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## Experience equals success on track for Holtgraver

By Thomas Zuck, FOR THE TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Friday, June 4, 2010

"Little" Danny Holtgraver is no longer so little. And, as hard as it is to believe, Holtgraver, 20, is in his fifth season driving a Sprint Car, and results are beginning to match his experience.

"We definitely have a better car under us now," Holtgraver said. "My dad has been getting the car better and that really helps my confidence because when I go out there, I trust that the car is good."

Holtgraver will need that trust. The All Star Sprint Series is tonight at Lernerville, and it should be a tightly contested race; one to which local drivers also look forward in their desire to protect their home turf. Holtgraver currently is third in Lernerville points and he has scored four top-five finishes.

Holtgraver has always been fast, that was never in doubt. So why now are the results improving? And why is he now looking forward to races like the All Stars or the World of Outlaws? According to Holtgraver, it is a matter of trust and communication.

"I think a lot of it now is I am able to tell what the car is doing out there, and I have enough experience now that I can tell my dad what the car is doing and we can make it right," Holtgraver said. "Dad knows what to do. We have a pretty good system now, where I can tell him something and he knows what I am trying to say.

"I guess we were lacking knowledge. We have learned a lot of things the past two years that have really helped us out. Timmy Shaffer (current All Star Sprint point leader) has been helping us out, and Brian Kemenah (four-time All Star Crew Chief of the Year), they've been helping us a ton. He's able to listen to what they are saying and we can get it to the car. They've got the car going in the right direction. When you have a good car, it makes my job a whole lot easier for the driver."

Last week at Lernerville, Holtgraver and Carl Bowser dueled for the lead in the Sprint feature. Bowser held off all of Holtgraver's challenges, but it is clear both drivers recently have made significant progress. Both drivers used the entire track, and that was a good sign for Holtgraver.

"I am definitely getting more confident here at Lernerville," Holtgraver said. "Even before I got hurt, when I broke my neck, I couldn't get into Turn 3, especially on the top. The track has really been decent and I have been able to go through, even on the top. I haven't really had a problem and have been able to go through wide open. It wasn't, really, even just the injury two years ago."

Part of that confidence comes from Holtgraver getting better at reading the track and changing conditions. But no matter how much better he has gotten at that aspect, there is one spot on the track that has always given him grief.

"For five years, Turn 3 up top has just gotten me," Holtgraver said. "I always let it get to me; it kind of just drops off the back. But in time trials, I am able to go hard into it. There really hasn't been any other turn that has given me any trouble like that. We went up to rolling wheels last year and you are going 150 miles an hour into the corner, there and I was running it wide open. I think it really has just been the hill. I know what it is like to go down over the hill."

Another area on which Holtgraver has improved is qualifying and it is something he is looking forward to tonight, even though he admits that he has, at times, gotten too excited over time trials.

"When they come to town, I just get so excited all day," Holtgraver said. "I keep thinking about time trials. Every time I get ready for a time trials show, I get so anxious. We are getting pretty good at time trials and, lately, we have been in the top 12 or 13 in all but a couple. If you do that, you get a pretty good spot in a heat race and then you should be able to transfer into the feature. It may not do a lot for you in the heat, but it should help you get into the feature."

A duel with Ed Lynch Jr. recently at Mercer Raceway Park has helped prepare Holtgraver for tonight's race. Holtgraver was the race at Mercer.

"It does help make me more confident for a show like this; it was pretty awesome," Holtgraver said. "We had a pretty good car again and it really helps starting on the front row. We had a pretty good lead and then I looked up on the board and there was the number two (Lynch) behind me. Then, I got stuck behind a lapped car for a couple laps and that really killed me."

"Coming off of four with two to go, that's when I stood up a little bit and drove it as hard as I could without overdriving. I knew Ed started in the back, so he really had to be coming fast if he was up that close. He caught me from the back and I was still able to pass him back and then hold him off for the last two laps."