

FX TRIBUNE

Weekend Preview: Lewis Hamilton sneaks into Toronto; NASCAR showdown at 'Dega; Hinch's name really 'Ricardo'? Cheating drivers lose lawsuit; Canadian drag racers honoured; \$10,000 to win an Enduro? Sign me up! | Toronto Star

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Lewis Hamilton was in Toronto - again - earlier this week as he made his way south to Austin, Tex., where the U.S. Grand Prix will be held this Sunday.

Since Austin is pretty much in our time zone, you won't have to stay up late on Saturday night or haul yourself out of bed early on Sunday morning to watch any of the practice sessions, the qualifying, or the race itself.

In fact, the first practice session for Sunday's GP is at 2:45 p.m. today (Friday) on TSN2 (which overlaps slightly with the NASCAR Sprint Cup practice that's on from 2 until 3 on TSN5).

I expect everybody will be watching the racing cars Friday and Saturday (Sunday's another matter) because there really isn't anything else going on when it comes to sport. The Argos are awful, the Jays are history for this year, anyway, and the Leafs (as usual) are still doing a lot of talking and not a lot of walking. Any team that has a 4-0 lead at the start of the third period, as they had against Winnipeg on Wednesday night, and winds up losing, 5-4, does not deserve to be watched. As the ranchers in the American West would put it: the Leafs are "all hat and no cattle." To paraphrase Phil Ochs: I ain't watchin' anymore.

In any event, Hamilton popped into Toronto when he first got to North America at the beginning of the week. Wouldn't know it, though, except for a photo he posted to his Twitter account in which you can see the CN Tower as clear as a bell in the background. So I can't tell you if he came to hang with the Raptors, or to drop in on his old pal Drake, or maybe even to watch the Blue Jays, but you can bet it was to see something or somebody.

But Hamilton plays this stuff close to his vest. If you call the folks at Mercedes-Benz Canada, they can't tell you if he's been around because they're in the dark. Which is okay, because he's on his own time. But it would be nice if he'd let us know he was coming, wouldn't it?

He's trailing teammate Nico Rosberg by nearly two dozen points going into the American GP. But things can turn around quickly in F1: if he should happen to win the race on Sunday and Rosberg has an off-day, the point swing could result in fingernail biting time.

The race on Sunday, incidentally, is on TSN3 at 2:55 p.m. If you want to watch the pre-race show, it will start at 1:30 on TSN3 followed by the pre-race show at 2.

The NASCAR race, on TSN5, will come on at 2. It should be a doozy, as it's being run at Talladega and of all the Chase races, it could be the hardest to win. The Crash Factor at 'Dega makes it almost impossible to predict a winner. Even the drivers won't go out on a limb.

As of today, only two racers - Jimmie Johnson and Kevin Harvick - have qualified to move on to the next three races in which the Round of Eight will be cut in half for the winner-takes-all showdown at Homestead-Miami Speedway on Nov. 20. Of the 10 drivers who are trying for the final six spots, the bottom four of Austin Dillon, Denny Hamlin, Brad Keselowski and Chase Elliott would appear to be the most vulnerable.

But, again, it's Talladega, where anything can happen - and usually does. One way or the other, it's going to be exciting.

The IndyCar community lost a good friend in recent days with the passing of Buddy Sokolick, 60. He worked for a concert production company in the States that presented shows starring people like the Rolling Stones or the Boss but he spent his weekends in the Indy racing paddock working part-time for various teams. He did it for 30 years and it was all for the love of the game. He will be missed. R.I.P., Buddy.

James Hinchcliffe is hanging in on Dancing With The Stars in more ways than one. His dancing is great, I guess (I am not one to judge, seeing as I have two left feet whenever I am dragged onto a dance floor, which does not happen often) but his zany personality is what's really grabbing everybody's attention.

You know that years ago he created the mythical online community of Hinchtown and appointed himself mayor, don't you? Now, whenever DWTS requires him to add a little flamenco to his routine, he's created "Ricardo," an alter ego who is sly, suave and sexy.

It's working. Big time.

I suggested to a friend the other day that Hinch is so valuable as a performer as well as a racer that it's a wonder some NASCAR owner hasn't tried to poach him, seeing as Danica has proved to be capable but ordinary. Hinch, I said, could be a winner in the Sprint Cup as well as a character. Plus the racing would be safer.

And my friend surprised me by suggesting it might already have happened. "He was rumoured to be going to Ganassi," my friend wrote. "Maybe it's NASCAR Ganassi."

Maybe.

Change of pace: the 2006 Moto GP champion, **Nicky Haden**, will ride a Honda in place of the injured **Dani Pedrosa** at this weekend's Australian Grand Prix race. Pedrosa broke his collarbone when he fell off during practice for last weekend's MotoGP race in Japan. **Marc Marquez** won that race, which gave him his third championship,

And believe it or not, tickets are on sale now for the Sat., March 4, 2017 appearance at the Rogers Centre of the **Monster Energy AMA Supercross**, featuring 2016 champion **Ryan Dungey**, last year's Toronto race winner **Ken Roczen** and familiar names like **James (Bubba) Stewart**, **Chad Reed** and **Eli Tomac**. Call Ticketmaster or go to the Rogers Centre Box Office to get your tickets - it's almost always either a sellout or close to one.

Crime Doesn't Pay, Dept: Remember those five **DirtCAR Racing** drivers who were found to have been treating their tires with illegal substances and were kicked out, fined and suspended, only for them to turn around and sue the sanctioning body?

Well, they had their case thrown out in a U.S. court this week. They then asked to be reinstated and said they would pony up the penalty money.

Now look, in weekend warrior stock car racing, a lot of stuff goes on and the officials turn a blind eye. We're talking about racers who show up every week and spend a lot of money to do it and don't stand a chance in hell of ever winning anything. So they run stroker engines and nobody really cares. And they soak their used, hard tires in stuff that makes them soft and sticky again - at least for awhile. But, as I say, they are never going to win anything so they are allowed to get away with it.

But these guys who were nailed are top professional racers who all, over the course of a 10- or 11-month season, are going to make well in excess of \$250,000. They are full-time guys who start in Florida in January and haul north for the summer and then either go back to Florida or out to California for October and maybe a bit of November.

In the end, drivers **Scott Bloomquist**, **Gregg Satterlee**, **Jimmy Owens** and **Ricky Thornton** had their suit dismissed against World Racing Group and subsidiary DIRTcar Racing and Eldora Speedway and its owner, **Tony Stewart**. It was at the Eldora Dream race when these guys were caught. **Brandon Sheppard** dropped out of the suit earlier.

All five were disqualified from the event, including the loss of all purse money and championship points earned during the event, fined \$1,000 and penalized 1,000 points. The total penalty, including loss of money, fine and the cost of the tire analysis was \$19,630 for Sheppard, \$4,655 for Satterlee, \$7,630 for Owens, \$10,930 for Thornton and \$6,105 for Bloomquist.

"We're happy this is over," said DIRTcar Racing COO **Tom Deery**, in a release. "It is a waste of resources that should have been invested in the sport rather than damaging it and polarizing fans."

Amen.

And now for something completely different.

My friend and colleague - and the motorsport columnist for the Hamilton Spectator - **Tim Miller** sent me the following media release this week. I am printing it here, without editing. It's a good news story about a lot of good guys:

Twenty-three of Canada's drag racing legends were inducted into the **Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame** at the Second Annual Gala held at Hôtel Universel in Montreal on Sat., Oct. 15, 2016. Among the inductees recognized this year was world champion **Gianni Cantusci**.

"I am honoured to be inducted into the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame among all these legends," said Cantusci, who was accompanied by his family and his father, **Frank Cantusci**, who was inducted last year.

"It's a privilege to witness the class of 2015 welcome this year's inductees," said **John Scotti**, Founder of the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame. "Seeing the positive reactions from members of the drag racing community at each annual induction, is truly a rewarding experience to be a part of."

The newly inducted legends included racers, crew chiefs, engine and chassis builders, mechanics, track officials and track photographers, announcers, promoters and sponsors from St. Albert, Alta., to Windsor, N.S., who have made a lasting impact and significant difference in the development of the sport of drag racing in Canada and elsewhere.

Accompanied by family and friends, the 23 drag racing legends were honoured with a custom tailored 'Blue Blazer' bearing the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame logo and a custom designed Hall of Fame ring.

"With each new induction, the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame Museum is expanding with new artefacts and memorabilia, thanks to each inductee and the drag racing community," said **Bob Aubertin**, Director of the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame.

"Not only are we recognizing some of our nation's drag racing 'Greats,' it also shows today's generation just how far the sport has really grown."

To be eligible for induction into the Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame, candidates must have actively been engaged at the top level of their categories for more than 25 years and have made a tremendous contribution to the sport. They must have established a national record as an individual or a member of a team (NHRA/IHRA national record or National Event Win).

Other inductees may come from other drag racing areas such as photographer, track operator, etc. They must also reside or be an expatriate of Canada.

The Canadian Drag Racing Hall of Fame is a non-profit organization that is based in Montreal at 7905 Boulevard Provencher, Saint-Leonard, Que. Founded in 2014 by John Scotti, President of John Scotti Automotive Group, it is the only organization that recognizes drag racing professionals in Top Fuel, Funny Car, Pro-Stock and Sportsman categories.

Here is the list of inductees.

Ken Achs, Saskatoon, Sask.; **Ron Hodgson**, St. Albert, Alta.; **Jeff Arend**, Thornhill, Ont.; **Richard Jones**, Ottawa; **Bob Beazer**, Odessa, Ont.; **Bill Kydd**, London, Ont.; **Vic Beleny**, Welland, Ont.; **Wayne Lang**, London, Ont.; **Gianni Cantusci**, Ottawa; **Abe Loewen**, Regina, Sask.; **Guy Desjardins**, Montreal; **Brian Mulligan**, Cornwall, Ont.; **Bob Elliott**, London, Ont.; **Norm Noddle**, Wasaga Beach, Ont.; **Rob Evans**, London, Ont.; **Harold Parfett**, Edmonton, Alta.; **Geoff Goodwin**, Prince Albert, Sask.; **Venice Perno**, Stoney Creek, Ont.; **Charlie Haviland**, London, Ont.; **Rob Potter**, Dundas, Ont.; **Vince Hazel**, Windsor, Ont.; **Bert Straus**, Kitchener, Ont.; **John Waldie**, Embro, Ont.

Okay, it's Norris again.

End of media release.

I know John Waldie. He's a personal friend. I can say with no exaggeration that if it hadn't been for John Waldie over the years, half the drag racers and stock car racers in southwestern Ontario wouldn't have been able to afford to go racing. Whether it was some money here, some tires there, or a job in the shop at Stratford Motor Products that he used to own, an awful lot of racers owe a big vote of thanks to that man.

Don't believe me? Go ask Scott Steckly. He'll tell you.

Oh, as an FYI. The annual induction gala of the **Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame** scheduled for Saturday night in the Glenn Gould Theatre in the CBC Building in downtown Toronto is – wait for it – sold out. If you were planning to go, well, there's always next year, Remember, if ya snooze, ya lose.

LOCAL RACING: An incredible amount of money is up for grabs at **Flamboro Speedway** this weekend. For an entry fee of \$150, you can enter a 300-lap Enduro and the winner will be paid - are you ready for this? - **\$10,000.** I'm seriously thinking of coming out of retirement.

Meantime, at Flamboro last weekend, ace PR man **Randy Spencer** reports that after a two-week delay, the annual year-end Frostoberfest race weekend at Bennett Chevrolet Flamboro Speedway finally got under way.

With the forecast for day two looking bleak, changes to the schedule made the annual two day event a one day event. With time constraints, the Grisdale Late Models were the casualty and originally that part of the show was planned to be moved to early 2017. But that has changed and it will take place in late October.

Also double qualifying heats were now changed to single heats. The Flamboro Stadium & Speedway Hall of Fame Pure Stocks had heat wins went to Andy Wheller and Ross Winters Jr. Klotz Auto Repair & Engine Machine Shop Mini Stock heat wins went to Russ Aicken, Lane Zardo and Kevin Bridge. Ray's Auto Centre & Towing Thunder Car heat wins went to Brandon McFerran, Steve Ecker and Vaughn Lawrence. Dan Nanticoke won the single heat for the Pro Four Modifieds. OSCAAR were on hand and the Midget heat wins went to Owen Elliott and Brent Kemps. The Pro Midget heat wins went to Adrian Kemps and Daniel Hawn. And the Modified heat wins went to Luke Gignac and Gary McLean. B features were run for Pure Stocks, winner was Jacob Robb, Mini Stocks winner was Rick Schwartzberg and Thunder Car winner was Dennis Cybalski.

Due to the large car counts and my job as scorer, it was impossible to make notes as I usually do for the weekly races. So I can only list the winners, full results and overall results for the Thunder Cars and Mini Stocks.

The London Recreational overall winner in Mini Stocks was Cory Young and Thunder Cars was Steve Ecker.

Please join us October 22nd for the Halloween Enduro 300 plus Demolition Derby. Pits open at 11am, front gate at 1pm and racing starts at 4pm.

And October 29th, the Grisdale Triple 50's for Late Models and a Mini Stock Invitational with twin 30 lap features are planned. Pits open at 10am, Front gates at noon and racing starts at 2pm. For further information on both events please contact John Casale at 905-659-3042.

Huge thanks to Mike Schmidt of London Recreational for all the work he put into this event and Stock Car Racing in Ontario!!

Thanks to Ingrid Hartman for videos and Derek Smith (www.racepulse.com) and Mike Kiers (www.cableguyphotos.com) for photographs. Also, thanks to Ashley McCubbin for the OSCAAR results.

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