

closerlook: Veteran crew chief Miller becomes rookie again ... by Jim Carson

Sports media types like to refer to coaching trees in football, basketball and the like. Younger coaches can look back on their times either playing for legends such as Nick Saban or Mike Krzyzewski or as assistant coaches on their staffs, and if they have a lot of success their names can sprout off their own branches.

The same can happen in motorsports, especially in a short-track-racing-crazy state such as Wisconsin. One driver or wrench-turner can pay his dues under the tutelage of one well-known mentor, then in turn others can look at him as the trunk of their trees in the sport.

That was the case with Chris Wimmer, an accomplished driver in his own right whose victories include two wins in the Larry Detjens Memorial at State Park Speedway. Wimmer learned quite a bit from his uncle Detjens and others, then operated the Wimmer Motorsports driver development team which propelled the careers of young standouts such as Harrison Burton, Sammy Smith and Jesse Love.

Back when Wimmer was a regular racer around the Badger State, Tucker Miller was frequently on his crew. Miller also drove a bit on his own, before selling his equipment in 2014 and going back to showing up at racetracks in street clothes. In 2018 he formed Tucker Miller Motorsports, which sells parts, assembles engines and offers advice on setups and other aspects of the sport. Racing, including a crew-chief role for three-time State Park champion Justin Mondeik for almost two years and a close call to a LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway crown with Brent Kirchner in 2022, has been his full-time job for six years.

"My motors are 5.3; they end up costing less than crate motors. I wish it was around when I was racing in the late 2000s and I was running 9:1 motors. In my last year Tesar Engineering sponsored me an engine for the whole year," the almost-38-year-old Miller said. "I've done some dirt street stock engines, after a few years ago when a guy asked me to build one for him. I wish I could get to some of those races to help my customers, but I'm busy every weekend with asphalt."

Adding to his schedule in 2023 was a chance to get drive again, at Golden Sands Speedway which primarily raced on Fridays; that left the rest of his weekends open. Former Sands and Marshfield rookie of the year A.J. Kreager was one of the drivers with whom Miller worked; Kreager and her boyfriend were on Miller's crew when he raced. Kreager soon focused on college and her career, and her family sold the race team to Tate Baumer, a limousine company owner who had fielded street stocks around Wisconsin for many years.

Baumer brought in Miller, who wound up a close third in points at the third-mile oval in Plover, Wis. This #27 is a Fury Race Car, a familiar chassis to Miller since that's the brand the Wimmer team campaigned in the late 2010s.

And since Miller had never previously turned a lap at Golden Sands, he was eligible for rookie of the year honors.

"I was happy to have a solid year, especially not



Jeremy Libick Racing Photography
Tucker Miller drove Tate Baumer's Super Late Model to rookie of the year honors – and led 30 laps at the Trickle 99 on Memorial Day – at Golden Sands Speedway in Plover, Wis. Miller first drove a Super in 2008 but had never previously competed at the Sands.

being in a car for so long. And this was also the first time getting in a car with one of my engines in it," Miller said. "Our best finish was second on the season championship night; I caught M.G. Gajewski with 10 laps to go and tried working him over, but couldn't do it. And we led 30-some laps of the Trickle 99 (on Memorial Day)."

Miller did find his way to victory lane, although he was holding his tire gauge instead of his helmet. He was the tire specialist for 2023 ASA Midwest Tour champion Gabe Sommers, and he also split spotting duties with Gabe's brother Max. Gabe pulled off two Tour triumphs including the Oktoberfest 200 at LaCrosse, and 'Fest also meant the title celebration.

"Chris Wimmer was doing some of Gabe's stuff a few years ago and I got to meet them," Miller said.

"Now they're on their own with Travis Sauter, and I've been friends with Travis for a long time. We've gone snowmobiling together; we're all from the same area."

Miller, also supported by DuWayne Kreager Insurance Center, A&A Lock Service, Ritchie Oil & Propane, 2510 Restaurant & Deli and Hilltop Auto Wrecking, is also a bit of a racing historian. That makes sense, as his father and grandfather both competed, and he recently uncovered a pack of photos which were taken by his grandmother as far back as the 1950s.

"I try to keep track of my old cars too," he said.

"My car from 2009 is now Wayne Mackesy's as a Limited Late Model, but it was Dillon Mackesy's Super at State Park before he got a newer car. Wayne, his dad, still has the original clip. They buy parts from me so I know."



Tucker Miller (third from left) was the tire specialist and occasional spotter for 2023 ASA Midwest Tour champion Gabe Sommers, under the guidance of crew chief Travis Sauter (far right).

Doug Hornickel/fastlapphoto.com

Upper Midwest

closerlook: Summer surprise carries Guralski at State Park ... by Jim Carson

The Larry Detjens Memorial, the annual ASA Midwest Tour special last July at State Park Speedway, was a breakthrough moment for this year's eventual Super Late Model track champion Brock Heinrich. The next beneficiary of that event, highlighted by a late tangle up front between eventual Tour champion Gabe Sommers and race leader John Beale, was Jevin Guralski, who came home second in that 125-lap summer clash.

That was the highlight of the year for Guralski, from nearby Wausau, Wis. His older brother Kole was also in the Detjens, placing 10th, and originally the 16-year-old Jevin was just planning to support the family.

"They were low on car count, so we went almost as a field-filler," said Jevin, from Wausau, Wis. "I kinda ended up making my way to the front. After a restart at the end, I couldn't get to Brock."

Jevin scored two more runner-up finishes during the year, including one in the Flip Merwin Memorial in June. The results slipped a little in August, and on the other two occasions when both Guralskis were on the quarter-mile together, Kole had the better finish. Both teenagers have cars with service from Toby Race Products; Kole's car was fresh from Ty Majeski's arsenal, while Jevin's hand-me-down machine has been re-clipped by Majeski's famed crew chief and chassis specialist Toby Nuttleman.



William Prutz/QCWilly Photography

Jevin Guralski won several heat races in his rookie season of Super Late Model racing at State Park Speedway in Rib Mountain, Wis.

Jevin, sponsored by Acoustech Supply, Advantage Enterprises, Lyon Heating & Cooling, Central Wisconsin Vending, Truck Country, Homestead on 52, Gatorade, A&A Lock Service, Throm Health & Wellness, Kim's BS Sauce, Tucker Miller Motorsports and and Performance Parts Supply, could have a better chance to become the first in the family with a Super Late

Model feature win. He plans to compete regularly at State Park again, with other options open such as Marshfield Motor Speedway. Kole might only have three or four starts in 2024, because he has taken a job as one of the crew chiefs at Legends Direct, and he'll be with a Marshfield-based team at some February races in Inverness, Fla.

closerlook: It's like father, almost like son at Hawkeye Downs ... by Jim Carson

Kevin Korsmo has three Hawkeye Downs Speedway championships in legends cars from the 2010s and one from earlier in the Late Model class. His son Kacey Korsmo finished oh-so-close to scoring titles in both divisions in the same year.

The younger Korsmo topped the 2023 standings in the scaled-down cars at the half-mile in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



War Turtle Photography

Kacey Korsmo placed second in Late Model points at the half-mile in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and won the track championship in legends cars.

The legends get plenty of attention at Hawkeye, along with plenty of competition, including 60-year-old Kevin Korsmo who won three features to Kacey's two. That's good advertising; Kevin works at Legends Direct, the distributor for the largely-entry-level machines.

Double duty for Kacey came with a connection to one of Kevin's former ri-

vals. This Late Model was a Lefthander chassis first built almost 20 years ago. Tim Plummer drove it for almost a decade, parking it when he quit in 2015, but originally it was piloted by Iowa mainstay Dudley Fleck.

Its appearance is definitely different from when Fleck had it as a #14 or #74. Korsmo, along with track champion Bryce Miller, carried an outlaw body on his Late Model, which made it legal for use in the UMA 602 crate-engine class at some Wisconsin tracks. Miller had no trouble getting it approved for Hawkeye racing against a field comprised of Big 8-rules Limited Late Models, and the same thing happened with Korsmo.

"(Template-bodied cars) have a little more top-end speed, but the 602, over long runs, keeps the tires on it a little more," said Korsmo, sponsored by his dad's North View Storage business, plus Atkins Savings Bank, Compass Insurance, Mahoney Construction and the Color Lounge by Cora. "I ran second to Bryce three or four times. One time I was ahead of him for maybe half the race. Then on the last night I was trail-

ing him by three points. I was leading and my car went out of gear into neutral ... with a big flame out the back. I lost seven or eight positions and then charged back to third."

Korsmo, an account manager for Iowa Beverage, has been on good terms with Miller since his days racing legends cars. They have a mutual friend in Riley Stenjem, the Wisconsin Super Late Model star who used to run legends against the elder Korsmo.

Both cars are in Kacey's future, and in the case of legends he also runs on dirt. Late Models don't run every week at Hawkeye, so he'd like to run some with the 602 class at Madison International Speedway and Dells Raceway Park. Then there's an October trip to LaCrosse Fairgrounds Speedway, where the 602 class event is called Cratetoberfest.

"We did that the last two years," he said about the LaCrosse race where he placed fourth in 2023 after a DNF in 2022. "That track's super-similar to Hawkeye, so going to LaCrosse is a pretty easy transition."

closerlook: Road to oval racing rough for road-racing crossover ... by Jim Carson

A newcomer to oval-track racing might find one home bullring to hone his new craft. Cory Luciano, who raced open-wheel cars on road courses in his teens, wound up with six racetracks to learn the basics of Pro Late Model racing.

Luciano, from Ajax, Ontario, followed the APC United Late Model Series in 2023. The crate-engine circuit visited five ovals in the province, and Luciano's best result was a ninth at Flamboro Speedway. His journey making only left turns began last February at New Smyrna Speedway, where he ran all six Pro races at the World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing; his best result in the Sunshine State was 13th.

All of this came with no previous oval experience, and no seat time at all in nearly 12 years as he and his father formed their own construction company. He became interested again after watching the 2019 Canadian Short Track Nationals at Jukasa Motor Speedway and the 2021 Autumn Colours Classic at Peterborough Speedway. By then REAL Construction became successful enough to where the 30-year-old Cory could get back into the sport.

Joining the rookie in the seat of the #94 were two more experienced Late Model racers. Taylor Holdaway, a former go-karting friend who sold Luciano his Dave Wight-built chassis, took on the role of co-crew chief, along with longtime short-track veteran Shaun McWhirter. He also has one car earmarked for Ontario racing and one which he took to Florida.

"After Speedweeks we bought another new car,"



Thompson Photography

Cory Luciano (94) topped the rookies in the APC United Late Model Series presented by Grisdale Racing Products.

Luciano said. "Now we've got both cars that we're trying to piece back together. I'm not sure if we're gonna do the whole United Late Model Series again, because we're more focused on getting down to the States and doing some more. We have our eyes on a couple of races like one at Berlin (in Marne, Mich.), so we're taking a look at those."

Luciano, also sponsored by Langille's Scrap Metal Recycling and Gray's Landscaping, can also look back on strong points from 2023. And his problems, includ-

ing a DNF in the APC season finale, didn't keep him from having plenty of fun from February to September.

"We ran in the top five at Sauble and got collected by a lapped car. Once we had fifth at Flamboro we got wrecked on a late restart," he said. "If we could put a whole race together, I think we'll do all right. We've bumped up our program up again this year, with the trailers and equipment and everything that goes along with it. And I'm 95 percent sure that we'll be back at New Smyrna."

closerlook: Mombourquette making the most of Limited loss ... by Jim Carson

In 2022 Dustyn Mombourquette was the Limited Late Model champion at Sunset Speedway, winning five of seven features. The final month of that season brought some mixed emotions, because management at the third-mile oval in Innisfil, Ontario, announced that the Limited division, which brought car counts near 30 just a decade ago, would

be discontinued due to some summer half-dozen.

A few Limited veterans joined the ranks of the Pro Late Model class, which has been growing around Canada's most populous province for a number of years. Others such as Paul Maltese and Al Inglis had trouble adapting their cars to the Pros, but Mombourquette came

with a new car and quickly gained respectability against multi-time Pro track champion Gord Shepherd and other frontrunners.

"We got a new chassis in the fall of 2022, and my dad and I built it all winter and turned it into a complete Pro Late Model," Dustyn said about his dad John Mombourquette who raced Late Models for parts of the 1990s and early 2000s. "It was enjoyable for sure to get to do all that with my dad. He had always built his own cars."

By the end of 2023 Mombourquette, a machining student at Georgian College in Barrie, Ontario, had this #16 in good shape. He peaked with a second-place finish, showing that he had adapted his driving style well for the new chassis from Wight Motorsports Inc.

"In the Limiteds you can run built engines with two-barrel carbs and bigger standard clutches. The Pros have 604 crates, four-barrels and triple-disc

clutches, and good four-piston (brake) calipers," Mombourquette said. "We had such a good package going in that, and for lack of a better term, it was easy to drive 'cause I always knew what to expect. This Pro car, we've had to work on constantly to get it a little better."

The carrot of NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series sanctioning is dangling over Sunset, and a trip to the postseason banquet for the champion is an obvious goal. But Mombourquette, sponsored by IHL Canada, JM Roofing & Contracting, Fastenal, Murphy's Auto Sales, Georgian Waste Services, Currie Heavy Towing, Speedy Auto Machine, Paul's Auto Body, Bourque Transmission and Amp Pro Electrical Solutions, would simply love to improve on his speed and results from last season.

"I'd love to win a race or a couple of 'em. I know we're capable of it," he said. "All the cards have to fall in the right place to pull it off."



Thompson Photography

Dustyn Mombourquette was the rookie of the year in the Pro Late Model division at Sunset Speedway and also the Ontario honor for the NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series.