

NEAR Hall of Fame: Inductees; Cars in Scale

# Shorttrack

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**We're all over NEW ENGLAND**

**Rob Janovic, Jr.  
Champion**

**Nick Fornoro  
Remembered**

**A Tough ACT  
to Follow  
The Series looks  
to its Future**

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# What Goes Around...



**R**ight to the end, it was new territory for Rob Janovic, Jr. Sure, Janovic had won the 100-lap segment of the Finale the year before, his first extra-distance triumph. But now, late in the 2007 Finale, Janovic was running third, more than enough to capture his first Waterford Speedbowl SK-Modified championship.

"I was thinking this car is so fast and

I've got to win a championship," he remembers. "It was one of those devil-on-one-shoulder-and-angel-on-the-other deals. I wanted to win, and the car could do it, but I knew I was going to let so many people down if I got greedy and tore a wheel off or something."

Over the final 20 laps Janovic "didn't even want to get somebody else's paint," on the VoJan No. 51. So

**Rob Janovic, Jr., has been racing around Waterford Speedbowl for 21 years. This year he finally raced to his first championship.**

*by Pete Zanardi*



*photo by Keith Cyr*



*Janovic, right, battles the Speedbowl's one-man SK dynasty, Dennis Gada.*

*photo by Steve Kennedy*

Janovic listened to the angel. He finished third, rewarding VoJan, an entity since 1996, and winning the championship in a 12-year old Chassis Dynamics car.

"I was repeating the same expletive that I used when I won my first race," Janovic continues. "'Holy s\*\*t, I just won the championship.'"

Co-owner John Volpe (The "Vo" in

VoJan) and crew-chief/spotter (and brother-in-law) Greg Hanner were already celebrating. Tire guy Greg Teracciano, who has been with Janovic since the beginning, Damon Schoendorf and Jimmy Gumbert were also celebrating. They had beaten back a determined challenge from Dennis Gada, who was looking for a record seventh championship.



photo by Steve Kennedy

*"As much as I thought a championship run would be the most stressful thing I've ever encountered it actually ended up a very fun challenge," says Rob Janovic. "It was the most fun that I've ever had."*

Still, Janovic needed time for the championship to "sink in." Championships, he explains, "weren't my biggest priority. I just like winning races, and when I don't, I want to at least run competitively."

## ...Comes Around

Rob Janovic is always mentioned in the company of Gada, Jeff Pearl, Tommy Fox and Ed Reed Jr., by the hopelessly parochial Speedbowl media. They are all homegrown racers. Janovic now had what the rest had - a championship.

It was Pearl, the 1998 champ, who explained to Janovic "Championships are affixed to you; they are forever."

Six-time champion Bob Potter offered advice over the week leading up to the final race and then posed in Victory Lane with Janovic. Fox was among those welcoming him aboard.

"All the accolades, e-mails, phone calls, interviews since; it's sunk in," says Janovic, a racer since coming to the Speedbowl in 1987. "(The championship) is a bigger deal than I thought."

He's been a winner, scoring at least one SK checked every year since 2002. Over that span he was never worse than fifth in the final point standings, grabbing third twice. But being the rabbit in a championship run was brand-new.

"I have never really been in that situation before," Janovic continues, "I've been second late in the season with a slight mathematical chance, but this was different."

When the team moved into the points-lead in June, "all the guys got excited," says Janovic. "I cautioned them that there was a ton of time left and we really hadn't had any bad luck. 'Let's not get too excited,' I told them. 'It could turn into great disappointment.'"

As the weeks dwindled, Janovic got into it.

"As much as I thought a championship run would be the most stressful thing I've ever encountered it actually ended up a very fun challenge," he says. "It was the most fun that I've ever had."

Janovic, who along with his brother Gary and Teracciano came to the Speedbowl in 1987 with a '70 Chevelle, has learned to prioritize. That initial operation lasted three years before Janovic, who entered the University of New Haven, became a now-and-then competitor until returning with Volpe in a Late Model in '96.

They won on opening day, his first-ever checkered. That and the first SK win - in 2000 - are cherished memories.

"I have always placed so much emphasis on winning races," he says. "It is tough to say anything could ever match the thrill of winning the first race. The championship ranks with them but for different reasons. This is more cumulative, an achievement of several seasons."

Without being aware, the team has been moving toward the title for a dozen seasons.

It was, he says, "a tough sell" convincing Volpe to go to the SKs. "His heart was in the Late Models," and for good reasons. The team had some success in the division. Janovic had to make some changes as well.

"The biggest thing," he says, "is I didn't come from a

*Janovic takes a victory lap at Waterford after winning his first feature on opening day in 2000. "It is tough to say anything could ever match the thrill of winning the first race," he admits.*

racing background. I'm self-taught. I was building my late models, setting them up myself in a division with lots of room for interpretation. It was an area best left to the likes of [master chassis builders] Phil Rondeau and Jay Stuart, but I always had stubborn pride."

By 2001 he was at a point where "I didn't want to end my career without winning at least one modified race."

His heart was set on a Chassis Dynamics car knowing "a CD car with a good engine would at least put us on an equal basis. The rest would be up to me."

They wound up with the first car



*photo by Steve Kennedy*

Mike Paquette built after assuming ownership of CD in 1995. VoJan continues to campaign the car, a fact that gets them media-attention on the highest level.

"Mike comes to the Speedbowl and just stares at the car," says Janovic. "He is amazed that the car is still winning races."

And it will be back in 2008. "Once a season begins I'm always anxious for that first win," Janovic says. "I'm sure that will be true again. Now, there is a championship as well."

"Defending champion;" now there's more new territory for Janovic to handle.