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JMS-If You Build It They Will Come

Delmar Friesen is a Nebraska farmer/businessman. The kind that knows everyone in a small community, the kind that everyone greets with a smile as he sits in a local restaurant eating dinner. Among his many successful ventures is a Chevy dealership in Sutton. At age 59, his thoughts could easily turn to reaping the rewards of years of labor. Instead he did something totally outrageous, imitating Kevin Costner's character in 'Field of Dreams.' No, he did not build a baseball field. Crazier than that, he built a race track. And, yes it was in the middle of a corn field, about 7 miles south of York.

The economy in rural Nebraska has not exactly been scintillating the past few years. There is no shortage of race tracks in the Cornhusker State. And don't forget the old racing cliché-how do you make a small fortune in racing? Answer-start with a large fortune. So, why build a race track now?

"It is something I've always wanted to do," answered Friesen. Dig a little deeper, and you find that Friesen was a racer in the late 60's and early 70's, and son Jason has raced since 1989, traveling the Midwest racing a late model and a modified. The Friesen's were able to pick out things that worked for others, but more importantly could see things they believed they could do better. In 2003 ground was broken for Junction Motor Speedway, and Delmar Friesen set about turning a dream into reality.

Working with various governing bodies to obtain necessary permits to build was perhaps the toughest task Friesen faced. Of course moving 500,000 cubic yards of dirt doesn't happen overnight either. Nor does building a grandstand to hold 4,000 people. Or a MUSCO lighting system second to none in the area.

The racing surface at Junction Motor Speedway is gumbo/clay. The track is a 3/8ths mile oval, with 6% banking on straights and 12% banking in the corners. The track is 80' wide along the straights and 90' wide in the corners-ample room for side by side racing.

The track's MUSCO lighting system consists of 6 computer set light poles with lamps equivalent to candle power to daylight, meaning it is very bright around JMS. While most of the facility is 'best available,' the lighting system is one rung lower than MUSCO's best. Of course MUSCO's best happens to be the back lighting system seen at mega-venues like Daytona International Speedway, and Lowe's Motorspeedway in Charlotte. And the JMS system is more than adequate for hoped for TV coverage at the facility.

The 33' tall grandstands were built close to the racing action, and will hold 4,000 people. With drivers pitting outside the track, fans get a great view of all the

racing action. Planning for the future, foundations have been laid on each side of the current grandstands, allowing for an additional 8,000 seats to be added.

Earl Baltes Sighting???

Aggressive is one word to describe the track's schedule since opening in 2004. The 2005 season includes 53 nights of racing over 8 months, with everything from mini-sprints to figure 8's taking the track. The JMS weekly show features the NAPA CNCTA Late Models, and four late model tour specials highlight the schedule.

Track prep for an event takes 1-1 ½ days. Long days. Twelve hour days. And like a certain famous Ohio promoter, owner Delmar Friesen is the center of the buzz of race prep activity. Give him a baseball cap with a bent bill and you would swear you saw a younger Earl Baltes at work.

The Lucas Oil/TORA King of the Hill event on 6/25 showed that no detail is too small for Friesen. Typical Nebraska summer weather, blue skies and a blazing sun working its magic on cornfields as far as the eye could see. But for Friesen blue skies and a blazing sun meant only one thing-pour on the water. A typical one day show means dumping 25+loads of water on the track. Maybe 85,000 gallons gives a more complete sense of how great a task this is.

At many facilities, once the track is packed, you will not see any track maintenance equipment. Friesen not only wants, he demands the track be as racy as possible for fans and drivers alike. At some tracks a rut is just an obstacle to drive around. At JMS, a rut is fixed. Leaving behind the water truck, Friesen jumped in a John Deere for a little "farm work." On 6/25 he farmed spots in several corners, smoothing the track, making for a better race. In between? Well, he could have visited one of the press box suites and enjoyed the races. Instead he was in the infield greeting each of the 39 SLM drivers coming off the track from time trials, thanking them for participating in the race. Later, during driver introductions, Friesen again greeted drivers, congratulating them on qualifying for the feature. Little things? Maybe, but little things that made the event better, and positive little things that drivers and fans remember.

Family Entertainment

In talking with Friesen, son Jason, and PR Director Steve Hansen, the word family was repeated often. Family owned, family sport, family entertainment. An \$8.00 adult admission, with a \$4.00 admission for students is part of the family friendly atmosphere at the facility. Good quality and reasonably priced concessions fit in, making the races at JMS affordable for families.

Reaching out to local communities is part of the promotional efforts of the track. Lincoln is the closest big city, approximately 225,000 census, and it is an hour

down I-80. In this part of the country, 'city' means a place on the map with 5,000-7,000 residents. That might be a village in California or New York, it is a city in Nebraska. Each city and village in the area is important to JMS. PR Director Hansen speaks with community groups, and with organizations such as the summer reading program in nearby York. Trying to involve locals, not only in the pits, but in the stands as well. Trying to build the weekly show, trying to build a brand. And the JMS brand? Honor what the fans want. Give them a three hour show packed with entertainment, and at a reasonable price.

What The Future Holds

Friesen feels the racing industry is in the throes of major change. That a number of current tracks won't be around in five years.

"The price of gas is just an excuse," stated Friesen. "Do you drive less, have you slowed down? What is going to do in some tracks is insurance. What they will have to do to be able to get insurance. They might not be able to afford those types of changes."

For JMS? Well, it is a new, well-built, and safety-conscious facility. No worries there. "We need to build our weekly program," commented Jason Friesen. "Our success begins with the weekly show."

Of course there are plans and dreams as well. Of TV coverage, and a Cornhusker version of the Show-Me 100. The track took a first step toward such a race, with the Lucas Oil/TORA King of The Hill race. With the guidance of the Friesens, and the continued hard work of the dedicated race fan staff at JMS, the race can be more than just a dream.

Sidebar-The King Of The Hill Showdown

Americans strongly believe in the bigger is better, more is most appreciated theory. If that was the criteria used to judge the King Of The Hill Showdown at Junction Motor Speedway, fans reaction to the race would have been lukewarm at best. Sure, 13 states were represented in the pits, but only 39 SLM drivers signed it.

However, the resumes of the 39 drivers would definitely jump out at any fan in the know. Thousands of feature wins, scores of track and tour championships, major wins at West Plains, Cedar Lake and Eldora-these 'Outlaws' could Show-Me(and you) how to Dream about the World. The Real Deal and a Million Dollar Man were on hand. Not just a few stars, entire constellations-Freddy Smith, Earl Pearson Jr., John Anderson, Brady Smith, Kelly Boen, Matt Miller, Kyle Berck, Brian Birkhofer, Steve Kosiski, Terry Phillips, Don O'Neal, and Donnie Moran.

Hoosier hot-shoe Don O'Neal rocketed around the JMS oval in 16.81 seconds during time trials. Almost as fast were Pearson, Birkhofer, and Moran. O'Neal won his heat, showing fellow competitors they would have to get around him to take the feature checkers. 2005 Dream winner Matt Miller gave himself a 34th birthday present with a heat victory, with Birkhofer and Steve Kosiski taking the remaining heats.

Starting on the pole of the 50 lap King Of The Hill Shoot-Out, O'Neal wasted no time showing Cornhusker state fans why he is the winningest super late model driver over the past two years. As Kosiski and Birkhofer battled side by side for second place, O'Neal built a half straightaway lead over the pair of Midwesterners. The 71 from Indiana began lapping cars early in the race, and as lap 22 showed on the scoreboard, had lapped through 12th place. Other than the checking out of O'Neal, there were good races throughout the field. Berck, Freddy Smith, and Moran had fans buzzing, going 2 and 3 wide lap after lap after lap. Late in the race Birkhofer began to rein in O'Neal, and with fans shouting approval, closed the gap dramatically in the final three laps. O'Neal was able to hold off the Flyin' 15B, and ended the night adding to his Lucas Oil tour point lead. Rounding out the top ten were Miller, Boen, Kosiski, Pearson, Scott James, Brady Smith, Freddy Smith, and Moran.

This race was part of a two day Lucas Oil Midwest swing. Lucas Oil and TORA co-sanctioned a race the night before at the venerable High Banks of Belleville, KS. Officials of both tracks plan to work together to build on the success of this year's events. With ESPN2 televising some Lucas Oil events, back to back events at tracks only 1 ½ hours apart has some appeal to the television network. Belleville has hosted a televised event, and JMS is more than ready to do the same.