

County fair to feature flat track races

By Vera Sloan
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Flat-track motorcycle racing will return to Colby and the Thomas County Fair after a nearly 50-year absence.

Practice begins at 1 p.m. Thursday, July 29, with heat races at 4 p.m. The main event begins at 8.

"The practice and heat races are open and free to the public, and there will be some great entertainment during those times," said Frank Hardman, promoter and rider. "People who watch will really want to stick around for the main event that evening."

Hardman, owner of Cyclezone Racing, said he's from Glenrock, Wyo. He and his wife Lori have promoted flat-track racing for more than 30 years.

He said Colby was on the flat-track circuit in the late 1950s and 1960s, and he is helping to reintroduce the sport here. There are riders here, he said, and it's something that appeals to a lot of people.

In explaining flat-track racing, Hardman said that in America, horse racing was originally either "quarter pole" (racing in a straight line for a quarter of a mile) or on a closed oval track of grass or dirt. It wasn't necessary then, he said, to describe the race as "flat track" because they were all flat.

"After the coming of motor vehicles," Hardman said, "special high-speed oval motor race tracks were constructed on wooden surfaces. They were banked or even tilted to allow what were pretty primitive machines to attain higher speeds than on a flat surface."

In flat-track racing, he said, traction is more important than horsepower, and the racers use special Goodyear racing tires almost exclusively.

On a banked track, he explained, particularly one like the Thomas County track, they use straw bales to lessen the impact if riders miss the curve. Riders used to control their speed by sliding

before back wheel brakes were added to motorcycles. Some races today which actually offer classes with no brakes.

He said the flat-track races in Stockton, which celebrated 100 years in 2006, are known nationally.

"The Colby track was once a full half mile, and it was easy to reach 100 mph on the straightaway," he said. "It's easy to pick up to 65 to 75 mph in the corners, but it varies from track to track, and we should see speeds on Colby's track reaching at least 95 mph."

Hardman said there should be some nationally known riders at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. He said the racers are not coming to compete with other fair activities, but to offer entertainment.

He said that they like to pack the stands. The riders have listening devices on their motorcycles because they like to hear the crowds cheer and yell when the bikes pass the stands.

"It's a whole different sound than the noise from stock cars," Hardman said of the racing bikes. "It isn't nearly as noisy, because the engines aren't nearly as big."

"With fuel at eight bucks a gallon, you have to love the sport," he said. "We burn about a quart of fuel in six laps on a half-mile track. The fuel tank holds two gallons of high-octane fuel, so you can about imagine that cruising (at) speed for very long doesn't make for real a happy situation."

Riding gear is heavy and hot, he said, and pretty expensive, with a suit costing from \$1,800 to \$2,200. He added that he has worn the same racing boots since 1972. The rider's left boot (the one that goes down on the track on a curve) has a steel sole, plus the toe is hard surfaced because it takes such a beating.

"The races in Colby will more than likely attract racers from about 20 states," he said. "There will be some of the top vintage racers in the country, and we'll even have a race for kids 4 and up."

Royals survive Sox rally

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Billy Butler and Jose Guillen homered and Zack Greinke survived a five-run eighth inning for a 7-6 victory over the Chicago White Sox.

Guillen also made a great catch of Mark Kotsay's leadoff drive in the ninth against Joakim Soria, banging into the right-field wall and falling to the ground but keep-

ing the ball in his glove.

Greinke (4-8) won for the third time in four starts. He sailed into the eighth with a 7-1 lead, but a pinch-hit, bases-loaded triple by Brent Lillibridge keyed Chicago's comeback.

Soria relieved Greinke to begin the ninth and closed for his 20th save in 22 opportunities.

Sliding into home plate



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

A baserunner for the Bambino Boys Jade team slid into home plate while the Orange team catcher tried to tag him out during a game at the Colby Recreation Fields on Wednesday.

Atwood gears up for county race

The 30th running of the Lake Atwood County Challenge Race will be at 7:30 a.m. Sunday.

The men will run four times around the lake for a distance of 8 kilometers (5 miles) and the women will run twice around the lake for a distance of 4 kilometers.

Every age-division finisher scores points for his or her county. In nearly every race, the team having the most participants wins the competition.

There are no awards and no entry fees. Runners take part for the honor of his or her county. All they have to do is show up.

County residence is not a requirement. Bring an out-of-county friend to the race and have that friend run for your county.

The County Challenge Race is the first event of the annual Lake Atwood Day celebration hosted by the Atwood Rotary Club.

Plan to be in Atwood on the Fourth of July.

Cavalier free agent expecting many offers

By Brian Mahoney
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — Finally free to leave Cleveland, LeBron James is ready to hear reasons why he should.

The NBA's long-awaited free agency period opened early Thursday, with teams such as New York and Miami focusing their attention on California.

Now all eyes will be on Ohio.

James was set to welcome the New Jersey Nets and the Knicks to his home state, with additional teams awaiting a later audience with the King.

The Clippers have scored an invite, proving even longtime losers have a chance for a transformation in this highly anticipated shopping season.

Teams could begin making their pitches at 12:01 a.m. (eastern time), and some got started quickly. Chris Bosh heard from four of them, including presumed favorites Chicago and Miami.

Atlanta's Joe Johnson was expecting early visits in Los Angeles from the Hawks and New York Knicks, with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporting that the Hawks were prepared to offer the All-Star shooting guard a maximum salary contract.

James could get multiple offers Thursday as the head of perhaps the deepest class in history.

It includes other All-Stars such as Dwyane Wade, Bosh, Dirk Nowitzki, Amare Stoudemire and Carlos Boozer; veterans such as Shaquille O'Neal and Ray Allen; and young up-and-comers such as Rudy Gay and David Lee.

"We've never had anything like this in my time that I can remember," New Jersey Nets president Rod Thorn said. "There have been big-time free agents before, but never this many teams that are trying to woo them. So it's unprecedented."

Teams were headed around the country to speak with players, though the Mavs were saved a long trip when Nowitzki informed them he would meet with them Thursday in Dallas — with the message arriving while president Donnie Nelson was at the airport preparing for a flight to Germany.

Showing they planned to be active, the Knicks confirmed on Twitter they would also

meet with Wizards swingman Mike Miller in Los Angeles. But they did so without team president Donnie Walsh, who went directly to Ohio in preparation for Thursday's meeting with James.

Pat Riley and a Heat contingent also began their free agency tour in California, where teams were hoping to meet with Stoudemire. Miami also planned to meet with Johnson.

It promised to be a wild first few days of July, with plans changing by the minute.

"You're not in control, as much as you would like to be," Timberwolves president David Kahn said. "I don't think any team feels right now they're in control of the situation. There's too many teams with room. Too many fine players out there. I think in those types of situations, it's best to be really nimble and change course if need be."

Kahn said early Thursday that Gay would visit Minnesota later in the day and Lee would arrive on Saturday. Gay is a restricted free agent, so Memphis can match any offer for him.

Lee was an All-Star this season in New York, but may not be back since the Knicks are hoping to land bigger names.

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