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Tony Bruce Jr. Promotes Memorial Tribute

Forgive Tony Bruce, Jr., if he's been a little tired the last few days.

Working tirelessly to make sure The Steve King Memorial was success took a lot out of Bruce and his family this past weekend at the Jetmore Motorplex.

Bruce, of Liberal, served as the promoter of the event while also driving his No. 18 sprint car against the best the American Sprint Car Series has to offer.

Getting some much-needed rest for Bruce kept him from making the trip to 81 Speedway in Park City and race in the National Championship Racing Association 360 sprint show that night.

Bruce's efforts certainly would have pleased King, who was killed while racing his sprint car at the Knoxville Raceway in August of 2006.

The work Bruce put into the 3/8ths-mile track showed. Bruce spent the four days leading up to Saturday and Sunday night's ASCS 360 sprints and United Rebel Sprint Car Series 305 sprint cars had the best possible track to race on.

And they did.

"I don't think anyone left unhappy after either night," Bruce said. "We were good with our car count and with the number of fans that came out. It was a pretty successful weekend and it seemed like everyone had a good time."

An example of the effort put in by Bruce and his crew came on Friday. Teams were able to get a feel for the surface with a practice session that was held that evening.

More work needed to be done after the practice to make sure the track was in better shape for entertaining racing.

"We stayed up to four in the morning working on it," Bruce said. "We just wanted to make sure it didn't burn up tires after Friday night's practice."

Although that made the track a little rough for Saturday night's show, Bruce said the condition helped showcase the driving ability of his fellow competitors.

But the track was smoother Sunday night and fans filled the grandstands to see some of the best sprint car drivers duke it out for $10,000 paycheck. When the dust settled, 19-year-old Jack Dover of Springfield, Neb., claimed the hefty pay day after mastering the field, which included runner-up and four-time series champion Gary Wright.

While the race for the lead was entertaining, passing wasn't a problem throughout the field as

several drivers utilized the numerous grooves to improve on their poor starting position.

And Bruce was one of those drivers who had to make plenty of passes Sunday night.

In his qualifying heat race, Bruce's motor lost a cylindered. After changing the motor, in accordance with ASCS rules, Bruce had to start at the back of his B-Feature. He then raced from 15th to four, one spot away from transferring.

Bruce took a provisional and started 25th in the A-Feature before racing his way to an eighth-place finish.

The weekend was far from horrible for The Steve King Fund, which aids individuals who are hurt or killed that are involved in dirt racing.

Saturday was deemed Steve King Day in the city of Jetmore and many activities took place.

"It was very encouraging to witness the support the Steve King Fund received from the local community through all the activities that were held on Steve King Day and the support we received from the racing community at the track," said Danette Amstein, King's sister. "Tony and his family did an exceptional job of bringing two great nights of racing to southwest Kansas. Besides local fans, we had fans drive in from Denver and up from Dallas to enjoy the festivities."

Amstein said the Steve King Day and the events at the Motorplex raised over $6,000 for the Steve King Fund. All the funds raised stay in Hodgeman County and are used for scholarships to help area residents in need.

Since the fund's inception, Amstein added, more than $14,000 has been distributed.

Unfortunately for the Kings, the weekend didn't end well on track. After Zach Chappell piloted the No. e85 to a third-place finish Saturday night to lock into Sunday's finale. Chappell was running in the top-10 Sunday before crashing the car with three laps to go.

While Bruce is slowly catching up on his sleep, he said he hopes the event takes place for years to come.

"We had a good turnout and people got to see a good show," Bruce said. "As much positive feed back as we've gotten, we'd like to make it an annual event."

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