



A Classic day for Schill, and a sad reflection

LOVES PARK, III. (April 11, 1982) —

There's a hole in the upper-Midwest racing community this season, after the off-season closing of Rockford Speedway. The .29-mile oval held its final racing events last October, with the 58th annual National Short Track Championships, the Bahama Bracket Nationals and an added race at the end of the month.

Among those who feel gut-punched the most without this facility, which first hosted racing in 1948, are the Rockford-area local racers. Al Schill lives about 80 miles away in the Milwaukee suburb of Franklin, Wis., but he also knows that loss rather personally. His first home track, Hales Corners Speedway, first opened just two years after Rockford, but his little dirt track shuttered for good after 2003 and is now a home improvement store with the rather-insulting nickname Speedway Menards.

"I started racing in 1966 at age 21 in a sportsman car there, in a '55 Chevrolet," Schill said. "Actually I had been sneaking in there five years prior, because back then you had to be 21 to race. My brother was 21 so I did it that way."

Before long Schill spread his wings to the paved surface, running a modified at Rockford on Fridays to go with his dirt bullring pursuits. Late Model racing was next, and he was a regular in his Lefthander chassis by the late 1970s.

He was a standout against the local contingent for a few years, but his first victory against a larger group of traveling heavyweights came 42 years ago today in the Rockford Spring Classic. That was the season opener for the ARTGO Challenge Series, a circuit which Schill followed for most of the 1980s and won four more times.

"I remember it was a postponed

race, and the next weekend was Easter," he said. "We won it and then came back to a garage with no heat and stand in a snow pile to get to it."

Details from this Classic are sketchy, but Schill was on the pole for this event which drew 28 entries. He also had one of the first 9:1 engines under the hood of his #14, and this Classic might have been the first major victory for that power combination.

"I was really good at the short tracks," Schill said. "At the half-miles like Madison and Kaukauna, I'd be down on horsepower, but my chassis was still working."

His machines were working most frequently at Slinger Super Speedway, where he won five consecutive top-class championships from 1984-88 and a Slinger Nationals in 1999. He kept competing on a part-time basis until he turned 70, and he earned two feature wins at the quarter-mile in 2012.

Schill still watches races fairly regularly, perhaps as soon as this weekend's Falloween show at Dells Raceway Park. He knows that the paved and dirt facilities could always use his support, even as a fan. The Badger State's latest piece of uneasy track news came from State Park Speedway, as 2024 will be its final year under the Wimmer family's promotion, and there's no solid future for the Wausau bullring beyond that.

"It's sad when you see a track on that Dale Earnhardt Jr. show," Schill said about the NBC Sports-produced program Lost Speedways.

ARTGO Spring Classic: 1. Al Schill Sr.; 2. Tom Jones; 3. Tom Reffner; 4. Dick Trickle; 5. Mel Walen; 6. Tracy Schuler; 7. Junior Hanley; 8. Willie Goeden; 9. Dave Weltmeyer; 10. Conrad Morgan; 11. Jim Weber; 12. Steve Christman; 13. Burt Weitmeyer; 14. Larry Cooper; 15. Randy Slack; 16. Dave Price; 17. Danny Duke; 18. Dennis Lampman; 19. Wayne Para; 20. Joe Shear; 21. Dave Watson; 22. Denny James.



Kim Kemperman

Al Schill is shown at age 67 from 2012, the last year he won a Super Late Model race at Slinger, Wis.



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Al Schill is one of four drivers with victories in Rockford Speedway's three cornerstone features: the Spring Classic, the All-Star 100 and the National Short Track Championships headliner. His first Spring Classic win came 42 years ago today.