

Michael LaBelle's / Weirbach Racing

Lima Half Mile Report

This whole week I could think of nothing else but the next round of the AMA Pro Flat track series in Lima Ohio. Last week in Indiana was probably the worst day in a long time, and as many people have told me over the past few days it will probably not be my last bad racing day. However, as I have told my family and friends over this long week, "let the past be the past and let's go racin". My Father and I commandeered my grandmothers ford focus on Friday afternoon and headed down towards Lima, Ohio. Last year I had struggled at this track, even though people had high expectations for me due to the fact that in Canada stone half-mile racing is all we have. The trip down was pretty smooth and did kind of nice to only have to drive 6 hours instead of the average 10 hours, and after the 6 hour drive we arrived in Lima Ohio right at mid-night. Even though I was extremely tired, I got absolutely NO sleep because all I wanted to do was go Half-Mile racing!

We arrived at the Lima state Fairgrounds Saturday morning and got into the already long line to enter the pits and waited for what seemed forever (I have found waiting to be a big part of our day). At 10:30am the AMA crew, with a little help from the local Police, let us into the mad scramble to find a place to pit. After getting everything up to tech inspection and a little chat with the AMA crew, all the riders got dressed and we were up in staging fired up and ready to go cushion riding. The track was just how Canadians like it, it had slightly banked corners and very wide which was good for passing, plus had a deep Cushion from top to bottom.

The first session went very well from start to finish because I had managed to catch and pass two of the riders ahead of me, both of which were pretty far ahead by the time I hit the track. The cushion was tossing me around, so I actually tried to ride under it, the bike was running great and I felt right at home. When I got back to the pit I had a talk with my team-mate Mikey Martin, and we both decided that our gearing was a little off. My dad and Dick Weirbach quickly changed to gearing we thought was rather bizarre but we thought it was worth a try. The first timed session went just as well as the first, I had once again managed to catch and pass a couple of riders ahead of me for a top ten fastest time. This time we thought the gearing was awesome but made a couple adjustments before I went out for my last timed session to try and make things easier. However the changes we made couldn't really help me much because the Cushion was so rough that I couldn't ride it, and the bottom was very slick and had no traction. Somehow I still managed to post the 3rd fastest time of the session which gave me an 7th fastest time of the day and a much needed front row start in my heat race.

It seems like the further we get into the season the worse the waiting gets but after the fans had left the pits and the opening ceremonies were over, I found myself sitting on the front row of the first Pro singles heat race. The green light lit up and 16 of us hit the first corner wide open. I found myself in 3rd place coming out of the first corner and I was picking up ground on the leaders fast. Going into the 3rd corner I slipped under the rider ahead of me for 2nd, we exited 4 and saw a red flag. Everyone quickly lined up again, and the rider who had gone down and caused the red had assumed his position on the last row. Once again we were into the first corner, wide open. I was in 4th for just over half the race, but I changed my racing line and picked up some ground, passing 2 of the riders ahead of me. We were just entering corner 3 when the emergency lights at every corner flickered on and just ahead of me were two riders down. I had absolutely nowhere to go but directly into one of the riders lying on the track so I put the bike down as gently as I possibly could. I had managed to pull the clutch in so I jumped up and took off. I was quickly told that the AMA crew was going to go back a couple of laps and count that as the order of advanced riders so I was officially into the Lima main event.

I didn't want to make any adjustments on my bike because I thought it was working very well so all I did was make sure everything was good to go and I just relaxed. After the last expert twins LCQ and the quick track work, we were sitting on the line ready to go. I found myself on the second row of riders looking at the back of some of the best riders on the circuit. The green light lit and the mad scramble into the first corner had commenced. I had a bad start and found myself back in about 10th place so I started to go to work. Even with the 12 lap main, I really didn't think I had enough time to work my way to the front, but I just focused on getting as many points as possible but by the half-way flag I was looking at the back of the 3rd and 2nd place riders Chaz Springsteen and James Rispoli. The three of us put on quite the battle but on lap 11 Chaz slipped under James for second. Going into the last corner I held the throttle on and rode through the cushion Canadian Style. I must of gotten a better drive because coming out of the corner I drove past James for 3rd and the final podium spot.

It was nice to be back to normal again. Indiana was a huge momentum killer from Springfield but now I have new momentum to build on for Michigan. All I can do from here is keep working and eventually I will be writing about my first AMA Pro-Singles victory!

Michael LaBelle 20T

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