

DRAG RACING / LUCAS OIL NHRA NATIONALS

THE WRIGHT STUFF



Marc Gewertz / NHRA

Jason Line of Wright holds the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals trophy Sunday after winning the Pro Stock final at Brainerd International Raceway.

Jason Line edges Erica Enders to earn first Pro Stock title at BIR

By Jon Nowacki

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BRAINERD, Minn.

Wright native Jason Line sat in the cockpit of his Pro Stock race car in 2014, as crews at Brainerd International Raceway worked feverishly to dry the track.

Unfortunately it was in vain, as overcast, humid conditions made it difficult to dry the track in time, the sun going down on Line's dream of winning at the track he calls home.

Line won the postponed final two weeks later in Indianapolis, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't here. It wasn't at home.

"I feel like I almost got cheated," Line once said. Well, cheated no more.

Line, 50, of Mooresville, N.C., exorcised his demons Sunday by winning the Pro Stock final at the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals at Brainerd International Raceway, the track he has been coming to since he was just 2 or 3 years old. His father, Lawrence, competed in the first drag race they ever had here in June 1968 and continued to come back after Jason was born the following year.

"Wow, that's all I can say," Line said to NHRA announcer Alan Reinhart while addressing a throng



Photo courtesy of NHRA

Jason Line of Wright races in the Pro Stock competition Sunday during the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals at Brainerd International Raceway.

of fans after defeating Erica Enders in an epic final, covering the quarter-mile in his Chevrolet Camaro in 6.597 seconds at 209.10 mph. "But you're not going to make me cry, though. There's no crying in racing. Sorry."

Reinhart had the perfect response.

"Big, tough guy," he said. "You beat a girl in the final round. Way to go."

"Let me tell you something, that girl's tough," Line said. "I don't feel bad about that at all."

And the crowd loved it.

Never has a BIR victory parade lasted longer, with all sorts of people coming up to Line for

photographs, autographs, hugs, handshakes or just to say "awesome job," some of whom race cars tuned by Line Performance in Wright, including Line's parents and siblings.

While Funny Car driver John Force is the king in popularity, nobody had that kind of following here, that kind of connection, not on this day, perhaps not ever.

"Certainly my first memories were coming here," Line said. "It was really the start of something big for me, my whole family, really. I made my first (drag racing) pass here and won my first race here, so a lot of firsts. This place has been

a big part of our lives, and to see all the fans yelling and hollering, it was really cool, a great moment. I'll remember it forever."

Times were fast on a sunny 70-degree day that was 10 degrees cooler and less humid than Friday and Saturday. Leah Pritchett (Top Fuel) and Ron Capps (Funny Car) were Sunday's other Pro winners, while Line's teammate, Duluth native Greg Anderson, had a day he wanted to forget, getting knocked out in the first round for the first time since Phoenix in February.

It's as if the teammates had swapped cars for the weekend, with Anderson being the hot driver coming in, only to have things go awry.

"We just didn't really get a good run this weekend, and we never found what we were looking for," Anderson said. "That's hard, it's a tough pill to swallow, especially here because you want to do so well in front of your family and friends and everyone here cheering for you."

Line was the top performer in all four qualifying sessions over the weekend and was the No. 1 seed, but Enders, the No. 2 qualifier, quickly made it

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Backups lead Vikings to victory

Mannion, Sloter each throw TD passes against Seahawks

By Chris Tomasson
St. Paul Pioneer Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Vikings couldn't duplicate the preseason opener, when three quarterbacks threw touchdown passes. But they'll settle for two doing so.

In Sunday night's 25-19 preseason win over Seattle at U.S. Bank Stadium, starting quarterback Kirk Cousins led the Vikings to just a field goal in his two drives. But reserves Sean Mannion and Kyle Sloter came on to both throw touchdown passes.

In a 34-25 win at New Orleans in the Aug. 9 opener, Cousins completed 4 of 4 passes for 65 yards and a touchdown and a perfect passer rating of 158.3. He was 6 of 8 for 68 yards and a 100.0 rating against the Seahawks.

After the Vikings fell behind 10-3, Mannion threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to rookie tight end Irv Smith Jr. late in the second quarter to tie the score 10-10. Sloter threw a 4-yard touchdown pass to Brandon Zylstra late in the third quarter to put the Vikings up for good at 17-13. Zylstra caught five passes for 37 yards.

The Vikings punted on Minnesota's first drive of the game. On the second one, Cousins completed a 34-yard pass to Adam Thielen down the right sideline and threw a long pass down the middle to Thielen that resulted in pass interference and a 45-yard penalty. They moved the ball to the 6, eventually resulting in a 24-yard field goal by Dan Bailey for a 3-0 lead.

In the first half, Bailey handled both placements, also kicking an extra point. In the second half, Kaare Vedvik, acquired Aug. 22 from Baltimore, had one placement attempt, kicking an extra point. The holder for all kicks Sunday was wide receiver Chad Beebe.

Punter Matt Wile, last year's holder, did not hold after suffering a cut left thumb in a sideline mishap during the game against the Saints. Vedvik punted three times for a 46.7-yard average. Wile had one punt for 35 yards.

Starting running back Dalvin Cook sat out for the second straight preseason game. He was replaced by rookie Alexander Mattison, who carried 10 times for 41 yards.

Getting the rest of the work at running back was Mike Boone, who carried 21 times for 66 yards and caught one pass for 45 yards. Ameer Abdullah sat out the game.

Mannion took over in the second quarter for Cousins, and completed 11 of 14 passes for 88 yards.

Mannion's highlight was the touchdown pass to Smith, his first preseason score after being a

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Twins post historic sweep

Polanco's triple gives Minnesota its first four-game sweep over Texas

By Betsy Helfand

St. Paul Pioneer Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Jorge Polanco patiently looked at three pitches out of Emmanuel Clase's hand — all around 99 miles per hour.

The fourth time, he swung. And connected.

Polanco sent a 99 mph pitch into the outfield, clearing the bases. That two-out eighth-inning triple opened up a 6-3 lead for the Minnesota Twins, who went on to win by that score as they swept the Texas Rangers on Sunday in their last game at Globe Life Park.

With the win, the Twins concluded their road trip 5-1

and it marked the Twins' first four-game sweep over the Rangers ever and ninth sweep this season.

"I was concentrating on putting the bat on the ball and getting a good pitch," Polanco said. "I was thinking that the fastball was going to cut, so that's what I got, and I was able to drive it."

"He kind of left no doubt. It wasn't a funny play or a funny hop or something going on," manager Rocco Baldelli said of Polanco's triple. "He just had a good at-bat, put a great swing on the ball, drove it into the gap and let everyone kind of do their thing marching around

the bases."

Polanco's big hit came after the Twins (76-48) had watched their long-held lead disappear in the previous inning when Sam Dyson allowed a solo home run to Shin-Soo Choo. It was the first home run Dyson had surrendered as a member of the Twins and the first run he had given up since coming off the injured list with biceps tendinitis earlier in the week.

But thanks to Polanco, it didn't doom the Twins.

It did mean, however, that Martin Perez wound up with a no-decision rather than a win. Perez had grown up in the Rangers' organization. He spent his first seven years in the big leagues in Texas, and he had been looking forward to pitching on Sunday



Jerome Miron / USA Today Sports

Rangers catcher Jeff Mathis (2) tags out Twins first baseman Ehire Adrianza (13) at home plate during the eighth inning Sunday at Globe Life Park in Arlington, Texas.

at a ballpark he knew so well, against friends who he considered family.

Perez, who had a chance to pitch against the Rangers (60-64) earlier this season at

Target Field, put six scoreless innings up in July before getting chased out after giving up four runs in the seventh.

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Photo courtesy of NHRA

Jason Line of Wright celebrates with fans, many of whom were family members and friends, after winning the Pro Stock final Sunday in the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals at Brainerd International Raceway.

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apparent she wasn't going down without a fight, posting what was then the best elapsed time — 6.584 seconds — in Sunday's first round of eliminations while dispatching Shane Tucker.

Line appeared to regain his dominance in the later rounds and it all came down to the end, and her earned it.

The drivers' reaction times were almost a wash, Enders' .014 to Line's .016., leaving just a smidgen to have to make up. He did just that, winning by .005, or about a bumper's length.

"My goal is not to leave first against her, my goal is to be close, because she is quicker than I am," Line said. "I have my moments, but she is as good as anybody ever as far as letting her left foot out, and I don't care who. She's as good as there ever has been."

Beating Enders was sweet redemption after she beat Line in the 2015 finals at BIR, denying him once again.

"You don't forget those things," Line said. "To Enders' credit, she came over to Line immediately after the race and gave him a big hug, knowing what this meant to him at his home track.

The funny thing is, Line didn't even think he won.

"I don't normally look over in high gear, but I did," Line said. "I won't tell you what I said. I really thought I was a couple (thousands of a second) behind, so when the (win) light came on, I was a little surprised. I'm not really excitable guy, but that was as excited as I ever get."

Afterward, Line talked about the first time he ever drove a car down a drag strip. It was the left lane, in Brainerd, a 1976 Caprice Classic, a car he joked couldn't have gotten anything more than a warning on nearby Highway 371.

Line later became a

three-time NHRA world champion, but every year the pressure to win Brainerd, in Brainerd, grew on him, questions about is this the year starting to weigh on him, the chances of him winning decreasing with each passing season.

"The question definitely got old, no offense, absolutely," Line said, drawing a hearty laugh while addressing the media afterward. "But you want to win here in front of your friends and family, because as fun as it is for me, it's probably as much fun for them. For me, to see them, and to see how happy they are, that makes it super special."

With his victory, the 49th of his Pro Stock career, he now has won races in 16 straight seasons, the longest active streak of any NHRA Pro, regardless of class.

Line certainly had the best car all weekend, but he had the best car in 2014, too, only to be left out in the cold. Line was about to come onto the staging area, but he remained parked as racing was called off.

Perhaps Line couldn't help but look up in the sky Sunday, just to see if there were any rogue rain clouds passing through, or perhaps falling meteors, something, anything, that could ruin this day.

Nope, this story wasn't meant to be a Shakespearean tragedy, but a Hollywood ending.

While Line didn't cry, he said he saw some tears from a few friends.

"Because they know how bad I've wanted to win here, they get pretty emotional," he said.

"In 2014, I was a little bit distraught, because we were so much faster than anybody else, I felt like all I had to do was be halfway decent. The track just wouldn't dry, and they did the right thing — it wasn't what my heart wanted — but it was the right decision.

"I wanted to finish it, but you know, everything works out for a reason. Sometimes it's just hard to understand when it's happening."

Zylstra catches TD vs. Seahawks

By Jess Myers
Forum News Service

MINNEAPOLIS — With the many twists, turns and destinations that have been a part of Brandon Zylstra's football career thus far, one would be justified in thinking that he may have run out of new experiences to be had.

Yet there was the Spicer, Minn., native returning punts in the NFL last season, as well as making special teams tackles.

"Last year was really my first time playing special teams since high school so it was a big learning experience for me," said Zylstra, 26, prior to Sunday night's Minnesota Vikings preseason game versus Seattle. "I'm trying to build off that this year, play loose and not be so robotic."

As far as catching passes — the trade that made him a star, first at Concordia in Moorhead as a collegian, and then with Edmonton in the Canadian Football League as a professional — he did that just once in his rookie year with the Vikings. While seeing action in all 16 Vikings games last season, he caught a 23-yard pass from Kirk Cousins in a road win over the New York Jets on Oct. 21.

That was his role again Sunday versus the Seahawks, where Zylstra caught just one pass, but it came at a key time. In the second quarter of a 3-3 game, with the Vikings facing third-and-9 at their own 25, Zylstra hauled in a slant pass from backup quarterback Sean Mannion, picking up 10 yards and a first down before going out of bounds.

He caught two more passes before halftime, converting on another third down near the sideline, and converting on a slant pass in the red zone as the Vikings drove to tie the game at the half. In working the sideline successfully, it was easy to confuse Zylstra, who wears No. 15, for No. 19 Adam Thielen, the Vikings' other small town Minnesota guy who catches passes. The on-field similarity is not an accident.



Brad Rempel / USA Today Sports

Vikings quarterback Sean Mannion (4) passes in the second quarter Sunday against the Seattle Seahawks at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

"He's someone I've leaned on the past two years. I respect his game so much, the way he gets open, the way he moves his body, his releases," Zylstra said of Thielen, who hails from Detroit Lakes, Minn., and played college ball at Minnesota State-Mankato. "I try to emulate a lot of that and if it fits with me I try to put it on my game."

In the third quarter it got better, as Zylstra made a move in the end zone to fool Seattle cornerback Jamar Taylor, then caught a Kyle Slotter pass for a touchdown and a 17-13 Minnesota lead.

Just getting on the field was Zylstra's first and most formidable challenge heading into his second NFL season. A leg injury during organized team activities in early June sidelined Zylstra for much of the summer. While most players spend June and July getting in shape for training camp, Zylstra spent that time trying to get healthy.

"I didn't get to do much to prepare for camp, so I was trying to get acclimated and get back into shape during camp, so that was kind of tough on me," Zylstra said. "But I'm doing the best I can."

During the final few days of training camp, the man who coached the Denver Broncos to a Super Bowl title just four seasons ago liked what he was seeing from the former Cobber.

"Brandon, coming off an injury, has made up a lot of ground. When you come back from an injury it takes a lot of time," said Gary Kubiak, the Vikings' new offensive advisor. "But what I've seen in the last few days is him start to look like himself again. This will be a big two weeks for him. He's going to get a great opportunity with us and obviously he can help us."

As part of a pass-catching corps already loaded with receivers like Thielen and Stefon Diggs, and tight ends Kyle Rudolph and Irv Smith Jr., Zylstra is looking for a place in the offensive picture. Nights like Sunday, where he caught all five passes thrown his way for 37 yards and the touchdown will most likely help his cause.

"The way this offense works is there are a lot of guys rolling in and out, so I just want to be versatile and play all positions," he said. "They have me bouncing around quite a bit."

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second-round pick. His lowlight came on the previous possession, when he threw an interception that DeShawn Shead returned 88 yards for a touchdown and a 10-3 Seattle lead.

Slotter came in at quarterback for the entire second half. He completed 11 of 13 passes for 116 yards.

Slotter also led the Vikings on a fourth-quarter drive that culminated on a 1-yard touchdown run by fullback Khari Blasingame. A two-point conversion run by Boone put them up 25-16.

Vikings cornerback Holton Hill, already facing an eight-game NFL suspension to start the regular season, was ejected late in the game for a helmet-to-helmet hit.

Duluth native C.J. Ham had two carries for 8 yards from his fullback position.



Ben Ludeman / USA Today Sports

Vikings wide receiver Brandon Zylstra (15) catches a touchdown against Seahawks cornerback Jamar Taylor (8) during the third quarter Sunday at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis.

Third Quarter
SEA—J.Myers 52 yard field goal, 8:58.
MIN—Zylstra 4 yard pass from Slotter (Vedvik kick), 2:29.

Fourth Quarter
SEA—J.Myers 27 yard field goal, 12:16.
MIN—Blasingame 1 yard rush (Boone rush), 5:10.
SEA—J.Myers 20 yard field goal, 3:12.

TEAM STATISTICS

SEA	MIN
First Downs	13 27
Total Net Yards	221 409
Rushes-Yds	23-76 39-137
Passing	145 272
Sacked-Yds Lost	1-4 0-0
Comp-Att-Int	12-27-1 28-35-1
Punts	3-49.7 4-43.8
Punt Returns	3-38 2-11
Kickoff Returns	3-87 6-129
Interceptions Ret.	1-88 1-0

Penalties-Yards 9-105 6-87
Fumbles-Lost 1-0 1-0
Time of Possession 21:50 38:10

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING—SEA, C.Carson 5-25, Homer 4-16, X.Turner 2-13, Ursua 1-11, Ru.Wilson 2-9, Barrett IV 1-5, R.Penny 6-(minus 2), P.Lynch 2-(minus 11). MIN, Boone 21-66, Mattison 10-41, Badet 1-10, Ham 2-8, Slotter 2-6, Thielen 1-5, Blasingame 1-1, Cousins 1-0.
PASSING—SEA, Ru.Wilson 6-9-0-82, P.Lynch 6-15-0-67, Barrett IV 0-3-1-0. MIN, Slotter 11-13-0-116, Mannion 11-14-1-88, Cousins 6-8-0-68.
RECEIVING—SEA, Lockett 3-27, Jr.Brown 2-52, Jz.Ferguson 2-24, R.Penny 2-10, Ursua 1-25, Dv.Moore 1-8, C.Carson 1-3. MIN, Zylstra 5-37, Smith Jr. 5-28, Treadwell 4-47, Thielen 3-45, Hikutini 2-8, Boone 1-45, Blasingame 1-20, Dillon 1-15, K.Rudolph 1-11, Beebe 1-7, Badet 1-7, S.Diggs 1-6, Mattison 1-4, T.Conklin 1-(minus 8).
MISSED FIELD GOALS—SEA, NA. MIN, NA

Super Stock — Brett Speer, Chevy Camaro, 10.162, 126.41 def. Jason DeForest, Chevy Cavalier, 9.029, 141.88.
Stock Eliminator — Chris Knudsen, Chevy Camaro, 10.608, 121.78 def. Brett Speer, Chevy Nova, 10.649, 115.74.
Super Comp — Gary Stinnett, Dragster, 8.910, 184.77 def. Tyler Bohannon, Dragster, 8.894, 167.49.
Super Gas — Veron Rowland, Olds Calais, 9.876, 162.06 def. Bo Butner, Chevy Corvette, 9.871, 166.17.
Top Sportsman — Larry Demers, Chevy Cobalt, 7.063, 193.40 def. Curt Friedrich, Camaro, 6.701, 207.66.
Top Dragster — Henry Wiebusch, Dragster, 7.159, 188.07 def. Luke Bogacki, Dragster, 7.369, 177.44.
Top Fuel Harley — Doug Vancil, Weekend, 6.256, 218.12 def. Tii Tharpe, JTR, 6.532, 217.56.
Pro Stock Snowmobile — Glenn Hall, Arctic Cat, 7.938, 161.61 def. Matt Ernst, Suzuki, Foul - Red Light.

Point Standings

Top Fuel
1. Steve Torrence, 1,650*; 2. Brittany Force, 1,015*; 3. Doug Kalitta, 1,013*; 4. Clay Millican, 1,009*; 5. Antron Brown, 998*; 6. Mike Salinas, 986*; 7. Leah Pritchett, 903*; 8. Austin Prock, 826; 9. Richie Crampton, 785; 10. Terry McMillen, 708.

Funny Car

1. Robert Hight, 1,397*; 2. Tommy Johnson Jr., 1,218*; 3. John Force, 1,199*; 4. Ron Capps, 1,171*; 5. Jack Beckman, 1,098*; 6. Matt Hagan, 1,047*; 7. Bob Tasca III, 1,038*; 8. J.R. Todd, 981*; 9. Shawn Langdon, 914*; 10. Tim Wilkerson, 824.

Pro Stock

1. Bo Butner, 874*; 2. Greg Anderson, 802*; 3. Alex Laughlin, 794*; 4. Jason Line, 774*; 5. Matt Hartford, 753*; 6. Deric Kramer, 709*; 7. Erica Enders, 697*; 8. Jeg Coughlin, 663*; 9. Chris McGaha, 581*; 10. Kenny Delco, 363.
*qualified for playoffs

Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals At Brainerd International Raceway Sunday's Results
Top Fuel
1. Leah Pritchett; 2. Mike Salinas; 3. Austin Prock; 4. Doug Kalitta; 5. Brittany Force; 6. Steve Torrence; 7. Clay Millican; 8. Billy Torrence; 9. Luigi Novelli; 10. Chris Karamesines; 11. Antron Brown; 12. Terry McMillen; 13. Richie Crampton; 14. Kyle Wurtzel; 15. Scott Palmer; 16. Cameron Ferre.
Finals — Pritchett, 3.732 seconds, 321.04 mph def. Salinas, 4.066 seconds, 235.72 mph.

Funny Car

1. Ron Capps; 2. Tommy Johnson Jr.; 3. Matt Hagan; 4. Shawn Langdon; 5. Jack Beckman; 6. Bob Tasca III; 7. Bob Bode; 8. Robert Hight; 9. Cruz Pedregon; 10. Dale Creasy Jr.; 11. Paul Lee; 12. Tim Wilkerson; 13. J.R. Todd; 14. Jonnie Lindberg; 15. Terry Haddock; 16. John Force.
Finals — Capps, Dodge Charger, 3.946, 324.28 def. Johnson Jr., Charger, 3.947, 319.98.

Pro Stock

1. Jason Line; 2. Erica Enders; 3. Matt Hartford; 4. Deric Kramer; 5. Jeg Coughlin; 6. Alex Laughlin; 7. Chris McGaha; 8. Bo Butner; 9. Richard Freeman; 10. Kenny Delco; 11. Fernando Cuadra; 12. Val Smeland; 13. Fernando Cuadra Jr.; 14. Wally Stroupe; 15. Greg Anderson; 16. Shane Tucker.
Finals — Line, Chevy Camaro, 6.597, 209.10 def. Enders, Camaro, 6.604, 207.59.

Other Finals

Top Alcohol Dragster — Shawn Cowie, 5.252, 276.80 def. Megan Meyer, Foul - Red Light.
Top Alcohol Funny Car — Shane Westfield, Chevy Camaro, 5.755, 260.66 def. Doug Gordon, Camaro, 6.148, 220.98.
Competition Eliminator — Jim Greenheck, Chevy Camaro, 7.543, 178.73 def. Shaun Vincent, Chevy S-10, 8.388, 158.11.

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