

LATE MODEL DIGEST

June 20, 2025



Brown, Butcher win in Wisconsin

Kil-Kareful: Dayton 100 draws packed house and rave reviews • Another Pro podium for Rackley teen Kitzmiller

DOUG HORNICKEL/FAST LAP PHOTO

closerlook: Midweek marvel: Dayton 100 popular for promoter ... by Jim Carson

In 2016 the short-track scene in the Buckeye State was left with a gaping hole. Columbus Motor Speedway, which first hosted races right after World War II, closed when the Nuckles family sold the 3/8-mile oval and surrounding facility to the suburb of Obetz.

At about the same time, Kil-Kare Raceway's .4-mile D-shaped oval was on shaky ground, as its owners were much more concerned about drag racing. While the dragstrip has run consistently, the oval staged only one race night in 2019 and none the next year.

Gary Estes had turned many laps around Columbus, and he didn't want its fate to fall on his home track in Xenia, Ohio. The star driver through the 1990s and early 2000s had remained involved in the sport since hanging up his helmet, most notably as the car owner who gave Travis Braden his first major Late Model ride and the 2013 championship in the then-ARCA/CRA Super Series. Estes has also served on numerous crews around Ohio and points north and south, especially drivers Brandon Oakley, Zachary Tinkle and whomever the Platinum Motorsports team had behind the wheel at the time.

After the pandemic Estes found another way to stay active. He took over the promotional reins at Kil-Kare, which has scheduled four oval races each year since 2021. The latest show under his watch was the Jeff Nuckles Memorial Dayton 100, where Braden topped a 30-car entry list and earned \$15,000.

"It's the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," said Estes, originally from Miamisburg, Ohio. "There are so



Scott McIlwain

Travis Braden takes the checkered flag in front of full stands at Kil-Kare Raceway in Xenia, Ohio.

many unknowns, like the money situation. It's a challenge, and I'd hate to do that for a living."

Estes has other business interests outside of the sport, but for this season running Kil-Kare is his only racing role. Many key figures in the area have stepped up to help, notably the tech and race-day staff at nearby Shadybowl Speedway. The Late Models, plus the modifieds and one other support class, went by the Shadybowl rulebook for this event, and some divisions had this as a 'Bowl points race.

His tactics have proved effective thus far in 2025. Modifieds highlighted a May 8 card which filled the grandstands, to the point where staffers were

turning people away along Highway 142 at about 8 p.m. This Dayton 100 show, which paid three times the winner's prize than the 2024 race offered, was also a sellout or extremely close, and Estes believed that there were more people in the pits for this show than the one a month earlier.

"There wasn't any bleacher spot that I saw that didn't have a butt in it," Braden said.

The biggest change with the Dayton 100 was a move away from Kil-Kare's traditional Friday oval date. The dragstrip, recently purchased by IHRA, had June filled with multi-day events.

"They said, 'Dude, there's nothing available on a Friday night in June.' I

said, 'How about a Wednesday?'" Estes said. "I'd always wanted to do a Wednesday race. A lot of people are locked into their series and can't come on a weekend anyway. When I raced, 100 years ago, they did Wednesday Outlaw races at Columbus and a few other places once a year.

"Last year it was big too, but when we announced it was gonna be a Wednesday, you know how everybody gets on (social media) and says I'm dumb. Jamie Sites has a business (XL Automotive) and has friends that have businesses, and he said, 'Dude, we're gonna shut them all up,' and poured some money into the purse."

It turned out to be a fantastic decision, and not just because the weather was ideal. The midweek spot allowed Braden to drop in and compete. The other nationally-known name on the entry list was Casey Roderick, who returned to the Platinum team in a one-off appearance and finished fifth.

The remaining Kil-Kare oval dates were set for Fridays, although the Late Model return August 8 had to be rescheduled. The most circles on the calendar were for this Dayton 100, and it was a no-brainer for Estes to name it after the second-generation promoter in the Nuckles family.

"For sure I had no clue when I started," Estes said about his move in 2021. "Jeff helped me, even though he was wheelchair-bound by then. We were really close friends, and I called him out of the blue. I wanted to get in here and open it up. He said I had nothing to lose and he'd help me with what I needed."



Scott McIlwain

Ryan Fleming (1) and Don Mahaffey Jr. (18) lead Brian Gay (3), Brian Brewer (60) and others at last Wednesday's Dayton 100, in front of a packed pit grandstand. The fans' bleachers were also at or near capacity on the frontstretch.

Five Flags Speedway

closerlook: Stories of big, small fish come with Kitzmiller's runs ... by Jim Carson

The ARCA Menards Series season opener at Daytona International Speedway saw several underdog stories unfold. The happiest of those was third-place Jason Kitzmiller, who at age 51 crossed the line only behind two racers of a much younger generation: winner Brenden Queen with the multi-car Pinnacle Racing Group effort, and runner-up William Sawalich with the powerhouse Joe Gibbs Racing team.

Kitzmiller has a family-owned effort, called ALL Construction Racing and named after the company he owns near Petersburg, W.Va. The ARCA team is officially owned by fellow West Virginia native Codie Rohrbaugh, who himself was one of ARCA's little-guy racers plugging away in the late-2010s. Rohrbaugh also owns the CR7 Motorsports team in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series. He drove his Truck for a while and then found other drivers, winning for the first time last fall with veteran Grant Engfinger in the seat.

Kitzmiller's road to respectability in ARCA has been long and tough. Since the pandemic it has been a partial-season run. His sixth-place result at Daytona in 2024 was his best showing until this February at the "Big D." He had planned to run the full ARCA slate this year and placed fifth at Talladega Superspeedway, although he brought in Engfinger to run the Charlotte Motor Speedway race in May while he attended his daughter Addison's high school graduation.

In the past five years Kitzmiller has found more seat time in the series for older ARCA and Pro Cup cars. He won the 2022 championship in the SuperCup Stock Car Series. Then came a switch to the Grand Na-



Rackley WAR Racing

Isaac Kitzmiller gets advice from crew chief Jace Thomas before a Pro Late Model race in May. Thomas fell ill with a staph infection May 31 while working with Keelan Harvick at Kern Raceway and underwent surgery while still in California; he hopes to come home soon. Mark Reynolds filled in for Thomas and called the shots for Kitzmiller last Friday at Pensacola, Fla.



David Kranak/Impact Zone Photos

Isaac Kitzmiller drove to a third-place finish in the latest Allen Turner Pro Late Model 100 at Five Flags Speedway, matching his best result in the crate-engine short-track class.

tional Super Series the next year; he rolled to the 2024 points crown and entered 2025 one win away from A.J. Henriksen's GNSS win record. In those tours he's a big fish in a small pond, while in ARCA he's learning to swim competitively with established players such as the Gibbs, Pinnacle and Venturini Motorsports teams.

One of the newest teenagers in the ranks is Jason's 16-year-old son Isaac Kitzmiller. Isaac competed alongside his dad for nine GNSS races a year ago and won four times. The Kitzmiller and Rohrbaugh families have put Isaac on a similar path, albeit a shorter one of sorts. He's following the ARCA Menards Series East, a schedule that's half over after four races. At the East summer break, he's actually in the points lead, ahead of drivers on teams owned by veteran car owners such as Joe Farre` and Andy Hillenburg (to be fair, Gibbs protege Max Reaves missed a race and won the other three he has started).

In the young Kitzmiller's other rides, he feels equal to his competition in terms of resources. He still runs legends cars, now for former Super Late Model driver Joe Ryan Osborne whose Joe Ryan Racecars is an established force in the scaled-down entry levels. And in Pro Late Models, he is steadily improving as a part of Rackley WAR Racing.

Until last summer Kitzmiller had never been in a Late Model. One start came last August at Five Flags Speedway and he pulled off an eighth-place finish, certainly promising for a first-time racer at the abrasive



David Kranak/Impact Zone Photos

Isaac Kitzmiller has finished between fourth and seventh in all four of his 2025 ARCA Menards Series East starts.

half-mile racing surface in Pensacola, Fla.

This year his Rackley WAR schedule has intensified. The latest crate-engine race at Five Flags, in a division sponsored by Allen Turner Hyundai, was his 14th of the season in the #25, and it was one of his most encouraging. He placed third, matching his top finishes during one of his six races at Florida Speedweeks and two of his four starts in the zMax CARS Pro Late Model Tour.

"We've been working really hard to get that first win in a Pro Late Model," Kitzmiller said. "It's be really big for the team. I can feel it coming. I'm super-blessed to do it all. I really like being at the racetrack, even when I'm not racing, like when I was at Hickory the week before with Keelan Harvick. I want to surround myself around it as much as I can."

The connection with the Rackley Roofing-sponsored team, owned by company boss Curtis Sutton and longtime Late Model standout driver and shock specialist Willie Allen, came as a result of Kitzmiller's tie-in with Team Hornaday Development. Everyone involved, including NASCAR Hall of Famer Ron Hornaday Jr., likely had high hopes for Kitzmiller at Five Flags, since he had seen the track last August and also this March when he placed fifth in the ARCA East race.

"We had a lot of notes and a really good setup there. It's a lot easier coming into it having a good setup; I could just focus on myself," he said. "I think I was about a straightaway back (of winner Spencer Davis and runner-up Jake Finch), as we were fighting tight at the end and loose off the corners. You'll have that at pensacola because of the tire wear. I feel like I can drive a Pro Late Model a lot harder and be more aggressive on entry into the corner. The ARCA car's a lot heavier ... and you have to be a lot more cautious."

He'll also have some more time to debrief, at least regarding full-sized cars. This weekend he's actually off, although he has more midweek legends races at Charlotte, and he'll go watch his dad run the in ARCA national circuit at Elko, Minn. His next Pro show is the July 2 CARS event at Caraway Speedway, one of his home tracks now that he lives in Mooresville, N.C.

One Last Look

ASA STARS • Madison International Speedway and Slinger Super Speedway



Doug Hornickel/Fast Lap Photo
Cole Butcher celebrates a victory at Slinger with Donnie Wilson Motorsports team manager Bond Suss (right) and his excitable son Brock Suss (left).



Kim Kemperman
Carson Brown gets fresh tires from Anthony Campi Racing crew members during a stage break at Madison International Speedway in Oregon, Wis. Brown scored his first ASA STARS National Tour victory in this Friday show, the first of a two-race weekend.



Doug Hornickel/
Fast Lap Photo
Derek Thorn shows off the presenting sponsor for the series on his Highlands Motorsports Super Late Model.



Ron Erstad Jr.
Stephen Nasse signs a body panel for a fan before the El Bandido Yankee Tequila 300 at the quarter-mile in Slinger, Wis.



Kim Kemperman
Ty Majeski (91), who set fast time at Slinger, takes a restart alongside eventual race winner Cole Butcher (28) and right ahead of Derek Kraus (9), Stephen Nasse (51), Chase Pinsonneault (14) and Kasey Kleyn (1). Butcher, Nasse and Kleyn also finished in the top five two days earlier at Madison.

One Last Look

Elsewhere around Wisconsin



Roy Ophime Photography

Rose Borntreger takes a bow after scoring her first Limited Late Model victory at Dells Raceway Park. Her older brother Andrew Borntreger finished second, tying his career best in the division.



William Prutz/QCWilly.com

Michael Haggar (19), shown ahead of Brandyn Wind (41) and Colton Morgan in practice at Golden Sands Speedway, won that night's Limited Late Model race at the bullring in Plover, Wis.



Jeremy Libick Racing Photography

Kolton Guralski set fast time at Jefferson, Wis.



Jeremy Libick Racing Photography

Shane Radtke Jr. (51) leads Kurt Kleven (51) and Michael Grueneberg en route to a Limited Late Model triumph at Jefferson Speedway.



DanLewisphoto.net
Grant Griesbach's second Super Late Model win of the year at Wisconsin International Raceway was the Rich Somers Memorial Red Race. The opening leg of the Red, White & Blue State Championship paid \$3,000 to the winner.



Roy Ophime Photography

Paul Paine won the second CWRA feature at the Dells and had the best average result of the night.

Ellen Bishop/Compassus via Hub City Times
Longtime race fan Joe Sevenich, who has dealt with lung diseases for many years and was in hospice care in nearby Wisconsin Rapids, wanted to attend a race one last time. His care team, family and Golden Sands Speedway made it happen, and the 74-year-old Sevenich even got to take a ride in the pace car. His son Joe Jr. flew up from Georgia on two days' notice to see his dad's wish granted.

