**Engines Roar to Life at UPIR**

**Drivers and Track Prepare for Opening Race Weekend**

**By Todd Rose**

Drivers took to the UPIR quarter-mile dirt track this past Saturday to prepare for this year’s opening race weekend, and for good reason. Not only has the track been slightly reconfigured with turns 1 and 2 being modified prior to this year, but the UPIR Modified drivers are preparing for some major competition this coming Saturday. NASCAR driver Ken Schrader will be competing in the UPIR season opener, and seemingly everyone at the track is excited. Modified regulars Lonnie Dalgord, John Ostermann, and 2013 Track Champion Dale Peterson all expressed their excitement, each stating that not only is it going to be a great weekend of racing, but having Ken Schrader here is going to be great for the track and racing in Escanaba all together. The modified drivers aren’t the only ones excited about the idea of a NASCAR winning driver racing at UPIR. 600 Micro Sprint driver Scott Degnan, along with 2013 Junior Micro Sprint Champion Jesse Liss both expressed the same amount of excitement as the modified drivers, if not more so.

A new year at UPIR not only brings a new racing season, a reconfigured track, and new drivers, but also a new era of racing in Escanaba with the formation of the UPIRA (Upper Peninsula International Raceway Association). With this newly founded group, UPIR is looking forward to the future, and how to make racing better and better not only in Escanaba , but in the UP as a whole. UPIRA President Tom Dubord is ecstatic about the changes for 2014 and heading forward. With new changes to the track, the new organization, an influx of new drivers, and a huge event with Ken Schrader to kick off the season, Dubord says this will be a great year for racing at UPIR.

On-track action was almost constant throughout Saturday’s open practice session, with brief breaks to water the track and reduce the amount of dust being kicked up into the air. Drivers took turns running 5 laps in pairs shaking down their cars and getting a feel for the newly configured track. Driver Scott Degnan, along with son Drake were two drivers logging many laps during the session, at one point sharing the track with Scott showing Drake different lines around the track. Excluding a few spins, no major accidents occurred during the session. If this practice session is a hint at how the season will be at all, one thing is for sure, and that is, it is going to get wild.

Opening race weekend is this Friday and Saturday May 16-17, gates open at 5:00 EST both days with racing slated to begin at 6:00 EST. For more information visit www.upirtrack.com.