

## Chase Elliott and John Hunter Nemechek Claim Victory at SpeedFest

By Phillip Prichard

Speedfest 2014 proved to be a memorable event for both John Hunter Nemechek and Chase Elliott at Watermelon Capital Speedway on the last weekend of January. John Hunter Nemechek, son of NASCAR driver Joe Nemechek, took the checkered flag for his first win in the JEGS-CRA All Star Tour. Chase Elliott, son of NASCAR legend Bill Elliott dominated the ARCA/CRA Super Series race, battling Johnny Sauter in the second half of the race to earn the victory. 18 year old, Elliott has proven in the last few years that he is dominant force in the Late Model Series. This dominance earned Elliott a ride in the NASCAR Nationwide Series with JR Motorsports for the 2014 season.

The Champion Racing Association powered by JEGS and the ARCA/CRA Super Series powered by JEGS kicked off their 18th season of competition with the traditional non-points season opener, the 10th Annual Zaxby's SpeedFest 2014 on the last weekend of January at Watermelon Capital Speedway. Watermelon Capital Speedway is a 4/10s of a mile semi-banked asphalt oval located in Cordele, Georgia.

Jeff Cannon (33), an Illiana Motor Speedway regular, qualified on the pole for the JEGS-CRA All Star Tour event with a best lap time of 15.930. He fell short of last year's qualifying record by just .091 of a second. Garret Jones (88) qualified second,

Bubba Pollard (26) was third, Nemechek (8) was fourth and Payton Ryan (54) was fifth in qualifying.

John Hunter Nemechek (8) made his Late Model racing debut in 2012, but victory had eluded him until SpeedFest Pro Late Model 125. Nemechek battled with Hunter Robbins (18) where he took the lead on lap 29. The remainder of the field was battling behind Nemechek and Robbins. Seventeen cautions and one red flag proved to be an exciting race. After a caution on lap 110, Garret Jones (88) was closing in on Nemechek.

After holding off the field through a record six green-white-checkered attempts, Nemechek prevailed to earn the victory.

Finishing in the second position was Spencer Davis (129), Korey Ruble (17) was third, J. J. Haley (99) was fourth, Dwayne Buggay (45) was fifth, Harrison Burton (12) (son NASCAR driver Jeff Burton) was sixth, Hunter Robbins (18) was seventh, Jeff Cannon (33) was eighth, Terry Senneker Jr (00) was ninth and Christopher Tullis (24T) was tenth.

The headline event of the weekend of Speedfest was the ARCA-CRA Super Series Speedfest 200. The 29 Car field ended with some theatrics and controversy but in the end Chase Elliott captured the victory.

NASCAR Sprint Cup series star and home track favorite, David Ragan (77) of

nearby Unadilla, Georgia started on the pole after a seven position inversion along-side fellow Georgian, Scotty Ellis (83) in 29-car field. Ragan led the first nine laps before he was passed by Chase Elliott (9) who started in the fourth position. Ragan held onto second the majority of the first half of the race. NASCAR Camping World Truck Series star, Johnny Sauter (5) passed Ragan on lap 87, where he trailed Elliott into the halfway break at Lap 100.

After the 100 lap break, Bubba Pollard (26) who elected to take no tires started in the first position. On lap 107, both Sauter and Elliott slipped by Pollard and the excitement brewed as they raced hard up to lap 183.

Elliott battled with a dominant Johnny Sauter throughout the 200 lap event, with Sauter leading for much of the second half. Elliott spent the final quarter of the race working his way under Sauter but was continually denied the position by the dogged veteran.

Sauter pinched Elliott on several occasions and on lap 183, Elliott didn't budge as the two made heavy contact off Turn 4, sending Sauter spinning from the outside and out of contention. The move proved to be the winning 'pass' as Elliott would hold off a hard-charging Daniel Hemric to win one last Super Late Model event before graduating to the NASCAR Nationwide



Series in 2014.

Elliott stated the race special because of how hard we had to work to earn it. We had to race hard and raced hard with Johnny Sauter since the break all the way to the end and we came out on top.

Sauter could not be reached for comments after the race but his actions immediately after the accident with Elliott served as a snapshot for how he felt. While under caution, Sauter drove his No. 5 around the track, slammed it (relatively) lightly into Elliott's entry and promptly retired from the event.

In Victory Lane, Elliott insists that the contact was just the result of hard short track racing and that Sauter should reach the same conclusion once he gets over the heat of the moment.

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Cup Driver David Ragan led the first 9 laps



John Wes Townley finished 7th in the Zaxby sponsored race



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