



# SIMPLY AMAZING

## John Labbous Jr. Schooled Them All At 1,000 Feet

BY JOHN DIBARTOLOMEO



Over the years, the names Peter Biondo and Kyle Seipel have been synonymous with a number of things. Both have literally grown up at the race track; Biondo watching his father Sam terrorize several East Coast tracks and Seipel the same as his father Ted and mother Georgia mimicking that feat out west.

Once the pair “grew up,” they certainly had big shoes to fill and have managed to make quite a name for themselves. Besides just winning on a local basis, both Biondo and Seipel have scored a ton of winners’ trophies and championships on both the sportsman and bracket racing levels. Being in that position gave them a unique perspective, which was enhanced by their long-distance friendship.

Biondo says, “Having raced a number of high dollar bracket races, both Kyle and I saw things we liked and things we didn’t. Kyle and I would always talk about one day running our own race.”

Seipel said, “With the way things are in our lives between business and family, it’s getting harder to remain at the competitive level that both Pete and I have been. This is certainly not to say that we don’t feel competitive, but our thoughts were to run a race the way we thought one should be run. We also felt this could be a long-term deal for us.”

Most racers seem to have an opinion of how a race should be run, but few are ever in the position to actually accomplish that feat. A feat, which both Biondo and Seipel realized quickly, would be herculean.

The concept was simple. Four days of bracket racing with a good payout and reasonable entry fee. Bristol Dragway was chosen for its track quality and location to hundreds of bracket racers in that part of the country. The only concern was eighth- or quarter-mile?

Most all race tracks in the south run eighth-mile and the majority of their customers have



**A** When John Labbous Jr. (center) picked up the win on Thursday’s \$12,500-to-win event, little did he—or anyone else for that matter—realize he’d have another \$40,000 coming his way for wins on Friday and Saturday. A simply unbelievable run of good luck and skill combined.

**B** George Rupert showed up in Bristol to do battle with his gorgeous ‘69 Camaro and prove door cars can win. The veteran racer took the runner-up spot in Thursday’s warm-up race.

**C** When the calling is for this much money to win, it draws the very best cars and drivers loaded with nitrous, chrome and terrific graphics such as Taylor Lastor’s dragster.

## BRISTOL SPRING FLING 20s



They came from all over as Richard McFarland's unique Pontiac dragster proved. The California driver is a regular on the high-dollar bracket racing scene.



Masters Entertainment was on hand to film the event for a special "Inside Drag Racing" show, which will have aired by the time you read this. However, it was highlighted by several in-car camera shots, which took the viewer behind the wheel of some of the sport's best drivers.

Even NHRA regulars came to partake. Dan Fletcher put a delay box in the winningest car in drag racing to attempt to earn some real cash.

no desire to run 1,320 feet. On the opposite end of the spectrum, most northeast racers run the quarter-mile and have an adverse reaction to anything less. In order to appease both, Biondo and Seipel sought a compromise that started two years ago on the NHRA national event scene: 1,000 feet. And so while the race was officially titled as the K&N Spring Fling 20s presented by Sparco, unofficially it became known as the 1,000-foot compromise.

Seipel said, "We weren't sure how the racers would react to 1,000 feet, but we felt it would allow us to

be able to serve as many customers as possible. And coming from the racer's side of the staging lanes, we knew that every racer was indeed a customer."

"My father always taught me," Biondo said, "that the best rule in business

was to take care of your customer. And that's what we tried to do here."

George Rupert, who was Thursday's runner-up said, "I think the 1,000-foot was a great idea. It really doesn't make any difference to run it. It's just a number



For their first time on the other side of the staging lanes as promoters, Kyle Seipel and Peter Biondo remained front and center all weekend in a successful effort.



We thought driving while using a cell phone in Tennessee was illegal. Apparently not, as Junior Houston proved. By Day 4, he was calling home to say he'd earned a \$20,000 payday as the Day 4 winner.



John Labbous Jr. had already made a mark on the sport of bracket racing with several wins and championships before he ever pulled into Bristol Dragway in late April. His 2010 year of racing was just beginning and, the week before he had won a local bracket race. To no one's surprise, when the night finally ended on Thursday, the second generation racer was standing with the \$12,500 winner's check.

Friday's \$20,000-to-win affair opened with each racer receiving one time shot. When eliminations were down to four cars, each was brought directly back up the return road and NHRA announcer Alan Reinhardt and Jared Pen-

nington shared the mic duties to interview each participant. The combatants at that point were Chad Hedgecock, Tommy Plott, Mike Fuqua and... John Labbous Jr. The typically quiet Labbous spoke even less, intent to simply concentrate on the job at hand, possibly even stunned that he was in the position to win once again.

He quietly put away Fuqua and when Hedgecock turned on the red light in the final, the stage was set for Labbous to make his second appearance to collect another big check.

Now, of course there, have been plenty of high-dollar races where someone has won two in a row, but no one was ready for what was to come in Saturday's 20K-to-win event. Even though Mother Nature tried to play havoc, the K&N Spring Fling 20s would have none of that. Under threatening skies, which about the quarter-finals showed a massive green and yellow blob on the radar



Tight racing was the order of the weekend, as it was all about taking or not taking the stripe. Regardless of the fact that this was the only event short of NHRA fuel car racing contested to 1,000 feet, it was still all about the right dial-in to choose.

The only person on the grounds with 1,000-foot experience was Top Fuel driver Shawn Langdon (left) who teamed up to drive one of Jon Ciccarone's (right) dragsters. That experience meant little as Langdon fell early in eliminations.

Biondo's and Seipel's minds, left out a large contingent of door cars. Seipel said, "Again, falling back on our racer roots, we chose to

you put on your car. Matter of fact, I think there's a lot of tracks that should be looking at it. These cars are getting faster all the time and the shut-down areas aren't getting any longer."

In the end, just about any of the almost 200 racers who showed up to take part in the Spring Fling 20s echoed Rupert's statement.

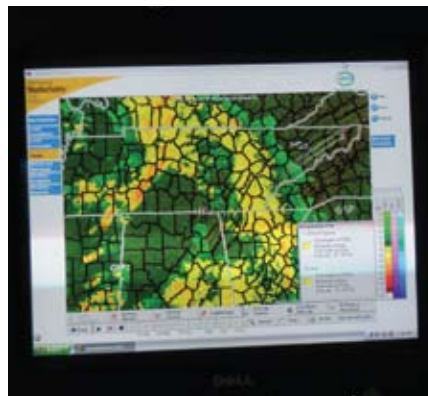
Most times at these types of races, dragsters seem to dominate, which in

separate the door cars and dragsters for the first three rounds before they were brought together."

But the real story of this race was not the 1,000 foot; the Jim Harrington Memorial Barbeque presented by Sparco and cooked by chef extraordinaire Anthony Bertozzi, or the separation of door cars from dragsters. No, the real story was the type of domination by one driver which is very rarely seen.



Biondo and Seipel used the staging lane expertise of Curt Smith (right) who made sure everyone was paired up with their correct partner.



Mother Nature tried to intervene in the on-track festivities but never failed to materialize, as all the events of the weekend went off with only minor issues.

## BOX SCORE

**INAUGURAL K&N SPRING FLING 20S  
PRESENTED BY SPARCO  
Bristol, TN**

### Thursday

WIN: John Labbous Jr., White House, TN  
R/U: George Rupert, Cookeville, TN

### Friday

WIN: John Labbous Jr., White House, TN  
R/U: Chad Hedgecock, London, TN

### Saturday

WIN: John Labbous Jr., White House, TN  
R/U: Jeff Rucks, Rainesville, AL

### Sunday

WIN: Junior Houston, Newland, NC  
R/U: Brian Folk, Durand, IL

### Dragster King of the Mountain

WIN: Jason Lynch, Pleasant View, TN  
R/U: Nick Folk, Durand, IL

### Door Car King of the Mountain

WIN: Luke Bogacki, Woodville, AL  
R/U: Tom DeLago, Brownsburg, IN

## BRISTOL SPRING FLING 20s



Everybody wants to get in on the act. After sitting behind the mic for three days announcing the action, even Alan Reinhart had to get in on the action. Borrowing Dan Fletcher's Stocker, apparently he couldn't find a dentist either, as he earlier had noted, "It is brutal out here. You couldn't schedule a root canal for this weekend?"

screen headed directly at Bristol Dragway. It all mysteriously disappeared though, allowing the race to continue

In the final, the winner of the 2005 Million Dollar Race, Jeff Rucks, was set to take on—you guessed it—John Labbous Jr. And while no one was surprised that he took home the Thursday check, some might have been slightly amused he was able to win again on Friday. By now, though, people were downright amazed that he was in the final for a third day in a row. And when Labbous' win light flashed on as the pair crossed the 1,000-foot finish line, that amazement turned to astonishment.

With the finals completed on Saturday, as if by way of the Heavens literally opening up as their way of saying "I let this happen, now let's hit the barbeque," rain came pouring down. Billy Leber, who was racing his Super Gas Corvette for the first time in "bracket mode" said, "I just want to know if there's a lake or river nearby because after what he did, I just want to see if that kid can really walk on water."

Three days is unbelievable; four days? That wasn't going to happen, though, as Junior Houston defeated Brian Folk in Sunday's final. But those in attendance got to witness an unbelievable feat by an experienced and talented driver.

As for the rest of the show? When you get this quality of drivers

together for big money, you can bet that tight racing is the order of the day. There were more times when win lights were won by less than ten thousandths of a second than anywhere else.

Reinhart, who typically only announces NHRA events, and who was brought in to entertain the masses, said, "Why would anyone subject themselves to this kind of abuse? You couldn't schedule a root canal for this weekend?"

Biondo and Seipel also brought back from the West Coast an event known out there as the Ultimate Gambler. Run in Vegas on Thanksgiving weekend, it features 32 cars and a \$1,000 entry fee, with a winner-take-all purse structure. Here it became the King of the Mountain event with *only* a \$500 buy-in, but still a winner-take-all event. A separate race was contested for dragsters and door cars.

And the Jim Harrington Memorial



Proclaimed as the Goddess of Forgiveness, Emily Lewis (seated) entertained those unfortunate first round runners-up who were able to buy back into the program for another shot at the cash.

Barbeque presented by Sparco? Chef Anthony (Bertozzi) outdid himself and a huge crowd enjoyed his world famous duct-tape chicken (don't ask, but it was good), salads, barbeque beef, and other assorted dishes. A DJ played the tunes after which a Karaoke contest began before finally closing with a Jim Harrington story as told by Tom Dauber. Affectionately known as "the Shoe" or "Harry," we lost him earlier this year when he passed away from complications of an illness. However, as anyone who had ever come in contact with him will attest, he left us with a ton of stories.

As Dauber put it, "Harry needed a car to go to a race and called to ask if he could borrow my dragster. Naturally I said yes, but he said, 'Wait, I need a truck and trailer too.' Of course I lent him my rig and got a phone call after the race that the good news was he had won the race. The bad news was he crashed my motorhome pulling out of the track.

"Things happen, so the next weekend, he informed me he needed to go to another race and could he borrow my car and trailer again. Of course, but he needed a tow vehicle too so I loan him my Suburban. On Monday following the event, the phone rings and it's Harry. My first words unknowingly were 'what did you crash my truck again?'"

"His answer? 'BINGO!' I'm in shock and I ask how bad? And he says, 'Well, you'll never see it again!'"

"That was Harry and we all loved him."

So was the event a success?

Biondo said, "Yes. We were real happy with it but the one thing we quickly learned was just how much work there really is."

Unfortunately success never comes easy. But this pair from opposite ends of the country knows that fact. Despite all their racing successes, this one weekend in April 2010 is just another notch on their belts.

**DRR**



**Chef Anthony (Bertozzi) sweated over a hot stove and cooked up some of his famous duct-tape chicken and other things to feed the multitude of participants at the Jim Harrington Memorial Barbeque presented by Sparco.**



**The highlight of the barbeque might have been the Jim Harrington stories, but it was closed by a stirring rendition of Harry's favorite song, "Sweet Caroline," sung by Jared Pennington and Todd "Tubby" Thompson, and joined by a small chorus of Harry's thousands of friends.**