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Rock Island showdown set for Triple Crown of Karting

With two rounds of action complete, the battle is tight in the first Triple Crown of Karting as competitors prepare for the final round of action at the Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix powered by Mediacom on Labor Day Weekend in Rock Island, Ill.

Previous rounds of the Triple Crown were run at the Quincy (Ill.) Grand Prix of Karting, the Battle at the Brickyard at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the Thor Industries Elkhart (Ind.) Riverwalk Grand Prix.

Triple Crown of Karting awards will be given as the result of points won in Briggs & Stratton 206 Heavy, Yamaha Heavy and 125cc Open Shifter at Quincy, Elkhart and Rock Island. Triple Crown points will be awarded in Margay Ignite Senior at Quincy, Indianapolis and Rock Island.

After the first two rounds in the Ignite Senior Triple Crown competition, Texan Jeff Dolian holds a narrow 3 point lead over Keith Scharf of St. Louis with Bermuda's Scott "Skitchy" Barnes in third. Only 8 points separate the entire field heading into the finals at Rock Island.

Delmar, Iowa's Tony Neilson, with 8 points, holds a narrow one-point lead over three other competitors in the Briggs & Stratton 206 Heavy Triple Crown. Iowa Quad-Cities drivers Michael Welsh and Nick Okenfels and Wisconsin's Allen Borntreger each have 7 points with four other drivers within striking distance.

The Yamaha Heavy Triple Crown competition is led by karting veterans Michael Dittmer of Davenport, Iowa with 10 points and Bowen, Ill. racer Todd Bolton with 8 after both notched top

finishes among Triple Crown racers in the first two rounds. But Neilson is just behind with 7 points followed by Iowan Morgan Schuler with 4 points heading into the final race at Rock Island, which all of the drivers know quite well.

In the 125cc Open Shifter class, Joe Ruch has built a commanding lead with 12 points after being the top Triple Crown finisher at both Quincy and Elkhart. Indiana's Alex Conlin and Devon Smith-Harden, Bermuda's Barnes and others will be battling for second and third as long as Ruch can get the 1 point at Rock Island awarded for starting the race.

In order to participate, racers must have signed up for the series and paid a one-time \$50 series fee in addition to regular entry fees. All money will be returned to competitors through trophies and awards.

Each event runs its own rules, weights, spec tires, prizes, etc. and assigns Triple Crown points. For example, you could finish in fifth place at one of the races competing against non-Triple Crown competitors, but still win first place points for finishing ahead of others participating in the three-race series. Triple Crown awards will be presented at the Awards Ceremony at Rock Island, Sunday, Sept. 2. First, second and third place trophies will be awarded along with cash prizes to all first-place winners based on the number of Triple Crown entries in their class.

The points system is simple: 6 points for first, 4 for second, 3 for third, 2 for fourth with all others who start receiving 1 point. Ties will be broken by finishing position at Rock Island. This system virtually assures that everyone has a chance to win the Triple Crown as long as they participate in all of the events.

The return of Elkhart in 2017 and Quincy South Park this year restored two of the more historic races in the sport. Coupled with the Rock Island, which continues well into its third decade, the races represent 65 years of karting history

Quincy Grand Prix of Karting at South Park

In 2002, race promoter Gus Traeder decided not to bring the South Park race back after 32 years based on a deteriorating track, high costs and declining entry numbers. Traeder founded the race in 1970 as a tie-in to the Dogwood Festival.

This year's decision by Traeder's son, Terry, to bring back the Grand Prix of Karting to South Park after a 17-year pause was two-fold. Gus Traeder passed away in 2016. Terry Traeder, a former national and professional champion driver, knew his dad had always wanted to see the race brought back. When the Quincy Park District resurfaced South Park's streets, Traeder knew the Grand Prix could be resurrected. After talks with the district, Traeder cleared his first major hurdle by securing insurance.

The Quincy Grand Prix was once the longest-running street race in America. Its roots could be traced back to 1958 when Gus Traeder was the manager of Quincy's Montgomery Ward Farm Store. A supplier brought a kart to the store and Traeder bought Quincy's first.

Gus Traeder later became a well-known racing promoter and founded the Professional Karting Association in 1978. That first race in 1970 saw 73 drivers in five classes compete for a purse of \$1,000. At its height, there were nearly 600 entries.

There was no purse this year, but drivers competed for special trophies and prizes. The 1.13 mile tree-lined course will be the safest to date.

Xtream Rock Island Grand Prix powered by Mediacom

Rock Island, known by racers as "The Rock", has long been an iconic event that is on most racers' bucket list. It began in 1994 and was part of Traeder's Professional Karting Association for the first two years.

The race shifted gears in 1996 with karting promoter and NASCAR Winston Cup safety official Tom Argy Jr. becoming race director. Since his death Terry Riggins has served in that capacity for the past 15 years.

Rock Island combines national and even international kart racing with the ambiance of the city's Downtown Arts & Entertainment District in a metropolitan area of 375,000 people. It includes nightly outdoor concerts, a car show and other activities. It hosts racers from coast to coast and 8 foreign countries and is the only place in kart racing where top level 4 cycle, 2 cycle, gearbox and vintage karts all race together at the same venue in front of thousands of spectators. For the past 19 years it has also been host to the "King of the Streets" shifter race. Rock Island is sanctioned by USAC and is on the ACCUS national schedule which allows international competitors.

Thor Industries Elkhart Riverwalk Grand Prix

In the early 1990's the Elkhart Grand Prix had over 40,000 spectators, 600 entries, and was televised on "the new" ESPN2 network. After a more than 20-year absence, the Thor Industries Elkhart Riverwalk Grand Prix brought karting history back to life in northern Indiana last year.

As part of the revitalization of downtown Elkhart's Riverwalk District, racing returned in 2017 along a unique .6-mile track that crosses the Elkhart River twice per lap. Led by Thor Industries and the City of Elkhart, the region's RV manufacturers came together to create an event the city's citizens and racers can enjoy every August!

Over 140 racers took part in the 2017 event that was highlighted by a weekend of concerts, family events, and racing. And 2018 is shaping up to be even bigger and better with the addition of karting's first "Relay Race" -- pitting 4-kart teams against each other and more concerts and activities for the family.