



SOUTHERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AUTO RACING COMMISSION
In Conjunction With The
MUSEUM OF SPEED AT THE BEDFORD FAIRGROUNDS
4th Quarter 2020

I feel relatively sure we have never experienced a year that we were more glad to see come to an end than 2020. As we continue to confront the virus and process its deadly impact, we now have reason to be optimistic as vaccines are slowly being administered. So, let us keep the faith and respect each other in the process.

Many speedways either cancelled or altered their winter banquet routine, Bedford was one. We will recognize the 2020 Bedford Champions from each class. In the Super Late Models Jeff Rine captured 4 feature wins in the Elbin 92 and pulled down his 6th point title, closing within 1 of all-time leader Jack Pencil's 7. Spike Moore was both the Late Model Sportsman champion and the leading feature winner with 3 victories. In the Modifieds Mike Altobelli Jr was the driver to beat garnering 5 feature wins while earning his first point championship. Consistency was the name of the game for Semi-Late point champ Bill Replogle as he captured just 2 feature wins in this always competitive class. Pure Stock point champion Dalton Ritchey picked up 3 feature wins and numerous up-front finishes on his way to his first title. In the 4 cylinder class it was the consistent driving of Darren Howsare and his 2 feature wins that earned the point championship. Overall, 2020 had to be deemed a success on the Bedford track despite all the unique distractions and challenges for the Speedway's Officials. The fan base also deserves enormous credit for supporting the track each and every week. The Museum of Speed also wishes to congratulate all last year's point Champions, and each and every driver that towed into the Bedford pits last year. Thank you.

In this episode of the historical corner, we conclude our examination of the controversial pari-mutuel wagering referendum confronting the voters of Bedford County in the spring of 1965. To illustrate how far back this topic was discussed, on July 18th, 1953 the Bedford Gazette sports editor ran a story that highlighted the revenue generated for Allegany County and the State of Maryland each time the Cumberland Fairgrounds conducted a session of legalized pari-mutuel horse racing. He emphasized the amount of vehicle traffic heading south through Bedford County towards the Fairgrounds each time they raced, business and tax revenue leaving Pennsylvania.

Fast forward 12 years and now of all locations Bedford County found itself one

election day short of receiving a coveted State issued pari-mutuel permit for the fairgrounds. The referendum on the spring ballot gave every eligible voter in the County the right to approve or defeat the projected \$6 million sports complex that would include a legalized horse racing operation. For some it was the economic opportunity of a lifetime, but for many it was a moral issue that required a virtuous response. Primary election day, May 18th, dawned sunny and pleasant. On a day when few County races of any significance were being contested voters poured into the polling houses in unprecedented numbers to voice their opinion. Early returns that evening, mainly from Bedford Borough and Township, tallied at one point almost 1,600 votes approving the referendum. Optimism among the supporters ran high well into the evening, back slaps and hugs were in order. But as the evening drug on and the smaller rural precincts reported their results, the vote lead dwindled along with the mood in the room. Ultimately the no's prevailed by defeating the referendum by 655 votes out of more than 13,000 votes cast that day, a day that will forever have undetermined significance in County history. We can only speculate what might have been. But we do know six years later in 1971 Pennsylvania legalized public gambling when the lottery was instituted. Some of the same people that vehemently opposed the horse racing referendum now patiently stood in line at local outlets to purchase their gambling tickets. So apparently to some it was not really a moral problem with wagering, but perhaps with the fear of the unknown. The opportunity was dead, so the developers packed up and left town.

The Fairgrounds once again seemed destined to be silent with little activity other than the 7 days during fair week each summer. However, that would change a mere two months later when Breezewood businessman Roy Morral worked out an agreement with the Fair Association to promote weekly auto races beginning after the 1965 Fair. Within a 3 month span Bedford transitioned from hosting a professional sports complex which included horse racing, to a weekly auto racing track that continues today. If the wagering referendum was approved there is absolutely no way auto racing would have continued beyond the 1965 Fair race. The track and facilities would have been modified to accommodate horses and only horses. So in essence as a lifetime auto race supporter, I'm grateful how everything played out, yet I still wonder what if. Fifty-five years later we celebrate and embrace our rich auto racing heritage at Bedford and thank the car racing enthusiasts that unintentionally paved the way for horsepower rather than horses by rejecting the 1965 referendum.

On a regretful note, the Museum of Speed's annual February preseason fundraising party has been cancelled for this year. A decision was required last month to have proper time to not just rent a venue, but also organize all that is essential to assemble such an event. The Museum's Board of Directors will miss this opportunity to promote our sport while sharing an evening with a lot of great race fans and some of our region's all-time best racers, past and present. We will also miss one of our key early season fundraising events, but like you we'll make some adjustments and withstand the shortfall of revenue normally generated from this social gathering. We wish to thank everyone that has supported our previous parties and look forward to future events.

First practice at Bedford, March 27th. Follow us on the web at, museumofspeedatbedford.com, or email at, mos@museumofspeedatbedford.com.