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The Best Little Track That No One Knows About

Like a lot of you, I plan my racing schedule far in advance, anticipating events months in the future. I'm already thinking of some races in 2008. Gas prices over \$3.00 a gallon do not keep me from going to a race I want to see. I love to write-writing helps feed my racing habit.

The races I want to see? Well, I've been to The Winternationals at East Bay in Tampa-and if DLM would like me to go again, they have my email address. Who wouldn't want to watch over 90 super late models race each night for six nights? Volusia County sounds nice too. Or, how about Arizona in January? Hey, Mike, I could write about mods for the new Dirt Modified magazine, as well as the late models. And I promise one new story for everyday I am there. Promise. Living in Nebraska means that Arizona and Florida in the winter sound nice.

And of course, there are the races I would like to see before I get too old. And I am a lot closer to "too old," than I am to young. The Show Me 100. The Outlaw Nationals at Cedar Lake. The Dirt Track World Championship. And of course the World 100(hey Tony, I would love to be your guest that weekend. I am one of the four people who actually believe that Denny Hamlin nearly stopped while leading the Pepsi 400, just so you would have to run into him). All great races, but none are circled in red on my calendar.

Yeah, I do still have a calendar. No Blackberry for me. No iPhone. If you want to know the truth, I don't even have a cell phone. I have a work phone, a home phone, and I travel with people who have cell phones. And, I have a calendar. And on the calendar, I circle one race date each year. The Boone County Ag Society 50. Has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? Kind of like the Topless 100, or the Dream.

Some of you think that Nebraska is in the middle of nowhere, and if that is so, the Boone County Speedway in Albion is in the middle of the middle of nowhere. Ninety one miles from my home in Fremont. Through North Bend, Schuyler, Columbus, Monroe, and St. Edward. Not long enough to get tired of riding, just long enough for my son Matt and I to discuss track prep at Eagle Raceway, the NCRA show in Doniphan, the midget races coming up at Junction Motor Speedway, and Carl Edwards night at I-80 Speedway. To guess the car count at the WDRL show that night in Albion. To listen to the "racing" CD he burned-mostly sledge hammer rock, because it gets him in the mood for late model racing.

Albion, Nebraska, population 1,711. County seat of Boone County, Nebraska. Home of a Pizza Hut, a Subway Sandwich shop, Julie's Catering & More. A

Runza replaced the Dew Drop Inn-too bad. And, Albion is home of the Boone County fairgrounds, and with it, a first rate racing facility.

To say I like fairgrounds tracks would be a fib. I have loved fairgrounds tracks from my first race, over 50 years ago. Fairgrounds racing IS grassroots racing. A fairgrounds track is a link to the past of racing, maybe to the future of Saturday night racing too. All the fairgrounds tracks are special, the track in Albion, just a little bit more so. And racing at a fairgrounds track during the annual county fair is a slice of Americana that everyone should taste at least once.

Matt and I arrived at the fairgrounds after the conclusion of the parade-just barely, and before the start of the mud volleyball tournament. As we were walking up to the grandstands, a re-enactment of a Wild West Shoot-Out was taking place. It must have been the gunfight at the OK Corral, because it was over in seconds. The expo building had 4-H displays, and there was a truck show west of the grandstands. No carnival-the carnival does not arrive until after the races. But, there was plenty to eat. Funnel cakes, kernel corn. AND, you may call the confection shaved ice, I say it is a snow cone, no matter which, it is a perfect treat for a humid, 90 degree Nebraska afternoon.

To me, walking into the pits at any race track is an adventure. Talking with people we have already written about, and meeting people we might write about is fun, and we always learn something new. Talked with John Anderson who is having a great 2007, and to Craig Preble who has had his share of bad luck. His share, and the share of about five other drivers as well. Saw Bryant Goldsmith's mother Deb, and got her take on Bryant racing on asphalt with ASA. The learning curve is steep, and going through ten tires every race weekend, asphalt racing has not been cheap either. And had a long conversation with Jim Wilson, the golf cart driving Wikipedia of dirt late model racing. Then spent 45 minutes watching track prep.

Yeah, track prep. If it is boring, why do so many people complain about the track prep of so many racing venues? Internet boards are full of complaints. I think the problem may be that city folk do the dirty work at many tracks, and it is their country cousins who truly know how dirt works. At the Boone County Speedway, the Krohn brothers have turned track prep into another performing art. It seems like the water trucks at many tracks race around the facility. At Albion, three water vehicles are used-one goes slow, one goes slower, and the other hardly moves at all. Once the track is watered, a fleet of older Suburbans takes the track for packing. A fleet of older model Suburbans, with late model tires mounted. That and a John Deere 8640 tractor pulling an eight wheeled packer weighing 7,000 lbs. Oh, and one pick-up, and a mystery vehicle with a Dukes of Hazzard horn. Maybe that is the secret to proper track prep, a mystery vehicle. At intermission the water trucks once again soak the track. As they are doing this, a tractor pulling a field cultivator breaks up the dirt, and lets the water soak

in. Back come the packers, and by the end of intermission, the track is racy for the features. And who said I don't know anything about track prep?

Have I mentioned the grandstands at Boone County Raceway? They hold about 3,000 people. Nothing unusual about that. They are nearly full every week, and that is unusual. They are covered-a roof of tin, and during a race, the only word that comes close to defining the sound is cacophony. And the grandstands are old. Very old. Eighty two years ago they were a part of Wrigley Field. Yes, THE Wrigley Field at 1060 Addison Street in Chicago. They were removed from that site, and hauled by train to Albion. And like stained glass windows in other temples of worship, the reconstructed grandstands will last forever. The stands in Albion are as solid as any race track stands my butt has had the pleasure to inhabit. Oh, almost forgot, the night of the Boone County Ag Society 50, the grandstands were full of the most appreciative fans I have ever seen.

One support class of 29 hobby stocks, and 36 late models. I used to whine about car counts-anything under 60 late models was reason for complaint. As I grew older, maybe wiser, I realized that if the right cars were present, a count of 30-40 was perfect. The late models for the Albion WDRL show were a mix of BCS drivers and WDRL regulars. And the "right" cars were present. With Brian Harris, Justin Fegers, John Kaanta, Denny and Dave Eckrich, Kyle Berck, and John Anderson on hand, there were plenty of Midwest hot shoes ready to test the semi-banked, hairpin corners, 3/8ths mile oval.

When I say appreciative fans, I mean it. The atmosphere was more like a football game, than an auto race. The mere mention of a local driver's name brought a chorus of cheers from the crowd. And, though not a scientific survey, the number of Moyer and Bloomquist t-shirts being worn suggested it was a knowledgeable crowd too. Football and farming is the normal breakfast conversation in rural Nebraska diners, but Omahan Tom McLaughlin found out that racing is a topic of interest too. "I stayed overnight in Albion after last year's race. The next morning I ate breakfast at Julie's Catering and More, and people were still excited and talking about the race." As fair director Dave Warner noted, "Albion loves racing, and the local support is outstanding." Very true. Other Nebraska tracks in more populated areas decided that a WDRL show was too expensive for them. Yet half of Boone County showed up for this race, and the little town that could out performed their city slicker cousins.

It only seems appropriate that John Kaanta and Ace Ihm dueled for the trophy and \$5,000 winner's purse. Kaanta is the dirt late model feel good story of the year. The 53 year old former Chief Sheriff's Deputy from Elk Mound, WI is running for WDRL Rookie of The Year. And is a major force in the WDRL point's race. And Ihm? Well, Ace is a throw back. In this day and age it almost seems sacrilegious for a tour driver to show up in anything less than a fancy hauler with a huge enclosed trailer. And with half a dozen pit crew members to work on the car. Ihm comes to the track with a pick-up towing an open trailer. His pit crew is

his girl friend. And he gets by with a little help from his friends. Ihm pitted by John Anderson, and Anderson, his crew, and car owner helped Ihm, giving him a right rear tire and shocks to run. And Ihm made the most of his help, qualifying for and winning the Iowa-Illinois Taylor Insulation Pole Dash to start the feature on the pole.

Ihm and Kaanta were 1-2 from the start of the race. Ihm would build a little lead, then lose it when he came to slower traffic, and when the caution flag flew. After the final restart of the race on lap 36, Kaanta seemed faster than Ihm, but could not make the pass. With a roar of approval from the crowd, Ihm passed under the checkers two car lengths ahead of Kaanta, taking his first WDRL victory ever.

So, Ihm, a driver with none of the advantages many drivers have, wins the race at the Boone County Speedway, a track that makes do without the advantages of big city tracks. Better than fiction.

So, what about next year? The WDRL drivers love the track and fans, and the fans love the drivers. Fair board director Dave Warner has already talked with WDRL owner Jim Wilson about putting Albion on the schedule again in 2008. Ihm will be back. And me? Well, Cedar Lake is on my fantasy schedule for next season. You want to send me anywhere Mike? I would love to go. And Tony, I really, really, really do believe the Daytona wreck was Denny Hamlin's fault. How about letting me write about your place? Yes, fantasy. But, no fantasy at all, I will be going back to Albion for the 2008 WDRL show. What about you? Time to make a trip down Nebraska Highway 91 to the little town that could. No, Bloomquist and Moyer won't be there. No one from the WoO is likely to show. Maybe a Lucas Oil driver or two if that series is off. Doesn't matter. If you are a hard core late model fan, this race, this track is for you. I guarantee you will walk away with a smile, thinking "this is why I love racing."