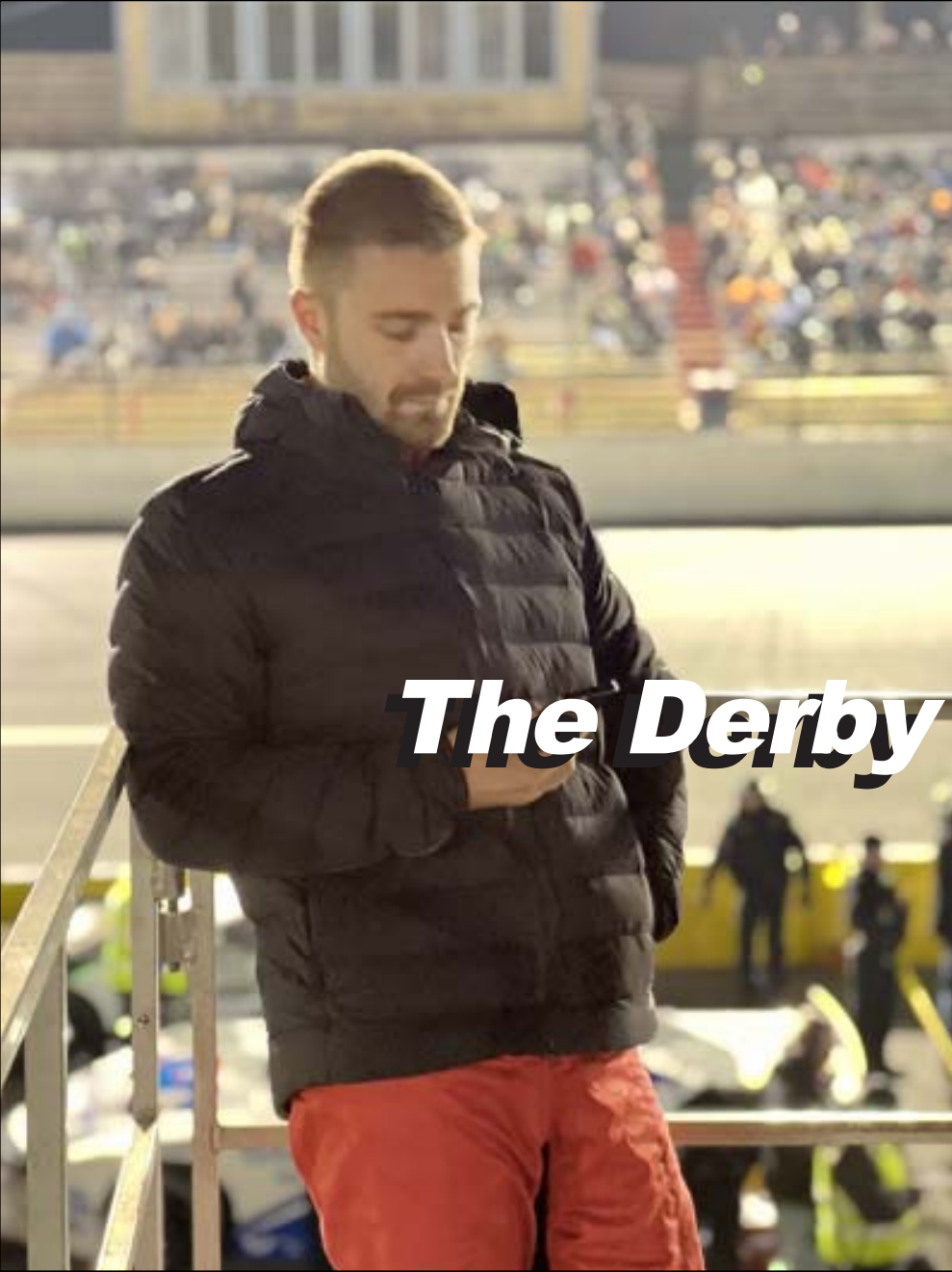


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## The Derby & The Dome

January 2025

Inside...



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**Publisher's Note**  
***Racing According to Plan***



**Dan Plan**

I wrapped up my 2024 season with another visit to the Gateway Dirt Nationals. This event is held inside The America’s Center Dome in downtown St. Louis. This was my third visit to the event, and it just keeps getting bigger and better every year.

***The Dome***

The first year I went was about 5 years ago. At that time, just the front stretch of the lower level was full during the Friday and Saturday shows. This year, the entire lower level was basically full for the Thursday and Friday preliminary events. For last year’s event, they opened up the upper section for the main event Saturday night. This year, they opened the upper level on Friday evening. I can tell you from first-hand experience the view from the upper level is fantastic for two reasons. There’s practically zero dust in the upper level, and very minimal exhaust fumes.

There are varying opinions about this event regarding if it is “real racing.” I honestly don’t understand this argument. There are Late Models and Modifieds on a dirt track going in circles. How is that not racing? It is extremely entertaining to say the least. Sure, the track is small, but they have plenty of room to pass. The track always seems to be rough, or as the professional dirt racers say, “it has character.” Isn’t it amazing how two different sayings can both have basically the same meaning? One is interpreted as negative and the other is received as positive. Weird, but effective.

*Publisher's Note continued on page 4*



*The Midwest*  
**RACING**  
*Connection*  
January 2025

P.O. Box 22111  
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www.theracingconnection.com

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*The Midwest Racing Connection* is published six times during the summer racing season by The Plan Company, Inc.  
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651-451-4036.

*Cover photos by: Bruce Nuttleman, Charlie Spry, Todd Narveson & Shawn Swanstrom*

THE MIDWEST  
RACING CONNECTION





*Publishers note from page 3*

For anybody that has entertained the idea of going to DirtInDecember in St. Louis, I would highly recommend seeing it in person. There are plenty of pre-race sight-seeing opportunities and plenty of post-race nightly activities.

There is one pro tip learned from this years' experience. If you arrive to your hotel after the races with the thousands of other people waiting for the elevator, find a maintenance guy. They might just use the maintenance elevator to avoid the wait in the lobby. I'm not giving out any names, but I know a guy that was able to do this on two occasions.

As I think back about the past year, the 2024

month of August, I watched Scott Bloomquist participate in what would be his last event. Scott raced in the USA Nationals before tragically passing away a week later.

And finally, I ended my 2024 season attending 51 different events in 5 different states. Even though I have more time to go the races, I still have not reached my totals that were achieved prior to 2020. I'm hoping to change that in 2025. I also learned the criteria behind counting your number of tracks

attended by the

"Track Chasers" throughout the United States. Even though it feels like I go to a lot of races, I was way behind some of the Track Chasers. I figured my



Chasers. After learning about some the criteria used by many of the Track Chasers from Gregg McKarns, my number is almost 140. Still not close to some of the real race chasers, but I feel better about being over 100.



racing season included a couple of historical moments for me. Back in February, I watched one of the last Lucas Oil Late Model races ever held at East Bay Raceway Park during Speedweeks. The Lucas group had another show scheduled for October, but Hurricane season in Florida cancelled this show. Early in the

race track total throughout the course of my life was around 80 different facilities. Way below some of the real Track



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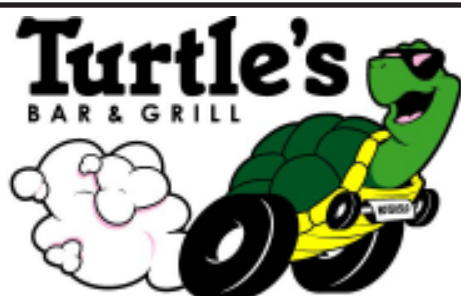
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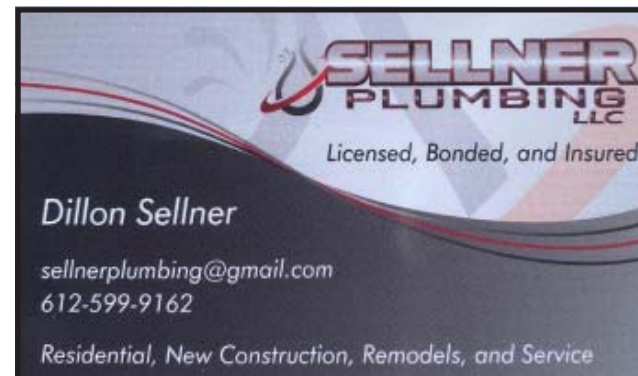
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Going in Circles



Charlie Spry

As we enter a new year it seems that everyone likes to do a little reflecting on the year gone by, and racing people are no different. I have a notebook for each year that I not only keep track of race winners at various tracks, but also my own personal stats on races attended.

With that being said, the 2024 season started out wet, as four of my first five race attempts were rained out. Soon it was six of the first twelve shows, and then it dried out, as I only had two more rainouts all season after that kind of rough start.

Things were a bit different for me, as I think this may have been the first year that I attended more dirt shows than pavement. 30 to 20. With tracks closing and whatnot, I look for that personal trend to continue. I am also getting to know more and more of the dirt racers and getting very familiar with that style of racing. I am one of those people that can go to any kind of racing and enjoy it.

So, here is a rundown of tracks and shows attended for me in 2024. Dubuque Fairgrounds Speedway came out on top for me, with ten shows attended. The Sunday night show just works well for me. Next up was Beaver Dam Raceway with eight shows attended. Unfortunately, weekly shows are not



Dells Raceway Park had Charlie Spry in the house 4 times this year  
(Dan Plan photo)

planned here for 2025 with only specials being run, so the count there will drop. Next up is a tie between Lafayette County Speedway on the dirt and Madison International Speedway on the paved side, both with seven. I made it to Dells Raceway Park four times, Sycamore Speedway three times, Sugar River Raceway (karts) three times, then Marshfield Motor Speedway, State Park Speedway, and Grundy County Speedway two times each, and finally, 300 Raceway in Farley and Maquoketa Speedway, both in Iowa, one time each.

Totals come to 30 dirt shows and 20 paved. 33 of my races were in Wisconsin, 12 in Iowa, and 5 in Illinois. I also had 8 rainouts for the year. A bit low for me, but probably will continue to drop as tracks close

or stop racing weekly. The loss of tracks such as Rockford, Columbus, Lake Geneva, and now Wausau really drops my count.

So, we will see what happens in 2025. Probably be quite similar, although we are hoping to get a northern swing into 2 or 3 Michigan U.P. tracks fit into the schedule for 2025.

Favorite shows? Cannot pinpoint that. I really enjoy any tracks weekly show. It is not very often that I leave disappointed.

It was also a fun year in that I once again got to meet a bunch of new people and of course reconnect with many old friends. Racing is not just about watching cars go in circles, even though my column title reflects that! See you in 2025!



Dubuque Fairgrounds Speedway was the most common place to find Charlie during the 2024 season  
(Dubuque Fairgrounds Speedway photo)



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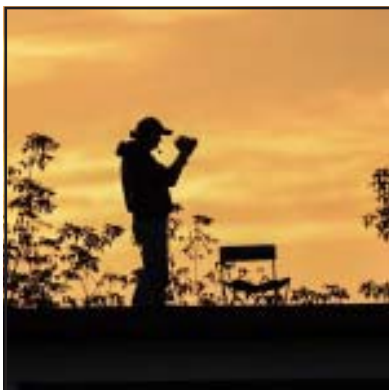


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## Dangerous Dan



**Dan Margetta**

I hope everyone's off-season is going well and you're not suffering too much from the racing withdrawals as we trudge through the winter months in anticipation of Spring and going racing again. I haven't been up to a whole lot this winter with the only racing related activity having been a quick trip to the Performance Racing Industry (PRI) Trade Show in Indianapolis and a few slot car races in December.

PRI was a last-minute idea by Dan Casey who wanted to go to represent Slinger Speedway and the Slinger Nationals Lap Money program. As we talked on the phone Monday evening, the light bulb went on that I still had two remaining vacation days to use from the regular job and after a few phone calls and online searches we were going to Indy on Thursday morning. I quickly came up with a flyer and sent it to Craig Zeller to print up and found a decent affordable hotel while Dan worked with Slinger to secure the admission tickets. It all came together quickly and we spent Thursday and Friday at the trade show. I hadn't been there in about five years and the show is still huge as there is no way one can see the whole thing in just one day. It didn't take long to find friends and we even made a few new ones as interest in participating in the Slinger Nationals lap money program was high. If all continues to go well, don't be surprised to hear

some unorthodox lap sponsors that may make you go "hmmm" and have the internet trolls talking about the lap numbers the money is on. We even made friends with a former snowmobile racer from Eagle River whose son now races off-road trucks and he promised us he's bringing his camper to the Slinger Nationals to continue the fun and hang out with us circle racers. Dan knew a lot of people from tool fairs and we spent a lot of time in tool company booths and of course we couldn't pass the Hepfner Racing Products, Five Star Race Car Bodies, and Bassett Racing Wheel booths without stopping to socialize. It was cool to catch up with my TV friends at the Speed Sport booth and yes I already committed to running a camera for several shows at Dells Raceway Park, Slinger Speedway, and Madison International Speedway. All in all, it was a productive trip and we were back in Wisconsin Friday evening already wishing Spring was here.

The only racing I was part of this past month was the plastic toy kind as the 32<sup>nd</sup> season of the IndySlotCar League continues on. The league began 32 years ago as a way to keep in touch with racing friends during the off-season and has grown pretty big over the years. A full field now consists of 16 drivers and the league has been going on for so long now that it's hard to get out (kind of like the mafia LOL) as no one wants to be the one to end the tradition. The December race has a Christmas theme and was held at the very first track built for the league, named The Shrine for its historical legacy. It's the same track Milwaukee CBS TV Affiliate Channel 58 did a feature story on last year. This year's Shrine race was especially meaningful because its owner Mike Kristoff is moving which meant the track was going to be disassembled immediately after the race with an uncertain future if it would ever be put back together. It's one thing if the track is already up but I'm pretty sure it's a different story to convince the wife to dedicate a portion of a new basement to rebuild a slot car track. Anyways, the race came down to a classic battle between myself and my "arch-rival" Dean Strom. We were actually racing side by side with about a minute to go and it was pretty intense because there is no one I would rather beat more than Dean and I'm sure he feels the same about me. Plus we are good friends and work together at a lot at tracks

during the race season so the opportunity for smack talking is always there. Well on this night, Dean spun with thirty seconds to go and I didn't which meant I squeaked out the win in what was possibly the final race at The Shrine. I usually only win one race a year so I'm probably done with the victories this season and it wasn't Rockford, Hales Corners, or Lake Geneva but it did feel cool to win even if it was just stupid toy cars.

The trip to PRI usually gets everyone thinking ahead to the 2025 racing schedules and I spent the last part of December trying to set out where I'll chase races next year. Everything is done with wide eyes at this time of the

year and I'm sure things will change and I may not make all of them that I would like to but so far it is shaping up to once again be a busy race season. It will all kick off in February in Daytona with SpeedWeek events at New Smyrna and Volusia before ending with the Daytona 500. Then the Midwest season kicks off in April with the Ice Breaker 100 at the Dells and Slinger Speedway's Opener. May will be busy with ASA Midwest Tour races at Madison and Jefferson along with a pair of Super Six Late Model races at the Plymouth Dirt Track and Slinger's weekly shows beginning. The Tundra Super Late Model Series opens up at Wisconsin International Raceway in May as well. June is probably the busiest month with the High Limit Sprint Cars at 141 Speedway and the World of Outlaws Sprint Cars at Plymouth Dirt Track while the asphalt super lates are at the Dells for the Trickle 99 and the Dairyland 100. The ASA STARTS National Tour comes to Wisconsin in June for events at Madison and Slinger while Road America also has the NTT IndyCar Series and the Trans Am Series on back to back June weekends.

The month of July kicks off with several 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend shows in the state but I will be at the NASCAR Chicago Street Course event once again. I'll head straight from Chicago to the Slinger Nationals at Slinger Speedway and will probably take in some weekly races at Plymouth or Jefferson before heading to Indianapolis for the Brickyard 400. The USAC Sprint Cars are running at the dirt track in turn three of IMS and the ASA STARS Redbud 400 is at Anderson that same weekend so it should be plenty busy in the Circle City. The World of Outlaws Late Models come to Wilmet a few days after that as well. Road America closes out July and welcomes August with the big IMSA Sports Car weekend. Of course I'll be at the big "Dixieland 250" or whatever they call it now at WIR the first Tuesday in August and a few days later the Dells has another Alive for Five event with the Badger State 100. The GT World Challenge comes to Road America in the middle of August and the NTT IndyCar Series makes another stop at the famed Milwaukee Mile the following weekend. I'll end the month of August at the Dells for the ASA Midwest Tour Jim Sauter Classic and the big Labor Day Weekend special at Slinger.

September will feature the second year of the National Short Track Championships at the Dells and I'd really like to get to Elko for the first time. Of course October means Oktoberfest Race Weekend at La Crosse which is always a blast and finally the Falloween 100 will wrap up the Alive for Five Series at the Dells. October will end and November will begin for me in Phoenix for the NASCAR Championship Weekend.

I know it's a pretty robust planned schedule and it all looks good on paper now, but I'll probably make most if not all of those. We are fortunate to have so many options up here so if weather becomes a factor or something comes up at one event, there's always another one close by to get our racing fix. Hopefully I'll see many of you in Daytona in about a month as we kick off yet another racing season.



*Kim Kemperman photo*





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Talkin' Racin'  
with Jason



Jason D. Searcy

As we wrap up 2024 here are the top 10 things that I am thankful for as a Minnesota Motorsports fan.

To see the domination of Brent Kane and the 99 team in the Thunder Car division was masterful. Kane started a majority of the races near the rear of the field, it was like watching Bruce Lee master his opponents, Kane would pick off his competitors one by one, could pass anywhere on the track and was always one step ahead of the wreck. He won 13 of 19 races and never finished out of the Top 5 once the entire year. Amazing.

The return of Jim Bendzick and Thunder 4x4 (formerly Rolling Thunder) to Eve of Destruction events. After taking a few years off, Thunder 4x4 returned to do several shows at Elko Speedway. Known in Monster Truck circles as one of the best in the world at performing the cyclone maneuver, if you have never seen it, you are missing out.

The incredible 4-way battle for the Power Stock crown at ELKO. Rarely have we seen a better series of races coming down the stretch run than for the Power Stock title. Drama ensued both on the track



Brent Kane won 13 of 19  
feature races at Elko  
Speedway in 2024



and in the tech shed as the top four competitors all had a chance at the championship going into the final night of racing. The racing was hard and clean and Julie Jorgenson ended up on top for her second title.

A year of firsts, in 2024 we saw the first ever front flip on a 3 wheel motorized bike from Rockstar Russ Lorbiecki, the first ever completed front flip on a 2 wheel motorcycle by Shannon and Sawyer Schmidtman from Twin Stunts and the most amazing was Nick Rogers who did the first ever full ATV backflip during the ATV Big Air Tour show during Eve of Destruction at Elko Speedway.

I am thankful that IndyCar and Firestone did a tire test at Iowa Speedway, hopefully they will figure out how to give the teams a tire that has some degradation for the 2025 Hy-Vee IndyCar weekend, so we don't see the repeat of the parade lap 250 that we saw in 2024.

Elko Speedway drifter Austin Matta from Shakopee MN was selected to join the Formula Drift Pro Championship in 2025, he is one of only 39 drivers in the world to be chosen to compete, an incredible achievement.

The return of the ASA Midwest tour to ELKO

after a 7 year absence. Those cars are so cool, so fast and the drivers are next level. Watching Elko Speedway legend Donny Reuvers race his way to a podium finish was fun and the talent of Levon VanDerGeest and Justin Mondeik was on display. Unfortunately Ty Fredrickson has some mechanical problems but the good news is the Tour will be back September 20th 2025 at Elko Speedway.

Addition of Bigfoot Monster Truck to Eve of Destruction events at Elko Speedway. Driver Josh Baumgartner really stepped up his game by driving the historic Bigfoot truck at Elko Speedway a few times, he also added the new-skool nose wheelie into a stoppie trick which is an essential trick for the new generation of Monster Truck fans.

The 2024 ARCA Menards series race at ELKO was the most dramatic finish that I have ever been a part of. The drama associated with William Sawalich, the hometown hero, having to race back through the field after being spun out. ARCA deciding to finish the race with sprinkles coming down and the impending thunderstorm on the horizon and the incredible finish where Sawalich takes the lead, loses it, and then takes it back at the finish line was magical. Sawalich won by 0.011 seconds, the second closest finish in the 69 year history of the ARCA series. A never forget moment for me and everyone who attended that race.

The number one thing that I am thankful for is that we are guaranteed to have another race season at my hometown track Elko Speedway, the last remaining asphalt track in the state of Minnesota. It is no secret that ELKO is for sale and Tom Ryan is actively seeking a buyer for the property. The schedule is out and 2025 will be the 60th season of racing and my 14th season as the announcer. How about if we all vow to enjoy the season and I hope to see you all at the track this summer!



## Racing Nuggets



### PJ "Jacklyn" Nuttleman

This past year has been one of the most bumpy rides that I've had in a while. Good and tough situations. We were able to be on hand in Phoenix to watch Ty Majeski claim his first NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series Championship, which was AWESOME. And we've had some heartache to contend with as my step-father passed away. My mom moved in with Toby and me for several months after that.

That whole experience was the gamut of emotions, but I've appreciated the extra time with my mom, who now has found a house of her own, just five minutes away in the same town as us. I'm grateful for

her living closer to us. It doesn't hurt that our dogs adore her, so if we are running off to races—she's always willing to spend some time with her “grand-doggers.” It was reassuring to have her watching our dogs, Pudge and Daisy, while we took our annual extended race trip to Florida this year.

I've never felt more like a normal married couple than realizing a week before we were to leave that I had the wrong date down for our departure. I was supposed to ride in the race car hauler with Toby down to Florida, but apparently, I erroneously had us leaving on Thanksgiving Day. He ended up leaving the day prior, while I had to work, so I flew down to the Sunshine State on Thanksgiving.

I was worried about traveling on a holiday, anticipating the worst experience, however, I was dead wrong. Flying out of Madison, I thought I was being punked because when I got to security, I was the

## What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

*PJ Nuttleman photo*



*PJ Nuttleman photo*

only person going through the line with about eighteen airport workers. It was a total breeze.

I arrived just in time to enjoy the Thanksgiving feast with the team, most of whom had already had quite a snootful of Fireball and cocktails. As I sat there enjoying the conversation and laughs, I marveled at this ragtag team of guys who have weathered many storms together and remain tight friends. This was definitely the calm before the storm of two big

races over two weekends: The Bigley Memorial and then the Snowball Derby.

There is nothing that pleases me more than when Toby is in a great mood at the racetrack. That usually indicates that the car is good and the driver is “mostly happy” with the attitude of the car. Let's be honest, between Toby and Ty, they are rarely ever fully satisfied with a race car. A fact that used to nut me right up, but I've since learned to read between the lines of what they are saying and HOW they are saying things. I knew they had a good piece for the Bigley Memorial after the first and only practice day for the event.

And that note alone, is a great point. The Bigley is probably one of the best examples of a race that is made for all racers: It has a big purse, with \$30,000 going to the winner. It has only one day of practice before the event. And it only uses four tires. Majeski's team only used two sets of practice tires the day before, so that made for an incredibly affordable race, especially when they won it.

*Racing Nuggets continued on page 12*



*Racing Nuggets from page 11**PJ Nuttleman photo*

It was quite the Wisconsin Flex with an all-Cheese State Podium! Majeski, Casey Johnson, and John DeAngelis were the top three finishers. Nothing tastes better than going down south and eating those southern boys' lunch in such a dominating fashion. The truth of the matter is that there were a LOT of midwestern racers representing at the Bigley. I'm so glad to see so many make the trek and be able to

make it worthwhile for their efforts. It bodes well for the sport and keeps the country on notice that the #MidwestIsBest for racing talent.

As soon as the boys cleared tech, we all piled into the hauler and began the journey north to Pensacola. I always thought Illinois was the longest state to traverse, but over the years, I've discovered that Florida gives it a run for the money. Despite driving through the night, with little to no traffic, it still took us about seven hours or so to get from Bradenton to Five Flags Speedway. I'm pretty sure Brian Bank (tire guy) drove the entire stretch, after a long day at the track. He's hard core like that.

It was quite a different approach for the Snowball Derby for teams, with multiple days of practice, multiple sets of tires, but an even larger purse—\$50,000 for the winner. FloRacing was onboard this year for the coverage and they brought the additional money to the program, along with incredible coverage from all accounts.

For Toby, Ty, and the team, the car was a solid piece. Qualifying for the Snowball Derby is always a nail-biter. I was standing on top of the hauler with several others when it began. Ty was up there as well,

*PJ Nuttleman photo*

watching the first half of the qualifying. He was aware as some of his competitors cracked off fast laps, that his track record might fall. Nothing motivates a driver more than the possibility of losing something. Ty definitely got up on the wheel and “sent it” into the turns on his qualifying lap, as he ended up perched at the top when the dust settled. The most amazing thing about the stout level of competition at this year's Derby was that the top 30 in time were separated by .221 seconds. THAT is a tight field!

I get so stressed out watching and listening to the scanner at the Snowball Derby. The race is so long and grueling and there are so many swings and surges of how the race unfolds. Ty had a very dominant car in the long run, but in the end, as usual—it was the short run that proved to be where excellence needed to be top notch. Kaden Honeycutt would claim the victory. Stephen Nasse, who always ends up being in the hunt, regardless of where he qualifies was second, and Ty ended up third. It was a podium finish, but it is still something that Toby is chewing on and leaves a bitter taste in his mouth.

After the race when things were winding down, I was just standing in the pit with others and Ty looked at me expressing sympathy over knowing that Toby would be crabby until they raced again. I appreciated his knowledge of how his crew chief operates.

And so the clock starts ticking for when they will race again. “Time Marches On,” a song by Tracy Lawrence has always been one of my favorite lyrics. As I type this column, it is almost 7am on New Year's Eve. Twelve years ago tonight, Toby and I were married. It's been a wild ride with plenty of “hills and valleys,” but I can't think of a better co-pilot to continue to drive down the road of life with.

As I listen to him softly snoring next to me, I smile knowing he starts to build a new race car next week. As my grandmother always said, “Idle hands are the work of the devil.”

I think it's safe to say, Toby's hands are never idle.

*PJ Nuttleman photo*







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# Ty Fredrickson - 2024 Kulwicki Cup Champion

*Ty Fredrickson was crowned the 2024 Kulwicki Driver Development Program (KDDP) champion late in the year. Along with the accolades associated with the title, Fredrickson pocketed \$54,439. Ty's on track performance was highlighted by several main events wins, the ASA Midwest Tour Rookie of the Year award and the TUNDRA Super Late Model Championship.*



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# 2025 Chill-Chaser at Tomah-Sparta Speedway

*After a one-year hiatus, the annual Chill-Chaser 200 Enduro returned to Tomah Sparta Speedway.  
A large contingent of nearly 60 cars started the 200-lap main event, won by Justin Schelitzche.*







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## Brent Larson Laying Groundwork for Future Plans with World of Outlaws Late Models in 2025

(Matt Skipper WoOLate Model PR)

Brent Larson has an eye on the future and the path there involves another full-time year with the World of Outlaws Late Models in 2025.

The Lake Elmo, MN native will embark on his eighth full-time World of Outlaws season next year with a long-term plan in place to one day see his son, Matthew, take his seat.

“We’re still having fun doing this and keeping things going,” Larson said. “I’m hoping to transfer my son into where I’m at someday, and I feel like the best way to do that is to keep going for another year or two until he’s ready, and the schedule looks reasonable this year, so hopefully we can have some good weather and some fun.

“I think just the idea that there’s a future beyond what I’m trying to do is the biggest thing for me. It’s something my wife and I enjoy doing. We like going down the road together and making memories with our friends. We like feeding people good food and knowing we’re gonna be able to do that for years to come with my son. It keeps us digging and excited towards getting better and performing well.”

Matthew has already shown promise in a Late Model during *World Short Track Championship* at The Dirt Track at Charlotte this year, finishing fifth with the Crate Racin’ USA Late Models.

But before Brent turns over the seat, he still has plenty of goals he’d like to accomplish with the Series.



Dan Plan photo

His first Series victory eluded him, again, in 2024 but the 2025 schedule brings the World of Outlaws to several tracks in his home territory. Among them include the \$75,000-to-win *Dairyland Showdown* at Mississippi Thunder Speedway, the

\$50,000-to-win *NAPA Auto Parts Gopher 50* at Deer Creek Speedway and the \$100,000-to-win *USA Nationals* at Cedar Lake Speedway – where Larson is a five-time track champion.

But there will also be some new challenges on the 57-race schedule with a few tracks returning to the tour.

“I’m excited to go back to [Federated Auto Parts Raceway at I-55],” Larson said. “The last time we were there, we could run three wide, and any tracks that we can do that at, I’m all down for it. USA Nationals being \$100k is huge, so I’m excited to see what we can do there. Some of the ones that look new to me are also always fun to go to.”

Larson earned six top 10 finishes and one top five – a third-place finish at Thunderhill Raceway – this year, resulting in a 12th-place finish in points.

He’ll be targeting a return to the top 10 in points next year, starting with the season-opener at Volusia Speedway Park during *DIRTcar Sunshine Nationals*, Jan. 23-25.

“It was definitely not where we wanted to be this year,” Larson said. “I feel like we’ll have a few things to work on over the winter. We’ve had some steering problems early in the night, then we’re a little right rear loose later in the night so we used Charlotte as a testing mode to try new things to help us qualify better and have more balance before we go to Volusia.”



Emily Schwanke photo



# Bill Balog Set for Sophomore World of Outlaws Season in 2025

*The North Pole Nightmare is coming back for a second year with The Greatest Show on Dirt*

(By Alex Nieten WoO Sprint PR)

Bill Balog is bringing his B Squared Motorsports team back to the World of Outlaws NOS Energy Drink Sprint Cars for a sophomore season in 2025.

After more than two decades of Sprint Car racing that included 10 Interstate Racing Association (IRA) championships, Balog decided 2024 was the right time to join *The Greatest Show on Dirt* full-time. “The North Pole Nightmare” is already looking forward to a second straight year of traveling the country with the nation’s best Sprint Car drivers.

“I’ve kind of been preparing even while we were still racing,” Balog said of getting ready for 2025. “It’s definitely a lot of work, but we have a better idea of what we need to do.”

The rookie campaign yielded plenty of highs for the Hartland, WI resident. It began with an eighth-place run in the season opener, and it only took Balog eight races to pick up his first top five of the year – fourth at Kennedale Speedway Park. He led laps before finishing fifth at Federated Auto Parts Raceway at I-55 in April. Two weeks later, Balog’s first podium of the season arrived with a runner-up at Paducah



Trent Gower photo

International Raceway. He made the Knoxville Nationals championship Feature for the first time in his career. And one of his brightest moments was a third-place finish at the BillionAuto.com Huset’s High Bank

Nationals finale.

“It went better than I expected,” Balog said. “I think we had a good car going into the season and were able to get a little better engine package. And after Volusia, we got going pretty good there. I was very happy with how we were racing and how the car was working. Definitely had some highlights.”

Now, Balog’s attention shifts to a sophomore surge after an eighth-place finish in points this year. The 45-year-old is ready to see if he can climb even higher in 2025, turn some of the top 10s into top fives and maybe even grab a win or two. He knows it won’t be easy.

“The numbers and names have changed, but the intensity hasn’t,” Balog said. “Some of the guys that are now retired that were Outlaws were the same way. It was just about impossible to pass them. It’s another level.

“Our goal for 2024 was top 10s, and we were able to get a lot of those, but fifth pays a lot better than 10th, and third pays a hell of a lot better,” Balog added with a laugh. “I would say more top fives would be a natural goal. Also, there’s a lot of people that have won one Outlaw race, and then from there the list gets a lot shorter. So, I’d like to win a race or win a couple races. I’m not 20 years old, but I think I can still do it.”

Trent Gower photo





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