



REmarks

Chicago Region RE, Rick Bentson

July 1, 2016

What a month June has been! The first 9 days of the month were the calm before the storm of events. Beginning June 10 things got real with 44 cars taking to the track at our PDX Track Day event at Autobahn Country Club. Yours truly served as Chief Steward, with an assist from George Laws so I could exit early to get some sleep before getting up at half-past-the-middle-of-the-night for the drive to Blackhawk Farms, timed to arrive in time for the morning Worker meeting to work corners for the Milwaukee/Blackhawk Valley regions Double Divisional race weekend. This would be weekend one of the June Triple Header of race weekends.

Following the Blackhawk Farms weekend, the **61st running of the Chicago Region June Sprints** at Road America greeted 308 entries with great weather (unlike last year, which featured 3 days of rain) and 3 days of very competitive racing, including 67 Spec Racer Fords! As an added bonus for the spectators in attendance the Battery Tender Mazda MX-5 Cup pro series was included on the weekend's schedule, bringing an additional 42 cars and their own brand of great racing.

As a Jack-of-all-Trades of sorts for the weekend I had the pleasure of being able to experience the many flavors of the June Sprints and I gotta tell ya, I couldn't be more proud of the event we put on! From Registration, to Tech (with free soft-serve ice cream for drivers, crew and anyone else who stops by!), to the amazing job done by the combined Road America/SCCA crew in Race Control, to the best corner marshalling crew in the country (a bit of personal bias there, I admit, but I don't think I'm wrong), to the best, and I mean the BEST podium ceremony in all of amateur racing. If you haven't taken the opportunity to see a June Sprints podium ceremony, put it on your list. Patrick and Dennis Morgan and the Coulter clan do an amazing job. Our podium ceremonies rival that of most professional race series. And this year we were the first automotive event to use Road America's new Victory Circle podium in the paddock area.

I also had the pleasure of meeting and spending some time with our 2016 June Sprints Grand Marshal Sgt Liam Dwyer. A true American Hero, Liam served 2 tours in Afghanistan, and lost his left leg and suffered many other serious injuries to an IED during his second tour. He's undergone 50+ surgeries to put the pieces back together and get them working again, yet his spirit and enthusiasm for life survived intact. As Grand Marshal Liam did everything asked of him and more, from taking an "inspection" lap of the course and officially pronouncing the track ready for racing before the first race on Saturday (in the Mazda MX-5 Cup pace car, with Mazda's North American Director of Motorsports John Doonan driving), to waving the green flag for the Spec Miata races (did I mention that despite his injuries Liam races a Mazda in the Continental series?), to attending both the Friday and Saturday worker parties to meet and greet the volunteers, to signing autographs for the spectators, he did it all. He even brought World Challenge pro driver Tom Long along to the worker party Saturday night, and both of them signed the 2 drivers suits that were raffled off to a pair of lucky volunteers. Liam then suggested he offer the winners of those suits on a hot lap ride in the MX-5 Cup pace car during lunch on Sunday. Corner Marshal Serena Grap took him up on the offer and instead of a single lap they did three. I think the smile on Serena's face will have to be surgically removed. I am very honored to have had the opportunity to meet Liam. He's a remarkable human being.

Big thanks to all our volunteers for ensuring a safe, professional and well-run event; thanks to the 300+ drivers and crew for attending the Sprints and putting on such a good show, thanks to our many sponsors, who provided over \$70,000 in cash and awards, providing the June Sprints with the biggest award pool in all of SCCA with the possible exception of the Runoffs, and special thanks to **Advanced Autosports** for sponsoring the Saturday night Worker Dinner.

The return of IndyCars to Road America on June 24-26 completed the June Triple Header weekends, for which Chicago Region provided staffing for corners and few other specialties. I was back to working corners and spent the weekend on Corners 5 and 4A (thank you Flag Chief Jim Krueger for that plum assignment).

With IndyCar, all of the Road to Indy support series and all 4 Pirelli World Challenge group the schedule was packed but the racing was excellent! Saturday in particular was a challenging day for the corner crews, starting with the morning meeting at 6:50AM and ending with the final checker at about 7:15PM and no lunch break. Sunday was much easier, with a couple of hour-long breaks and a 4PM finish. Sunday was the first time I had the opportunity to work station 4A, which is about 200 yards before the IndyCars brake for turn 5. The station is literally 8 feet from the racing surface and the IndyCars come by at over 180mph. Talk about an E-ticket vantage point! As corner-mate Ed Danecki observed, working a station like that spoils you from ever wanting to watch a race from the spectator side of the fence again.

All weekend long the corner marshals had the voice of Chicago Region member Joanne Jensen in our headsets, as she works for IndyCar as Chief Observer (what we would call Chief Communicator), as does Chicago Region alum Jim Swintal. Both also work for IMSA and will be back to Road America in August for the WeatherTech Sports Car Championship weekend, which Chicago Region will also be staffing.

Not to be overlooked, although I was unable to attend due to the conflict with the June Sprints was our 3rd **Solo event** of the season at RT 66 in Joliet. What a great season Solo is having! I don't have the entry numbers for the most recent event but the first 2 events of the year each had close to 180 competitors. After the extreme challenges of last year our Solo folks deserve a good season, and they are getting one this year.

Check the event calendar for other things going on in July – our third PDX of the season is coming up on Friday, July 8th, followed closely by another PDX, the Grand Subaru Invitational PDX on Sunday, July 10. Our 4th Solo event is on the 17th, followed the very next day by our joint Chicago/Milwaukee region full-day PDX at Blackhawk Farms. Come on out and give your street car a workout.

Chicago Region club racing takes time off in July, but Milwaukee region hosts their Cat Majors race at Road America on the last 2 days of the month.

Til next month –

See you at the races!

Rick Bentson
Regional Executive