

(Kaukauna, WI) – Andy Monday will be the first to admit he'll have his hands full in his super late model title defense when "Thursday Night Thunder" kicks off at Wisconsin International Raceway in Kaukauna Thursday, May 24.

The Appleton Ace captured his first ever division crown on the final night of racing in August 2017. With a bulk of the same players stepping up their collective games and a few new faces in the mix, the road to the Fox River Racing Club championship will be anything but easy.

"There are a lot of them but one who will be tough will be Bobby Kendall," said Monday. "At the end of the season in '17 he was the fastest car on the track and he won the Red, White and Blue championship too." Kendall has a brand new Race Tech chassis at his disposal for the '18 season.

A pair of local drivers who've got numerous track titles under their belt – Lowell Bennett and Jeff Van Oudenhoven – are still a threat to win a title. "JVO will be back weekly and he ran into a bit of bad luck last year," said Monday. "Lowell obviously has a lot of titles under his belt here, too. We came right down to the wire with Lowell last year."

Returning weekly to WIR in 2018 will be Cambridge's Casey Johnson who'll pilot a new Pathfinder car for Chase Motorsports. "Casey is tough wherever he runs so we'll have our eye on him no doubt," Monday explained. "Two guys that don't get mentioned a lot but I expect to be tough are Brent Strelka and Sawyer Effertz too. Maxwell Schultz I hear is going to part time but when he's there he'll be a threat and with Travis Dassow running up at WIR weekly this year you can never count him out either. Travis will run the ARCA Midwest Tour and he's got a real strong car, too."

Others expected to return weekly include Appleton's Cory Kemkes, Appleton's Taylor Vanderboss, Green Bay's Chad Butz, Freedom's Kyle Calmes, Wrightstown's Taylor Haufschildt, Oshkosh's Pete and Trevor Vandermolen, Appleton's Michael Anthony, Ashwaubenon's Jake Carpenter, Brillion's Alex Stumpf, Mequon's Randy Schuler, Kewaunee's Mike Hardtke and Darboy's Mickey Schallie.

The division that boasted nearly 24 cars per night on average in '17 could see those numbers even higher, bolstered by a solid rookie crop of drivers that includes Appleton's Alex Seidel, Pewaukee's Grant Griesbach, Freedom's Tim Springstroh, Appleton's Dave Satorius, Hilbert's Corey Manders and De Pere's Neal Sannes, who plans on competing on a part time basis. Other competitors that plan on making stops to compete on Thursday nights on a part time basis include 1996 track champion Mark Schroeder and Appleton drivers Brad Anthony and Mike Reichenberger. "Some nights we may be close to 30 super late models which is phenomenal for a weekly show," said FRRC president Tom Gee. "We're really pumped up for a big year on Thursday nights."

The season opening "Thursday Night Thunder" race at WIR will take place Thursday, May 24 at 6:45 p.m. A pre-season race party will take place Thursday, May 17 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Admission to this event is free and fans are encouraged to bring their kids as many teams will have their race cars available for kids to take selfies.

Food and drinks will be served in the pit concessions.

Tuesday night oval practices are slated to begin on May 1 with Saturday, May 5 serving as the annual FRRC practice and inspection day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Spectator admission is free that day.