

That First Taste of Victory: A Post-Laconia Follow-Up with Bronson Bauman

By Chris Martin, Contributing Writer for AMA

A position inside the all-conquering Indian Wrecking Crew is the most coveted seat in the American Flat Track paddock for obvious reasons, but it does not come without its own particular set of challenges.

For example, any rider joining the team in 2019 would be hard pressed to escape the mile-long shadow cast by the series' dominant reigning AFT Twins presented by Vance & Hines Champion, Jared Mees, who enjoyed historic success with the team in 2017 and 2018 and showed no signs of letting up anytime soon.

Briar Bauman has managed that task magnificently, winning the AFT Twins season opener and stacking seven consecutive additional podiums behind it to open up a 34-point advantage eight races into the '19 campaign.

However, his success has only resulted in an exponentially larger combined shadow that had effectively masked the steady progress of his younger brother and teammate, Bronson Bauman, who was dealing with the racing equivalent of being on the dark side of the moon.

Just about the only way Bronson could step into the light was by standing atop the podium -- an achievement he pulled off last Saturday night in the inaugural Laconia Short Track presented by Russ Brown Motorcycle Attorneys.

It couldn't have come in much more challenging circumstances. Bauman was forced to navigate a rough track that seduced riders into mistakes -- as evidenced by five red flags across the two Main Events. He also had to overcome overwhelming pressure of two different sorts -- both on-track, as he fought with everything he had to hold on to the lead across four separate stints, and mentally, as he attempted to maintain his composure during three different stoppages.

"The track was brutal, so a little mistake cost you quite a bit," Bauman said. "It was nerve wracking. Every single time I saw the red flag, I was shaking my head, going 'Why? Why me? Why right now? Is this seriously how I've got to do this right now?'"

Any thoughts that big brother Briar might simply hand Bronson the win were wiped away when he dove up the inside to steal away the lead late in the race.

But on that occasion, the red flag actually worked to Bronson's advantage.

"The red flags were definitely heart-breakers," he said. "The only one I was thankful for was the last one. That was big. Just before the last red flag, I heard someone coming up behind me. I knew there was only one person fast enough, strong enough, and dumb enough to pass me on that track right then. And sure enough, I looked back and saw the big #14!"

"I was hoping maybe he'd let me have just this one, but when he got underneath me, I knew he wouldn't. And I wouldn't give him one either. We've both got to earn it."

And that's exactly what Bronson did after the third and final restart.

"I'd never been in that position before. I mean, I led a lap of a national earlier this year -- kinda -- at Daytona, but there my brother went right past me. That last restart, I was honestly a very nervous Nellie. Briar had just passed me before the last red flag. But I also knew I was getting great starts. I knew what I had to do. I just stayed to the bottom and didn't give that line up, and sure enough, I was somehow able to do it."

The immense race-long pressure Bronson felt did not fall away until he reached the checkered flag... or a few feet before that, anyway.

"Going into Turn 1 on the last lap, I did everything I could to crash the thing, but somehow I stayed up. Getting into Turn 3, I was thinking just don't mess up. Coming off Turn 4, I didn't quite hear my brother anymore, and I knew I had just won my first national.

"I'm not one who likes to celebrate before I actually do something, because I believe that anything can happen at any given time. But for this to be my first... I came unglued right then and there, before I even crossed the finish line. The emotions were unreal."

The fact that Briar came home second only made it that much sweeter.

Bronson said, "It's awesome to go 1-2 with my brother. The only time I've been on the podium has been with him. Last time, he got the best of me. It's awesome to get the best of him this time. It's a lot better to be the '1' than the '2.'"

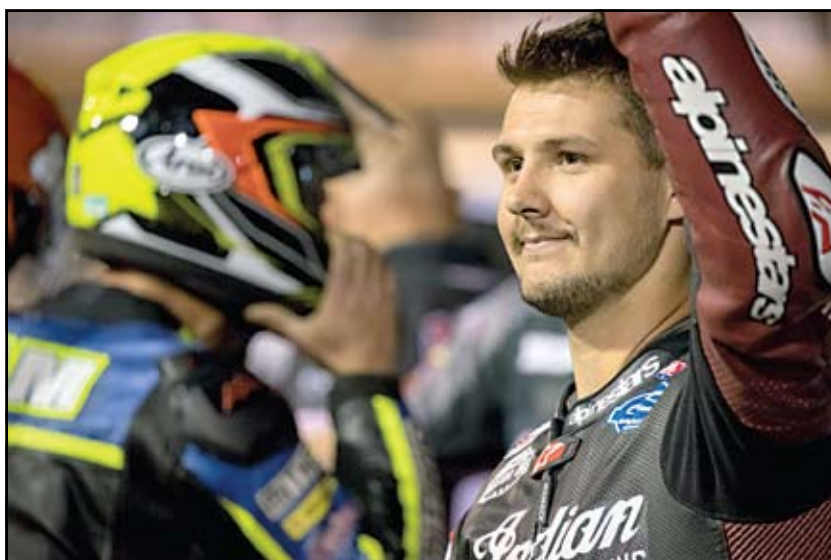
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Briar Bauman making an attempt at the inside line to pass brother Bronson



Briar congratulating Bronson for a career milestone



Bronson Bauman