

Local Racing Legend Gone At 78

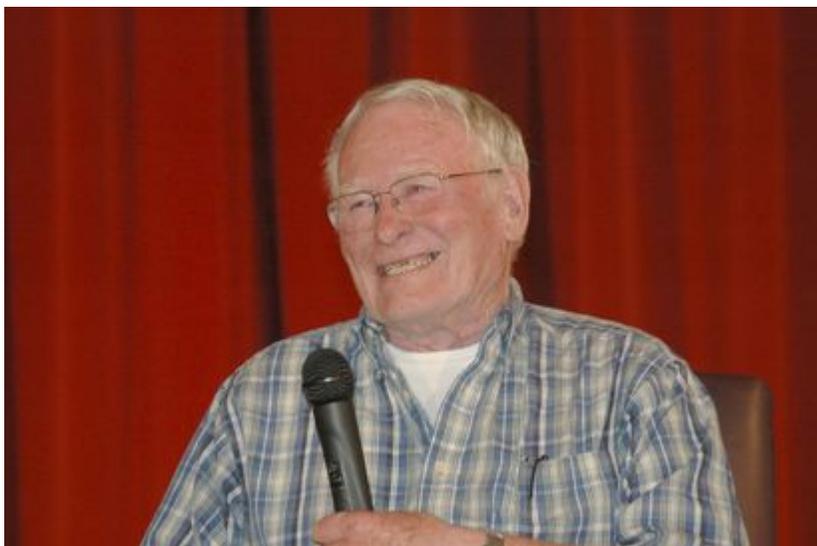
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By Scott Kindberg, Post-Journal

The front of the Carl Cappa Theater at the Robert H. Jackson Center in Jamestown is a who's-who of local dirt-track auto racing.

Seated in the front row, from left to right, are Sammy LaMancuso, Squirt Johns, Tom Dill and Ken See. Standing in the back row are Ron Schnars, Dick Barton, Ron Blackmer, Skip Furlow, Jim Scott, Mick Johnson and Ken Shearer.

Planted firmly in the middle of that group, wearing the biggest smile of the bunch, is one Bobby Schnars.



Local dirt track racing legend Bob Schnars passed away Saturday at the age of 78. P-J file photo by Scott Kindberg

It's May 31, 2015 and the friends and former racing rivals are having a reunion of sorts, thanks to the premiere of "Busti Bobby," a documentary film chronicling Schnars' legendary career, written and produced by Lakewood residents Randy Anderson, Randy Sweeney and Greg Peterson.

After all, if anyone deserves to have his story told on a big screen, it's Schnars, because to most anyone who has followed the local racing scene, the guy behind the steering wheel of the famous M-1 car is larger than life.

Robert E. "Bob" Schnars died peacefully Saturday at his home on Busti-Stillwater Road in Jamestown. He was 78, which means he hadn't raced competitively in nearly 40 years, but it's safe to say that his legacy will live forever.

Although he competed at many other race tracks from 1957-77, Schnars' main focus was at Stateline Speedway and its sister track, Eriez Speedway in Hammett, Pennsylvania. In two decades of racing, Schnars racked up 181 feature race victories and 25 track championships on the Stateline-Eriez circuit.

"When you're talking about 'The King' of Stateline it will always be Bob, as far as I'm concerned," said Anderson, a lifelong fan of auto racing and arguably the area's most noted historian on the subject. "I think Dick (Barton) would say that, too. Dick doesn't want to be known as 'The King' of Stateline. I think he wants to be known as the guy who beat 'The King's' (wins) record, but he doesn't want to be 'The King.'"

In these parts, the figurative throne has room for only one person.

"Even casual sports fans are going to have some recollection of the name Bob Schnars," Anderson told The Post-Journal last year.

Referring to him simply as "Bobby" was usually enough.

"You can't tell the story of Stateline Speedway without telling the story of Bobby Schnars," Anderson said. "He still has a huge following. The guy hasn't raced up there (for decades), but when you go up to Stateline and you say, 'Bobby,' you don't even have to say his last name, because everyone knows who you are talking about."

Anderson didn't meet Schnars until 20 years ago when Barton made the introduction.

"To me, (Schnars) was like on some mountaintop, like he was unapproachable."

On a figurative mountaintop, yes.

Unapproachable?

Hardly.

"Bob Schnars was my hero as a kid," Anderson said, "because he won all the time. That's what every fan wants. You want to be on the winning team, don't you?"

The "team" of former drivers that turned out at the Jackson Center almost exactly a year ago were all champions in their own right. Heck, Barton, Blackmer and Furlow are all inductees of the Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame, joining Schnars in that exclusive fraternity.

But there was only one "Bobby."