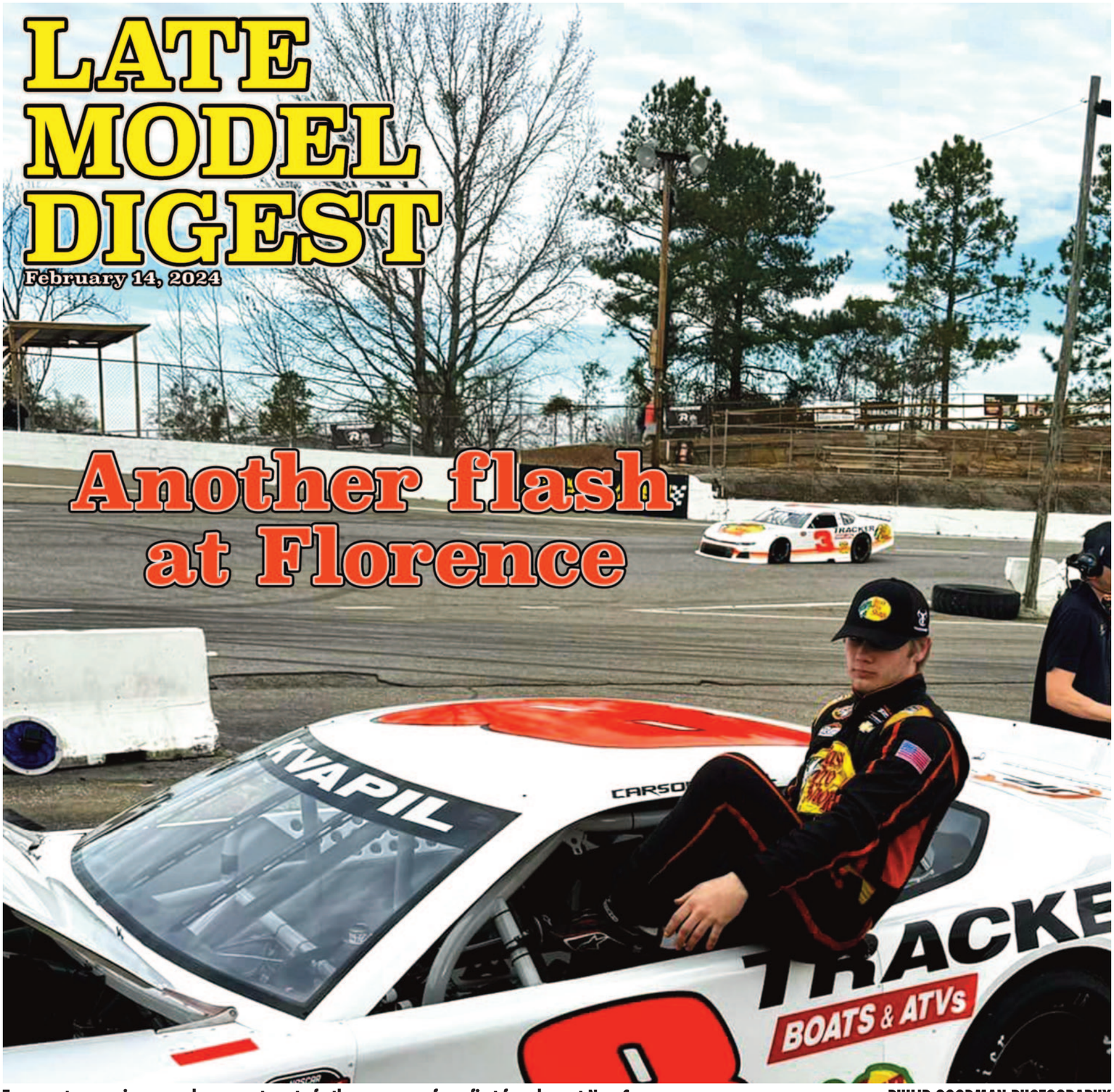
LATE MODEL DIGEST

February 14, 2024

Another flash at Florence



Two sportsman winners and an assortment of other successes from first few days at New Smyrna

PHILIP GOODMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Kvapil powerful enough with Jr. there

From staff and team reports
and Short Track Scene

TIMMONSVILLE, S.C. (Feb. 10) — Very little has changed for Carson Kvapil entering his third year racing Late Model Stock Cars for JR Motorsports. The 20-year-old from Mooresville, N.C., is going with what has worked in 2022-23, to the tune of nine victories and two straight championships in what is now the zMax CARS Tour presented by SoundGear.

One of Kvapil's best racetracks is Florence Motor Speedway, the site of his CARS triumph last March. There was one major difference in his #8 ride between this CARS date and his two latest appearances at the 3/8-mile oval, last November's Charlie Powell Memorial weekend and this season's Icebreaker lidlifter which were both under the NASCAR LMSC rulebook.

Longtime JRM crew chief Bryan Shaffer figured that a GM 604 crate engine would be the best option for the Icebreaker, as opposed to the Harrington Enforcer he uses in CARS races. This 125-lap event fell into his hands, even though he estimated that his Hedgecock chassis was down up to 70 horsepower against those using traditionally-built power plants. This race was slowed by only two cautions, and the built engines often prosper against crates on restarts.

"Long green-flag runs are what the 604 is good for," said Kvapil, sponsored primarily by Bass Pro Shops and Tracker Boats. "When you're down on power, it's hard to make moves on short runs. We're definitely glad that the last yellow was with 20 laps to go and not three laps."



Ted Malinowski

Carson Kvapil and his spotter Brett Edwards enjoy victory lane at the Icebreaker 125 presented by ValAsta Racing.

Kvapil actually grabbed the lead from local favorite and polesitter Casey Kelley on that final restart. Connor Hall soon found his way past Kelley into second and kept the pressure on Kvapil in heavy lapped traffic over the final moments.

"With 20 to go, I realized Carson was going to have the car to beat," said Hall, the 2023 NASCAR Advance Auto Parts Weekly Series national champion. "Once we got by the #16 for second, we were pretty much matching lap times until he got to traffic. If I had maybe one more lap or more traffic I would've had a shot."

The other main similarity between the recent JRM efforts under the NASCAR banner was the presence of the team owner on the entry list. NASCAR Hall of Fame and multi-time Cup Series most popular driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. was in the team's #3 here, just as he was in November when he finished eighth and ran higher, and here for the 2023 Icebreaker which was even more disappointing. This time Junior held fourth at the end, also using a 604 engine and with Bass Pro founder Johnny Morris in attendance.

"I'm thankful that we got it running better, because we hadn't run that well here the last couple of times," Earnhardt said. "We came here and tested a week ago … worked really hard and ran a lot of laps. It's a tough crowd here … a lot of great racers who did a lot of clean racing."

Icebreaker 125 presented by ValAsta: 1. Carson Kvapil; 2. Connor Hall; 3. Casey Kelley; 4. Dale Earnhardt Jr.; 5. Sam Yarbrough; 6. Kade Brown; 7. Jacob Heafner; 8. Mason Diaz; 9. Matt Gould; 10. Justin Hicks; 11. Darren Krantz Jr.; 12. Doug Barnes Jr.; 13. Brandon Pierce; 14. Lanie Bucie; 15. Adam McCumbee; 16. Riley Gentry; 17. Landon Huffman; 18. Strom Altman; 19. Alex Meggs; 20. Bryant Barnhill; 21. Donovan Strauss; 22. T.J. DeCaire; 23. Tyler Matthews; 24. Truett Miranda; 25. David Roberts; 26. Matt Cox; 27. Zack Miracle; 28. Colby Higgins; 29. Cody Kelley; 30. Jamie Weatherford; 31. Alex Hicks; 32. Blayne Harrison.

Lap leaders: Casey Kelley 1-74, Yarbrough 75-95, Casey Kelley 96-105, Kvapil 106-125 • Cautions: 2 • Fast qualifier: Casey Kelley, 17.633 seconds



JimJonesphoto.com

Connor Hall finished second in his first appearance with the Nelson Motorsports team at Florence Motor Speedway in Timmonsville, S.C.



Philip Goodman

Kade Brown (23) tries to hold off Dale Earnhardt Jr. for fifth place in the late laps. Earnhardt wound up fourth, improving on his November 2023 result by four positions.

Briggs, Brusso top support-class field

From staff and team reports

SAMSULA, Fla. (Feb. 10) — An early attraction at the 58th annual World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing was the sportsman class, with plenty of Late Model connections up front. There was also a sense of redemption for Kody Brusso, in her second-ever weekend of competition at New Smyrna Speedway.

In the 2023 edition of Speedweeks, Brusso placed second in both of the division's races, behind Derek Griffith and Adam Briggs. The hope wasn't that high after opening night at the historic half-mile, but she left 24 hours later with a wide smile and the long-awaited trophy.

Brusso, from Pensacola, Fla., captured the 50-lap Saturday feature and avenged her 2023 close calls in just over half an hour. It wasn't a smooth process, as she started fourth - looking ahead at Griffith - and got knocked to the rear of the field on the first lap when officials ordered her to pit to repair a sagging bumper.

The extra distance - 15 laps longer than the Friday race, won by Briggs with Griffith in second - helped Brusso. With 35 on the scoreboard she grabbed the runner-up spot, then she cleared Travis Devendorf for the lead about a minute later.

The winning car looks a bit like the straight—metal-bodied car she campaigns at Five Flags Speedway and other places around the Gulf Coast, but this SRL Sportsman-legal ride is less of a Late Model than what she races near home. This #7 is originally a Port City chassis with a stock front clip; it was acquired from Sunshine State veteran Kevin Ingram. And her top adviser on this car is Chuck Burkhalter, who lists a pair of 2005 Speedweeks victories among his many accomplishments as a driver and setup man.

"We had this car that Brooke (Storer) wanted to race with Jason Boyd, but me and Jason didn't jive," Brusso said. "He hired Chuck to help him with my car, and Chuck's been in charge of me after that. We feel like friends, and he and his brothers are like family. He helped Steve Wallace when he was down here winning in Super Late Models."

The other notable name on the #7 side here was former NASCAR Xfinity driver and Cup Series spotter Jimmy Kitchens, who filled in for her usual spotter Holly Long. The Alabama native came to New Smyrna with Late Model driver John Bolen, but when Burkhalter needed to be in the pits they convinced Kitchens to take a headset for this 50.

There was one down side to the weekend for Brusso, sponsored by AMS Roofing, Parks & Long Construction, Shawn Waddell Communications, K1 Race Gear and Night Owl Creations. Her wife Storer also had her car in the field for the Saturday race, but Storer was collected in a first-lap accident.

Brusso had one other chance to race at New Smyrna later in 2023, but that one was rained out.



JimJonesphoto.com

Kody Brusso, joined by her crew chief Chuck Burkhalter (left) and his brother Willie, won the Feb. 10 sportsman feature at the 58th annual World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing.

Briggs was also a rare visitor, but he had the setup down, at least for one night. He started on the front row in the Friday race and went flag to flag, fighting off Griffith on the lone restart.

This #14 was a purpose-built sportsman car, built new about four years ago with help from AMF Chassis, a shop which has since gone away and whose primary chassis jig is now owned by former Late Model star Wayne Morris. Briggs, sponsored by B&W Supply, Shifters Transmissions and Sorrells On-Site Fleet Service, also has a Super Late Model, earmarked for Auburndale Speedway.

"We didn't run it much last year - two or three races," said Briggs, from Lakeland, Fla. "We concentrated on sportsman races, but this year we plan to run the Super more."

Feb. 9: 1. Adam Briggs; 2. Derek Griffith; 3. Travis Devendorf; 4. Kody Brusso; 5. Timmy Todd; 6. Chris Huntoon; 7. Garrett Larson; 8. Hunter Slayton; 9. George Alexander; 10. Tyler Simpson; 11. Hudson Sharp; 12. Scott Bramlett; 13. Rich Lavance; 14. Kyle Case. DQ-3: Steve Barnes.

Feb. 10: 1. Kody Brusso; 2. Rich Clouser; 3. Steve Barnes; 4. Timmy Todd; 5. Adam Briggs; 6. Jimmy Frazier; 7. Chris Huntoon; 8. Hudson Sharp; 9. Rich Lavance; 10. Travis Devendorf; 11. George Alexander; 12. Earl Beckner; 13. Derek Griffith.



JimJonesphoto.com

Adam Briggs won a sportsman race at New Smyrna Speedway for the second straight Speedweeks.

One Last Look

Speedweeks • New Smyrna Speedway



Jason Reasin Photography

Giovanni Ruggiero and members of the Donnie Wilson Motorsports team went to the winner's circle after the first night's Super Late Model race at the 58th annual World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing.



Jim DenHamer

Gus Dean (57) battles Derek Griffith in the Feb. 11 Super Late Model race. Dean earned his first Speedweeks victory in his 33rd start at the half-mile just west of New Smyrna Beach, Fla.



Jim DenHamer

Dawson Sutton (26) passes Jimmy Renfrew Jr. in Pro Late Model action. Renfrew won in the crate-engine class on opening night, and he podiumed the next three evenings behind winner Sutton.



Rackley WAR Racing

Dawson Sutton captured three straight Pro Late Model wins on the second through fourth nights of the 58th annual World Series of Asphalt Stock Car Racing.