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April 2023

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Publisher's Note
Racing According to Plan



Dan Plan

This past month we took a trip to Texas to visit family. I often take this opportunity to spend at least one day at race track. This year I made another visit to Kennedale Speedway Park in Kennedale, TX. I had been to Kennedale one other time about 20 years ago. On my visit 20 years ago, the town of Kennedale had 3 race tracks in town. They were all located within a half mile of each other; Texas Raceway (drag strip), Cowtown Speedway (quarter mile dirt) and Kennedale Speedway Park (another quarter mile dirt track.) The unique thing was Cowtown and Kennedale were directly next to each other. I actually went to both tracks on the same night during my initial visit. These days, Kennedale Speedway Park is the only one that remains.

Evidently the city was interested in utilizing the land occupied by the three tracks for commercial or residential use for tax purposes. Cowtown closed about 8 years ago due to environmental concerns with some material put down to improve the parking lot

Different Divisions & More Nerd Goals

surface. The drag strip closed in about a year later when they city government ruled against their continued operation.

During my visit to Kennedale this year, I was able to watch a division I had never seen before and another one I had not seen in 20+ years. The new division was one that is fairly popular at the Southern Dirt Tracks. They are called Factory Stocks. They appear to be a Bomber-type car, with a bigger motor and the real kicker is they run slicks on dirt. The Factory Stocks all run Hoosier F-45 pavement Late Model takeoffs. It makes them look pretty cool, and they seemed to stick surprisingly well.

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The Midwest
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THE MIDWEST
RACING CONNECTION



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The division I had not seen in a long time was the Dwarf Car division. The Dwarf cars are the predecessor to Legend Cars. They are similar in size to the Legends, but are allowed to build their own chassis, bodies and allow different engine combinations. The Dwarf cars had one of the largest fields on

hand for the night with 24 different cars competing. The way things have gone with the two previous tracks in town, I'm not sure how much longer the city will let Kennedale survive. I'm glad I had the opportunity to visit one more time. After my visit to Kennedale in March, I realized I might have an opportunity to reach my nerd goal of attending a race in each month of the year again. My

season started at Tomah for their Enduro in January followed by my trip to Speedweeks in February. With a race now in the books for March, I think I can find something to fill out the remaining months of 2023. April through October will bring plenty of opportunities to catch short track racing close to home. November and December will be the challenge, but I'm sure I can find something again.

Factory Stocks & Dwarf Cars and the remains of CowTown Speedway (left), aerial photo of the proximity of CowTown and KSP (right)



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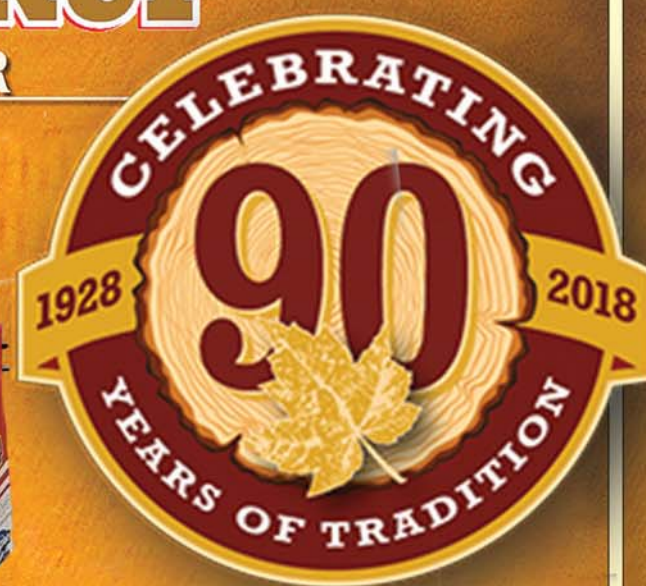
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Going in Circles



Charlie Spry

Everyone has by now probably heard that the 2023 season will be the last for the iconic Rockford Speedway. For years, encroaching city and retail sprawl has taken over the area, and the land that the speedway has sat on since 1948 has been pounced upon. The Deery family held out as long as they could, but with pressure from the city Fathers they finally had to give in and sell to the inevitable.

This was one of the first tracks that I ever attended as a child. I had the opportunity to attend more races here than any other track during my lifetime. Like so many other, I am going to miss the place and the people in it dearly. So, I thought that I would put a few of my memories on paper, which they say helps heal the hurt a bit.

My first strong memory is of the 1970 season. Veteran Chicagoland racer Erik Johnson decided to travel north and race here this year, and of course, the local hotshoe Joe Shear was the man to beat. I remember these two went at it like there was no tomorrow. Johnson had his "8-Ball" '64 Impala, which was built like a tank to take on the rough Chicago area tracks, while Shear had a sharp looking '69 Chevelle, which was much more nimble. Shear usually came out on top, but not always. I remember that back then the fans were very vocal, with shouts amongst the Johnson fans and the Shear fans ensuing back and forth in the stands. I do not remember any fights, but it could have happened.

Next up, the 1971 National Short Track Championship. Dick Trickle was practically unbeatable this year... Anywhere. Veteran Bill Retallick drove his purple '69 Chevelle to the upset win over Trickle that year. Trickle got in a wreck or something happened early in, and he got a lap down. Retallick had meanwhile taken the lead in the race, as Trickle unlapped himself and began his pursuit of the leaders. late in the race he caught Retallick, but could not get by him, and Retallick got the win. I always liked Trickle, but I liked Retallick as well, and always like the upset victories. Not too long ago I had the chance to talk at length with Mr. Retallick, and it was fun to hear him

recall this race with obvious pride. He had one heck of a monster motor in that Chevelle! I miss those days of the big-block motors. We will never see anything like that again and I was there.

The Roadrunner class in 1969-1971 or so. While the Roadrunner class has always put on a good show, the first few years that I attended here kind of stand out. There were an amazing amount of cars entered each night and they did not stop the race for practically anything. For a young kid it was something to see and made me want to come each week to see what happened.

1980. This was the year that Al Papini brought out a beautiful, blue '69 Chevelle for the Roadrunner class, and completely dominated. I think he won the first four or five features that year and they finally told him he had to move up and run with the late models from there on in. I think he only ran that car one or two more nights before getting an actual late model. Al's Son, Alex told me that Al's best friend Brian Larson built that car with him and was really sharp. He said that Al used to call him "Brian The Brain."

1980. This was the year I first took a car out onto the highbanks to race. It was during the popular spectator drags, or as they called them, "spectacular drags." I took a \$150 '69 Chevelle two door hardtop out there with a stock 350 and a big old Holley 650 mounted on top of it and let 'er go. Was the overall winner one night in July and won my first racing trophy. Sadly, that car got totaled in a highway crash that fall and went bye-bye. Still wish I had the car. Spectator drags were always a very popular attraction there and I still enjoy them.

The late models from about 1977-1982. This was when late models were still

Rockford Memories

very affordable, but technology was creeping in. The track had great fields of cars with top drivers such as John Luther, Wayne Lensing, Dave Fossum, Al Papini, Brad Gerke, Wayne Swartwout, Keith Selvog and many more. Body styles were varied and there were some very good battles, even in the first heat and semi-features. I feel very fortunate to have witnessed the racing during this era.

The annual "Bahama Bracket Nationals." Often imitated, never duplicated, this one-of-a-kind event featured just about any kind of race car or truck you could image. They were all put into brackets according to qualifying times. Besides racing with your bracket-mates. you also had to be watchful of your lap times, for if you turned laps faster than two-tenths

Going In Circles continued on page 7



Going In Circles continued from page 6

over your qualifying time, you were black flagged. I saw the heartbreak from many who “broke out” on their last lap while leading, and the surprise when the second place driver actually got the win. So many cars from so many different tracks all put together. This gave me a chance to meet some pretty cool people from so many other tracks besides the regulars. This has remained my favorite race show of the year, every year. It was originally started in the early 1990’s and has remained a favorite of mine every year. Now, I will have to travel a bit to see some of the people who I would see every year here for this event.

2013. Alex Papini dominated the Late Models on his way to the track title. Some cheered him, some booed him. They all came to watch him. He was and is an exciting driver to watch. Winning the track title at the track where his late Father raced so long meant the world to him. He started out the year winning four of the first five feature weekly features of the year and the First Big 8 event of the year as well and never left a doubt.

2016. Curt Nighswonger won the figure-eight track title. If you know Curt, you know he is one of the guys that struggles to put a car on the track each week, but he does it. Always willing to help others, he is also a very humble and down-to-earth person. He did not win a single figure-eight race that year but was steady enough to get the track title. I know it means a lot to him.

The Sixer division. Started here in 2017, this class took off like wildfire. Mid-sized American cars such as Pontiac Grand Prix’s, Grand Am’s, Olds Alero’s, Chevy Impala’s and other like-sized cars were becoming of the age where they were well-used cars on the street or found in junkyards. They were everywhere and were what this division was and is all



about. Starting out kind of slowly with few cars, after a year or two the division jumped up in popularity, where car counts jumped up into the 40’s each night. Some of the racing purists were not happy, but many more loved the action that happened when drivers tried to race cars that were cheap and not really meant to be race cars, but suddenly were. Started out as an idea from Gregg McKarns at Madison, he had heard about this division from a track out east, and got it started. Rockford and many others quickly followed when they saw how much interest there was in the

class. It has since spawned the High School Racing Association for high school kids, and also a Ladies division. It looked like so much fun that I had to build one myself. I have to say that it is the most fun I have had racing.

Finally, just the many great people that I have had the pleasure to meet throughout the years. I have made many friendships here. This track will never be forgotten.





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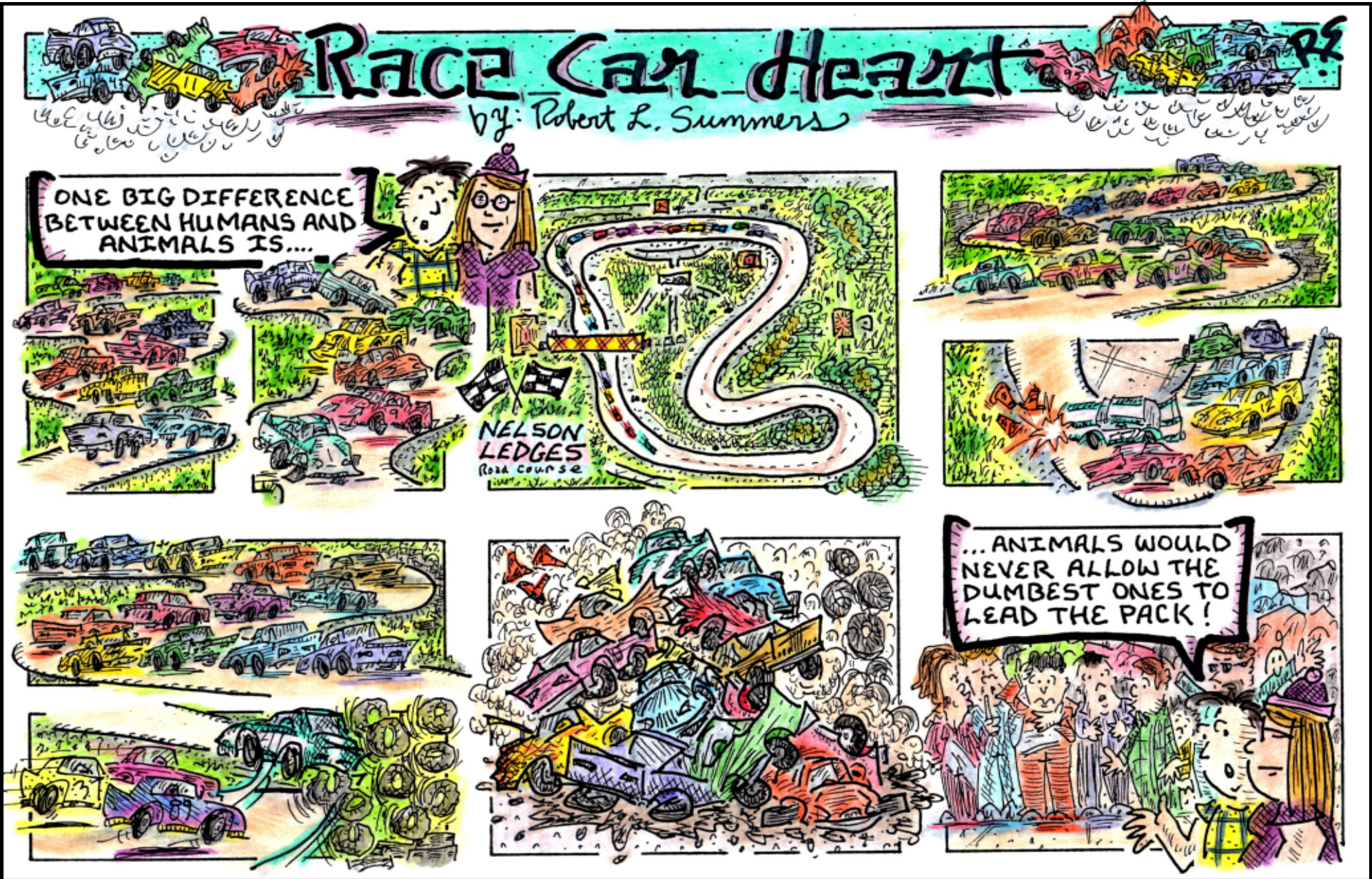
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Kennedale Sport Mod Photo Gallery





Legendary Opener - April 21 & 22



Racing Nuggets



PJ "Jacklyn" Nuttleman

Have you ever made a mistake and had the misfortune of it happening on a VERY public stage—so public that it seemingly can never be buried in the past? People continue to bring it up when you're trying hard to climb out from under the weight of it. The mistake has become your defining moment and it would seem there is no way to ever live it down.

That's a helluva way to go through life, isn't it? It's hard enough to forgive yourself when you've made a mistake, but to have the general public throwing it back in your face—that makes it downright unbearable at times.

We can't control others—we can only control ourselves and our actions... even if our past actions are what we're wrestling with—it's how we choose to move forward in the aftermath that speaks volumes.

This whole topic started rattling around in my head after Dan Plan and I interviewed Alex Papini on our latest Racing Nuggets Podcast. Admittedly, I was just getting to know Alex last December when we met for the first time face-to-face at the Snowball Derby. While I was familiar with the as he referred to it, "the front stretch Monster Truck incident at Rockford Speedway" with Brian Johnson—I can honestly say that it never crossed my mind as we were talking in Florida this past December.

But I was having a mutually enjoyable conversation with him. I imagine that's not the same experience he has with others, particularly on social media. People can be hateful and cruel. They will see you enjoying a little sunshine and want to come along and dump a steaming turd on you to ruin the happiness.

I've witnessed this plenty with my husband, Toby particularly after his own infamous issue last year at 4-17 Speedway in Florida with the hollow bolt incident. The car he built, driven by Ty Majeski won the big race, only to be disqualified in the post-race inspection for a singular hollow bolt in the trailing arm. As documented by Toby, it was a late-night assembly issue where he didn't have enough proper bolts to finish the job and had intentions of replacing it before the race.

Overcoming Mistakes

There are people out there who love to remind you of your mistakes and try to keep your identity attached to them.

I probably get more feisty about it than Toby does. He has seemingly become better at just letting stuff like that slide off his back, like water on a duck. It is an art to being able to push aside the barbs that people throw at you after you've made a mistake on a large public stage. That art is called "focus;" focusing on the next opportunity with a positive attitude.

But why do people enjoy tearing others down like that? I can't imagine they would enjoy it if the roles were reversed. And if we're being honest—EVERYBODY makes mistakes. Some of us just do it in a very public way. However, there is a sure-fire way to overcome it.

If you've made a mistake on or off the track—own it. Give a genuine apology to the appropriate people and then give yourself grace. Forgiveness is a two-way street. You need to ask for it from others, but you also need to give it to yourself—regardless if others accept your apology and forgive you. Carrying the weight of a mistake around your entire life serves no purpose. It holds you back from reaching your full potential.

I also think laughter is a key component to getting past a mistake. If you're able to laugh at yourself, it tends to preemptively take the joy from the trolls who want to keep throwing your mistake in your face to try to hurt you.

So, as we get this new race season fired up, let's all try to make an effort to not dwell on our mistakes



OR the mistakes of others—and above all else, make a solid effort to be kind. This world is getting more and more weird, hostile, and divided. Being kind is the best solution to combating that and it doesn't cost you a thing.

Good luck to everyone this season—and God bless!



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Dangerous Dan**Dan Margetta**

It was another fun Tuesday night racing slot cars with the collection of fellow racers and fans that dubbed their weekly gathering Slot Car Night in America and after having just returned from Daytona, it felt good to catch up with everyone again. I was invited to join the group several years ago despite not having any cars of my own by Jerry Priesgen who had become a good friend after working together on the weekly Driver's Meeting radio show and Slinger Speedway. Jerry was my "car owner" as he let me race one of his cars each week after diligently working to find the best set ups during the week. On this night we talked between races about how we were both looking forward to the start of the local racing season and discussed many of the hot topics concerning Slinger Speedway. At the end of the evening, we both finished mid-pack and bid each other a good night and until next time.

Only there wouldn't be a next time as late in the afternoon on March 27th, I received the news that Jerry Priesgen had perished in a motor vehicle acci-

dent earlier that day. That kind of news stops you in your tracks and with it the racing community, especially in South East Wisconsin, lost an essential cornerstone of its foundation. Jerry Priesgen was the Competition Director at both the Slinger Speedway and the Beaver Dam Raceway and did so much more behind the scenes to better the sport. He came off as a guy who truly loved every aspect of motorsports and deeply cared about its integrity which is probably why we got along so well. I sensed that right away working with him at Slinger whether it was the detailed presentations and notes he would bring to pre-season rules and procedures meetings to his direction of the weekly race programs over the track radios to his shop visits on his own time to inspect driver's cars and offer advice. At Beaver Dam Raceway, Jerry would always be found standing by the turn three pit exit wearing his trademark pink baseball

Goodbye Good Friend

cap covered by the radio headset as he lectured on the raceceiver and directed the show. I'm not sure of the official story behind the pink hat and I think it had to do with being able to see him but eventually he became known to everyone as "Pink Hat." He was willing to do just about any job at the track on race night and I'll always remember the fun we had and the good laughs as we cooked brats and burgers for the late

season Slinger Monster Truck show last year when the kids who normally did the cooking were all back in school and it was all hands on deck.

Directing a race night isn't easy and often times a firm call needs to be made quickly to keep the show moving and at Slinger, Jerry was the eyes in the video room utilizing the inputs of many track spotters as well as the video replay to make a final call. I know from personal experience, he listened to all of us on the radios and valued our inputs to what we saw before confirming it with video and issuing the final edict. We didn't always get it right and like me, I'm pretty sure he would lock in memory the calls that were missed so as not to miss them again. His door was always open to discuss issues at the end of the night and whether they were resolved or just ended up agreeing to disagree, mutual respect was never sacrificed. I'll never forget a night two years ago

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Dangerous Dan continued from page 15

when a dispute over sending a driver to the back for involvement in an incident (for the record, video replay showed there was contact or “involvement”) resulted in a pretty big blow up in the spotter’s stand. Things got pretty hostile, so much so we re-checked the video at the end of the night which we always did when someone got that mad. The replay confirmed the correct call was made. It was right before the Slinger Nationals and the next day was the practice day and as it wound down I was invited to stop out to a crew member’s house who lived nearby to hang out. As we were hanging out, it soon became evident that he was the spotter who was involved in the dust up the night before which shocked me that the dude spouting off was actually a good friend of mine. As we were hashing it out over a cold one at his house, my phone rang and it was Jerry inviting me to join the rest of the officials for dinner at a nearby restaurant. There was a bit of a pause when I told him I was there with the guy screaming at us last night before it was decided we would all break bread over dinner and figure things out once and for all. By the end of the night we were all laughing and carrying on and I remember thinking this is the epitome of what racing is all about as even though everyone wanted to tear each other’s heads off in the heat of the battle, at the end of the day we were all racers and all walked away with a better understanding from where each side was coming from.

I really got to know Jerry when I had the fortune of co-hosting the Drivers Meeting radio show with him and Jeff Wessel. The Drivers Meeting was a show held live in a bar that highlighted local racers where they “got to tell their story.” You could tell right away Jerry loved the social interactions and he was instrumental in lining up guests as he firmly prodded those reluctant to go live on the radio. Many times those who were the most nervous about the experience ended up enjoying it and it was fun to hear Jerry coach them and offer encouragement during the commercial breaks. A lot of times many of the guests returned multiple times over the season and in the end we all made new friends. Although I never saw him race, Jerry did drive modifieds and sprint cars and I think that experience helped smooth the nerves of many of the weekend warriors we had on. The program lasted an hour but once we were off the air, nearly every week we continued talking racing for just the audience that was live at the bar. Jerry could go all night if we let him and you could really tell he just loved being a part of the atmosphere. Plus, he did it all on a volunteer basis and other than maybe someone buying him a drink at the bar once in a while, I don’t think he ever received or asked for anything for his time. Jerry’s regular job was at Zuern Building Products and off the track he often helped racers and fans with their various building projects and he served his community as a town of Addison supervisor and zoning chairperson.

The guy just loved racing and when he wasn’t working at a track or talking up the sport on the radio,

he was at a race somewhere. Many times when I couldn’t get off early at the regular job, Jerry would save a top row spot for me at Sun Prairie, Plymouth, Dells Raceway Park, Kaukauna, or Jefferson. He organized trips to Eldora when the NASCAR trucks ran there and while I never could figure it out work schedule wise to go, the stories I heard made those trips sound fun. There’s no doubt Jerry’s passing has left a huge void in this upcoming racing season as he definitely was one of a kind. It will be sad not hearing his voice on the radio at Slinger this year but we’ll continue on as he would want us to and strive to put the best show on as he watches above. It wouldn’t surprise me to see some pink ball caps at tracks this season in his memory either. We’re going to miss you buddy. Rest in peace my friend.



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MAY 16	► NORTH WILKESBORO	
MAY 25	► HICKORY	
JULY 11	► SLINGER	
JULY 15	► ANDERSON	
AUGUST 1	► KAUKAUNA	
SEPTEMBER 16	► TOLEDO	
OCTOBER 15	► WINCHESTER	
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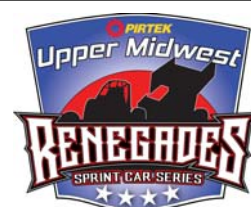
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