

2-13-23 East Bay Raceway Park

One of the primary motivations for this Florida trip, along with the Daytona 500, was that East Bay is shutting down at the end of next season so I knew I needed to see it. It was a bit of a difficult decision between going to a Lucas Oil race or the All-Stars - I would normally always go with the sprint cars but the late models get such large car counts that it was a real contender. Taking everything into account I ultimately decided to go to the All-Star race.

I had a bit of a mishap on the drive down - a wreck on the freeway left glass on the road that I ended up running over, cutting down my right rear tire. I managed to put on the spare in less than 5 minutes and found a repair shop less than a mile away that was open for another 15 minutes and they got it repaired. I only lost about 30 minutes in the process and still managed to only miss two groups of hot laps.

The track is on the outskirts of Tampa, nestled in a fairly industrial area. I parked in a lot across the street and it looked like they had a motocross track out there. I got my ticket and there was no line to get in, and I found a nice top row spot (which I only the next day discovered should have required a reserved ticket, but it was not indicated as such and there were plenty of open seats in the area). There weren't a ton of people there, I thought there would have been more for the All-Stars but I suppose it's a midweek race and the Lucas Oil Late Models are the biggest draw at this track.



The lighting was quite good, but the PA wasn't great. I did appreciate that the piped Blake Anderson's Floracing commentary in as I always enjoy listening to him call the races.

There is a nice third mile with nice looking clay and a small amount of banking. I found the painting of the track name on the backstretch wall to be unique in style, with that sort of graffiti look and acknowledging their impending closure.



There was a strong contingent of All-Star 410s, 37 in total signing in. The support class was non-wing "mini sprints", that, like the "mini sprints" in New Hampshire that I'm familiar with, seem to actually be micro sprints. There were only 8 of them.

The sprint cars ran hot laps then qualifying. One got the infield tractor tire with a wheel and got up pretty far sideways but managed to save it and keep going.

All-Star heats were enjoyable but generally uneventful, with everyone running the cushion on the outside. It was pretty spread out, not a lot of real racing in any of the three.

The mini sprint heat 1 had the best racing thus far, with a great battle for second and third. They went back and forth many times, sliders and contact throughout. The cars are so small compared to the track that they're kind of able to run wherever keeps up the momentum.

It was cool seeing Alex Bowman running a sprint car tonight and he had a good showing, battling with Tyler Courtney for the dash win. They would have to be my two favorite drivers tonight, with Courtney being probably my favorite sprint car driver, so it's always fun to see them compete.



By the time the B main came around I could feel dirt landing on me, but it didn't obstruct my visibility into the track, and was the first time there was any dust tonight. It finished before 8:30, they kept the show moving well with nothing extraneous holding up the flow.

The mini sprint feature didn't have as good of racing as the heat. It was more competitive than I'd have expected for such small cars on a big track though, especially for having so few of them.

The sprint car A started at 8:52pm, crazily early, but I'm not complaining because they got a full show in before that.



Tyler Courtney only took five laps to reach lapped traffic. It was a wide track and very conducive to sliders, with good racing throughout. The first caution of the night was for a spin in the feature.

It was fun watching Justin Peck moving up through the field, making good progress forward. There were a lot of sliders, especially in turns three and four. There was a spin in turn four right in front of the field and somehow everyone avoided him, including one car that did a full 360 and kept going.

Peck and Courtney had a great battle at the front for the win. They were all the way up to wall in three and four and were really fun to watch. There wasn't any particular crazy moment but the racing was great in the feature and I love watching sprint cars on a wide track that goes all the way to the wall. I hadn't decided what I was going to do tomorrow but the racing in the feature sealed it for me, I'm going to come back for the second night of the All-Stars tomorrow.