



**The Race:** Xtra/Mart 150

**The Place:** Thompson (Conn.) International Speedway

**The Date:** Sept. 14

**The Time:** 3:30 p.m. (ET)

**Track Layout:** .625-mile paved

**Race Purse:** \$88,390

**2006 Winner:** Reggie Ruggiero

**2006 Pole:** Tony Hirschman

No.	Driver	Pts
1	Lia	2392
2	Szegedy	2209
3	Civali	2111
4	Silk	2102
5	M. Hirschman	2095
6	Christopher	2027
7	Stefanik	1935
8	Blewett	1798
9	Tomaino	1754
10	Flemke Jr.	1745
11	Beers	1725
12	Marquis	1653
13	Savary	1633
14	Houlihan	1623
15	Grigas	1582

**Schedule:**

Saturday: Practice 9:30-11 a.m., 2-2:45 p.m., Time Trials 2:45 p.m.

**Track Contact:**

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- *Stefanik Looks To Carry Momentum To Thompson*
- *Houlihan Ready To Call It A Career*
- *Lia Back To Owner-Driver For A Day*
- *Rookie Race: Savary And Grigas Battle To The Finish*



## Turning The Corner Just In Time



Seven-time NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour champion Mike Stefanik found his way back to Victory Lane at Stafford Sept. 30 in the second-to-last race of the season. (Mary Hodge)

## Win At Stafford Has Stefanik Looking At Thompson With optimism

Mike Stefanik was just two races away from a long, soul-searching winter.

And then came the Fall Final.

The seven-time NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour champion arrived at Stafford (Conn.) Motor Speedway having muddled through a season that had produced just three top fives and six top 10s in 14 starts. Title No. 8, a goal in the offseason, was never a serious consideration after a 34th in the season-opener at Thompson (Conn.) International Speedway for the No.

16 Diversified Metals Pontiac.

"It's been a short season, but a very long season," Stefanik said. "We had a couple chances to win earlier in the year — Claremont and Riverhead. The other tracks, we just basically struggled really, really bad.

"It didn't matter which car we ran. We were just missing the boat."

Wholesale changes were the rule of the day for

Please see Stefanik, page 2



## ➤ News & Notes



➤ **The race:** This event is the 16th of 16 races on the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour schedule. It is the fifth of five races in 2007 at Thompson (Conn.) International Speedway.

➤ **The procedure:** The starting field is 32 cars, including provisionals. The first 27 cars will qualify through two-lap time trials. The remaining five spots will be awarded through the provisional process. The race will be 150 laps (93.75 miles).

➤ **The first four:** James Civali (No. 28 Ramar-Hall/Liberty Limousine Chevrolet) held off Chuck Hossfeld to win the Icebreaker April 15. Donny Lia (No. 4 Dodge) won the rain-shortened race June 21. Todd Szegedy (No. 2 Wisk/Snuggle Ford) won Aug. 16 in the race that was halted after 108 laps following the race accident that involved John Blewett III. Blewett later died at an area hospital. Ronnie Silk (No. 19 Major Motion Transport/Silk Plumbing Chevrolet) picked up his first career win in his 34th career start. Silk qualified fourth Saturday, Sept. 8, but rain pushed the race date to Sept. 23 and Silk got the win a week after finishing second at New Hampshire International Speedway.

➤ **The top 10:** Lia may have wrapped up the points championship, but there is plenty to race for at Thompson. Szegedy leads James Civali by 98 points and Silk by 107 in the battle for second. And just 84 points separate Civali and sixth-place Ted Christopher. Also, eighth-place Jimmy Blewett leads 11th-place Eric Beers by 73 points, as several drivers battle to finish the season in the top 10.



Donny Lia (left) and his father, Don Lia, share a moment with the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour championship at Stafford. (Howie Hodge/NASCAR)

## *Stefanik: 'It was more a relief than a joy about winning the race.'*

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Stefanik at Stafford, where much of the focus was on crowning a new champion (Donny Lia) while the old champ tried to get on track.

"Being a realist, I didn't think we had much of a shot," Stefanik said. "We all sat down as a team and the first words out of my mouth were 'I don't think anybody wants to go out and ride around in 14th.'"

With some advice from others in the paddock, Stefanik and Co. went in a completely different direction after qualifying 14th on Saturday. The changes yielded a top 10 by pit stops on lap 61. Stefanik was the second one out and worked his way to the front by lap 92, where he stayed for the rest of the race.

It increased his career win total to 68 – already the most in the history of the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour. It also gave him at least one win in 19 of the 22 seasons he has run a race on the Whelen Modified Tour. He has a victory in every season he has run a full schedule on the Whelen Modified Tour.

"It was more a relief than a joy about winning the race," Stefanik said, "because we've been so complexed about our situation."

Stefanik said the struggles stemmed from trying to come up with a setup to suit the new softer rear tire.

"We could not come up with a package that suited the picky driver we had," said Stefanik, with a little self-deprecating humor. "I couldn't drive the car in deep; it wouldn't carry any speed in because it wouldn't turn. Once the car turned, the back end would step out. I couldn't really race anybody, because if I tried to pass somebody, I would have cleaned them out."

It was Stefanik's first win since the Icebreaker at Thompson April 4, 2006.

This weekend, Stefanik will return to the .625-mile oval feeling more optimistic than he has the entire season. Just in time for the offseason.

"There was a huge amount of pressure," Stefanik said of facing the winter if the struggles had continued. "We were already contemplating probably doing some testing at Florida. ... I don't ever remember struggling in a Modified this bad. To be that uncompetitive was just tough, tough to swallow."

It was Stefanik's 19th victory at Stafford. He figures if Stafford worked, then he'll be okay at Thompson.

And if things turn out okay there ... "If we run competitively at Thompson, this is a starting point," Stefanik said.

### 2007 SUNOCO ROOKIE OF THE YEAR STANDINGS

Driver	Points
1. Richard Savary	95
2. Bobby Grigas	94
3. Billy Pauch Jr.	87
3. Rowan Pennick	87
5. Ryan Preece	84
6. Bobby Santos III	73
7. Joseph Hartmann	68
8. Woody Pitkat	66





Dick Houlihan will run his last race this weekend. (Mary Hodge)

When he first started racing, more than three decades ago, Dick Houlihan told himself he would retire when he hit 50.

"And 50 was here before I knew it," said Houlihan, who announced he would make his last start at this weekend's World Series at Thompson. "I've done it for 35 years and I'm getting a little tired. ... I pretty much figured last winter that this was my last year."

Houlihan has made 53 starts since joining the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour in 2004. This season, he finished seventh in the annual combination race at Martinsville (Va.) Speedway and is 14th in points. He pointed to getting to race at places like Martinsville and New Hampshire International Speedway as highlights.

"I never thought I'd race at those places," said Houlihan. "And I got a chance to do that, so that was cool."

Houlihan recently took his civil service test to reach industrial instructor 3 for his job running the vehicle garage at the prison in Bridgewater, where he has worked for more than 25 years. He spends his nights working on the race car.

"I'll be alright with it, but it's not going to be easy," said Houlihan of retirement. "With the Tour, you need to be on top of your game. ... I just knew it was time."

Chuck Hossfeld (far right) will return to Thompson, driving for 2007 NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour champion Donny Lia. (Howie Hodge)



**Lia Back To Being A Car Owner For A Day**

By pairing with car owner Bob Garbarino, Donny Lia got to completely focus on driving. The result was the 2007 NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour championship for Lia and Garbarino, the first title for both. By clinching the championship at Safford (Conn.) Motor Speedway in the second-to-last race of the season, Lia heads into the World Series weekend at Thompson with no pressure.

While driving for Garbarino this weekend,

Lia will also field his No. 18 car for the first time this season, with Chuck Hossfeld in the car.

"I just wanted to race my car," said Lia, "and he's a friend of mine who can get the job done."

Hossfeld started the season with a runner-up finish in the Icebreaker at Thompson. But he and the No. 79 Hill Enterprises/Coors Light Pontiac team parted ways after just four races.

➤ **Race for Sunoco Rookie of the Year Award**



Richard Savary and Bobby Grigas are separated by just one point in the Sunoco Rookie of the Year standings heading into the final event of the season at Thompson International Speedway. (Mary Hodge)

**Coming Down To The Wire ...** The 2007 Sunoco Rookie of the Year will come down to the final race of the season. **Richard Savary (No. 20 Superior Oil Chevrolet)** leads **Bobby Grigas III (No. 09 Triple G Scaffolding/Amsoil Racing Chevrolet)** by one point. The standings are based on a driver's best 12 finishes.

Savary was the fourth-highest rookie in six

different races, and can only improve his point total by finishing among the top three rookies at Thompson. Grigas, on the other hand, was seventh out of 10 rookies in the Thompson race Aug. 16. Any finish better than that would improve his total by that number of points. The tiebreaker is overall points, where Savary leads 1633-1582.



## NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour Special Awards Standings

### ➤ BUD POLE AWARD

Donny Lia	3
Todd Szegedy	3
Ted Christopher	2
Tony Hirschman	2
Eric Beers	1
Matt Hirschman	1
Richard Savary	1
Ronnie Silk	1



### ➤ WHELEN ENGINEERING WINNER OF THE RACE AWARD

Donny Lia	6
James Civali	3
Todd Szegedy	2
Jimmy Blewett	1
Ted Christopher	1
Ronnie Silk	1
Mike Stefanik	1



### ➤ SUNOCO ROOKIE OF THE RACE AWARD

Bobby Santos III	5
Bobby Grigas	2
Woody Pitkat	2
Ryan Preece	2
Billy Pauch Jr.	2
Rowan Pennink	1
Richard Savary	1



### ➤ FEATHERLITE MOST IMPROVED DRIVER

John Blewett III	2
James Civali	2
Jimmy Blewett	2
Ted Christopher	2
Eddie Flemke	1
Dick Houlihan	1
Rowan Pennink	1
Reggie Ruggiero	1
Danny Sammons	1
Mike Stefanik	1
Zach Sylvester	1



### ➤ POWERADE POWER MOVE OF THE RACE

Mike Stefanik	2
Eric Beers	1
Eric Berndt	1
Jimmy Blewett	1
John Blewett III	1
James Civali	1
Joseph Hartmann	1
Matt Hirschman	1
Jerry Marquis	1
Rowan Pennink	1
Woody Pitkat	1



Reggie Ruggiero	1
Richard Savary	1
Todd Szegedy	1



Eric Beers won his first Budweiser Pole Award of the season during the Fall Final weekend at Stafford (Conn.) Motor Speedway. (Howie Hodge)

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