAC Silver Crown + DIRTcar Modifieds |
| Thurs., May 26 | Indianapolis, IN | Circle City Raceway | USAC Sprints + DIRTcar Modifieds | Sun., Sept. 4 | Du Quoin, IL | Du Quoin State Fairgrounds | ARCA Menards Series + DIRTcar Modifieds |
| Sat., June 11 | Newton, IA | Iowa Speedway | ARCA Menards Series | Fri., Sept. 16 | Indianapolis, IN | Circle City Raceway | USAC Sprints + USAC Speed2 Midgets |
| Sat., June 18 | Knoxville, IA | Knoxville Raceway | NASCAR Camping World Truck Series | Sat., Oct. 1 | Salem, IN | Salem Speedway | ARCA Menards Series + Great American Stock |
| Sun., June 19 | Milwaukee, WI | Milwaukee Mile | ARCA MW Tour + 3 Other Classes | Fri. Oct 28-Sun. Oct 30 | Nashville, TN | Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway | All American 400 Weekend |
| Sat., June 25 | Elko, MN | Elko Speedway | ARCA Menards Series + 3 Classes | | | | |

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Photo Gallery



Like a fine wine, Tom Carlson appears to get better with age
Brewster Baker photo



The UMSS Sprints are schedule to make an appearance at Thunder Hill in 2022
Dan Plan photo



Bobby Pierce Jr at the Gateway Dirt Nationals this winter
Cal Naughton Jr photo



Gabe Sommers had several strong runs at Speedweeks to start the 2022 season
Junior Jackson photo



Kyle Larson in World of Outlaws action
Ryan Nuttleman photo



Brent Larson in World of Outlaws Late Model action
Jacy Norgaard photo

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SAT. MAY 14- SEASON OPENER (2 PM)
SAT. MAY 21- DOUBLE FEATURES (7 PM)
SAT. MAY 28- BUCK NIGHT \$ (7 PM)
SAT. JUN. 4- KIDS NIGHT (7 PM)
SAT. JUN. 11- MINI VANS (7 PM)
SAT. JUN. 18- DOUBLE FEATURES (7 PM)



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The Man on the Move - Danny Mann

Danny Mann is in his 6th year of racing Bandoleros. After racing mainly at Elko Speedway, Danny hit the road running in 2022. Following in his father's footsteps (Dustin Mann) Danny made the trip to Speedweeks in February, followed by a trip to Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway. The Nashville trip resulted in the younger Mann's best finish yet, with a second-place finish at the historic facility and a sixth overall finish with the combined points from Highland Rim Speedway. In addition to a full season at Elko, Danny looks to hit the road some more this year with trips scheduled to Dells Raceway Park, Jefferson Speedway, Slinger Speedway and Tomah Sparta Speedway.



Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway photo

Thur. 5/12 – Thursday Night Street Drags plus Shine N' Show Contest

Fri. 5/13 – NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series Season Opener

Fri. 5/20 – Adult Tickets \$10 plus Hobby Stock Challenge

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Sat. 5/28 – Salute the Troops 100 Jefferson Speedway

Sun. 6/19 – Father's Day 100 The Milwaukee Mile

Sat. 7/9 – Wayne Carter Classic Grundy County Speedway

Sat. 7/23 – Larry Detjens Memorial State Park Speedway



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Sun. 5/15 – Season Opener with Badger Midgets, MSA 360 Sprints and Wisconsin Legends

Sun. 5/22 – All-Star Circuit of Champions & IRA Outlaw Sprints \$6,000 To Win & Badger Midgets

Sun 6/5 – Kevin Doty Classic featuring Badger Midgets, WI wingLESS Sprints plus WI Legends



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New Dirt



Jacy Norgaard

It had been a few weeks since I had picked up a camera and shot some photographs. These days that long of a break is rare. But early season weather cancellations allowed for me to spend time with my girlfriend, Mikayla and do some sight-seeing around North Carolina. Refreshed and refocused, I was ready to photograph fast moving cars again. Mikayla was scheduled to work the NASCAR Dirt Race at Bristol. I decided to tag along and visit a few of my favorite tracks and add a new one to the list.

Thursday evening of that week was spent at Volunteer Speedway for the Kyle Larson Late Model Challenge. In addition to Kyle Larson racing, William Byron made his dirt late model debut. Volunteer Speedway is a hidden gem of a race track an hour west of Bristol. I arrived 3 hours before showtime and there were people everywhere. I signed into the pit gate, parked my camera bag on the wall at the top of Turn 2 and perused the pits. You would swear it was a Saturday night with the number of cars and people on hand. The event was a smashing success and while

Tazewell, Tennessee



Jacy Norgaard photo

Kyle Larson surprisingly did not win the race, the featured turned out to be pretty good. An all-Tennessee podium was the result with Mike Marlar winning, followed by Jimmy Owens and Scott Bloomquist.

William Byron did not fare so well in his debut on dirt (in a Super Late Model). Byron had his share of struggles and spun out a few times. Having observed this, it made me realize just how difficult Dirt Late Models are to drive. It also made me realize just how insanely talented Kyle Larson

Wythe last year while on vacation with Mikayla and watched her cousin race his crate modified. Wythe is a very large racetrack with picturesque views all



Jacy Norgaard photo

really is. Byron isn't some second-rate talent. He had just won his second Cup race of the year four days prior after all.

The next night I went another hour from Bristol. Only this time East to Virginia and the Wythe Raceway. I visited

around. The views on the track were even better. Jonathan Davenport dominated the 53-lap main event. He seemed poised for his first victory of the 2022 season. Only Brandon Overton had other plans. Overton who stayed right with Davenport for the latter

New Dirt continued on page 16



Jacy Norgaard photo

New Dirt continued from page 15

half of the race made his move on the last lap. Overton was able to sneak by Davenport going down the backstretch and stole the victory away from Superman.

I debated whether to go anywhere that Saturday. I had just done two nights of racing in a row and thought about heading to Bristol and catching the

I can't imagine navigating a stacker through that stretch. But sure enough, I arrived. I was met with traffic. The races weren't slated to begin for at least 2 hours. Yet the parking lots were full, and I ended up parking in a field just



Jacy Norgaard photo

Truck race. But the desire inside to see a new race-track was too hard to ignore. I charged my batteries and put Tazewell Speedway into my phone's GPS and off I went. The drive to Tazewell was rather typical of most journeys to a racetrack. A couple different two-lane highways and county roads. With 3 miles to go or so the trip got very interesting. The road started to wind sharply. Then came the hills. Imagine a roller coaster and a road course. This road was both. For the remaining miles I took each turn with caution and road the ups and downs of the hills. I started to question if I had perhaps put the wrong address in. Surely there couldn't be a race track out here. On this road? How the heck do they even get race haulers on these roads. It was an intense drive in my Trailblazer.



Jacy Norgaard photo

Jacy Norgaard photo



up the road from the track. As I walked into the pits and approached the track, I was shocked at this size. The track was high banked and small. My friend Chris Tilley, the series director for the Iron Man Late Model

Series said, "Just picture matchbox cars racing in a salad bowl." He wasn't kidding. I walked around the pits and said hello to friends. Glancing at the grandstands, I was shocked at how full they were. We weren't anywhere close to race time and the place was already packed full of people. I learned later that night that this crowd size was typical for Tazewell.

When I left out of there after the races that night and back out on the roller coaster road course, I laughed. I laughed because last month in this very column I talked about Tazewell. Only I didn't know it at the time. I wrote that, "I may spend one night at a bull ring in Tennessee this year and never return there. But while I'm there, I am experiencing the place that gave way to someone else's best moments and most cherished memories." Funny how things work out like that. I know there will be some one-off race tracks I visit this year. Places I probably won't ever make it back to. I'll take it all in and experience it as I promised. I just never expected to experience it so soon.

The passion of the race fans at Tazewell is inspiring. It seems these days that jam packed grandstands are hard to come by. There are a million things going on in the world right now and causes for declining attendance. I know that. But for one night it was as if none of that even mattered, let alone existed. Here I was with thousands of

race fans watching "matchbox cars in a salad bowl". You'd think you were trapped in the past. I could argue it felt that way due to the lack of cell phone reception. But I was glad I couldn't get a great signal that night. It gave me a chance to experience Tazewell. They race a class there called Classics. Vintage jalopy style dirt cars. I was in the infield for their feature event and walked to the guardrail in Turns 1 and 2. Standing there was a family. A kid, his father, and who I assumed was the grandpa. I always enjoy watching fans and their reactions to the races. When you work in racing and get the chance to see others enjoy the product that you help shape, it's incredibly rewarding. What caught my eye with this family was the grandpa. He was smiling ear to ear watching the Classics race. Hands pressed on the guardrail, watching as they raced side by side into the corners. I didn't get the chance to speak to him, but on the car ride home I thought about him again.

I bet Tazewell is where he grew up. Tazewell was his Raceway Park. That Classics division was his Figure 8's. And whether he gets back there one night or every night, he's living his passion. Those peaks and turns on the drive back west to Bristol gave me some perspective. Maybe I was meant to go to Tazewell and experience that road and what awaited at the end of it. Chasing your passion has it owns peaks and valleys. It's a winding road that I'm still on. I don't know where it ends, but I know one destination that was on it. Tazewell, Tennessee.



Jacy Norgaard photo



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**THE MIDWEST
RACING CONNECTION**

Racing History



Dale P. Danielski

French Island hosts first post WWII stock car race on the Richmond Farm in another ‘Lost Race Track’ feature story.

With World War II over, and folks looking for something to do for entertainment, a Hotrod/Stock car race was scheduled for French Island, part of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

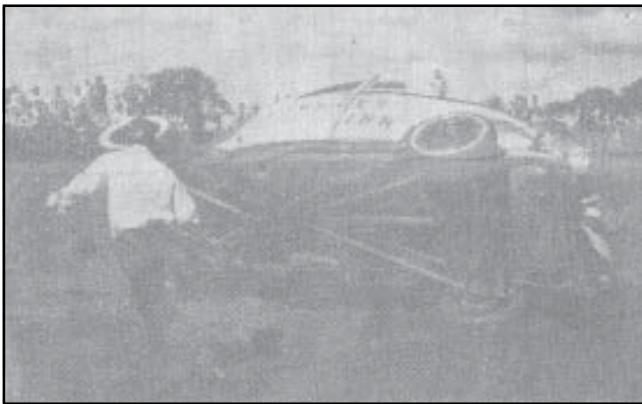
The fact that street cars were now prevalent, and could easily be suited to race, it was perfect timing to schedule such an event.

Enter Bob Deal and other area businessmen to promote such an event as a benefit for the area Jaycee group. The race was scheduled to take place on September 3rd, 1950 on the John David Richmond farm on the Island. According to Grandson, Dennis, “That first race they plowed a deep furrow on the outside and inside of the 1/4 or maybe 1/3 mile in length track. Along with my uncle Ray, my brother and a friend, we cut 100-125 poles and placed them near the edge of the track. That was to guide the drivers going around it. Snow fence was put up about 30 feet from the edge of the track which was to



Mixing it up racing on French Island in 1951

protect the spectators there. As you would guess it wasn’t much protection at all, especially with fans driving their vehicles right up to it for the best view.” Come race day it wasn’t entirely known how things would go, but Dennis Richmond claims word was getting around about this huge stock car race to be run in “The Pasture” as it was known. “Everyone was getting all hyped up about the race. Some local boys were going to race in it, and word was getting out of it being the best thing here since free movies!” It lived up to its billing. Traffic was backed up with people trying to get in. Some parked quite a ways away and just decided to walk the remaining distance. The racing was exciting as well with cars flying off the track and numerous roll overs, much to the delight of the over 6,000 announced fans on hand. At \$1.00 admission for adults and \$.050 for kids, the event was



profitable for the Jaycees too.” From a competitor standpoint it was brutal racing on the tiny dirt track. According to Roy “Happy” Franklin who supplied the bulk of the cars raced on the day, track conditions were treacherous. “It was rough. The cars looked like a bunch of jack rabbits racing around it. It was just a circle and all sand!” According to Franklin however it was the beginning of organized racing in the area. “A bunch of us had raced at a track we carved out on Goose Island, (Park south of La Crosse) but nothing was organized. I bought cars for guys to drive and if they maintained them, they could race them. The deal was I got 50% of what they made. They were almost all 1932 Ford Coupes and at one time I had 9 cars! I’d tow the cars to the races for those guys and they’d wreck ‘um!” That 1st race saw Harold Bentzen in one of Franklins cars finish 2nd. The 20 lap main event race was won by La Crosse driver, Bob Krismer who collected \$100.00 for the win. Krismer also won another \$50.00 by winning his heat race. Due to the rough conditions just 8 of the 15 cars starting finished. Clayt Bentzen was

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1950 French Island races ad. Much anticipation for the big Stock car race on French Island.

another local racer in a Franklin car racing on French Island and he set fast time during the day. A lap of 33 seconds around the oval earned him \$15.00. According to Clayt Bentzen the race cars were pretty much right off of the street. “We’d tune them up a little and put a munch bar on it, which was to hit someone with! We thought we could make a few bucks racing. The cars were stock and it was just a fun thing to do on a Sunday.” With the success of the first race another was scheduled in 1951, on September 2nd. Even though cinders were put down to remedy the previous years

Racing History continued on page 19

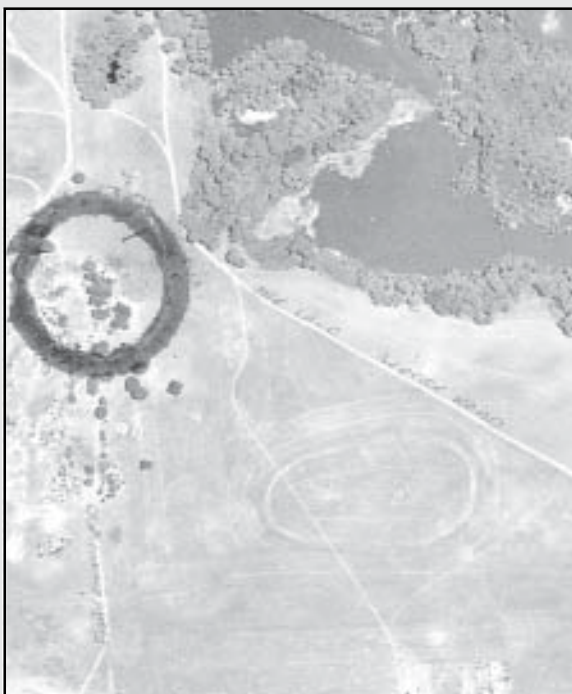
Racing History from page 18



Bob Krismer wins! He took home \$150 on the day for his efforts.

rough track conditions a crowd of only 1,000 or so spectators showed up for the race. Dick Hastings was the winner of what would prove to be the last event held on French Island. According to Dennis Richmond, the putting down of cinders did not sit well with John David Richmond. "They dumped the cinders in the corners which irritated my Grandfather because he claimed it ruined the farmland, the soil, so you couldn't grow crops. That was the last time they raced there, and the fish labs of the Department of the Interior sit on that property now."

Questions, comments, opinions and other information welcome at Starmaker Multimedia 967 10th Ave N Ste A, Onalaska, WI. 54650 608-783-5125 608-518-2478 or at dale@starmakermultimedia.com



Aerial photo from 1954 of the French Island track.

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THE MIDWEST RACING CONNECTION

Preserving History

by Dan Plan



Joan and Dan Nienaber captured many historical moments on video of stock car racing in the upper-Midwest

About 30 years ago I purchased several VHS video tapes from a company called Nothing Fancy Videos. The videos were from tracks in my area of the country from the 1960's through the early 1990's. There's action from Cedar Lake Speedway, Dells Raceway Park, Elko Speedway, LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway, Minnesota State Fair, North Starr Speedway, Raceway Park (in Shakopee), Rockford Speedway, Stillwater Speedbowl and Twin City Speedway.

In the past few years, I've been converting these tapes to digital format and posting short clips of them on YouTube. About a month ago, I received a call from Dan Nienaber, the guy who had Nothing Fancy videos. He was excited to see his work on the Internet and offered me his collection of videos. Man, I felt kid in a candy story. I really enjoy seeing history of our sport, and so does Dan. I figured I would give credit where credit is due and tell the story of Dan and his wife Joan's involvement in the sport many years ago.

How did you originally get involved in videotaping at Elko and Raceway Park?

My wife Joan and I decided we were going to do what we wanted to do for the first 10 years of our marriage, so we started going to the races. I'd always been a race fan. I didn't even own a camera. I rented one from a camera shop. The first film I took was the state fair dirt track races. I didn't know what I was doing. The 8mm days you had 2.5 minutes per side and then you had to find a dark place to turn the film over and take another 2.5 minutes. I managed to get some interesting footage. The first film I took at Elko starts with Danny Prziborowski in the pits. That one was with a rented camera. Finally, they came out with the Super 8 camera that was relatively easy to oper-

ate, so I got one. I started filming the races whenever I went to them. One time at Raceway Park, I ran across a shirt-tail relative of mine by the name of Bob Utecht. He was the promoter at Elko and Raceway for Phil Stewart. In the winter of that year, we went to Bob's house and showed him the film. He asked us to take film at the track. I had another chat with my wife and then we both started taking film at Elko and Raceway and then we would put together a film for the banquet at the end of the year.

Your involvement with Phil and Dianne Stewart lead to opportunities to video tape at other tracks (Twin City, Minnesota State Fair, Dells, LaCrosse & Rockford) as well, correct?

We were free, all we had were our jobs. We followed the racing around wherever it led. We had a grand time. Racing people are the greatest people. We just had so much fun chasing the racers around from place to place.

You also had some in-car video from your early days. How did you accomplish this?

Well, there was a holiday weekend possibly the 4th of July weekend. That was done in an extra seat on the passenger side of the car. We talked Bill Mueller into putting an extra seat into his race car. The film you see where the camera moves, like the scene where we are racing alongside Larry Behrens, I really enjoy those shots. I was pretty much face to face with him in his convertible. The other stuff I did was an in-car before the networks did. I had a small little box camera. I talked Ted Kitzman into building a little rack for it attached to his roll cage. At the start of each race, he hit the button and away we went. Pretty interesting shots. He won one of the races and ended up in a couple of crashes. It was fun to have a different perspective.

Your pavement videos stop around the mid - 1970's. What lead to that?

We were getting close to 30 and starting to think about starting a family. We had also taken charge of the junior high youth group at our church. When Phil Stewart died, we stayed on for one more year to help keep things established. After that we decided it was time to take a break.

You started videotaping again in 1987. What occupied your time during your hiatus from racing videos?

We spent time with the youth group and raised our son Paul. Once our son Paul was old enough to go to the races, we decided to get back into racing. We didn't want to do it 2-3 nights a week like we had been doing it, so we switched to Cedar Lake. That was kind of interesting too. I had been videotaping for myself and talked to Gary Cook and told him I had been taking videos also. Gary asked us to take videos full time for them. Lots of people saw me with the camera and started asking if we sold video. That's when Nothing Fancy Videos started. I started selling each week's videos. We were doing pretty well. What really put us on the map was when the World of Outlaws was here, Sammy Swindell coming out of the fourth turn did a spin on one tire and kept going. Everyone kept asking us if we had the video. I think just because of the one pirouette we sold 60 videos. Everybody wanted to see that. We weren't getting rich, but it was enough to go on vacation to the North Shore every year.

Your last Cedar Lake video was in 1994. Why did you stop at that time?

We were getting to the place where we needed to switch from video tapes to DVD. That would have involved purchasing additional equipment. About the same time another group came in that was going to do some fancy things with big screen and do replays and other items. The timing was good because it saved me from having to get extra equipment.

Quite possibly one of the very first in-car videos made by Dan Nienaber as he rode along with Bill Mueller at Elko Speedway as they run alongside Larry Behrens.



LIL' CALE

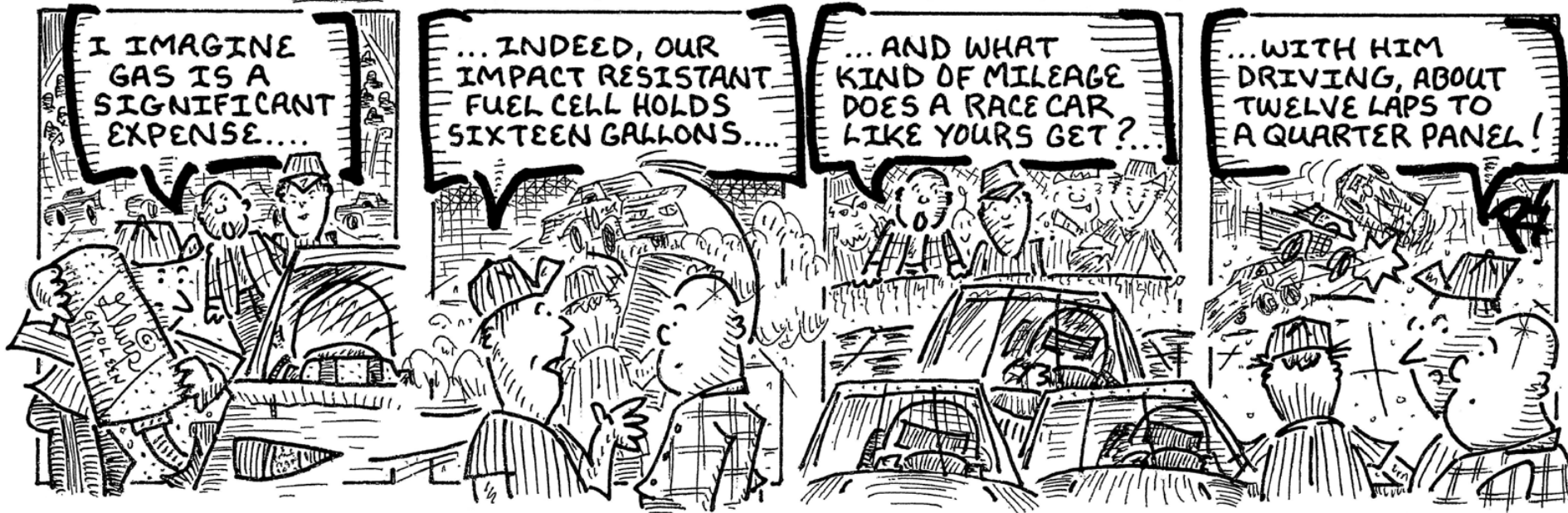
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Stop & Go Freddy

If you've attended a Super Late Model event on pavement in the last 25 years, chances are you've seen "Stop & Go Freddy" on pit road. Fred Mehlum started his involvement in short track racing with the late Larry Detjens in 1974. After the passing of Detjens, Fred moved to the safety crew with Larry Wehrs as a pit steward. In 1995 Fred started his "Stop & Go" career with the ASA at Jennerstown, PA. As Fred stated a few years ago in his Racing Nuggets interview "It just kept going from there." God Speed Freddy.



Doug Hornickel photo



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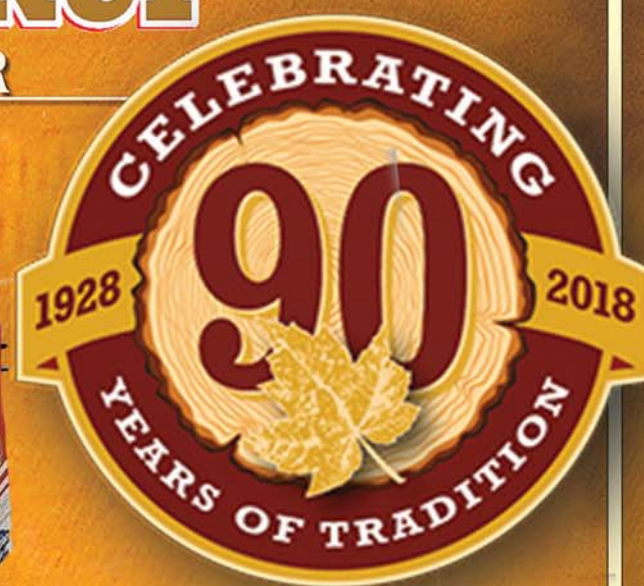
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