

It was the first practice at MRP for the Rotax Grand Nationals. It was a completely different track using the 125 Rotax Engine. More braking, and less momentum. It was a much more fun driving style. As you rounded corners that you previously did not have to lift, now you did have to lift. Throttle control is everything, too much gas and you loose control and go off the track. It was my favorite practice that I had driven in a while. Karts all around me faster, or slower.

The Practice is intense. The tuning is minor to get every last tenth out of the kart. It was the first practice out of the three practice days. The competition was already at a top level. It was more than the manufactures cup series that I had been competing in the past year. I was overwhelmed by all the drivers, and all the other race teams and race haulers. I had seen big teams at the Man Cup, like MKP, PCR, Birel, and J3 Competition. It was nothing like this. The entire grid filled from spot 1 to spot 51.

As the weekend neared everything got rushed and more chaotic. The tenseness was all around as I pushed my kart up for morning practice. All around, race teams rushing to get karts ready, making adjustments. Orders being barked by people. Impact drills grinding as they make tire changes. Generators running. The smell of gas stained the air with a strong aroma of chemicals. As we neared the grid, the heat bared down on me like a microwave oven. As you breathed in you could feel your core body temperature rising. When I got on the grid Everyone was getting their gear on and getting ready to drive. It was crazy and then I drove, I was on my time then, my zone.

This final day of practice would be the most important. The last day of testing, tuning, and changing. The past few days were a widespread range of condition helping, and frustrating. It was good for if we needed different set ups for different conditions. I had to get my line down as good as I can. If I get it wrong, there go my chances of doing well. It was that, that made me love racing.

As I woke up qualifying morning, qualifying became the number one issue on the list. If I qualify bad, then the chances of me getting in a wreck increase by the massive amounts. The realness of it set in as the we got to the track for qualifying. It started, and I was nervous but I couldn't be because soon, I would be on the grid and it would be my turn to drive. It was nerve racking as the three laps passed. One after the next as my group neared the line. Then it was time for group four. My group.

I started my kart and rolled out to take my warm up lap. I had to watch temperatures to make sure I could run at the optimal conditions. I crossed the line as my first lap started driving on the edge. I had a half decent lap as I crossed the line for the first time. The fastest lap is usually the last lap where everything is heated up and working in prime conditions. I crossed the line again, I had improved over my last lap. I hit the apex right in the esses, then the hilltop. The stress was so much, it was hard not to make mistakes. After 35 seconds of trying to be perfect, I made it to the final corner. As I drove through the last corner I tucked my head trying to get every last tenth and didn't put my head up, until I was in the first corner, and then I looked. I got a fast lap, I was ex-static. I couldn't believe it. I thought I would be another back runner.

It was my first big Rotax race I had ever competed in. I couldn't believe the massive size of the classes. There must have been 50 or more karts on the grid for the first heat. I was nervous to think I started in the upper quarter. It scared me because whenever I started that far up at the Manufacturers Cup it was bound to get wrecked. I pulled out of the grid and my stomach dropped. No turning back. This was it.

I got in line and pushed the guy in front of me as I approached the start/finish line. The green flag dropped and I shot to the inside and gunned it. I was up 4 positions by the time I reached the first corner and still gaining. I made it up to tenth by the hilltop. I was on Alex Keys' back bumper going down the hill.

I lost ground up to turn 7. Then I was the one being pushed. I fought lap after lap to keep my spot as the front ten stuck close together.

The flagman waved the one to go as I snuck up on Alex Again. Now I was approaching the monza, my last chance to pass. I went for it but couldn't make it. I didn't care because now I started in tenth for the final.

We gridded for the finals. I was amazed I had finished that far up looking at the top ranked national driver all around me. Then the front kid started so I followed. Then the kid drove out so I waited and went. I took my grid position and waited to come to the line. It was scary and exciting, but more scary. I was afraid I would get punted and get taken out and loose all the hard work. My friend said Birel was looking into me, not the factory team but MRP the USA importer, still that would be the extra bit I needed to go win finally. That was the little bit of confidence I need and when the green flag dropped, so did my foot. I gunned it and went low. This time I was pushed over the curb which made me almost get punted. I flew into the esses just to keep my tenth place.

As I went down the hill I went low. I made the pass and came out with the position. I knew that soon after, an attempt for position would be made back. So I drove the line. If he could get a fast line, then he would not be able to pass. I closed in on Kyle Kirkwood. I was pushing him up to the monza and then, he hit the gravel trap. A dust cloud shot up and gravel flew everywhere. I looked back and saw 2 other kids get caught up in it and made even more of a mess of the monza.

By now it was the twelfth lap out of twenty. I was making up ground on the top 5 as I picked off two more kids. I was in sixth when I got the 2 to go and the fifth place was in my striking distance now. By the time I was able to make the move, it was the last lap. It was a now or never. I could podium at this race. I pulled up and made the pass. I crossed the line in 5th place, I couldn't believe I

had come this far. As I pulled up to scales my dad was waiting for me after the scales. He didn't show it but I could tell he was beyond happy. Just then a guy from Birel America walked over and said, "I would like to offer you a spot under the Birel America team tent and help you represent Birel America. My dad blurted out "Of course we would. Who do I talk to figure out test dates and all of that?" I could tell it would be a good day.

I was confused about what was going on. Everything was a blur as I rushed to my friend's pit stall. He congratulated me and said, "What's going on with you and Birel," in a joking kind of way. I said "We got the offer and I will be with MRP for the rest of this and next season." I was really excited for this opportunity to become one of the top drivers in the USA. I was scary racing against the top drivers but I was going to do it anyway. I hadn't even taken it into consideration that now I would be going to Portugal for the Rotax World Finals to represent USA.

This year would be my year to become more than just a local racer and become that racer...