

Days of thundering steel

Thunder, rain didn't halt Ottertail's 'Smokin' Iron'

In past years, I referred to the Smokin' Iron Tractor Pull in Ottertail as the "Thunder Across the Lake".

This year, it was literally true and accurate. Friday afternoon, I drove toward Ottertail with my windshield wipers undulating back and forth to the rhythm of my smooth jazz... splashing my way home. Rain wasn't imminent, it was pouring down from the sky as if it were iron. I feared that it might be cancelled like two years ago.

Doubt hung over the track like the ominous clouds above it. Chances of having a tractor pull seemed remote and poor. Then the clouds parted at about 4 p.m. (the exact hour the track opened) and a clear sky pushed forth. Like magic, the 2008 Smokin' Iron event was on.

First I checked out the VIP tent and found things were as

well organized as they were every year. The volunteers are the unsung heroes in these types of events; little praise and long days. The management of the event know how valuable they are and the tractor pull wouldn't be the great success it is without them.

KRCQ Radio had a remote location show going on when I climbed the stairs to the announcer's booth (or as they call it...the tree house). Eric Roggenkamp had joined Dave Lee in his afternoon show and it was a delight to watch the two professionals at work (or play as it was).

Eric does the promotion for the sponsors and food booths, as Kenny Mack is the quintessential professional tractor pulling announcer. Kenny has followed the circuit for the National Tractor Pullers Association since its inception back in 1969.

Kenny Mack's dulcet tones reverberate throughout the entire area via a PA system that carries his voice for what seems like miles away. When it comes to pure unadulterated knowledge about each vehicle, its driver, and everything you ever wanted know about the fast growing sport, Kenny has no equal. This level of professional knowledge gives the fan in the grandstand an education that is easy to grasp and fun to follow. We are talking about complex physics that come into play when pulling a sled weighing thousands of pounds. The man makes it easy to understand.

I've wanted to interview Larry Koester since last year, and had the opportunity early Friday evening--and I walked away with more than a story. I met a man I truly admire for many reasons.

"Puller of the Year" among guests at Ottertail event

Larry has been a Grand National Champion and runner-up multiple times including a championship in 2006. Larry is an inspiration on and off the track and was twice named "Puller of the Year" by his peers. Pretty impressive, huh? Ok, add the fact that the man lost both his legs in a farming accident over 20 years ago and you may start to understand just how impressive those stats are.

His son, Adam, also drives a mini tractor named Double Play. Adam ended up second in points in 2006--in only his second year pulling. Adam claimed his career first National Tractor Pull Association Grand National Mini Modified Division Points champi-

onship in 2007. Larry, driving his Pennzoil Yellow Mini, finished second in the final standings behind his son.

Larry and Adam make an awesome father and son team, Larry has another card up his sleeve. His newly acquired son-in-law, Craig Corzine, also drives for his team and between the three of them, they make formidable foes.

Having gotten to the venue early, I had time to sit down with Larry and basically talk about life in general. For a man to lose his legs and not his character or belief in God, is a testament to the courage and fiber of that remarkable man's soul. He makes public speaking appearances and I can see why the man is so popular; he is the real deal. Did I mention the name of his mini tractor? His self-deprecating humor shines through like a brilliant sun on a dark and cloudy day. Yes, it really is named "Foot Loose". It only seems appropriate on a Father's Day weekend to have Larry, Adam, and Craig grace Ottertail with their presence.

Ottertail pull survives second bout of bad weather

Saturday came on the wings of windswept eagles, and blustery blasts of driving rain and gray-hued funnels. Once again, the track was assaulted from above and still remained standing after the tumult had ceased. The VIP tent was nearly blown away and a smaller tent almost left the neighborhood. The waiting drivers, crews; and volunteer staff were directed to the community center for the duration of a vicious downpour.

Rain fell like it was poured from buckets and the show



Heidi kratzke / Perham Enterprise Bulletin photos

still went on. It was nearly 8:30 p.m. when they started the pulling events back up again. A road grader carved its way down the track and was followed shortly by what looked like a paving machine.

Track gains notoriety for Ottertail

Ottertail has one of the very best tracks in the country for these events. It seemed a force stronger than nature would rule the night. The day wore on into a fair night and the tractors screamed their way down the track one by one as the night sky was filled with an ethereal light. Once again, Ottertail prevailed as a winner... not so much for the hosts' terrific organization, which they always have, but for the quality of contestants they attract in a sport that is destined for greatness. Good job Ottertail Businessperson's Association.

Despite some dauntingly dangerous weather, Ottertail's sixth annual Smokin' Iron Truck and Tractor Pull amassed a large crowd of enthusiastic spectators. When the pull grounds were temporarily evacuated on Saturday night after a funnel cloud was spotted in the region, pull attendees waited patiently for the night's action to get underway.

Smoke filled the air as the cheers of crowd members, both young and old, were drowned out by the thundering roar of the weekend's professional pullers.

