

YESTERYEAR AT THE UNIONTOWN SPEEDWAY 1918

An excerpt from the book, *Yesteryear at the Uniontown Speedway*
by Marci Lynn McGuinness

Since President Wilson declared war in 1917 "to make the world safe for Democracy", many of the young racers and racing managers had been called into service. Billy Taylor who had won the second annual Universal Cup that past year, was shot down over France and crashed to his death. Others who had entered the service at that time were Art Klein, Eddie Rickenbacher, Charlie Ewan, and Ora Haibe. Neil Whalen had been made captain in charge of a tank regimen.

BIG CROWD IS AT SPEEDWAY RACES TODAY

Papers thrilled that there were hundreds more fans at the board track for the May 1918 season opener Liberty Sweepstakes than ever before. Fair weather blessed Hopwood as the Uniontown Military Band and singer Helen Rush entertained during the day's preliminary warm-ups. A patriotic war address was given by Reverend E.A. Hodil. The Universal Race had twelve drivers and consisted of four heats of 24 miles/27 laps. The winner of each heat competed in the final heat. Five thousand dollars in gold was distributed to the winners, the largest pot being \$1,500.00 in the final heat. A Special Three Heat Match was run for the World's Track Championship where they ran 3 heats of 10 laps/11 1/4 miles each. Barney Oldfield and Louis Chevrolet competed in this with Oldfield taking his Golden Sub over the finish line two car lengths ahead of the popular Frenchman, for a pot of gold worth \$5,000.00.

The May 16, 1918 Liberty Sweepstakes Universal Race entrants were:

Driver	Entrant	Car
Eddie Hearne	L. Chevrolet	Frontenac Special
L. Chevrolet	L. Chevrolet	Frontenac "
	Omar Toft	Duesenberg
I.P. "Red" Fetterman	F.D. Saupp	Peerless
Omar Toft	Omar Toft	Miller
George B. Gardner	George B. Gardner	Hudson
Thomas Milton	A.S. Deussenberg	Duesenberg
Fred McCarthy	Fred McCarthy	Hudson
R.K. Mulford	R.K. Mulford	Frontenac
R.M. Shoff	Lawrence Motor Company	Lawrence
Denny Hickey	Fred McCarthy	Duesenberg
Ira Vail	Ira Vail	Hudson
Barney Oldfield	Barney Oldfield	Oldfield's Golden Sub
Louis LeCocq	Louis LeCocq	Roamer

R. Mulford Takes Third Trophy Leg

The final heat was between Mulford, Milton, L. Chevrolet, and Eddie Hearne. Milton had a safe lead in the first heat. Oldfield made headway in the second start, but was bowled over by Mulford. Eddie Hearne beat Fred McCarthy in the third spring after a heady match. Chevrolet took the fourth heat, but Ira Vail and I.P. Fetterman were disqualified after accidents which hurt their automobiles more than their persons. Dutch Thompson was in the grand stand, but did not have the government's permission to take to the air, so there was no aerial show that day. Even though the war was on, the gate receipts for this race were \$40,000.00.

The following headline appeared in the Morning Herald July 16, 1918:

MILTON SMASHES TRACK RECORD AT 107 MILES AN HR.

Tommy Milton, driver for the Duesenberg team, used his powerful 12 cylinder Roamer to turn the fastest lap ever run on the Uniontown Speedway in the qualifying trials the day before the big races. This proved the speedway association's claim that the track had the ability to produce speeds up to 106mph. Just after he caught his breath in the pits, Milton told reporters, "The boys will have to beat the Roamer and your Uncle Tom Thursday to get the money. Both myself and my car are ready for the best race of the season."

Barney Oldfield had been "big brother" to Milton for years on the racing circuit and had this retort for his protégé, "You know what the Golden Sub did to Chevrolet on the 16th. She is faster than ever today and if you get the checkers before I do you'll know that you have been through one real automobile race. It won't be a joy ride, boy." Oldfield began his racing career when Henry Ford was having trouble making a profit selling automobiles and decided to build a race car to raise prize money. Oldfield was hired as the driver for Ford's #999 and won several races for him.

On July 17, Charlie Johnson met with the United States Fuel Administration and agreed to hold the races at 3pm to allow coal production a full day's work as the war was on. The Independence Day Auto Derby was held July 18, 1918. Milton, Chevrolet, Mulford, and Hickey were slated as top contenders for the money.

CHEVROLET IS INVINCIBLE ON LOCAL SAUCER

For the second time, Louis Chevrolet took first place on the Uniontown Speedway Boardtrack. At the beginning of the 100 lap grind, I.P. Fetterman's green Peerless caught fire and was damaged beyond repair, disqualifying a fine contender. Just minutes later, George Gardner failed to notice the red "no start" flag and slammed into a group of cars that were making their preliminary lap to the flying start line. They were moving along at about 45mph when Gardner shot up at them going 80mph. Omar Toft, Dutch Thompson, Tom Milton, and Fred McCarthy had their race cars twisted about; Gardner's turning quickly over. Gardner and McCarthy were put out of the race, but no one was injured.

During the first ten laps old timer Barney Oldfield led Chevrolet on his hardest chase of the entire race. After ten laps Oldfield's tires gave up which put him out long enough to totally lose first place for the day. Twice Chevrolet stopped for tire changes losing his leads to Mulford and then Toft. Hearne had a sure second place in the 99th lap when he blew a tire 200 yards from the grandstand, stomped his brakes so he could stop at the pits and turned the car around. This lost his 2nd place to Toft; Hearne taking 3rd, Mulford 4th, Milton, 5th, and Oldfield 6th.

Other races held that day were:

The International Match Race where Oldfield beat Arthur Duray.

Chevrolet beat Milton in a 5 lap scoot and Hearne beat Mulford in another 5 lapper.

In the 16 lap/18 mile Australian Pursuit Race Denny Hickey took first place in his Hudson, over Toft and McBride.

MULFORD WINS RACE BEFORE GREAT CROWD

Under beautiful skies and before 30,000 people Smiling Ralph Mulford set a track average speed record of 97.24 in the 100 lap 1918 Autumn Classic. Chevrolet, Toft, Duray, Fetterman, and Milton followed. The Frontenac team had a great day finishing first, second, and fourth!

The Italian racer, Resta, competed with Chevrolet and Mulford in the first heat of the match races, but acquired a splinter in his front tire on the death curve, sending him into a tail spin and taking him out of the game. Denny Hickey had a similar accident toward the race's end and skillfully held the car on its wheels, bringing himself and his mechanic out unhurt. Chevrolet had been leading the big race all the way, but a tire change cost him his place.

In the paper discussing this same race they stated, "Whether or not there will be racing here next year is unsettled. Probably not. But plans are already underway to turn the big oval into an aviation field and with the amplification of the aeronautical program of the army there is a likelihood that a flying school may be located here. This would enable the money put into the big plant to function towards winning the war, something its promoters and owners are extremely anxious to do.

Luckily, fighting officially ended November 11, 1918 and racing continued for four more seasons!