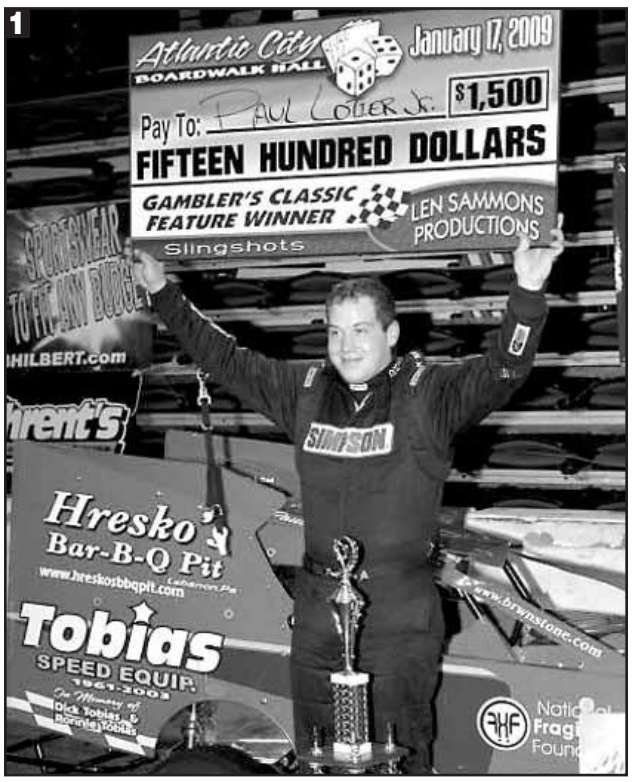
- Butler & Hieber Tangle Battling For The Lead -

Lotier In The Right Place At The Right Time For Slingshot Glory



By BARRY ANGSTADT

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ - In auto racing, the fastest car doesn't always win, and the same goes for the driver who leads the most laps.

Sometimes, you just have to put yourself in position and be in the right place at the right time.

That was the case last Saturday night in Atlantic City, as Paul Lotier, Jr. took advantage of a late race tangle between leaders Mike Butler and Kyle Hieber to win the Briggs & Stratton Battle on the Boardwalk for the Slingshots by Tobias.

"This is the greatest venue that the Slingshots race at all season long," said Lotier. "This event has the greatest atmosphere, and the greatest fans, so it's really fantastic to pull off a victory here."

Vernon McLaughlin III and Butler brought the 24-car field to Warren Alston's green flag, but a six-car pile-up on the backstretch eliminated a few Slingers on the opening lap.

On the second attempt to get the race started, McLaughlin and Butler dueled side-by-side before Butler utilized the outside groove to grab the lead.

Milford, N.J.'s Butler set the pace during the early and middle stages of the 25-lapper, keeping his W.I.N. Motorsports No. 4 at the head of the pack through a plethora of caution periods and nerve-wracking double-file restarts.

Behind him, 12th-starting Kyle Hieber slipped past McLaughlin for the runner-up spot, with McLaughlin returning the favor a couple of laps later.

The red, No. 121 chauffeured by McLaughlin then slowed dramatically, however, and the pilot from White House Station, N.J., fell out of the race with nine tours complete.

Ryan Godown, the dirt Modified ace from Ringoes, N.J., was methodically working his way forward from his seventh starting position. Godown, steering the Rich Sacceta No. 48, moved into third when McLaughlin retired.

The Iceman, Marc Daniels (21st starting spot) and Micro-Sprint hotshoe Jesse Hartman (23rd starter) had climbed into fourth and fifth, respectively, with one-third of the event in the record books.

Daniels ended up against the third turn concrete on a subsequent restart, and it was during this caution period that everyone in the building began to notice an unusual sound coming from one of the cars.

Upon closer inspection, the throaty rumble was eminating from the car of the leader, Mike Butler.

The issue, later discovered to be a faulty head gasket, did not appear to disrupt the Slingshot's performance as Butler continued to show the way.

A Rick Yard flip forced Alston to wave the red flag with 18 complete and set the stage for the race-changing altercation between the top two cars.

As the green reappeared, Jim Housworth and Lotier diced for the fourth position, as Godown pulled off the race track with mechanical problems. He was running third at the time.

With five to go and Hieber right on the leader's rear bumper, the pair made contact coming off corner number four.

Butler spun to the right as he hit the wall, collecting Hieber, with Lotier astutely diving to the bottom to avoid the mishap.

"I could see it coming, so I laid back and waited," smiled Lotier, "and I'm glad I had some room to get by them. They got together in the middle of the track at first, and I wasn't sure I could get around them. But then they went up towards the wall, and I made it past on the bottom."

The Lebanon, Pa. wheel-twister maintained his advantage over Housworth as the final five circuits clicked off without incident.

Lotier flew under the checkered to win by a couple of car-lengths over Housworth, who was set down during post-race inspection for a rule infraction on his No. 72.

"I just tried to keep it straight and hold it down on the guardrail over the last five laps," Lotier said. "I learned a lot from watching Billy Pauch win the TQ feature last night, and that's what he did to protect the lead."

Daniels rebounded from his brush with the concrete to earn second-place money, while Todd Dippel, Walllkill, N.Y., finished third.

SLINGSHOTS SPLINTERS: Lotier's $1,500 victory gave the Tobias family its second consecutive triumph in the Atlantic City Classic. Paulie's uncle, Rich Tobias, scored the Slinger victory in 2008.

It was a very bitter ending for Butler, as he was seeking redemption for his runner-up effort in the previous year's event.

Just as he did in this edition, Butler had a strong car and led the race in '08 before being passed late in the going by Tobias.

Hieber was honest, afterward, about hitting Butler to set off the incident between the leaders.

"Oh yeah, I got into him," stated the teen from Langhorne, Pa. "But I had help...I got shoved from behind, pushing me into Butler."

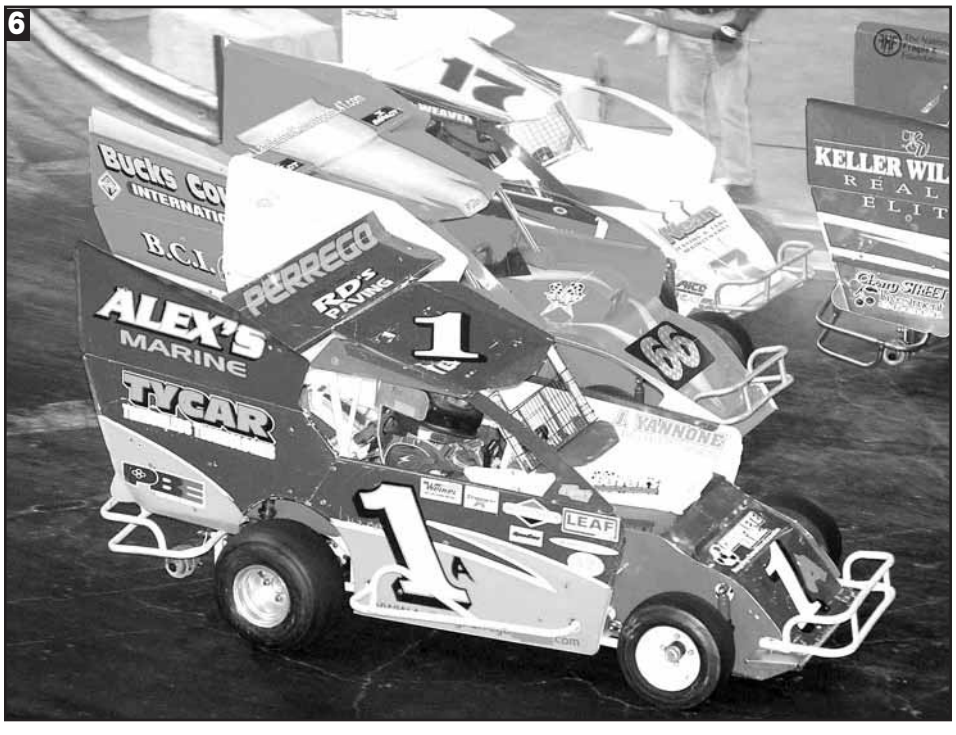
Dirt Modified standout Rick Laubach, driving Housworth's back-up car, started sixth and ran well in the early laps. Laubach was involved in some of the multitude of tangles and scrapes that marred the race, forcing him to drop out well before the checkered.

The tight, bullring style of racing was certainly entertaining but took its toll on equipment, with just four cars remaining on the speedway when the event ended.

In Briggs and Stratton Slingshot qualifying on Thursday night, Michael Butler of Milford, N.J., posted a fast lap of 10.722 seconds. He earned a $100 bonus named in honor the late Dick "Toby" Tobias.

Butler topped Shannon Smith (10.773), Anthony Perrego (10.836), Rick Laubach (10.874), Ryan Godown (10.985) and Willy Evernham (11.120).

Slingshot Feature Finish, 25 Laps: Paul Lotier Jr., Marc Daniels, Todd Dippel, Michael Butler, Kyle Hieber, Ryan Godown, Anthony Perrego, Jesse Hartman, Willy Evernham, Rick Yard, Ricky Yetter, Rick Laubach, Shannon Smith, Michael Glass, Danny Bohn, Kyle Rohner, Billy Weaver, Vernon McLaughlin III, Billy VanInwegen Jr., Gary Hieber, Bobby Butler, Kevin Van Walkenburg, Joel Smith, Jim Housworth.



AC SLINGSHOT ACTION 1) Paul Lotier Jr. was the happy winner last Saturday night; 2) Michael Butler (No. 4) battles with Kyle Hieber (No. 66); 3) Butler and Hieber crashed as they contended for the lead; 4) Rick Yard flips in turn two after a collision with Willy Evernham; 5) Yard continued to slide off the turn; 6) Anthony Perrego (No. 1a), Hieber (No. 66) and Bill Weaver (No. 17) make it three wide.

(Photos by 1&4- Mike Feltenberger; 2&6- Bob Armbruster; 3- Ace Lane Jr; 5- Jim Smith)