

LATE MODEL DIGEST

December 1, 2023

**Jett setter:
Noland wins
Bigley Memorial**



More from Bradenton, Tucson and Southern National • Canadian holiday stories

MATT BUTCOK/TWISTED CHASSIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Coming off the Corners by Jim Carson

Border crossing becoming more frequent in November

In Canada, Thanksgiving is the second Monday in October. The root of the holiday and its typical festivities are similar to what the time frequently means in the States, but it's a full month and a half earlier than the American day.

The only known asphalt Late Model race scheduled on Thanksgiving weekend north of the border is the Autumn Colours Classic at Peterborough, Ontario. Late November means more action for the pavement pounders in the States, with traditional shows at bull-rings in North Carolina, Florida and Arizona.

The Tar Heel State didn't attract any Canadians, but there were plenty of them at the Turkey Shoot at Tucson Speedway. The 125-lap Super Late Model feature was tough on Brandon Carlson (broken lower control arm 10 laps from the finish), David Smith (better known as a sponsor than a driver), veteran Darrell Midgley, and Tyler Emond and his new teammate Hayden Hoogeveen. The only Canadian who was on the track at the checkered flag was Kyle Reid, who finished seventh and last on the lead lap.

"A lot of guys from the West Coast seem to migrate to this track," said Reid, who lives in Fort McMurray, Alberta. "I was there this February with my wife, on a trip to Tucson, and the Chilly Willy 150 happened to be there. We went and



Chuck Buchanan

Alberta visitor Kyle Reid (42) gets out of shape next to Kody Vanderwal (43) and underneath his father Rudy Vanderwal (34) at the ninth annual Turkey Shoot Super Late Model race at Tucson Speedway.



Tiffany O'Neill/To the Front Race Photos

British Columbia veteran Brandon Carlson was running in the top 10 late before a suspension failure set in at Tucson, Ariz.

thought that this would be an interesting spot. We wanted to run it and make it work logistically-wise, so we've had it on our radar. We had a bunch of work stuff with some expansion, so we didn't get to race much this summer, but we had it in my mind that we were gonna do this race this fall and then the Chilly Willy next year. I love this place; it's a great facility, and a wore-out older race-track. It reminds me of Hickory a little bit - definitely fun and you can race three-wide. It also reminds me of Oxford, since everybody's running a different groove."

Reid has experienced both ends of his home country. Most of his adult life has been spent in Alberta, but he was

born in Nova Scotia, and in recent years he has made several visits to the Maritime provinces. He has slowly but surely earned respect and amassed success in his periodic trips east, including winning an ECI Pro Stock Tour race in the spring of 2022 at his old home track, Riverside International Speedway. Like several top Maritime racers, he enlists the help of King Competition and that team's staffers such as Andrew Hicken and Cory Hall.

"Even my West Coast racing is influenced by King," said Reid, who brought in Matt Drake to call his Tucson race. "My shocks have spent more time traveling than my car has; King prepares us two or three sets, depending on

where we're going."

East of the Rockies, several Canadians are on the entry list for the Snowball Derby this weekend at Five Flags Speedway. Ontario star Treyten Lapcevic is entering the Super extravaganza for the first time, as is Nova Scotia star Cole Butcher who's back with Donnie Wilson's team. Cole's younger brother Jarrett Butcher and fellow Maritimer Nicholas Naugle will qualify for the Snowflake 100, and the Pro Late Model roster also includes Ontario racers Kyle Steckly and Glenn Styres.

One driver from another province with a strong racing history had a head start in the Sunshine State. Jeff Cote made his first start in the States in the Bill Bigley Memorial at that big-money race's new home called the Freedom Factory.

Cote is a mainstay at the two operating pavement facilities in Quebec, called Autodrome Montmagny and Chaudiere. But the types of cars prevalent there, and in Cote's shop, are American-Canadian Tour-rules Late Models, and they don't have the horsepower or wheelbase of Supers or even Pro cars in the States.

The family making this possible should be a familiar name to all short-trackers. Mario Gosselin was born in Quebec and relocated to Florida while still in his teenage years to pursue his career, and he became a monster in Late Models around the Sunshine State and then the first big star in the old Hooters Pro Cup circuit. "Super Mario" now owns a NASCAR Xfinity Series team (one of his recent drivers is fellow Quebecer Alex Labbe), but his older brother Germain Gosselin (who moved with him and was his top Late Model crewman for years) is still a part of the short-track scene based in Winter Haven, Fla.

Charlie Ayers has run a couple of races with Gosselin assistance and was on the original Bigley entry list at Bradenton. By the time race day rolled around, Cote was in the seat.

"We'd been talking on the phone back and forth for almost three years," Germain Gosselin said. "When this race came up for me and my son, we told him, 'If you want to come and be with us and help, that'd be great - and bring your firesuit and helmet just in case. He's got a little more experience than Charlie, and Charlie didn't feel very good after practice. At the end of the day we put Jeff in the car to see where we were and he was a little bit faster, so Charlie decided to let him race."

This #7 effort still endured some mechanical gremlins, and they kept Cote from qualifying into the main event field. There was a consolation prize, as a 25-lap nonqualifiers race was added after the B-mains. Cote earned that victory, picking up a trophy which his Facebook post later translated into "dust collector."

"Jeff was not in the car to crash it either," Gosselin said. "This was his first time in a Super Late Model. He couldn't practice on iRacing because the track doesn't exist on there; it's not like New Smyrna where you can get on and learn about it. He was going against guys like Jett Noland, Jesse Dutilly and Anthony Campi, who grew up here. If my brother Mario got in a car, after 10 laps he'd remember stuff since you can't lose it. They all have a little edge on a 24-year-old kid from Canada who has never seen the track before."

Cote did keep the car in one piece, and spending time with the Gosselins (including Germain's 21-year-old son Justin, who was bound to be involved in the sport) is certainly a perk for a Thanksgiving weekend. Cote, Reid and a few other Canadians definitely did their part to celebrate two separate holidays this year.



team photo

Tyler Emond (18) was running as high as third at Tucson, but he wound up on the hook along with his western Canadian teammate Hayden Hooegeveen (25).



Matt Butcosk/Twisted Chassis Photography

Jeff Cote, on a team with Quebec-native-turned-Florida-setup-man Germain Gosselin, won the nonqualifiers race at the Noland's Roofing Bill Bigley Memorial presented by West Orange Roofing.

closerlook: Marthaler learns looking out windshield, in mirror ... by Jim Carson

For young stock car racers, the best course of action is often to follow a more experienced driver in practice or during a race. Weston Marthaler did just that for part of the weekend of the ninth annual Turkey Shoot at Tucson Speedway, in his Super Late Model debut, but he also picked up plenty by running at the front of the field.

The 16-year-old Marthaler, from Glenwood, Minn., found himself leading for more than 80 of the 126 laps in the Sunday main event. The holiday-weekend season finale didn't end well for the youngster, who was still battling for third before getting collected in an accident. He had just lost the lead to now-four-time Turkey winner Brett Yackey on a restart, which was understandable because this was the first race he has ever run where drivers shift gears on restarts.

"I overdrove the turn coming into (turns) three and four and got on the gas too early, allowing the #43 (Kody Vanderwal) to get to my inside," Marthaler said. "We were side by side through one and two and down the backstretch, then we made contact and it sent me into the wall. I wish we would've done better, but really we couldn't ask for it to be too much better."

The Gopher State teen's previous racing in full-sized cars has come in modifieds and the vehicles used in the Midwest Truck Series. Calling the shots for his efforts in 2023 has been Kelly Bires, a former Midwest Super Late Model star who spent parts of six seasons in the NASCAR Xfinity and Craftsman Truck Series.

Both had some experience at the 3/8-mile oval in Arizona's second-largest city. Bires guided Wisconsin driver Brad Kossow at two editions of Tucson's winter racing tradition, the Chilly Willy 150, where he finished fifth twice. This February Weston finished second in the modified race on Chilly weekend, getting advice from Bires who was splitting time with Tristan Swanson in the Super headliner; Swanson is also sponsored by the Marthaler Automotive family of dealerships.

Marthaler, the son of former driver Aaron Marthaler who finished eighth in the 2021 Turkey Shoot, followed the seemingly-obvious instructions from KBR Performance in the Friday and Sat-



Tiffany O'Neill/To the Front Race Photos

Weston Marthaler led about 90 laps in the ninth annual Turkey Shoot Super Late Model race at Tucson Speedway before a late accident derailed his debut in the division.

urday hot-lap sessions and the 50-lap qualifying race.

"Brett Yackey is pretty good here, so I followed him in practice," Marthaler said. "I'd been watching him for a few years when my dad raced here."

The 11th running of the Chilly Willy is the logical next race trip for Marthaler, who drove a Fury Race Car with Tesar Engineering power. Beyond next Jan. 19-21, the plans are up in the air for Marthaler.

"There are a lot of ideas floating around, with truck and Super and modified races here and there," he said. "We've talked about multiple possibilities."



Debra Ann Photography

Weston Marthaler and crew chief Kelly Bires went to victory lane three times in one night earlier this year at Dells Raceway Park racing a modified out of the KBR Performance shop in Lyndon Station, Wis.

nuts&bolts: Bill Bigley Memorial @ Bradenton ... from staff, team and series reports

Matt Butcosk/Twisted Chassis Photography
Jett Noland, shown with girlfriend Ashlynn, earned \$30,000 for winning the Bill Bigley Memorial at Bradenton, Fla.



New man in charge:

Jett Noland's triumph in the event his family business Noland's Roofing sponsored, the Bill Bigley Memorial at the Freedom Factory, was the first race for the #50 family team since a reorganization. Nick Manfull, who had spotted for the 20-year-old from Groveland, Fla., all season, was the group's new crew chief.

Noland's 2023 campaign enjoyed a strong spring under Jesse Dutilly, with a fourth-place finish at the Rattler 250 and a third two weeks later at Mobile, Ala.; both races were under the SRL National banner. The next few months were decent, but the team still made a change in late August. This Bigley tribute was a great spot for a return; Noland ran one race in September at Pensacola, Fla., in a Bubba Pollard team car.

Manfull has worked with several Florida stars – the teams of Anthony Cataldi and Nick Neri, plus Noland when he first started seven years ago – but it was a California connection which started this deal. Last year's Snowball Derby winner Derek Thorn had only talked casually to Manfull in the past.

"When we came together after Cordele in August to put this together for the Bigley and the Derby, I brought him in as kind of a guidance," Manfull said. "I never had intentions of taking over as the crew chief or anything, and the only way I'd do it is if we could get Derek involved. He wasn't with us here, but he tested with us at Pensacola a week earlier, and he was on the phone whenever I needed."

In addition to Noland's Roofing, the #50 Fury chassis is supported by the Cohen Law Group, Specialty Concrete

Services, Cypress Ridge Hunting Preserve and engine builder Robbie White.

Good record:

During the six seasons for the Bigley Memorial at 417 Southern Speedway, Anthony Sergi won twice and never finished lower than fifth. That latter streak continued in the event's first try at the Freedom Factory.

This time Sergi, who is now a race engineer with Joe Gibbs Racing, was making his second appearance with Jett Motorsports in his home state.

Flashback:

Sergi finished third the last time Super Late Models graced the 3/8-mile oval in Bradenton, Fla. That event was in February of 2017. The top four from that race, which drew only 14 entries, were on the entry list for this year's Bigley tribute.

The top three 2023 finishers – Noland, Johnny Sauter and Jeremy Doss – had never raced at the old DeSoto Speedway. Needing track time didn't affect Doss in qualifying, as the California star earned the \$4,000 pole bonus from Langford Lawn & Landscape.

Champion stays home:

The inaugural SRL National crown was determined by prize money won during every event on the slate. Pollard had built an insurmountable gap with wins in three of the first six races, so he elected to stay home in Senoia, Ga.

Pollard's wife Erin gave birth to the couple's third daughter Milla Drew over Thanksgiving weekend.

D-Jay:

A handful of Upper Midwest natives made their expected journeys to Bradenton for this race. The

most notable was Ty Majeski, the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series star who has come close to winning the \$30,000 twice. One year after Majeski's win was disallowed in tech, this time he brushed the wall late while running second.

Former NASCAR Truck champion Johnny Sauter came home second to lead the Midwest contingent. Derek Kraus and Luke Fenhaus placed sixth and eighth, just ahead of Majeski, while Paul Shafer Jr. and Jeff Storm also represented that region.

The lone New Englander was Dave Farrington Jr., who was racing in Florida for the first time. Farrington, from Jay, Maine, had made Southern trips, but they were usually in the Carolinas under the Pro All Stars Series banner.

"This finally came together after two years in the making," he said. "I go down to New Smyrna almost every February and knew that was coming up. The Bigley event makes a lot of sense financially. You roll in, buy a couple of sets of tires, and race for 30 grand and \$1,200 to start."

The former Oxford Plains Speedway and Beech Ridge Motor Speedway champion overcame a couple of power steering issues in his Distance chassis during the weekend, but horsepower was his biggest issue. PASS racers usually find GM 604 crate engines to be the preferred bullets under that banner. James McGinnis provided Farrington with an open engine here, but it had been six years since he had raced with that style of powerplant.

While in Florida he made a temporary home base with Mark Dodge, a former Maine resident who now lives in the Daytona Beach area. Farrington

Results refresher

Noland's Roofing Bill Bigley Memorial 128 presented by West Orange Roofing:

1. Jett Noland; 2. Johnny Sauter; 3. Jeremy Doss; 4. Michael Atwell; 5. Anthony Sergi; 6. Derek Kraus; 7. Michael Hinde; 8. Luke Fenhaus; 9. Ty Majeski; 10. Stephen Nasse; 11. Jonathan Guy; 12. Paul Shafer Jr.; 13. Nick Neri; 14. Tim Sozio; 15. Steve Dorer; 16. Dylan Bigley; 17. Tony Elrod; 18. Dave Farrington Jr.; 19. Granger Perra; 20. Jared Irvan; 21. Jeff Storm; 22. Jesse Dutilly; 23. T.J. DeCaire; 24. Daniel Webster; 25. Albert Francis; 26. Derek Griffith; 27. Colin Allman; 28. Chad Rutherford; 29. Cody Krucker.

Lap leaders: Atwell 1-11, Sauter 12-109, Noland 110-128

• Cautions: 8 • Fast qualifier (of 39 drivers): Doss, 14.373 seconds • B-main winners: Sozio, Rutherford • Nonqualifiers race: Cote

drove for Dodge once in a while, usually at Wiscasset Speedway. Having Dodge there will make things easier when Farrington tries his first Speedweeks at New Smyrna in February.

DNQ:

Like Sergi, Dustin Dunn returned to the driver's seat after spending the bulk of the season as a race engineer with a NASCAR team, in this case Kyle Busch Motorsports. Like Farrington, Dunn struggled with horsepower, and it hurt Dunn more.

The #59 had a backup engine under the hood, and Dunn wasn't fast enough to make the race through time trials or his last chance race.

"We weren't able to get our (main) engine rebuilt in time," Dunn said. "When you show up to this caliber of an event, you have to have your equipment at 100 percent and we just didn't."

Washington native and frequent Donnie Wilson Motorsports crewman Tyler Tanner withdrew after practice. Others left out of the feature included Bryton Horner, Richard Elkins, Jim Brinkley Jr., Rob Partelo and Chris McIntyre.



Kevin Peters

Anthony Sergi continued his top-five streak at the Bill Bigley Memorial.

closerlook: This #45 finally charts: Findley thankful in fourth ... by Jim Carson

Southern National Motorsports Park is the place where Jonathan Findley has seen more checkered flags than anywhere else in his Late Model Stock Car career, which spans just over a decade. SNMP is also the only place where he saw checkered flags in 2023.

Findley, from the District of Columbia fringe suburb of Bristow, Va., entered only a handful of races this season. Two summer shows on the CARS Solid Rock Carriers Tour ended with mechanical problems, and he lost an engine in one spring visit to Hickory Motor Speedway. The only time before the 23rd Thanksgiving Classic in which his #45 was on the track for the duration was in the March CARS opener at the .4-mile oval near Kenly, N.C., and even in that race he endured a faulty part in the rear end of his TORP chassis.

"It's very disheartening to only finish two races," Findley said. "Every time I think about quitting, and I get away from it for a month or so when quite frankly I don't have the money, I get the itch to get back in the car and do it again. It's like a drug; you can't get away from it."

That drug provided a high for Findley in this 250-lap holiday-weekend headliner. Findley placed fourth, his best-ever result for an extended-distance event at SNMP, and was a little relieved to get through the afternoon show.

"We did the whole thing with all new parts in it to make sure we didn't have any hiccups," said Findley, who qualified 12th. "Last year at the Thanksgiving



Corey Latham

Jonathan Findley (45), shown ahead of Jared Fryar, finished fourth and took hard charger honors in the Late Model Stock Car main event at the Thanksgiving Classic presented by Solid Rock Carriers.

Classic I felt I had a car to beat Josh Berry, and then I got wrecked, so I wanted to come back here."

Findley, believed to be the only McGunegill Engine Performance customer in the LMSC ranks, runs almost entirely off his grandparents' funding. His most loyal crewman is Derek Peebles, who is also a crew

chief at Alpha Prime Development which is Tommy Joe Martins' NASCAR Xfinity Series team. Peebles started in racing under the wing of LMSC veteran Mike Darne, who was also Findley's mentor for a while in his teenage years.

closerlook: Dig the gig: Mitchell's flashback to famed 'pig rig' ... by Jim Carson

The early editions of the Thanksgiving Classic at Southern National Motorsports Park featured Super Late Models and Late Model Stock Cars on the same cards. Eddie

Massengill was a mainstay on the Super side of the holiday-weekend entry lists around the turn of the century, enjoying the short trip to SNMP from Goldsboro, N.C., after plenty of in-season journeys



Michael Dunn

Justin Mitchell placed sixth in the Limited Late Model feature, his best result in three starts in the late-November show at Southern National Motorsports Park near Kenly, N.C.

to Concord Speedway and two titles in the old Big Ten class.

Massengill, whose ride for several years was called the "Pig Rig" and sponsored by Bailey's Slaughterhouse, lost his battle with cancer in March of 2022. Before he passed, he had a few chances to see his nephew Justin Mitchell compete in Limited Late Model races, including the Thanksgiving show in 2021.

"That was always the goal, kinda to get the family back into big cars," said Mitchell, now 26. "We ran legends and bandoleros before that, and go-karts."

While in college at East Carolina University, when a racing budget was practically nonexistent, he found an old Leicht chassis on an online marketplace for \$2,000. He put his engineering degree to use - even during the six months in which he was a member of the Ricky Benton Racing NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series team - and stripped the car

down and reclassified it, all in a backyard shop close to the school.

He gets to run that #10 - which was Massengill's number in the mid-2000s - a few times each year, around his current work schedule at a pharmaceutical company and his night schedule of teaching. Last spring at North Wilkesboro was a valued experience before an engine failure. This SNMP show was a better example of what was engineered by Mitchell, who is also a newlywed.

"We qualified .03 second off fifth and and busted off a good lap," he said. "Our long-run stuff is not there and we fell off pretty hard."

The future schedule looks similar for Mitchell, whose car also sports logos of Harold's Auto Sales and Short Track Engineering. Massengill has a 30-year-old son who races go-karts, but it's Trey's cousin who's closer to carrying on that family tradition.

One Last Look

Thanksgiving Classic • Southern National Motorsports Park



Corey Latham Photography

Josh Berry (62), Kaden Honeycutt (17) and eventual winner Brenden Queen race for the lead late in the Late Model Stock Car headliner at the Thanksgiving Classic presented by Solid Rock Carriers.



Corey Latham Photography
Brendan 'Butterbean' Queen celebrates another win with the Lee Pulliam Performance team.



Stanley Hawley/SDH Photography

Chase Burrow finished seventh in a Sellers-Burton Racing entry. Burrow recently ended his two-year stint with Rusty Skewes' Top Gun Motorsports, with which he won CARS Tour rookie of the year honors in 2022 and earned one pole this year.



Racing America

Chris Chapman inherited the victory in the Limited Late Model class after the disqualification of flagged winner Robert Arch, who won in this division in the 2022 holiday-weekend event.



Stanley Hawley/SDH Photography

Jacob Derrick wound up second in the Limited race in his first visit to Southern National. Derrick won eight features this year as a rookie at Langley Speedway and missed the track title by one point to Cody Bryant, who finished 10th in the LMSC feature.

Checkered Flag

Jamie Williams (1975-2023)



He reached the Finish Line

Page 5 has an update on Dave Farrington Jr., the Maine racer who visited the Freedom Factory in Bradenton, Fla. Farrington is a former track champion at Oxford Plains Speedway and Beech Ridge Motor Speedway. Beech Ridge's longtime photographer Jamie Williams passed away November 28; above is one of the team photos from Jamie's Finish Line Photography.

Williams (**left; Sharlene Myers photo**) was diagnosed with ALS about two years ago.