**UPIR Opens Season with Action Packed, Healing Night**

The Upper Peninsula International Raceway opened its race season on Saturday with a full card of racing. For the first time, cars would be racing on the new clay surface.. Along with the new track surface, new track equipment was also being used for the first time in a race day scenario. By the time the first heat rolled out, the excitement level had built to its highest point of the whole off season.

The first heat to take to the track was the Riverside Auto Junior Micro-Sprint Heat made up of young drivers, all between the ages of 5 and 13. When the green flag waved, it was Avry Corrigan of Bark River who took off, and never looked back, leading flag to flag, and surviving a restart, to take the win. Second place was taken by Joey Stankowicz, with Haden Frazer third. Both are from Escanaba.

Next the newly named Sportsman Micro- Sprints, last year’s 500 Micro-Sprints, came out to the track for their heat. 2014 Sportsmanship award winner, Gabriel Zellner out of New Franklin,Wisconsin taking the win. Bark River drivers, Paul Hosking was second and Jesse Liss third. 2014 UPIR Track Champion Kristy Peterson, Rapid River, finished the heat in fourth

The more powerful 600 Micro-Sprints roared onto the track for two heats. The first heat race saw quite a bit of action, with a heated battle between two Groleaus, grandfather Jim of Cornell and grandson Christian of Gladstone. Jim came out on top, with Christian close behind in second. Third place went to Steven Miller of Gladstone.. The second heat had the first scary moment of the night when Scott Ruleau of Menominee spun sideways in turn three. With nowhere to go, Brent Smith, Bark River, slammed into Ruleau, flipping into the air and landing on the front of Ruleau’s car. Smith jumped down from his toppled car, and Ruleau climbed out with neither driver injured. On the restart, a great battle ensued for the top position between Jordan Ives from Gladstone and Matt Peterson of Escanaba. Ives would claim the win and Peterson would take second. Not far behind in third was 2014 UPIR Track Champion Josh Bartel of Wilson.

The big cars were out on the track following the 600 Sprints, these of course, being the ever growing Street Stocks. The first heat was won by Greg Bruce of Gladstone after a race long battle with Escanaba’s Corey DeGrave who finished second. Greg’s grandmother, Joan Dlugas, recently passed away and Greg drove a great race to the checkers in her memory. Also from Escanaba, Ron Borchert came home in third. The second heat race included a very special tribute car driven by Jonathan Pepin from Escanaba. Pepin, whose grandmother and biggest fan, Eileen Boerschinger, passed away last week. Pepin painted his car to match his grandfather Roy “Peanut” Boerschinger’s old stock car, and changed his number to 2V in memory of his grandmother. Jon ran a good race, finishing in fourth position. The win went to 2014 UPIR Track Champion Rob Willis of Gladstone. Cornell’s Paul Wagner was second, and Matt Adams from Escanaba finished third.

The Bink’s Coca-Cola Sport Fours came out for their heats last. Two Gladstone drivers, however, where racing for more than just themselves. Last week, Cory and Tyler Corwin’s father and grandfather Alex “Wayne” Corwin passed away. In the first heat, Cory put on a heck of a show, passing everyone, and taking the lead on the last lap to win as the crowd cheered on loudly. Second and third went to Escanabans Dylan Lanaville who held the lead until the last lap in his Davey Allison replica and Hattie Bourdeau respectively. In the second heat, Tyler Corwin started on the pole, and didn’t look back, leading flag to flag, winning the heat race. Escanaba’s Randy DeGrave was second, with Kyle Johnson also of Escanaba in third.

During intermission the track was prepped for the main events. Two lucky young race fans won bicycles donated by Walmart. Radio Results Network donated backpacks and Pacino’s Food and Spirits Restaurant donated pizza certificates for fans. The Holiday Station in Escanaba donates a gas card each race and the winner will be announced at the driver’s meeting on June 13. Fans were able to see the new track equipment at work during this time.

The first feature to take to the track was the Riverside Auto Junior Micro-Sprints. Once again leading flag to flag, Avry Corrigan swept the card. Joey Stankowicz came home second. After a fierce battle for third, which included three passes in the course of one lap, Elliot Corrigan grabbed the position and held it to the end. This is the first time the Corrigan brothers have raced together at UPIR, and the first time they’ve both run in the top three together.

For the second time in the evening, New Franklin, Wisconsin’s Gabriel Zellner was unstoppable, dominating the Sportsman Micro-Sprint Feature. Kristy Peterson finished in second, with Dave Hosking of Bark River in third. Gabriel Zellner’s brother, Jacob, took to the track as well, but was involved in a two car incident with Paul Hosking, taking both cars out of contention for the win.

The 600 Micro-Sprint Feature was on track next. After several restarts, and a three way battle for the win, Jordan Ives pulled away in the final laps for the win. A hard fought second and third went to Matt Peterson and Christian Groleau respectively. Ives became the second driver of the night to sweep both his heat and feature.

Next up was the Modified Feature, which in reality was more of a duel between 2014 UPIR Modified Champion Dale Peterson from Rapid River and Escanaba’s Lonnie Dalgord. Due to other commitments only two Modifieds were able to make it to UPIR for the opener, but fans were in for a treat. Peterson and Dalgord put on a battle for the ages.. For ten laps, the two drivers passed each other in almost every corner. When all was said and done, it was Peterson that came out on top.

After the Modified duel was all wrapped up, the Street Stocks came back out for their feature race. For the third time in the course of the night, a driver won both their feature and heat. This time it was Greg Bruce, who kept out of trouble while everyone else it seemed had some sort of issue with their car. Matt Adams came home in second, and Ron Borchert was third. Jon Pepin was making his way through the field until he cut a tire while moving into the top five.

The final feature was for the Bink’s Coca-Cola Sport Fours. With both Tyler and Cory Corwin winning their heats, it was an all Corwin front row for the start. However, only a few short laps into the race, Cory cut down a tire as Tyler pulled away. The scariest moment of the night came when Dylan Lanaville’s car rolled over ending up on its’ side. After several tense moments, Dylan was helped from the car, stood and waved to the crowd. Dylan sought his own treatment for an injured hand. With a green, white, checker restart, Tyler Corwin took the checkers.. Randy DeGrave would follow in second and Escanaba’s Kyle Johnson finished third.

After a successful opening night, UPIR is excited to move on to next week for more great racing action. Gates open at 5PM EST, with racing at 6PM EST. UPIR would like to thank all of the drivers, fans, sponsors and volunteers that came out to support local drivers and racing in Escanaba. UPIR once again sends its’ condolences to the Bruce, Corwin and Pepin families in their time of grieving.

By Todd Rose, UPIR Race Reporter and Co-Announcer