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Motorsport America

OPEN PRACTICE AT GMP ON MARCH 23rd

Gresham Motorsports Park is so ready to race that we couldn't wait until The Larry Fleeman Memorial 198 on March 30th to get drivers on the track! On March 23rd, GMP will hold an open practice from 10am-2pm.

Saturday, March 23rd, the GMP pit gates will open at 9am and Pro Late Model, Outlaw Late Model, Truck, Sportsman, Renegade and Mini Stock rotating practice will begin at 10am.

The cost to get in the pits is just \$20 and the infield concession stand will be open. Spectators can watch the open practice from track-side parking and the grandstands for FREE.

Hoosier race tires and Sunoco race fuel will be available for drivers and teams to purchase from Garrison Racing Equipment at the open practice.

"We are so excited to get the season started," said GMP General Manager, Dan Elliott. "The Larry Fleeman Memorial 198 is the best race to start the season off. Larry Fleeman was a huge asset to GMP and we are thankful to the entire Fleeman Family for making our Season Opening race event possible. I look forward to seeing drivers and teams back on the track at the open practice next weekend."

For a detailed schedule for the Larry Fleeman Memorial 198, please visit www.RaceGMP.com. Follow GMP on Facebook (Gresham Motorsports Park) and Twitter (GreshamMP).

Sunoco Becomes Presenting Sponsor of the Southern Super Series

Southern Super Series officials announced today a partnership with Sunoco, the world's leading racing fuel manufacturer, to be the presenting series sponsor. The new Southern Super Series presented by Sunoco will make its on-track debut April 6 at Tennessee's Fairgrounds Speedway Nashville.

Green Oil Company of Fairburn, Georgia will be the Southern Super Series' Sunoco distributor and Sunoco 110 will be the series' spec fuel.

The inaugural Southern Super Series season will consist of 16 races at five tracks in four states. In addition to Fairgrounds Speedway Nashville, the home of the first and final races on the 2013 schedule, the Southern Super Series will make multiple visits to Five Flags Speedway in Pensacola, Florida, Gresham Motorsports Park in Jefferson, Georgia, as well as Mobile International Speedway and Montgomery Motor Speedway in Alabama.

Winners of each 125-lap feature will receive a \$5,000 payday, with boosted purses up for grabs in longer-distance World Crown 300 at Gresham and the All-American 400 at Nashville. The overall championship will be worth \$10,000, but there is room for the Southern Super Series to grow any and all of those figures with additional sponsorship opportunities.

Nashville's April 6 kickoff to the Southern Super Series is already one of the most anticipated events of the short track season. Some of the top drivers in the country have filed entries for the event and the list, in addition to an all-new SouthernSuperSeries.com website, will be available in the coming days.

Entry forms and further information for the April 6 season-opener at Nashville and others on the 16-race inaugural Southern Super Series schedule can be found on www.southernsuperseries.com.

Local Racing News

Close Finishes: Continued from page 6

to hold the car 'wide open' all the way around the racetrack to attain and maintain maximum speed. Without any throttle response, drivers virtually have no way to escape the dangerous pack racing situations that are the main byproduct of the restrictor plates.

The results have been countless 'Big One' style wrecks over the past two decades - including those we saw this past week in all three divisions that raced at Daytona.

Forget the fact the plates have turned events like Sunday's Daytona 500 into giant snoozers - an endless single file drone with little or no passing to speak of until the final 20 laps - or that untold millions of dollars of pristine, hand-built racecars have been turned into scrap iron over the years.

This kind of racing has proven time and again to neither be exciting or safe.

It is way past time for NASCAR to abandon restrictor plate racing. It's silly to build high cost engines that produce 800 to 900 horsepower only to restrict the fuel and air mixture choking them down to nearly half those horsepower numbers.

Doesn't it make sense to just build a 450 to 500 horsepower engine to begin with?

Not only would it produce the desired reduced speeds, but would improve the competition significantly as the drivers would be able to pass at will and have a greater degree of control/maneuverability in 'crisis' situations.

Finally, the teams would save money twofold - once with reduced engine costs - and second not having to build new cars to replace those crushed by the 'Big One' in virtually every restrictor plate race NASCAR now contests.

These two adjustments certainly can't guarantee events like Saturday's accident at Daytona won't happen again. If life teaches you anything, it's that you can't prepare for every situation.

However, incidents like those this past weekend provide opportunities to assess and adjust dangerous situations to the betterment of all. NASCAR needs to seize the moment to make these changes a reality. If they don't, the comments from the Social Media howlers and knee-jerkers this weekend will be justified.

Last Call

As someone who has been critical of Danica Patrick in the past, I have to give her props for her performance over the course of this year's Daytona 'Speed-weeks.'

Patrick has improved greatly since breaking into the NASCAR scene fulltime last year. Forget her landmark Daytona pole position run or her eighth-place finish in Sunday's 500 - just one look at Patrick's in-car camera shots reveal her hands are less busy than in the same shots from last year. There's little indication of Patrick sawing on the wheel to maintain control as was constantly the case last season.

In NASCAR terms, it appears Patrick has learned how to hold a 'pretty wheel.'

Now, if the media - especially the television folks at FOX - can start treating Patrick like the 'regular' driver she so longs to be, we'll really have something. Sunday's 500 race telecast left us wondering if Darrell Waltrip got an extra 'spiff' from FOX to constantly tell us how great Patrick was doing.

Like we couldn't see that for ourselves.

Perhaps FOX should concentrate on consistently getting the right graphics up on the screen. Better yet, don't go to break with 18 laps to go showing us the event on 1/12th the screen while offering up a Sprint, Coca-Cola and Toyota commercials on the rest.

Here's hoping they wise up quickly. If we have to listen to Waltrip drone on about all-Danica all the time - and miss key elements of the events so FOX can satisfy its corporate benefactors - it's going to be a long season trying to enjoy the races on television.

About John Close

John Close covered his first NASCAR race as a professional media member in 1986 at Bristol Motor Speedway. Since then, Close - a former Associated Press newspaper sports editor - has written countless articles for numerous motorsports magazines, trade publications and Internet sites.

His Close Calls column appears each week on www.CloseFinishes.com, www.MotorsportsAmerica.com and www.RacingNation.com.

Close has also authored two books - Tony Stewart - From Indy Phenom To NASCAR Superstar and NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series - From Desert Dust To Superspeedways.

A third book - On The Spot - a volume about the history of NASCAR race spotting, will be published later this year.

Close resides in Charlotte, NC with his wife Gail and son Sam.

You can direct comments/inquiries to Close at Closefinishes@carolina.rr.com