

UNLIMITED NewsJournal

A CHRONICLE OF SPEED

SEPTEMBER 2023

Kelly wins national title.



Chris Denlow

It couldn't have been much closer. J. Michael Kelly was ahead in the national points race when racing for Seattle's Gold Cup got underway, then he fell behind teammate Corey Peabody after the first day of competition and was still behind when the final heat started. But, when he passed Andrew Tate during the third lap and moved into first place, he also moved back on top of the race for the national championship. He ended up winning the title, his second and his team's first, by only 84 points. The details of how that happened are spelled out in the pages that follow. And, watch for next month's issue, when we'll review the entire 2023 season and provide the annual season summary.

2023 FINAL NATIONAL STANDINGS

- 1) J. Michael Kelly, *Beacon Electric* 5,284
- 2) Corey Peabody, *Beacon Plumbing* 5,200
- 3) Dustin Echols, *Flav-R-Pac* 4,181
- 4) Jamie Nilsen, *Legend Yacht Transport* 4,146
- 5) Andrew Tate, *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 4,014
- 6) Dylan Runne, *Miss HomeStreet* 3,684
- 7) Bobby King, *Graham Trucking* 1,252
- 8) Gunnar O'Farrell, *The Beast Unleashed* 762
- 9) Jimmy King, *Griggs Miss Ace Hardware* 670
- 10) Brent Hall, *Boitano Homes* 60*

*Boat only

ALSO IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

2 Tri-Cities Race Report

10 Seattle/Gold Cup Race Report

18 Getting to know Bobby King

24 HomeStreet ends sponsorship

25 Around the Circuit by Chris Tracy

26 Comments from H1 by Jan Shaw

TRI-CITIES: FINALLY A FINAL HEAT

Peabody wins amid confusion.

BY MAC CLOUSE

Neither of the season's first two races had a final heat. The initial attempt in each was halted by a flip before the heat was official. Re-runs were canceled because of serious thunderstorms. H1 finally had a completed final heat in Tri-Cities. However, because of three gun jumpers and a PA system that was pretty much non-existent all weekend, most spectators did not know who was winning. The winner was Corey Peabody in the U-9 *Beacon Plumbing*, finishing a perfect weekend for him.

Testing and Qualifying

Friday's testing was from 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., and qualifying was from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. There were a season-high nine boats in the pits: U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (Dylan Runne), U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* (Jimmy King), U-8 *Beacon Electric* (J. Michael Kelly), U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (Corey Peabody), U-11 *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* (Jamie Nilsen), U-12 *Graham Trucking* (Bobby King), U-40 *Flav-R-Pac* (Dustin Echols),

U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (Andrew Tate), and U-440 *Boitano Homes* (Brent Hall).

The U-12 was making its season debut as owner Rob Graham brought the boat out of a four-year retirement, with crew chief Tom Anderson and some former crew members. Driver Bobby King, the son of U-3 driver Jimmy King, was also making his Unlimited debut. He has driven in the Pro Lite 350 series and in Grand Prixs, but he would need to do the 15 laps necessary to qualify as an Unlimited driver. He did that easily during the

testing and qualifying periods.

Brent Hall of the U-440 still needed seven laps, with four over 130 mph, to qualify as an Unlimited driver. The boat did not go out during testing. During qualifying, it did one lap but died in the second lap. It was done for the weekend with gearbox and bearing issues. Owner Sharon Stocklin said, "We're pushing the boat faster than it was ever expected to do. It did 148 mph in Gunter'sville. We solve one thing and then something new shows up."

The eight remaining boats all tested,



Chris Denslow

After blowing over in Madison earlier in the month, the U-40 returned in Tri-Cities with a new name: *Flav-R-Pac*.



Chris Denslow

but no official speeds were announced.

In the first round of qualifying, six of the eight remaining boats qualified. *Graham* did 155.355 mph and passed in the second round. As usual, *Griggs* did one lap and then came in, done for the day; its speed was 156.304 mph. *Legend* had a speed of 156.164 mph but lost it due to an N2 violation.

Entering turn one in lap two, the *Goodman* was launched and flew for about 100 feet before it landed hard back onto the water. As a result, it had a fuel-flow violation. It could have been worse. "I hit some big rollers in that turn that couldn't have been from a hydro. When I landed on the water, it was a big jolt for me and the boat. All the lights on my dashboard came on so I just came in," said Tate.

All the boats that went out in the second round increased their speeds or qualified. The fastest qualifier was *Beacon Plumbing* at 162.191 mph. Second was *HomeStreet* at 161.646 mph. Next was *Flav-R-Pac* at 161.284 mph, and *Beacon Electric* did 158.974 mph. *Goodman* stayed on the water this time and did 157.284 mph, and *Legend* did 156.220 mph.

HomeStreet had the biggest increase in speed—over 9 mph. "It was better water, and we made some adjustments. We will have some tomorrow also," said Runne.



Craig Fjerlie



Lon Erickson

TOP: *Legend Yacht Transport* presented by *The Truss Company* rounds the second turn. **MIDDLE:** Bobby King gets a hug from his father, Jimmy King, after qualifying as an Unlimited driver. **ABOVE:** Brent Hall rides *Boitano Homes* back to the pits after its gearbox fails.

Saturday

Saturday's schedule was strange. Testing was from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Then the boats were idle until Heat 1A at 4 p.m. and Heat 1B at 4:30 p.m. All the qualified boats except U-9 tested, but all the teams were unhappy about the long time between testing and Heat 1.

HEAT 1:

In Heat 1A, *Goodman* was in lane one, *HomeStreet* was in lane two, *Beacon Plumbing* in lane three, and *Beacon Electric* in lane four. Peabody and Kelly did not try to get the inside lanes from the Madison boats, who cut across the course together to get them. Runne, Peabody, and Kelly were first to turn one. Tate was late. At the end of the lap, it was Runne, Peabody, Tate, and Kelly.

In lap two, Peabody was first to turn one. Runne slid out and then moved in while in lane one while exiting the turn. This slowed Runne a bit, and Peabody pulled away. Kelly passed Tate to move into third.

The finish had Peabody in first, Runne in second, Kelly in third, and Tate in fourth. Runne was told to run an extra lap due to the possibility of an infraction. Later, Runne was penalized one lap for bearing out on Peabody when they came out of turn one during the second lap. "We didn't hit, but the referee said I deserved the penalty. You could call this in every heat," said Runne. This moved Kelly to second, Tate to third, and Runne to fourth.

"I didn't think we had the speed to win, but in lap two I got some speed and pulled away. It is a good start to the race. So, I'll be happy and get sleep for tomorrow," said Peabody.

"Lane four was not the place I wanted to be," Kelly said, "but I'll take the second place. I need to have a heat with *Legend* so I can get points against them for the high-point championship."



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

TOP: Jimmy King flies in the U-3 Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware. **MIDDLE:** Brian Perkins (left) and Jamie Nilsen. **ABOVE:** Andrew Tate and Miss Goodman Real Estate.

"I got lane one, but I blew the start," Tate said. "In lap two, Kelly and I were close in turn one, but the inside was rough and he passed me."

In Heat 1B, the Kings got their wish to be drawn in the same heat. *Flav-R-*

Pac was in lane one, *Legend* in lane two, *Griggs* in lane three, and *Graham* in four. Dad and son would race beside each other, but Bobby was required to be on the outside, 15 seconds behind the front line. Echols and Nilsen were together in

turn one at the start. Bobby trailed, and Jimmy went straight to the pits after he crossed the start line. On the backstretch, Nilsen pulled away as Echols slowed for a brief moment.

In lap two, Nilsen led Echols by a roostertail in the backstretch, but Echols closed going into turn two. Nilsen used the inside lane to regain the one roostertail lead. In lap three, Nilsen pulled away to win by three roostertails. Echols got second and Bobby trailed in third.

"I'm disappointed that I didn't get to race against my dad," Bobby said, "but the heat was a good experience. It's tough when you have to start back there behind everyone."

"The engine is hurt," his father said. "At my last mark, I pushed on the gas and there was nothing there. Now there is oil all over the engine. We'll change the engine and be ready for tomorrow."

STATBOX

Columbia Cup

Tri-Cities, Washington: July 29-30, 2023
2.5-mile course on the Columbia River; 42.5-mile race

QUALIFYING: (1) U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, 162.191, 100 points; (2) U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (#1801), Dylan Runne, 161.646, 80; (3) U-40 *Flav-R-Pac* (#0721), Dustin Echols, 161.284, 70; (4) U-8 *Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 158.974, 60; (5) U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* (#0706), Andrew Tate, 157.284, 50; (6) U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* (#0203), Jimmy King, 156.304, 40; (7) U-11 *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* (#0925), Jamie Nilsen, 156.220, 30; (8) U-12 *Graham Trucking* (#0001), Bobby King, 155.335, 30; U-440 *Boitano Homes* (#1218), Brent Hall, DNQ, 0.

HEAT 1A: (1) *Beacon Electric* 152.948, 400 points, 500 cumulative points; (2) *Beacon Electric* 147.764, 300, 360; (3) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 144.508, 225, 275; (4) *Miss HomeStreet* 111.554 (one-lap penalty for encroachment), 169, 249. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Plumbing* 157.458.

HEAT 1B: (1) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* 145.895, 400, 430; (2) *Flav-R-Pac* 141.355, 300, 370; (3) *Graham Trucking* 131.366, 225, 255; *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* DNF - ??????, 0, 40. Fast lap: (2) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* 147.926.

HEAT 2A: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 150.763, 400, 675 (2) *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* 147.099, 300, 340; (3) *Flav-R-Pac* 140.052, 225, 595; (4) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* DSQ - N2 violation, 0, 430. Fast lap: (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 153.641.

HEAT 2B: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 153.450, 400, 900; (2) *Beacon Electric* 152.288, 300, 660; (3) *Miss HomeStreet* 148.972, 225, 474; (4) *Graham Trucking* 136.636, 169, 424. Fast lap: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 154.546.

HEAT 3A: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 152.302, 400, 1300; (2) *Beacon Electric* 148.321, 300, 960; (3) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* 146.377, 225, 655; (4) *Flav-R-Pac* 140.988, 169, 764. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Plumbing* 152.705.

HEAT 3B: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 150.151, 400, 1075; (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 149.874, 300, 774; (3) *Graham Trucking* 142.872, 225, 649; *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware* DNF - sheared propeller shaft, 0, 340. Fast lap: (1) *Miss HomeStreet* 152.055

FINAL: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 146.395, 400, 1700; (2) *Flav-R-Pac* 126.342, 300, 1064; (3) *Beacon Electric* 123,771 (one-lap penalty for jumping the gun), 225, 1185; (4) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 120.317 (one-lap penalty for jumping the gun), 169, 1244; (5) *Miss HomeStreet* 111.719 (one-lap penalty for jumping the gun) 127, 901; *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Truss Company* DNF - gearbox failure, 0, 655. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Electric* 155.335.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

Sunday

While Saturday had very little activity, Sunday would be busy. Testing was from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. *Flav-R-Pac* and *Goodman* were the only boats to test. Everyone else was ready for the three heats. Heat 2A was scheduled for 10 a.m. with Heat 2B at 10:30 a.m. Heat 3A was scheduled for 2:30 p.m. with Heat 3B at 3 p.m., and the final was scheduled for 4:30 p.m.

HEAT 2:

In Heat 2A, *Flav-R-Pac* was in lane one, *Goodman* in lane two, *Legend* in lane three, and *Griggs* in lane four. Echols was very early and had to slow to avoid jumping. Nilsen and Tate were close in lap one with Nilsen in first. Echols was in third with Jimmy in fourth. In lap two, Tate passed Nilsen but they were still close. Tate went on to win by about a roostertail over Nilsen. Jimmy passed Echols in lap three to get third, and Echols finished fourth.

"This was a stressful three laps," Nilsen said. "I was racing against two fast



Chris Denstlow

ABOVE: From the left, Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet*, Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing*, and J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* make their run to the starting line.

RIGHT: Dustin Echols and *Flav-R-Pac*.

Kelly: "My boat is tons better than last year. It can win races, but I need more acceleration out of the turns."

boats. Andrew got a lane inside of me. Lane one is an advantage on this course. I will try to get it next time." Tate's response was, "It was nice to be inside of Jamie."

Unfortunately, things got more stressful for Nilsen when he got a DSQ and zero points for the heat due to an N2 violation. Jimmy and Echols moved up one position.

In Heat 2B, *Beacon Electric* was in lane one, *Beacon Plumbing* in lane two, *HomeStreet* in lane three, and *Graham* required to be in lane four. Kelly, Peabody, and Runne were close in the first turn, but Kelly and Peabody were first out of the turn. Peabody took the lead in the backstretch and led at the end of lap one with Kelly in second, Runne in third, and Bobby in fourth. In laps two and three, Kelly pulled close to Peabody in the turns, but Peabody could pull away exiting the turn to regain the lead. That gave him the win. Runne was third with Bobby in fourth.

"It's great when I think the boat will succeed," Peabody said. "I like lane two to stay away from the buoys. J. Michael is faster in the turns, but I come out of the corner faster."

Kelly agreed. "My boat is tons better than last year. It can win races, but I need more acceleration out of the turns. I was catching Corey at the end of the straightaways and from lane one in the turns, but he has better acceleration out of the turns."

HEAT 3:

In Heat 3A, *Flav-R-Pac* was too early in the backstretch trying to get lane one. Echols had to cross the course and join the field, but he got lane four. *Legend* was in lane one, *Beacon Electric* in lane two,



Chris Denstlow

and *Beacon Plumbing* in lane three. Nilsen was first in and out of the first turn, but the better speed of the Strong Racing Team boats put Peabody in first and Kelly in second at the end of the lap. Nilsen was in third with Echols in fourth. This was how the heat finished with Peabody winning by three roostertails over Kelly.

Echols finished fourth, but was still pleased. "The boat is handling the same as it was before the flip in Madison. We only have one engine, and it is not as good as we hoped it would be. We are happy to be here and running fast."

In Heat 3B, *Goodman* was in lane one and *HomeStreet* was in lane two. The Kings again had a chance to race against each other with Jimmy in

lane three and Bobby in lane four. Bobby and Jimmy were early to the start. Bobby slowed to be legal, but Jimmy jumped. Tate was first in and out of turn one, but he and Runne were close in the backstretch and Runne had a narrow lead at the end of the lap.

In turn two of lap one, *Griggs* unfortunately lost its prop when the shaft broke where it exits the strut. The good news was that there was no damage to the back or the bottom of the boat. The prop and the small part of the shaft did fly up and go through the back wing, and they were later recovered.

In lap two, Runne and Tate went into turn one together, but Tate pulled away to lead by one roostertail at the end of the lap. Bobby trailed in third. Tate went on to win by about one and a half roostertails over Runne with Bobby finishing third.

Tate was happy with lane one. “I hope I can keep getting the inside. Anything can happen in the final.”

Runne was looking forward to completing his first final heat. “It will be a barn burner. The inside will be important. There are a lot of equalizers in a six-boat final—the wind, five laps, and what happens in turn one at the start.”

Bobby felt bad for his dad’s team. “I’m hurting for the U-3 guys. Ed Cooper has known me forever. My heart breaks for Ed and my dad. I won’t be in the final, but I have learned a lot from Friday until now. I was free to do what I wanted in this heat. I have a big learning curve, but it’s lots of fun.”

The field was now set for the six-boat final, all on the front line with no trailer: *Beacon Plumbing*, *Goodman*, *Beacon Electric*, *HomeStreet*, *Flav-R-Pac*, and *Legend*.

FINAL HEAT:

The pits in Tri-Cities have one long dock behind the boats. At the end of the pits that is farthest from the course is the famous “Bernie Tree.” It is a tree that

provides the only shaded pit area and has room for two boats. Many years ago, *Budweiser* boat owner Bernie Little paid for the tree to be rescued when it was sick and in danger of being cut down. The tradition now is that the winner of the previous year’s Tri-Cities race gets to pit the following year under the Bernie Tree. Since *HomeStreet* won last year, the two Madison boats were under the tree, the farthest away from the course.

Some teams are now of the opinion that it is better to be at the opposite end of the pits and closer to the racecourse so your boat can grab the inside lane after the five-minute gun is “fired.” And so,

for the final, the *Goodman* crew put their boat in the water early and then pushed it along the full length of the dock to the end that is closest to the course. The *HomeStreet* crew tried the same thing, but they could not go as far because they were told they had to leave room for the boats that were pitted at that end of the pits. This tactic of moving your boat as close as possible to the course will likely be reviewed by H1 during the winter.

At the five-minute mark, *Goodman*, *HomeStreet*, *Beacon Electric*, and *Beacon Plumbing* raced onto the course. Kelly got there first and moved into lane one. *Flav-R-Pac* and *Legend* did not join the race to



Chris Denslow



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TOP: The busy dock on the Columbia River before a heat.
ABOVE: From the left, *Beacon Plumbing*, *Beacon Electric*, and *Legend Yacht Transport*.

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TOP: From the left, *Legend Yacht Transport*, *Miss Goodman Real Estate*, and *Flav-R-Pac* make a run to the starting line. **ABOVE:** The Madison Racing Team boats *Miss HomeStreet* (left) and *Miss Goodman Real Estate*.

the course. They left the dock later. Kelly did manage to keep lane one and led the field down the backstretch towards the start but he was very early. *Goodman* was in lane two, *HomeStreet* in lane three, *Beacon Plumbing* in lane four, *Legend* in five, and *Flav-R-Pac* in six.

At the entrance buoy to the second turn prior to the start, Kelly made a decision. "I knew I was too early," he said later. "If I slowed down, I risked going less than 80 mph and getting a DSQ and no points. If I jumped the gun, I would get a one-lap penalty but still get points. And maybe I could get some other guys to jump. So, I decided to hit the gas, jump the gun by a lot, and be in good water in front of all the other boats. It worked out fairly well."

Kelly jumped the gun by about eight

seconds and was entering turn one when the rest of the field crossed the start line, almost in single file. Tate crossed, then Runne, and then Peabody. It was possible that one, two, or three of them may have jumped. Nilsen and Echols were late enough to see that they did not jump. With the non-existent PA system, there was no immediate announcement of additional gun jumpers. So, most of the spectators did not know who the race leaders were. It turned out that Tate and Runne also jumped.

The heat was fairly uneventful. Kelly led the field by a lot for all five laps and then got a white flag to do an extra lap. Peabody and Tate battled for second place on the water for four laps. Then the drivers learned who had jumped and Tate backed off. Peabody finished lap five

ahead of Tate and got the checkered flag, while Tate got a white flag.

The only two other legal boats were *Legend* and *Flav-R-Pac*, with Nilsen well ahead of Echols in lap four. Unfortunately, *Legend* slowed to a stop with a broken gearbox, moving Echols to second. The final order of finish was Peabody in first and Echols in second with Kelly in third, Tate in fourth, and Runne in fifth after doing their penalty laps. The final was confusing, and it did not have the competitive racing that everyone expected. At least it was completed!

Peabody had a perfect race. He was the fastest qualifier, and he won all three of his heats and the final. He was pleased and thankful. "I love this course, and this is a win on Darrell and Vanessa Strong's home course. It is ironic that this great boat came about because of the accident about a year ago in Madison. It is the result of lots of hours of hard work and new ideas. Thanks to Jeff Campbell, the crew, the Strongs, and our sponsor, Bill Cahill."

Echols explained his strategy. "I stayed at the dock for about 30 seconds before I left for the course. I wanted to stay out of the mess trying for lane one. We were clean to get through the whole weekend. Our second-place finish is the team's best ever."

Strong Racing Team owner Darrell Strong was also pleased. "We have won all the races, so I give our team a grade of A+. Wait a minute. We still have a race left. If we win in Seattle, the grade will be an A+. We wanted to get inside lanes, but with all that happened, lane four was okay for Corey. Here you want to pit close to the course to get a good lane. Dylan and Andrew did a good job this weekend in spite of being at the end of the pits under the tree." When asked if that meant that his team will turn down the Bernie Tree pit location next year, Darrell quickly said, "No, we'll take that spot. The shade is for the team!" ❖

Notes and quotes from the Tri-Cities pits.

BY MAC CLOUSE

Brent Hall: “My goals this week are to get me and the U-440 qualified. For me, I need seven laps, four of which have to be over 130 mph. I am learning about driving the Unlimited. It has more horsepower than the GPs, but the GPs have better acceleration. The bigger course does get lumpy. The heats for me will be like practice, good for learning. I appreciate all the support I am getting from my team, the other teams, and the fans.

Two Kings in the pits: Last year in San Diego, Bobby King was there to drive a boat in the Pro-Lite series. His dad, Jimmy, was there to be part of Bobby’s crew. Both were here in Tri-Cities, but this time both would be driving an Unlimited. As usual, Jimmy was here to drive Ed Cooper’s U-3. The surprise was that Bobby would be driving Rob Graham’s U-12, returning to the water after a four-year absence. “I am excited for Bobby, and I hope we get drawn to race against each other,” the elder King said. “Maybe after he gets his qualifying laps in, Ed will let him go out in the U-3.”

Bobby was also excited. “It is awesome to be here. I can’t thank Rob Graham enough for the opportunity. You don’t get many chances to race against your dad. I owe everything to him. The *Graham* team has made things very comfortable. It’s nice to have two races to do this.”

Shannon Raney: Shannon and Scott, co-owners of the U-11 *Legend Yacht Transport*, had a “husband and wife debate” in the winter to decide which boat to use this year. “I consider the former Ken Muscatel boat to be my boat, and I think it is faster,” she said. “It is what we are using this year. The T-4 boat is Scott’s favorite. I won the debate, and Scott thought we could make my boat faster, which we have done. We did a lot of preparation work over the winter, and we are very pleased with our results. We are also making progress to make our boat a part of the Cle Elum community. Three of our crew members are now from Cle Elum. We are doing some displays, and Mike’s Tavern is now the place in Cle Elum to watch the streaming of the races. We love the city.”

Kelly Stocklin: Co-owner of the Bucket List Racing Team. “We now have a sponsor for the U-40. Flav-R-Pac joined us at the last minute. They are a Tri-Cities-based company, and their products are frozen vegetables and fruits. The owner is into drag racing, and we hope to show him that he should also be into boat racing. This is a two-race audition for us, and we look forward to working with

him. We had to do a lot of work to be here. When the boat landed from the Madison flip, it broke the boat just behind the engine. The crew did an excellent job to rebuild the bottom.”

Corey Peabody: “I have always been a manager. I used to be a superintendent in the construction industry for my real job and did boat racing for fun. Now my real job is to be the team manager for the Strong Racing Team, which also includes driving one of the boats. It is much easier than what I was doing before. It is a nice vote of confidence in me from Darrell (Strong Racing Team owner). It is a good feeling to have that trust. The U-9 rebuild went well. There is still enough of the old boat so H1 does not consider it a new boat. So, it is now 31 years old. It’s neat to be doing so well in an old boat. But there are a lot of changes we made that are working out.”

Charlie Grooms: Owner’s representative for the Madison Racing Team. “We were sorry to lose Bob Hughes this year, but his health was failing, and we knew it was inevitable. We appreciate all he did for the team, and I appreciate what he did for me. This year has been a monumental year of change for our two-boat team. Jimmy Shane’s retirement turned our whole world upside down. We had to reset, and we are making good progress.

“We have two new drivers, and we lost two crew members to cancer. We still have a good team and good boats. Dylan Runne was Jimmy’s hand-picked successor to drive the U-1. We knew he would have to learn, and Gunter’sville and Madison were learning experiences. Andrew Tate is a proven winner, but the flip in Gunter’sville caused him to miss the Madison race. John Goodman is a good addition to our team and to the sport. We are bringing our sport to a new generation. We are proud of Andrew and Dylan as drivers and as ambassadors for the sport. The sport is sponsor driven, and we appreciate the eight years we have had with HomeStreet.”

Rob Graham: Owner of the U-12 *Graham Trucking*. “It is nice to be back. People are happy that we are here. We will take things one step at a time. I am pleased with Bobby King. He is a good driver and a good ambassador for the sport. Our plan is to stay with the circuit.” ❖

SEATTLE: TRIFECTA FOR KELLY

Beacon Electric zaps the freakin' field to win Gold Cup.

BY DICK SANDERS

Despite holding the narrowest of national-championship-point margins (9) after Tri-Cities, J. Michael Kelley had been overshadowed during the 2023 H1 season by his Strong Racing teammate Cory Peabody in the *Beacon Plumbing*. After all, Peabody had so far won every single heat he started and finished. But Kelley emerged at precisely the right time, winning an exciting, even violent, final heat over Peabody and a strong field in *Beacon Electric*. It was

enough for him to take home the Home-Street Bank Cup and the Gold Cup, and, by the narrowest of point margins, both the driver and team championships.

The fans enjoyed a perfect climax to a shortened season where fierce competition finally overcame crashes, Mother Nature and, in the previous week at Tri-Cities, a chaotic final heat where half the field jumped the gun.

As the season developed and fields grew to a solid eight raceable boats, the competitiveness of the fleet jumped out with each random heat draw. Anything was possible, unlimited scenarios, no

matter which four boats were thrown into a section. Unlike 20 years ago, it didn't require an iron hand on the tiller by late HydroProp commissioner Gary Garbrecht, assigning heat draws on a whim to guarantee tight racing. This year we were fortunate to have the right combination of good boats, almost all well-prepared, and drivers, both wily veterans and rookies of various shades of green.

Comparisons going back even further can't be avoided. Fifty years ago, Seattle's "Race in the Rain" duels between Mickey Remund in *Pay 'N Pak* and Dean

Chenoweth in *Miss Budweiser* attained almost mythological status among fans. The racing we would see this weekend would rival even that.

Qualifying

Friday dawned cool and gray on Lake Washington. Rain squalls to the south threatened all weekend but left the hydros and their fans alone. The sun even poked out by mid-afternoon each day. Water conditions were perfect. Qualifying was perfunctory. The Lake Washington qualifying record of 157.143 mph, set by Jimmy Shane in 2022, was never threatened, as most teams seemed intent on getting the most testing time in as possible.

The fastest qualifier on Friday was Dustin Echols in the *Flav-R-Pac* at 152.498 mph. Next was Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* at 152.171 mph, then Cory Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* at 151.297 mph, followed by Dylan Runne in *Miss HomeStreet* at 149.630 mph, J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* at 149.219 mph, Bobby King in *Graham Trucking* at 147.454 mph, Jamie Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* at 147.314 mph, Gunnar O'Farrell in *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* at 145.572 mph,



Chris Denslow

J. Michael Kelly drives *Beacon Electric* onto Lake Washington.

and finally Brent Hall in *Boitano Homes* at 133.739 mph.

The drama of qualifying was centered on one team. Rookie Brent Hall in the U-440 *Boitano Homes* was trying desperately to get enough laps in at over 130 mph to qualify as an Unlimited driver—and also to become the sport’s first qualified Black unlimited driver, a significant milestone. He had lots of fans in the pits pulling for him.

Needing five more laps, he turned five—but the very first lap was just short of 130. He did get the *Boitano* in as the ninth qualifier. On his second qualifying attempt, short by just one 130+ lap, the gearbox gremlins that had plagued the 440 team all year pounced. Hall saw the gearbox temperature rapidly rising and did the thing that professional racers do—he shut it down.

Unfortunately, the gearbox was already toast. The personable Hall will have to wait until 2024 to find a ride that will get him over that last two or 2-1/2 mile hump. The team’s crewmen spoke of the desire to build a gearbox testbed in the offseason that could replicate the severe loading and unloading conditions found on the racecourse.

Friday qualifying had been shortened by a scheduling snafu that saw the



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow

TOP: Brent Hall (left) and his crew chief Mike Lemler. **MIDDLE:** *Slo-mo-shun V*, the winner of the first Gold Cup in Seattle, was on display in the Stan Sayres Pits, which is named for the man who brought the sport to the city. **ABOVE:** Dustin Echols and *Flav-R-Pac* (left) and Dylan Runne and *Miss HomeStreet*.

Chris Denslow



J. Michael Kelly with his "game face" before starting a race.

Seafair airshow start while race and patrol boats were still on the water. Time was added to Saturday morning's testing/qualifying session. Six boats ran but only four improved their times. Dustin Echols bumped up his time with 153.692 mph in *Flav-R-Pac*, but Andrew Tate leapfrogged Echols to the top position with a 154.461 mph run in *Goodman*.

Heat 1:

Repeating the first heat draw at Tri-Cities, the four "team" boats were drawn together in Heat 1A. We had the Madison boys: Dylan Runne in *HomeStreet* and Andrew Tate in *Goodman Real Estate*. Then we had the Strong Team racers: Cory Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* and J Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*. The Madison boats got the inside lanes: *HomeStreet* in one and *Goodman* in two. The Beacon boats were outside: *Plumbing* in lane three and *Electric* in four.

HomeStreet was a little early approaching the start, but Runne backed off way too much and was left behind. *Plumbing* emerged in front at the exit pin, with *Goodman* and *Electric* trailing by half a roostertail. *Goodman* made up some ground in the second turn but not enough to pull in the *Plumbing* boat, as the three front runners were each separated by half a 'tail after one lap. The lap

speeds were very good (Peabody turned the fastest lap of the day at 149.269 mph) but there would be no position changes. *Plumbing* took home 400 points, follow-

ing by *Goodman*, *Electric*, and *HomeStreet*.

For Heat 1B, Gunnar O'Farrell made his racing debut in *The Beast*, starting by rule on the outside and five seconds behind the clock start. Dustin Echols cut the course twice in *Flav-R-Pac* during the milling period to grab lane one, but in the last turn before the start he unexpectedly swung wide, allowing Jamie Nilsen in *Legend* to slide into lane one, as well as Bobby King in *Graham* into lane two.

It was the rookie King who nailed the start. *Graham* led into the first turn, with *Legend* pulling even on the inside. *Legend* opened a small lead on *Graham* up the backstretch, with *Flav-R-Pac* another half 'tail back. On the second lap, *Legend* stretched its lead, while *Flav-R-Pac* steadily gained on *Graham*. *Flav-R-Pac* passed *Graham* after the start of lap three and increased its lead to the end to take



Lon Erickson



Chris Denslow

TOP: From the left, Dustin Echols in *Flav-R-Pac*, Bobby King in *Graham Trucking*, and Jamie Nilsen in *Legend Yacht Transport* presented by *The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse*.
ABOVE: Gunnar O'Farrell aboard *The Beast Unleashed* presents *Miss Thriftway*.

second. After *Graham*, *The Beast* rounded out the finishers. The *Legend* crew was all grins after their wire-to-wire victory.

Heat 2:

Aggressive course cutting during the milling period was the order of the day in Heat 2A. Several boats cut the course, sometimes twice in a row, first from back-to-front, then immediately front-to-back. At around the 2:20 mark, Andrew Tate in *Goodman* did just this, trying to get a lock on lane one. Unfortunately for Tate, Nilsen in *Legend* already occupied lane one, blocking Tate.

Now in no-man's land in the infield, Tate slid the *Goodman* through *Legend's* roostertail into lane three. Kelly held *Electric* in lane three, but only by taking a huge leap through *Legend's* roostertail. After the heat, crewmen spent time repairing front canard damage suffered in the landing. No call was made by the officials, even after a post-heat protest.

At the start, *Legend* had the inside but *Electric* and *Goodman* in lanes two and three had speed. *Flav-R-Pac* was a roostertail back in lane four but charging hard. *Legend* kept pace until the exit pin of turn one and started to fall back. *Electric* and *Goodman* were side-by-side for an exciting two laps, with *Flav-R-Pac* staying within a 'tail in lane four. On lap three, *Electric* gradually increased its lead to a full roostertail. They stayed that way to the finish.

For Heat 2B, rookie Bobby King put himself in lane one in *Graham*, next to Cory Peabody in *Plumbing*, then Dylan Runne in *HomeStreet* and, five seconds behind, rookie Gunnar O'Farrell in the *The Beast*. Peabody would have a relatively easy time of it, scooting to an early lead on a perfect start.

King wouldn't let him coast, though, pulling *Graham* alongside *Plumbing* at the end of lap two, as Peabody let up on the throttle. *Plumbing* showed superior speed through the next turn and pulled away for the win. An under-80-mph penalty resulted in a DSQ to *Graham*. *HomeStreet*

STATBOX

HomeStreet Bank Cup & APBA Gold Cup

Seattle, Washington; August 5-6, 2023

2-mile course on Lake Washington; 34-mile race

QUALIFYING: (1) U-91 *Miss Goldman Real Estate* (#0706), Andrew Tate, 154.461, 100 points; (2) U-40 *Flav-R-Pac* (#0721), Dustin Echols, 153.692, 80; (3) U-9 *Beacon Plumbing* (#92102), Corey Peabody, 151.297, 70; (4) U-8 *Beacon Electric* (#1496), J. Michael Kelly, 150.656, 60; (5) U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* (#1801), Dylan Runne, 150.068, 50; (6) U-12 *Graham Trucking* (#0001), Bobby King, 147.454, 40; (7) U-11 *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* (#0925), 30, 147.314; (8) U-60 *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* (#0721), 30, 145.572; (9) U-440 *Boitano Homes* (#1218), Brent Hall, 133.739, 30 (boat only, driver unqualified).

HEAT 1A: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 147.613, 400 points, 470 cumulative points; (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 144.291, 300, 400; (3) *Beacon Electric* 141.561, 225, 285; (4) *Miss HomeStreet* 135.242, 169, 219. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Plumbing* 149.269.

HEAT 1B: (1) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 141.228, 400, 430; (2) *Flav-R-Pac* 138.433, 300, 380; (3) *Graham Trucking* 137.062, 225, 265; (4) *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* 123.186, 169, 199. Fast lap: (2) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 143.243.

HEAT 2A: (1) *Beacon Electric* 145.061, 400, 685; (2) U-91 *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 142.861, 300, 700; (3) *Flav-R-Pac* 139.718, 225, 605; (4) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 130.672, 169, 599. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Electric* 146.056.

HEAT 2B: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 140.598, 400, 870; (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 136.440, 300, 519; (3) *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* 121.959, 225, 424; *Graham Trucking* DSQ – 80 mph violation prior to the start, 0, 265. Fast lap: (3) *Beacon Plumbing* 144.682.

HEAT 3A: (1) *Flav-R-Pac* 143.705, 400, 1005; (2) *Beacon Electric* 141.056, 300, 985 (3) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 139.958, 225, 824; (4) *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* 129.209, 169, 593. Fast lap: (2) *Flav-R-Pac* 144.910.

HEAT 3B: (1) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 144.697, 400, 1100; (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 144.471, 300, 819; (3) *Beacon Plumbing* 138.475, 225, 1095; (4) *Graham Trucking* 127.402, 169, 434. Fast lap: (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 147.221.

HEAT 4A: (1) *Beacon Plumbing* 146.613, 400, 1495; (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 146.458, 300, 1400; (3) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 131.879, 225, 1049; (4) *Graham Trucking* 97.803 (one-lap penalty for jumping the gun), 169, 603. Fast Lap: (3) *Beacon Plumbing* 148.837.

HEAT 4B: (1) *Beacon Electric* 143.215, 400, 1385; (2) *Miss HomeStreet* 141.228, 300, 1119; (3) *Flav-R-Pac* 130.144, 225, 1230; (4) *The Beast Unleashed presents Miss Thriftway* 124.280, 169, 762. Fast lap: (2) *Beacon Electric* 144.682.

FINAL: (1) *Beacon Electric* 141.073, 400, 1785; (2) *Miss Goodman Real Estate* 139.142, 300, 1700; (3) *Beacon Plumbing* 135.978, 225, 1720; (4) *Flav-R-Pac* 131.927, 169, 1399; (5) *Legend Yacht Transport presented by The Old Cannery Furniture Warehouse* 119.217, 127, 1176; *Miss HomeStreet* DSQ – 80 mph violation prior to the start, 0, 1119. Fast lap: (3) *Beacon Electric* 144.002.

COMPILED BY ALLEN STILES

Lon Ericson



Chris Denslow



Chris Denslow



TOP: From the left, *Miss HomeStreet*, *Beacon Plumbing*, and *Graham Trucking* cross the line together. **MIDDLE:** Waiting for the five-minute mark to arrive. **ABOVE:** J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* has the inside lane on Andrew Tate in *Miss Goodman Real Estate* and surges into the lead at the beginning of the final heat's third lap.

was awarded second place, *The Beast* was third.

Heat 3:

Once again Nilsen secured lane one in *Legend* at the start of Heat 3A, but Echols in *Flav-R-Pac* in lane two and Kelly in *Beacon Electric* in lane three charged past him and led through the first turn and up the backstretch. O'Farrell trailed in *The Beast*. Echols built a roostertail lead, while a battle for second place continued, with Nilsen using lane one to almost catch *Beacon Electric* on lap three. *Flav-R-Pac* won by two roostertails, while Kelly held off Nilsen by just half a 'tail. O'Farrell in *The Beast* was allowed front row privileges for the first but trailed throughout.

In a day of very good racing, Heat 3B was probably the best, by just by a hair. It featured *HomeStreet*, *Goodman Real Estate*, *Beacon Plumbing*, and *Graham Trucking*. Runne cut the course nicely from back to front in *HomeStreet* to gain lane one, with Tate in the *Goodman*, then Peabody in *Plumbing* and King in *Graham* on the outside. Peabody was late at the start in the *Plumbing* boat and would trail throughout.

HomeStreet led up the backstretch of lap one, with *Goodman* right on its hip. It was a furious battle, with Tate pulling the

Goodman on the third lap. Runne and HomeStreet grabbed the lead at the entrance pin of the final turn, only to have Tate and Goodman grab it right back and hold on to take the win by half a boat length. Peabody's third-place finish would have a dramatic effect on the high-points race.

Heat 4:

The initial draw for Heat 4 sections was identical to Heat 3, so the results were thrown out and re-drawn. At the start it would be Nilsen in *Legend* in lane one, then Peabody in *Plumbing*, Tate in *Goodman*, and King in *Graham*. The first three were side-by-side coming out of turn one, but *Legend* faded at turn two.

About this time King found out he had jumped the gun, but continued to stay ahead of *Legend*. At the front, Peabody locked the *Plumbing* up with Tate in *Goodman* in an epic, wire-to-wire duel, separated by no more than half a rooster-tail at any time. Peabody appeared to start to pull away early on the backstretch of lap three, but Tate found a burst of top-end and briefly passed Peabody on the outside entering the final turn. *Plumbing* used the inside lane to maximum advantage, edging away at the exit pin to eke out a two-boat length victory.

Kelly in *Electric* needed 400 points in Heat 4B to give himself a chance at the points championships in the final. He did just that, grabbing lane

one with *HomeStreet*, then *Flav-R-Pac*, and finally *The Beast* outside of him. *Electric* moved to a half-tail lead over *HomeStreet* and *Flav-R-Pac* coming out of the first turn. At the end of lap one, *Flav-R-Pac* looked like it was ready for takeoff. Echols feathered it back down but fell back from the chase. *Electric* went on to win by a tail or two over *HomeStreet*. *Flav-R-Pac* trailed in third, followed by *The Beast*.

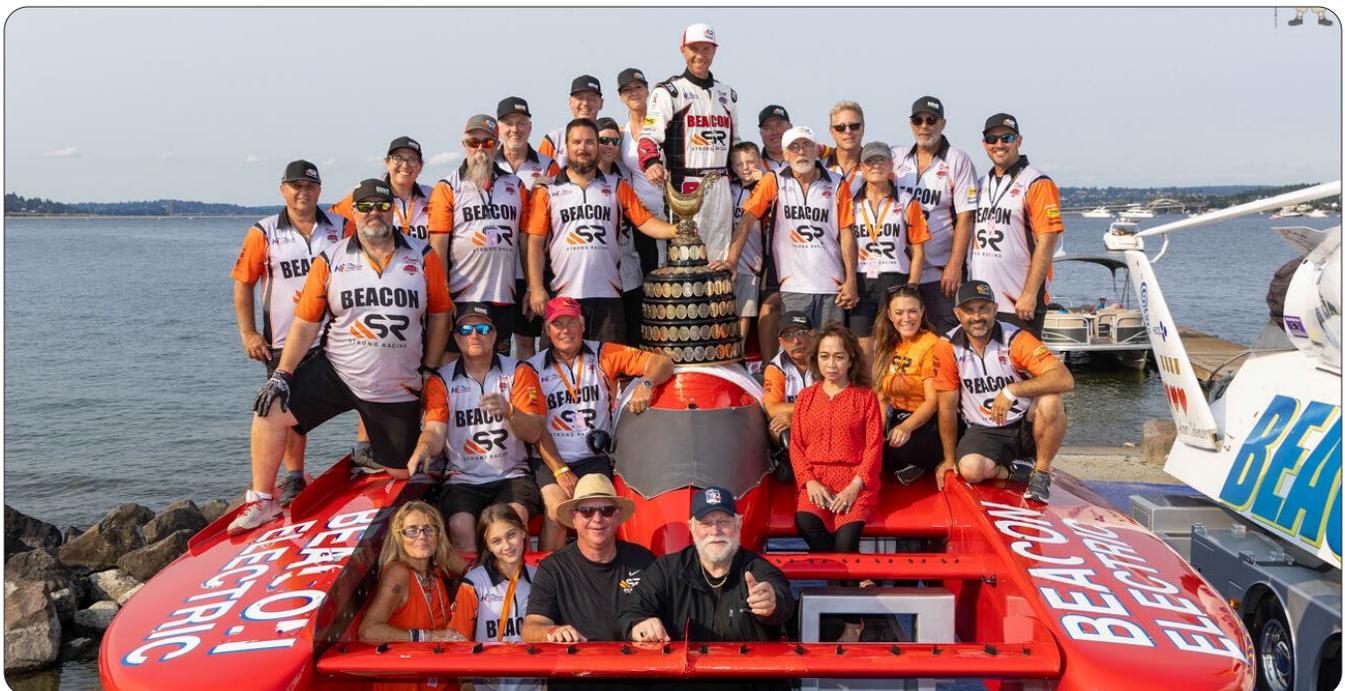
Final Heat

With the Gold Cup and national point championships up for grabs in just this one heat, it turned out to be an odd score-up, with very little jockeying. Jamie Nilsen, who had practically lived in lane one in every heat, cut the course in *Legend Yacht* just once and promptly found himself stuck out in lane five. Dustin Echols followed Nilsen and put the *Flav-R-Pac* in even worse position in lane six. With that, the rest of the field settled into their lanes early: Dylan Runne in *HomeStreet* in lane one, then J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric*, Andrew Tate in *Goodman Real Estate*, and Cory Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* in lane four.

As the clock approached zero, Runne had *HomeStreet* too early and slowed to avoid jumping the gun. Both he and Peabody in *Plumbing* lagged slightly as the field entered the first turn together. The field was still mostly together in the frantic

At the beginning of lap three, Goodman and Electric were deck-to-deck. Onboard video later revealed them to be deck-ON-deck three separate times as they approached and entered the first turn.

The entire *Beacon Electric* race team and family members celebrate their Gold Cup victory.



Chris Denslow



J. Michael Kelly (left) is congratulated by team co-owner Darrell Strong (middle) and team sponsor Bill Cahill.

THE 2023 POINTS CHASE

The race for the 2023 national championship literally came down to the wire between teammates J. Michael Kelly in *Beacon Electric* and Corey Peabody in *Beacon Plumbing* of the Strong Racing Team. Here's how the race unfolded, heat by heat, during the weekend of racing on Lake Washington:

BEFORE SEATTLE:	POINTS	TOTAL	DIFF.
1) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>		3,499	+19
2) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>		3,480	
AFTER QUALIFYING:			
1) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	60	3,559	+9
2) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	70	3,550	
AFTER HEAT ONE:			
1) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	400	3,950	
2) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	225	3,784	-166
AFTER HEAT TWO:			
1) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	400	4,350	
2) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	400	4,184	-166
AFTER HEAT THREE:			
1) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	400	4,584	+9
2) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	225	4,575	
AFTER HEAT FOUR:			
1) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	400	4,975	
2) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	300	4,884	-91
AFTER FINAL HEAT:			
1) Kelly/U-8 <i>Beacon Electric</i>	400	5,284	+84
2) Peabody/U-9 <i>Beacon Plumbing</i>	225	5,200	

run up the backstretch. Tate in *Goodman* led into turn two, flanked inside of him by Kelly in the *Electric* and also, gaining ground on the inside lane, *HomeStreet*.

Meanwhile, way outside in lane six, Echols amazingly kept pace, *Flav-R-Pac* turning an arc in turn two similar to the one he took on the wide, wide Gunter'sville course where he set a qualifying record two months earlier. On the run to the first corner of lap two, *Goodman* held the lead with *Electric* close inside. Both boats were tight in their lanes, not leaving Runne, who was within a roostertail, enough room. *HomeStreet* was washed down after the entrance pin and effectively out of the running.

Tate maintained a half-roostertail lead up the backstretch, but Kelly was pressing. Back near the end of *Electric's* roostertail, *Plumbing* was trying to hold off *Flav-R-Pac*. Entering turn two, Peabody was likely blinded by the outside splash of *Electric's* roostertail and veered out. *Plumbing* ricocheted hard off *Flav-R-Pac* but both drivers continued dueling.

At the beginning of lap three, *Goodman* and *Electric* were deck-to-deck. On-board video later revealed them to be deck-ON-deck three separate times as they approached and entered the first turn. At the edge of their roostertails, *Flav-R-Pac* and *Plumbing* were also side-by-side battling for third.

On the backstretch of lap three, drivers Kelly and Peabody started to open up space in their respective duels. Both Tate and Echols swung a bit wide at the next corner and the final order of finish was pretty much established. Kelly's *Electric* turned 144.002 mph on lap three, the fastest of the heat, and would not be seriously pressed again.

J. Michael Kelly would go on to take first, followed by Tate, Peabody, Echols and Nilsen. Runne earned a DSQ by running under 80 mph before the start.

By finishing ahead of Peabody in the final heat, Kelly also secured both the driver and boat championships by a mere 84 points.

In a significant change to the Seafair schedule, the Blue Angels flight demonstration took place immediately after the Gold Cup final heat, so awards were given out two hours after the final. Kelly was emotional about his national high point victories over Peabody, who he grew up with in the same neighborhood in the nearby city of Kent. The two have been

friends since the first grade. Second place winner Andrew Tate summed up his own 2023 season: “An F at the beginning of the year, a B at the end.”

Earlier in the pits, the winning Kelly enthusiastically signed posters and inflatable hydros for a large throng of fans. A youngster asked him how fast he was going in the final. Kelly’s G-rated answer

was simply, “As fast as we could go.” The true intensity of the race came shortly after when a crewman from another team wandered over and asked Kelly the same question. Kelly leaned in, out of earshot of the younger set and summed up his heat, and of the day’s racing in general: “We were hauling ass!” ❖

Notes and quotes from the Seattle pits.

BY MAC CLOUSE

Greg O’Farrell: In June 2022, Greg brought his boat to the Tri-Cities test session and let his grandson Gunnar do enough laps to be a qualified driver. Gunnar’s fastest lap was 155 mph. However, the boat did not race in 2022. This year, he, Gunnar, and the boat were in Seattle to race. “It’s fun to be back. I’ve told Gunnar to stay outside all weekend. This is a learning experience”. On Sunday, after the race, Greg said “It was a lot of fun. I saw a lot of friends. It was a good experience for Gunnar. The boat is in one piece, and I couldn’t be happier. We will now work with sponsorship opportunities for next year.”

Gunnar O’Farrell: “I have been waiting a year for this. I wish we could have been here last year. We didn’t change the boat much over the winter. I got some good advice from the other drivers at the test session.” On Sunday, after the race, Gunnar said, “This was a lot different than I thought it would be. It is a challenge to go from a small boat to these big ones. You do a lot more flying with the big boat, and it reacts slower than the small boats. When I was in a heat, the water was a lot rougher than I thought it would be. But it was great.”

Scott Raney: “We were disappointed to lose the gearbox in the final at Tri-Cities. It looked like we were going to get second place. Now we have to spend a lot to fix the gearbox. We will only have one for this race. We like to have two different ones so we can use whichever one is best for the water and weather conditions.” On Sunday, after the race, Scott said, “We had a good season that exceeded our expectations. We won a heat at every race and had good qualifying speeds. Now we need to continue to get better. We are learning what we need to do to get better. All of our sponsors are happy. What can we do to top this next year?”

Bobby King: “These two weeks have been the accomplishment of a childhood dream. Until I was seven years

old, I wanted to be a hockey player. Then I changed to wanting to be a driver. I owe everything I have done until now to my dad. Each course you race on is different. Seattle was more challenging, and I wanted to do as many laps as I could. Rob Graham is pleased. Thanks to him and the team. I hope I can talk to him about next year.”

Dylan Runne: “I’ll spend the rest of the season racing an F1 tunnel boat. The national championships are in three weeks in Ohio. It is fun to drive. It is an aggressive class of racing with no overlap rules. I have also started a new venture capital firm. It will keep me busy, but I’ll always have time for boat racing.”

Andrew Tate: “My grade for the start of the season was an F. I couldn’t have started worse for 50% of the season. But we built up momentum in the season. I am looking forward to 2024 and a better start to the season. Madison could be a good home for me. I could work with the city for the team. I’m a Midwest boy on a Midwest team.”

Kelly Stocklin: “The U-440 has some unique problems, things I don’t have sorted out. The gearbox is not always the problem. I feel bad for Brent. Unfortunately, I haven’t been able to give him the opportunity he deserves.”

Corey Peabody: “The big picture for our team was good, with lots of positives. We won here in Seattle for the local sponsor. We gave him something he really wanted. I’m proud of all we did.”

Darrell Strong: “We got the fourth win that we needed to get an A+ grade. The win in the final got us the Gold Cup, the national high-point championship, and the driver championship. Never in the sport’s history have two boats gone into the season’s final heat only 91 points apart. Michael knows how to drive this course, but it was a team effort.” ❖

GETTING TO KNOW BOBBY KING

Bobby King is the son of Jimmy King, driver of *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*. Bobby was the rookie driver of *Graham Trucking* at Tri-Cities and Seattle. The following interview was conducted by Craig Fjarlie on Saturday, July 29, in the pits at Tri-Cities, shortly after Bobby took his first ride in *Graham Trucking*.

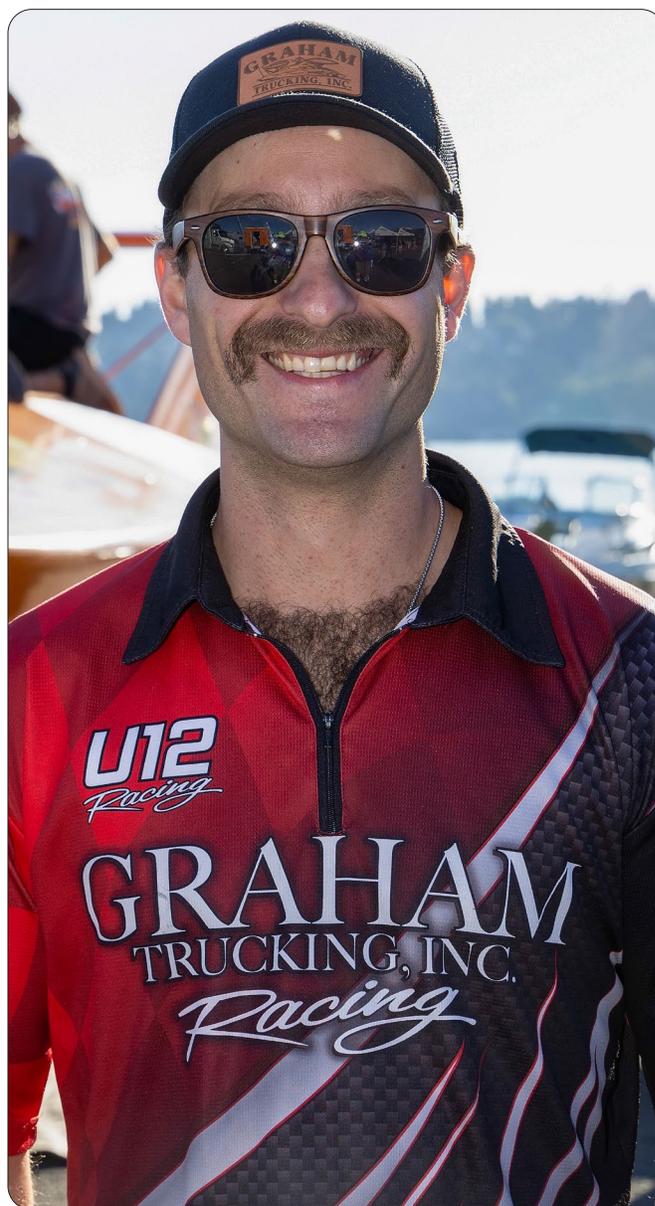
UNJ: Will you tell us a little about when and where you were born, and some of your early life experiences?

King: I was born June 2, 1994, in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. My mom is from Brockville, Ontario, and my dad is from Michigan. My dad dragged her down to a boat race and the rest is history. It's not like we lived in Canada or anything. I was only there for, like, a day, and then we all got brought back home. Grew up in a small, little one-stop-light town called Memphis, Michigan. When I say one stop light, I mean one stop light. We have a little diner, a little ice cream shop, little grocery store, and that's about it.

I went to the little school that's there. Did first through eighth grade in Memphis, and I also played a lot of hockey. That was kind of my first love before I found boat racing. I actually moved high schools. My freshman year, I went to Port Huron Northern to play hockey, and then I was fortunate enough to be able to play Junior B over in Sarnia, Ontario, for the Sarnia Legionnaires. Did that until I was 21. I mean, this whole time, right now, too, I was boat racing. I started racing, my first race was in 2011 in Tonawanda, New York.

What class did you start in?

I started in 2.5 Stock, me, my dad, and Jamie Auld. One of the great boatbuilders, very fortunate to call Jamie Auld a friend now. I've been talking to him this entire weekend. He was pretty much out of the boat-building game and my dad and I drug him back into it. We built my first 2.5 Stock and I raced that all the way up until 2016. I actually sold it to Dylan Runne, who's in the U-1 *Miss HomeStreet* and that's how me and Dylan and Andrew and those guys got to be friends. But after that, built the boat that I currently own. It's an H-350 in Canada or E-350 here in the states, but it's all a 350 hydroplane. I've had a lot of success with that. Won Valleyfield back-to-back years now, just last weekend.



Chris Denslow

When you were getting started, were you doing your own engine work, or did you have someone else do it?

Actually, my dad, Jamie Auld, and I built my first boat top to bottom. That's where I learned how to do all the composite stuff. I guess Jamie was kind enough to pretty much give me all the knowledge that he had over the years. As far as engine work, my dad's long-time engine builder, Ken Sperry, who did all the *Orange Crush* stuff, did *Casino 7* with Jean Theoret, just a really, really talented engine builder, he did all of it. So, it was pretty much an in-house operation. That's how it has always been with my dad. My dad has been fortunate to meet a lot of people and I was introduced to all of his contacts. You know, boat racing is expensive enough as it is, so we do all the down and dirty work, all the grinding, all the repairs, all that stuff. I try not to pay for it. If I can build it, I'm not going to pay for it, you know?

Yeah.

So, then, outside of that, that is pretty much my hobby. I'm pretty much full-time boat racing. Currently, I work for a company in Michigan called Sankeur Composite Technologies, SCT for short. Patrick has known me since I was a baby and he's always been buggin' me to come work for him. I've done quite a few jobs. Been his carpenter for 10 years and then I was industrial generator technician for four years, and now I do the composite stuff full time.

I'm currently supposed to drive a Grand Prix boat for Justin and Maryann Schaller, of Michigan. They brought the boat over to Patrick for me to finish it up, so my life right now is 24/7 boat racing. When I go to work, I'm putting the boat together, when I go home, I'm working on my boat, and then come to the race-course and drive these things. Just been really fortunate in this sport to have a lot of the right people around me. A lot of guys have pointed me in the right direction.

Just having my dad, I owe every-



Chris Denstlow

Bobby King (left) with his father, Jimmy King, driver of the U-3 *Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware*.

thing I have to him in this sport. He's like a living legend in my eyes, I mean, three Valleyfield wins, bunch of North American Championships, bunch of championships in Grand Prix. My dad still knows how to get it done. In 2019 he won an HRL championship and Valleyfield in the same year. He's nobody to sleep on. He keeps talking about being done and stuff, and I'm like, "Well, dude, you're still good at it, why do you want to be done?"

But, it's pretty much 24/7 boat racing for me. Luckily, my girlfriend, Kristie Gaedcke, she one-hundred-percent supports it. When she got into it, when we got into our relationship, she kind of knew the game. She's like, boat racing is going to be a giant thing and she had no idea what this stuff was or why I waste my time on it and all that. She's really grown to love it. She loves coming to the race sites.

That's a big plus.

Yeah. And just taking her to all these new places. This is the first time she has ever been to Tri-Cities. Next weekend will be the first time she has ever been to Seattle. Just a lot of places that she has never been able to go to, and she's lovin' every minute of it right now. She's having a good time. It's huge to have that sup-

port in the sport because it's hard to do it on your own. She knows this is what I love to do, and she just backs me 100%.

When you were getting started, you never raced outboards? You didn't go into J or anything like that?

No, we were really, really close to doing the outboard route and then my mom went to one of those races. Obviously, my dad did that stuff when he was 10, 11, 12 years old, and that was long before my mom. She had never seen one and she actually made her way to one of the races and was like, "Absolutely not, there's nothing around them right now. He's gotta be in a cockpit, basically."

So, we just made the jump to in-board right away. And like I said, we had so many people come to the forefront to make that boat happen. Ken Sperry, Chris McCarney, Tommy Alfano, Jamie Auld, Roger Mahan, all those guys that wanted to see me go race. It's already a really expensive sport and we're really fortunate to know the people that we know. Just everybody was like, if he wants to do it, we're going to back it 100%. I had some really good stuff right out of the box, which makes it a lot easier. But, you know, my dad never gave me anything for granted. He was like, if you're gonna do this, you're going to put the boat to-



Bobby King takes the U-12 *Graham Trucking* around the second turn at the Tri-Cities during his first ride in an Unlimited hydro.

gether. It's not like my dad was out there getting the boat ready for races and everything, he was only out there helping.

Not a turn-key thing.

No, he was like, "You're going to build every part of this thing, you're going to do all the maintenance, you're going to do it the right way." That was the biggest thing he drilled into my head. Very fortunate; obviously paid dividends. I got to where I am now. It's been a journey, that's for sure.

Who was doing your props in those days?

Roger Mahan, actually, as far as propeller design and stuff. Then we go through Dave Dewald. We had a good relationship with Jeff Titus and you know him. My dad, Roger Mahan, and Jeff, all throughout the years of boat racing. We're really fortunate there, and, you know, Roger Mahan knows what he's doing when it comes down to propeller work.

He has been in it for decades.

Forever, but, I mean, the guy's got a knack for a lot of things, but he's really got a knack for props. Even to this day, in 350, he's always designing me propellers

and stuff. I just tell him if it's good or bad and he goes back to the drawing board. That's why that 350 runs the way it does. It's because of Roger Mahan. It's all his engines, his propellers. I own the boat, but he supplies the engines, a lot of propellers and stuff, and gives me everything I need to put the boat out front.

This weekend, everybody's thinking here you are racing against your dad, but you've actually done that in 350.

Yeah, we got to do that in 350.

A couple of times, probably.

Yeah, absolutely. The big one for me was when we got to race against each other in Valleyfield.

That wasn't this year, was it?

No, that was, [pause] what year was that? We're going back, that would have been my first year with the boat, so that would have been 2018. Yup. We had a good little deck-to-deck race going on. Roger kinda got a little wild with the set-up so the thing wouldn't come out of the corners that great, so I got a jump on him and for two laps there I was. It was really cool to be doing 100-plus miles an hour right next to your old man [laughter]. Something not a lot of guys get to

do and even this weekend when we were out there testing yesterday, just to pull up next to him and be like, wow, this guy's done a lot. I'm just lucky to be here and everything. It's something, almost brings a little tear to your eyes. That guy has given me everything in boat racing, so just to be able to do it with him, and do it as a family, is just memories you'll never forget, man.

When you were beginning your racing, did you have a thought that maybe you could drive an Unlimited some day, or was that just too far in future and not something to worry about?

You know, everybody that jumps into this sport always...you know, you drive around in your car, you daydream a little bit about what it would be like to step into one of these. To be honest with you, I kinda thought I had a good chance for Grand Prix, but up here is just such a limited...the amount of boats, there are a lot of good drivers out there. The thought had crossed my mind a lot, but I didn't really think that I would ever end up in one.

You know, a lot of stuff has to align. You have to have a little bit of luck on

your side—right place, right time kind of thing. Luckily, the last couple of years with my boat and [being] fortunate to drive some really good Grand Prix stuff, just had my name said enough where I think the stars kind of aligned there. But like I said, there are a lot of other good drivers out there, too, that possibly could have had this shot, but basically, their name wasn't said enough. Either they had a bad year, this year or last year, all kinds of stuff like that. So, it definitely crossed my mind but, I'll be honest with you, I didn't really ever think it was going to happen.

You have driven Grand Prix.

Yeah. I started driving Grand Prix, actually, for Mario Maraldo in the *Baby Doll* when I was, like, 17, 18 years old. Mario lives really close to me now. I'm about 20 minutes away from Mario. He's known me since I was a baby. He's always known my dad. I had my 2.5 Stock then and I went to Waterford, Michigan, about an hour away from my house. We went there and Mario comes up and grabs me, he's like, "Want to go for a big boat ride?" I was like, "Absolutely, man." I got in there and that was the wildest two days of my life up to that point. I'm pretty sure I was 17 years old. You know, that power

that's behind you and everything. Mario was always really, really good to me.

So that's kind of where that all started. Then I was fortunate enough to be the backup driver for Ken Brodie, got in the boat a couple of times, had a couple of heats in it. This year at Gunter'sville I filled in for Andrew in the *Steeler* boat and was fortunate enough on my first weekend to get my first win, so that was really cool, especially to run on a record course. I mean, what a boat!

Those guys from Grand Island, New York, just know how to put a Grand Prix together. My godfather, Mike Geblein, is on that team and really pushed to get me in that boat. It's a big family thing and he knew that I could get the job done and pretty much gave me my chance. Talked the team into it and it was like, "I think this kid can do it." And you know, we went out there and got it done.

Another thing, if I had told you I was gonna win my first Grand Prix weekend, the first time in the boat, I would have told you a lie [laughter]. But, yeah, not a lot of Grand Prix experience but I'm hoping that changes in the future.

I'm really in love with this Unlimited thing right now, they're awesome boats to drive, but just with my dad's his-

tory in Grand Prix, those are a couple of things I want to chase down. Some of the stuff that he's been able to accomplish, I would love to be able to do in Grand Prix. Like I said, I really, really like this Unlimited thing. It's awesome and I hope I get to do it for many, many years to come, but just like Andrew Tate still gets to drive his Grand Prix boat and all that jazz, that's something I really want to do, too. I think if I can stay in Unlimited and Grand Prix for a long time, I'd be a pretty happy guy.

In terms of the Unlimited, how did you find out that you were under consideration to drive this boat?

Actually heard the rumors in Gunter'sville. I was driving the GP boat and then I had my 350 down there for the Pro-Lite series and people were, like, "Hey, you might get a call from Rob [Graham] if he decides to bring the boat out." Nothin' really ever came of it, you know, just kind of rumors. Same thing in Madison. Everybody's like, "Hey, you might be getting a phone call." Then a couple of days before Valleyfield, I was literally getting my boat ready in my garage and got a phone call from Rob. He's like, "Hey, man, want to come and drive a really big boat?" I'm like, "Absolutely!"



Chris Denslow

Bobby King and Graham Trucking (left) is on the racecourse with his father aboard Griggs presents Miss Ace Hardware.

So, got through the Valleyfield weekend, signed the contract, and here we are.

Did you fly out to Seattle, to the shop?

No, it was such timing...

The first time you saw it was when you came here?

First time I saw it. I mean, I'd seen the boat before. Everybody has seen the boat, but yeah, first time I crawled into it was here. Fortunately, Andrew was the last guy to drive it and I didn't have to change, really anything in the *Steeler* boat, or the *HydroFish* boat, so we were all really confident that there were only going to be some minor tweaks to get me to fit in the seat, and that's all it was. Just had to do a little stuff with the pedals and everything, but the seat was awesome. Andrew and I are pretty much the same guy. We're about the same height, same build, so that was very fortunate that it worked out that way, 'cause I'm definitely not the tallest guy on planet earth.

After Dylan Runne drove Goodman Real Estate during testing at San Diego in 2022, he remarked that he was surprised how much effort it took to drive it. He said, "I have to start a workout program." Are you finding that it takes a lot more effort to drive an Unlimited than a Grand Prix or 350?

You know, every boat has their things. I wouldn't say it's any more effort, but it's just how smooth you can be with these, especially these big boats. I mean, it goes for all classes of boats. The way these guys work and stuff. Obviously, this is an old *Budweiser* boat, so you know Villwock was in this thing, a really, really smart guy. I mean, physically it's very demanding, it really is. But, with the boat set-up that these guys have given me, as far as turning the boat and all that stuff, it's all about staying ahead of it. If you're behind the boat, that's when you've really got to work hard. If you're ahead of the boat and you're leading the boat into the corner, you know, you're not just sticking the fin and slamming it there and all that stuff.

But overall, like Dylan said, the physical demands to drive one of these things, I'll probably be right there with them. I'll probably have a lot more off-season work to do, as far as me being in shape and everything. Physically demanding, yes, but I'm sure it's the same with Dylan, too. As you give the team information, they can make the tweaks that really get the boat to where you're super comfortable in it. Fortunately, everything that I've asked the *Graham Trucking* team to do, they've given to me this weekend.

So far, so good, it's a smooth boat ride, but everything's different when you're by yourself versus when there's a lot of boats out there, so we're going to find out this afternoon if I still have the same answer for you [laughter].

Did they go over the starting procedure for the engine and all of that?

Oh, yeah. Tom Anderson, he really knows what he's doing. He has been in the sport for a really, really long time and he has broken everything down and made it as simple as possible. He has given me everything that I've asked for. He went over everything. We pretty much sat down Thursday night and, like, it's homework time, and started going over it. How to start the thing, where everything is, all the lights, gauges that need to be looked at, this, that, and the other thing. And so far this weekend, Tom has given me the world and all the tools to be successful. I can't thank the whole *Graham Trucking* team enough for that.

The first time you started it and went out on the course, what were you thinking?

Man, I was just like, well, you got the opportunity so you might as well make the most of it [laughter]. There's no reason to lollygag around, so I just got it up on plane, obviously got the nerves going and all of that, but for me, at least, once the engine starts, the adrenalin comes up and the nerves go down. It's kind of one of those deals, you just get in there and you're like, it's still a race boat.

At the end of the day, I've done this a million times. It's still a race boat that just happens to be a little bit bigger and a little bit faster. My dad has always had the best saying, especially when you jump in for the first time, "The throttle goes both ways." You do what makes you comfortable. So, I got the boat out there and I was like, well, these things are made to go fast, so just kinda put my foot into the floor and I was like, eventually you're going to have to go into that turn and not lift your foot, and I kinda made it happen real quick. I was like, all right, it's over



Chris Denslow

Bobby King shares a moment with J. Michael Kelly.



Bobby King drives *Graham Trucking* on Lake Washington in Seattle.

with, we did it. Man, we did it.

You have to start outside and back the first two heats, but then you can go with them.

Yeah, exactly. Starting on Sunday, as long as everything goes well. Tom and I have been talking a lot about that. These first two heats we're just going to mind our p's and q's. We're not setting any world records today, there's no expectation this weekend. The only expectation is I should bring the boat back to the dock. Just don't be dumb about it. And that's so far, so good. I've done it every time and like I said, this team has been awesome in welcoming me in. They seem to have a lot of confidence in me, and it makes it a lot easier as a driver.

To walk into a team that's kind of iffy about you—and I've been in that situation a couple of times in my career—makes it a lot harder, because you feel like you have to do more. It makes it easier to make the boat go fast when the team trusts you, and it seems like the entire *Graham Trucking* team, and Rob Graham, have the trust in me. It has been very welcoming; it feels like home already, you know?

Good. To change the subject a bit, and as something of a wrap-up question, some people have observed that there is a lot of gray hair in the pits. How do we get younger people interested in this? It

seems the bulk of the hard-core fans and a lot of the people working on the boats are older and have been around a long time. Do you know many young people who are interested in this?

Yeah, I mean, all my friends that see it are really, really into it. The biggest thing I've learned, especially with the Pro-Lite thing—and I kind of organized that and put it all together and I've told all the 5-Litre guys this—you see a seven, eight, nine, 10-year old kid walking around the pits, well, you grab 'em and put 'em in the boat. That puts a little bit of spark, like, you know, hey, I might want to do this one day. I think for me, it's always been about that.

It's the kids, because once they get to be a teenager, life's kind of mapping out already. They have their interests, and they have this and they have that but that's why every chance I get, there's kids. "Here's a card, kid, you want to come up and sit in the boat and stuff?" I think that'll be the big draw for it, just getting the younger generation, make them feel welcome.

I know there's a lot of stuff going on in these pits; big boats, a lot of money is being thrown around and this and that and the other thing, but those 10 minutes can change that whole kid's life and where it might go. He may want to do boat racing now, instead of going into

go-karts or something like soccer, hockey, or whatever it may be. So just all this, drivers and a team, taking that 10-minute chunk out of a day to change a kid's life, I think that's what is going to help the sport. Like I said, once you're a teenager your life's kind of mapped out.

I know my life was kind of mapped out because I grew up in a shop. I was either in a hockey rink or I was in a shop grinding on a boat. That's where my life was going to go. In any other sporting event, when I was eight years old, if somebody would have taken 10 minutes with me and said, "Hey, kid, this is what we do and here's my name and here's a card and everything," it could have completely changed...I could have loved soccer or something like that. I think that's really where it's at. You have to get kind of bare bones with it.

I think everybody kind of jumps the gun and well, we need this, and we need that. The biggest thing I've learned, and again it's all from the Pro-Lite series, is just taking that 10 minutes and when you watch a kid's face light up, it's like, wow! That was worth it. When they're sitting down in the cockpit and they're just in awe of what we get to do, that's what is going to make it grow again, in my opinion.

Okay, well, thank you. ❖

Head of HomeStreet Bank says boat sponsorship is ending.

The chairman and CEO of HomeStreet Bank has notified the Miss Madison Racing Team that his company's sponsorship of one of the race team's boats has ended. "This month marks a bittersweet moment as we say goodbye as your race team and boat sponsor," Mark Mason wrote in a letter sent to team members on August 14.

"As with many things in life, change is inevitable," he continued. "The landscape of the sport is evolving, and the paradigms of sponsorship are shifting. We are in a period of banking unlike any I've ever experienced. Like all banks today, we are working through a challenging earnings period driven by the accelerated increase in interest rates. As such, we've had to evaluate our non-essential expenses and make tough decisions."

HomeStreet Bank, which is based in Seattle, has sponsored Unlimited hydroplanes for the past nine seasons—eight of which being with the Miss Madison team. The bank has also been the title sponsor of the past three H1 Unlimited races held in Seattle as well as the most



Chris Denslow

HomeStreet Bank first became involved as a sponsor in unlimited hydroplane racing when it agreed to put its name on Ed Cooper's U-3 in 2015.

recent six San Diego events.

"As we bid farewell, let's celebrate and focus on the remarkable achievements and the memories we have created together," Mason told the Miss Madison team members.

HomeStreet Bank first became involved in the sport in 2015 when it sponsored Ed Cooper's turbocharged-Allison hydro at the Seattle, Detroit, and San Di-

ego races. With Jimmy King driving, the boat finished fourth in Seattle and fifth in San Diego.

Their sponsorship then moved to the Miss Madison team the following year and resulted in a national championship. During eight seasons as the team's sponsor, they campaigned two different *Miss HomeStreet* hydros that won a total of 14 races, including three Gold Cups, and five national titles. Jimmy Shane was in the cockpit for seven of those seasons, then retired and was replaced by rookie Dylan Runne, whose best performance this past season was a fourth-place finish in Madison.

Upon hearing the news, Steve David, a longtime driver for the Miss Madison team, suggested in a Facebook post that fans should thank HomeStreet for their significant support of the sport and team for almost a decade. "This is a good time to be grateful for what we had and ambitious for what's next," he wrote. "Our Madison team has seen challenges before, and we always get back in the ring." ❖



Chris Denslow

Miss HomeStreet hydroplanes have won a total of 14 races during the past eight seasons and five national championships.

AROUND THE CIRCUIT

Race Site News by Chris Tracy



Thank you to the hard-working food vendors at the boat races.

Getting food and drink was often on the agenda for spectators attending the Columbia Cup in Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, Wash.) or the HomeStreet Cup in Seattle. Thankfully, at both of the events, food vendors and their hard-working employees stepped up. It was no easy feat to provide the crowd with food. Let's look at two examples of what was needed to support the crowds.

The Tri-Cities Water Follies sought to increase food vendors this year. One new vendor was the food truck, Tumbleweeds. Tumbleweeds is a Mexican flare, brick and mortar, quick-food restaurant in Richland. Fairly recently, the restaurant expanded its business by having a custom-made food truck built to service local events.

Second-generation restaurateur and Tumbleweeds owner, Keith Moon, told me the new food truck cost more than his first house! As a first-time race vendor, Moon chronicled their experience. Here are Moon's thoughts.

The related costs to stage at the boat races were the largest that he has experienced since he started operating his food truck. They included: \$750 vendor fee, \$500 food vouchers for staff and volunteers, \$150 for parking passes and additional wrist bands for his staff, \$160 for ice, \$40 for menu creation (sign), \$225 in gas for the generator, and a \$250 permit to ground the generator. So, total approximate fixed costs were nearly \$2,100, or about \$700 per day over the three-day event.

After tallying the fixed costs, Moon mentioned that he "understands why

some vendors are on the fence about the boat races." But he also said, "The [Water Follies] staff and organizers seem to have it all together, very organized, kind, appreciative, and accommodating." And he liked the location that his food truck was assigned. "Our prime location next to the pits and on the boardwalk and sensed that this is where you need to be to make it all worth it."

Servicing the boat races meant that his team had some unique challenges. "Unlike past venues, they don't have power at our boat race spot, so we have to truck in 100% of all product to the location between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. [That] means we have to report to Tumbleweeds by 5 a.m. in order to make that happen, turn on the dry trailer, and wait for the appliances to acclimate, before we put all the product on board. If we are lucky enough to sell out, we'd be good...but if any product remains after the first day, we also have to haul it all back to Tumbleweeds [brick and mortar] since we can't leave power on through the night."

Moon knew he needed a limited menu for the boat races, but after Friday, he decided to adjust and expand the menu a bit for Saturday and Sunday. So, how did it go for the weekend? Here's Moon's evaluation.

"First, this weekend took everything we had to make it happen. Early 3 a.m. mornings and late night (washing) dishes. We ended up generating over \$12k in sales for the weekend. This has been, by far, our greatest producing event and probably our best 'office view.' Our entire team rallied behind this event and ensured its perfect execution!

"Would we do it again? Absolutely! Was it worth it? Absolutely! Was it the hardest thing we've ever done? It was really hard and I'm personally paying for that this moment (with a headache). There are those who make it happen and those who watch it happen. Thank you for my family, team, and supportive customers. You have to sacrifice for what you want, or what you want becomes the sacrifice. See you next year Tri-City Water Follies."

In Seattle, many race spectators sat in special-event areas, like the Captain's Club, Bayview, or the Skyboxes. Food came with their tickets in these areas, and it was provided due to the near Herculean efforts of the Old Ballard Catering Company. This was the second year Old Ballard provided the food and drinks.

Old Ballard also operates a brick-and-mortar restaurant, but it was closed from July 29 through August 9 so they could set up, prepare, serve, and take down after the boat races. During the three-day HomeStreet Cup, they served 2,000 meals each day. Food was prepared at their brick-and-mortar location and trucked to a central kitchen tent at the race site each day at about 7 a.m. From there, buffet food was delivered by golf cart to the second kitchen location, adjacent to the skyboxes, or to the various special-event tents. A staff of about 30 were involved in preparing and serving the food. One of the supervisors mentioned that "Seafair was a great team-building event."

Thanks go to all the vendors that help make the boat races a great experience for spectators! ❖

COMMENTS FROM H1

Jan Shaw, Director of Operations



The 2023 H1 Unlimited Racing Series will be remembered for several things. For those who were there, who could forget the thunderstorms in Guntersville and Madison? We also saw a couple of boats turn in impressive speeds. Dustin Echols turned in the fifth fastest qualifying lap in history and Corey Peabody set an all-time record for a heat on a 2.5-mile course.

But, most of all, it was a season of close competition. We had deck-to-deck racing at every contest, often throughout the entire heat. And, when was the last time six boats were within striking distance of the national championship when the season's final race arrived? It was also remarkable that the title wasn't decided until the season's last heat.

H1 Unlimited has much to be proud of in 2023. In addition to the nail biters on the racecourse, the live streaming was better than ever, and we had a good increase in the number of boats entered in the events compared with last year. We made good progress in many areas, but

we're not satisfied with where we are. We must improve even more.

For many people on the H1 Unlimited staff, the offseason is the busiest time of the year. That's when all the planning is done—all the behind-the-scenes effort that doesn't get attention until the boats hit the water in June. This year, with racing already finished in early August, the longer offseason promises to be especially busy for those staff people.

Arranging for the 2024 season will be one of those tasks.

The loss of the San Diego race was a serious setback, yet we have high hopes that we will return to Mission Bay. If all goes well, we also anticipate adding a couple of other new events next season. One of those possibilities is Detroit, where the organizers have signed a Letter of Intent and paid a deposit for a 2024 race. They are busy making the arrangements and securing the sponsors needed to make that event a reality.

We look at the rules every offseason, and this year will be no exception. Offi-

ciating the faster boats and the close deck-to-deck racing through all of the laps of a heat, not just in the first turn of the first lap, has given our referees a challenge. We'll need to look at ways to make their job easier.

And, speaking of rules, we've spent the past couple of years cleaning and reorganizing the rule books. Perhaps it's time we took a harder look at making some significant changes to our rules? Are there rule changes that you would like to see?

We also can't overlook the fact that it takes money to run this sport. We intend to make a greater push for new sponsors and to pursue new funding sources. We also will continue to seek new ways to get greater public attention to our sport.

So, H1 Unlimited staff members won't be kicking back and relaxing in the months ahead. There's plenty of work that needs to get done. ❖

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PLEASE JOIN US AT THE NEXT MEETING OF UNLIMITEDS UNANIMOUS

2 p.m. on Sunday, September 10, 2023

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