

Places In The Heart

For a lot of us, race tracks big and small are much more than just pieces of real estate. They're special places in our hearts, and just thinking about them evokes fond memories.

Some of my favorite tracks are gone or have uncertain futures.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the old West Atlanta Raceway in Douglasville, especially after one of its best promoters, the late Ed Massey, was inducted into the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame last week.

West Atlanta was one of my favorites. It was on the ropes for a time after Massey's tenure there before former Senoia Raceway owner Charlie Edwards bought it and gave it new life as Seven Flags Speedway. But that didn't last. With residential growth closing in, complaints from neighbors and rising real estate values, it was eventually sold for development and bulldozed beyond recognition.

On the NASCAR circuit, North Carolina Speedway in Rockingham was one of my favorites. For a time it hosted the second Cup race of the year. My buddy Monte Dutton used to say that after all the hassle and work that the season-opening Daytona 500 often brought for writers, Rockingham was

like a mansion on the hill.

Monte's right about a lot of things, as he was about Rockingham.

But "progress" and the wish to take the circuit to new markets doomed Rockingham. There are ongoing efforts to revive it. I'm hopeful they succeed.

I'm heartened about the success so far of the revival of another track that suffered a similar fate, North Wilkesboro Speedway. I sure hope it continues to come back.

But there have been some recent developments that concern me. And they make it clear that race tracks, at their core, are businesses and have to be treated as such to survive.

On Facebook, I read about two Southeastern tracks that are shutting down effective immediately.

The promoters of Friendship Speedway in Elkin, N.C., cited issues with behavior of people participating in races at their track.

"The honest reason is that we are not willing to put up with the disrespect and verbal abuse that some of the drivers, crew members and fans are directing to the track staff and owners," the post said.

The current promoter of North Alabama Speedway in Tuscumbia also



is giving up. In Lazarius Decatur's post announcing the ceasing of operations there, he didn't harp on the negatives that come with promoting. Instead he talked about the fun he'd had and the people he'd met. But he said the business part wasn't balancing out.

"At the end of the day we were doing this to keep local racers a place to race, and we simply can't afford any more," he wrote. "We went till we couldn't anymore."

He ended with a message for all of us.

"If you can go support your local

track during these times, you might just be the difference in keeping them open."

Tracks like Senoia Raceway seem to be doing well in spite of all the challenges that come with owning and promoting a race track. I hope folks don't take it for granted that it will always be that way.

See y'all at the races.

Read more *Trackside with Rick Minter* at <https://tracksidewithrickminter.blogspot.com/>



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