

# Davenport Leads Team To \$35,000 Payday At East Bay Raceway



**1** TAMPA, FL – The AES Racing Team was the big winner on Saturday night in the 7th Annual GM Performance Parts World Championship Race for the NeSmith Chevrolet Dirt Late Model Series Championship at East Bay Raceway Park thanks to its three drivers, Jonathan Davenport of Blairsville, Ga., Dennis Franklin of Gaffney, S.C., and Dan Breuer of Troutman, NC.

Davenport won the 100-lap main event to pick up the \$10,000 top prize, Franklin finished second to pocket \$5,000, and Breuer won the \$20,000 NeSmith Chevrolet Dirt Late Model Series Championship. It was a \$35,000 night for the AES Racing Team in the 2011 series finale in front of a packed house at East Bay Raceway Park.

After starting seventh, Davenport took the lead from Devin Dixon of Apollo Beach, FL on the 26th lap and never looked back to take a 1.780 second advantage over Franklin at the checkered flag. While Davenport looked dominate on the race track, it didn't feel or sound that way to the race winner.

"The car was stumbling the whole race, except for the last two laps when it went away and ran fine," Davenport said. "Barry Wright gave us a good set up for tonight and that was the big advantage we had. There was some tough competition out here tonight, and it feels good to win against a very competitive field. I want to

thank Steve Cooke and the AES Racing crew for giving me a fast car tonight."

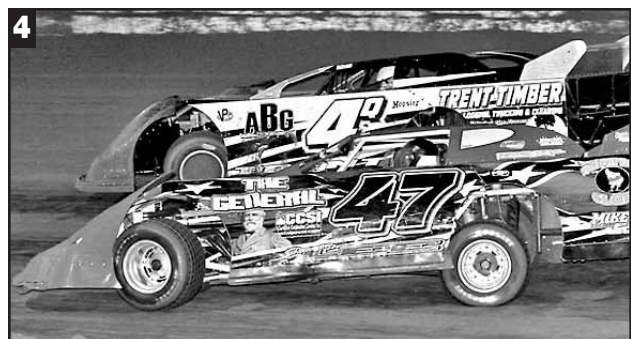
Breuer earned the \$20,000 2011 NeSmith Chevrolet Dirt Late Model Series Championship by taking the green flag for the 100-lap feature. Breuer had to take a provisional to make the race, as did his closest challenger for the title, two-time NeSmith Chevrolet Dirt Late Model Series Champion David Earl Gentry of Murfreesboro, Tenn., in the Eads Farms/Dixon Plumbing Warior.

Breuer finished 14th and Gentry finished 19th in the main event. Breuer ended up with 1,510 points, with Gentry trailing by 64 points at 1,446 points. During the season, Breuer had two wins on his way to the title. He credited his crew and a little luck to winning the championship.

"This AES Racing crew worked hard all season long to keep us in the championship hunt because David Earl Gentry is a tough competitor," Breuer said.

Randy Weaver of Crossville, Tenn., drove the Outlaw Race Products GRT to a seventh-place finish, and in doing so, clinched the 2011 NeSmith Chevrolet Dirt Late Model Series Chassis Manufacturers Championship for GRT Race Cars of Greenbrier, Ark.

Late Model Feature: 1. Jonathan Davenport; 2. Dennis Franklin; 3. Devin Dixon; 4. Mark Witener; 5. Brandon Overton; 6. Steve Francis; 7. Randy Weaver; 8. Philip Cobb; 9. Rodney Wing; 10. Chip Brindle; 11. Jack Nobsch Jr.; 12. Randy Korte; 13. Jeff Mathews; 14.



EAST BAY RACEWAY 1) Dennis Franklin (No. 27) races on the inside of his teammate and eventual winner Jonathan Davenport (No. 37); 2) Getting on his side is Doug Watson (No. 07); 3) Stacey Roberts (No. 11) races to the outside of Brent Glastetter (No. 18); 4) Racing side by side is Shannon Lee (No. 47) and Forrest Trent (No. 4q). (Photos by Robert Wing)



Dan Breuer; 15. Dave Schmauss; 16. Ivedent Lloyd; 17. Shan Smith; 18. Royce Bray; 19. David Earl Gentry; 20. Doug Watson; 21. Tim McCrae; 22. Travis Varnadore; 23. Doug Horton; 24. Jeff Smith; 25. Steve Banal.

## Wall's Turkey Derby: Less Can Be More

**Penn-Jersey Wanderings**

**Tom IAEGER**

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As was revealed in last week's AARN, the Cliff Krause family has taken control of N.J.'s Wall Stadium for the next three seasons. That's a good thing. I believe that Krause is not only the last hope Wall has, I believe he has the vision and resources to pull it off.

However, on another Wall topic, after digesting the track's 2011 edition Thanksgiving weekend Turkey Derby for a week, I would like to make some suggestions for future Derbies.

Both days of racing extended over five hours, with Saturday "clocking" in at over seven from the drop of the initial green to the final checkered flag. That's too long with the warm and beautiful weather we enjoyed, and if it had been as cold as some Derbies I've attended, it would have been horrible.

Although there can be some massaging here and there, for the most part, track management ran the show efficiently. It was the myriad of crashes that led to the lengthy days. The only thing for which I can fault the track was that it was not ready with transponders, and wasted probably half an hour each day checking transponders on some cars. Several times, before the start of a heat, officials had to stop the cars and pass them one after another over the transponder pick-up. Based on the few cars that were sent back to the pits—a sign of transponder failure—I believe that the problem wasn't with the transponders themselves, but rather that the transponder units in the cars had not been properly keyed into the computer.

There did seem to be a bit of confusion with restart line-ups. Whether that was the track's problem or the drivers', the officials had to stop the cars on the track to get them in order all too many times, and it seemed that, once they were lined up, the starter often paced them a lap or two beyond what I thought was necessary.

On the plus side, track management dropped the Tour Modified and Wall Modified consolations, and allowed all cars to start. This saved both time and wear and tear on the competitors. I've long been in favor of scrapping a consolation race and putting everyone in the feature, if that consi is going to eliminate only one or two cars.

My suggestions for future Turkey Derbies can be summed up in four words: Sometimes less is more.

When I attended my first Derby, "Turkey Derby II" back in 1975, it was a one-day affair that was geared totally to the track's three regular divisions, which at the time were full-Modifieds, Sportsman and Modern Stocks. They were the only divisions on the card and the Derby was, to my way of thinking, a celebration, and an exhibition, of Wall's weekly competitors. Sure, being the only race going, it attracted invaders, especially in the Modified division, but it was the regular weekly divisions that were on display.

Over the years, Wall's weekly divisions changed and several classes were added as semi-regulars. Several years ago, the Derby format was changed to a two-day event that brought in several visiting divisions.

While I'm not suggesting that Wall management drop the Derby back to a one-day event, I am suggesting that there was just too much racing and too many divisions offered in this year's Turkey Derby XXXVIII.

In 2011, Wall ran Limited Modifieds, Sportsman, Street Stocks, Legends, and Factory Stocks on an almost weekly basis, and had the ATQMRA Three-Quarter Midgets as a frequent visiting division. Wouldn't these—and the Touring Modifieds for the sake of tradition and for drawing a wider range of fans—be enough racing for a two-day event in what is normally a cold part of the year?

On Friday, Wall ran time trials for its Wall Modifieds, plus full shows for the Sportsman (heats and feature), Legends (heats and feature), dirt Sportsman (time trials and feature), Late Models (time trials and feature), and Factory Stocks (heats and feature). The Saturday schedule included the Wall Modified feature and the

scrapped consolation, plus full shows for the Touring Modifieds (time trials, the scrapped consolation, and feature), dirt Modifieds (time trials and feature), TQ Midgets (heats and feature), and Street Stocks (heats and feature).

As racing evolves into a back gate driven sport, promoters are pretty much universally looking to add divisions to any show that they can, but the Turkey Derby is a different bird from the vast, vast majority of events I attend. It runs on a holiday weekend. It runs with no competition; that is, with no racetrack within a thousand miles running against it. It had a 37, now 38, year history. If there is any event that a promoter can just throw open the gates and the fans will come, this is it. There is no need to rely on the back gate to make it work.

I have to wonder then, did the Derby really need the Late Models? The only other time the Late Models were at the Derby, they pulled a small field. This time they came up with a grand total of ten, and they look very similar to Wall's own Street Stocks. Wall management, not wanting to watch a 75-lap heat, made the excellent decision to drop their feature to 50 laps. Granted, their portion of the show took only about 45 minutes to run, but when you're throwing the first racing green at noon and still going well after sunset, 45 minutes saved in the middle of the show—by leaving a small class at home—would have been downright valuable.

When the Derby schedule was announced, the dirt Sportsman division was to run alone on Friday, with the dirt Modifieds there only for practice. As it turned out, there were so few dirt Sportsman that management combined the two classes and let the Mods run with them. Even combined, they hit only a dozen. Then, the dirt Mods, a non-resident division, were featured for a second time during the weekend when they ran on Sunday. Unlike last year, when they crashed the daylight out of one another, they ran off each day's entire show in well under an hour, but, again, without them, management would have cut 45 minutes out of a long day, and, on what could have been cold, that would have been huge.

Staying with the less is more philosophy, I would have no problem with Wall management cutting the length of some of the races next time 'round. In fact, I hope they do.

Last year, with the track surface brutally cold and traction-free, the Touring Modified feature took in excess of two hours, and I was wishing it had been scheduled for only half of its 150 lap distance. This year, with warm conditions, things went much better, at least until the last few laps. In its formative years, the Derby's Mod races were 150- laps. So, while I'd vote to shorten it to 100 circuits, maybe 150 laps is an untouchable tradition.

I do believe that the Wall Modified feature would be a better race at 75 laps than it is at 100 or, better still, at twin-50s, if they need to go 100 laps. Last year it took an hour and a half to run off 100 laps, and I'd guess it took over an hour this year. That's too long for 33 miles. Back in the early-1990s, just after the full Modifieds left the track and the Wall Mods took over as the top class, the Derby consisted of triple-50s for them, and that remains my favorite format.

The Street Stock 50-lap feature was interminable. The fans erupted in applause when it was announced that the race was being shortened. When the drivers protested, the decision was reversed and it was run to its original distance, but the fans made their opinions known, and I fully agree with them. I'd rather see them go 30 laps next year.

While the Sportsman 50-lapper went fairly well, it did seem a bit long for them. Thirty-five or 40 laps would probably be enough.

The Legends' 35-lap feature probably saw the cars circle the track over 200 times, taking into account all the yellow laps they ran in the hour and a half long race. Again, shorter would have been better, but to what extent can Wall management shorten a 35-lap race? To 25? Maybe the answer here and in other problematic features is not a time limit, but a caution limit. After the 10th caution, unless they are already within five laps of the checkered flag, give them the five to go signal. At the 11th caution, give them the checkered flag.

The Derby has always been one of my favorite races of the season and I'm sure it will continue in that role; however, I truly believe that if it offered a bit less racing, I'd enjoy it even more.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!*