

BIG 6 GP Championship, presented by MSR
Round 5 | April 30th, 2016 | Primm, NV

Steady rain the night before the race meant it was time to get the extra sets of goggles ready because it was going to be a muddy affair. The entire course wasn't wrecked, in fact most of the desert sections were nearly perfect, but the closer to the infield areas the course came, the deeper the mud became, even pooling up into huge puddles in numerous areas.

Putting it bluntly, my race got off to a pretty awful start. The starting area was on the muddiest part of the racecourse—the short-course truck track—and just a hundred yards down the start straightaway was a deep puddle of muddy water that spread nearly the entire width of the course. Obviously a good start would nullify the threat the puddle posed to vision, but I had an average-at-best launch off the line and once we all reached the puddle, a wave of murky muck showered over me, completely covering my goggles. A thick film of brown blocking my vision, I fumbled for a tear-off and came together with another rider who was undoubtedly trying to clear his vision as well, nearly sending us both to the ground.

After getting myself sorted, I want to say I was somewhere in the teens as things spread out, but I was able to make a few passes early on to get inside of the top ten—I slotted into eight place behind my teammate half way around the first lap. I made the move into seventh at the start of the following lap, but I was blowing through my tear-offs, which would soon become an issue. After closing in on Ryan Reina for sixth place, I pulled my last tear-off and soon after received a face-full of mud off of Ryan's rear tire. I wiped my goggles with my glove, but all that did was smear the brown goo across the width of my lens; I had no choice but to hit the eject button on the goggles and toss them to the side of the track.

For about five seconds I thought that was the best decision I had ever made. My vision was instantly crystal clear, but as I continued to get pelted with sand and mud off of Reina's 450, I quickly realized I didn't stand much chance of passing him as my eyes were getting absolutely hammered. I actually made the decision to back off, save my eyes, and come in that lap for goggles, which allowed my teammate, Justin Seeds, to take advantage as he made the pass back by.

Alongside my struggles for clear vision, I had also noticed that my bike had been smoking from around the motor rather constantly over the last lap, so coming in to the pits would also allow my pit crew to attempt to deduce the issue and make sure I could carry on in the race. The stop in the pits took quite a while as my team made sure they could locate the source of the smoke, which ended up being the slightest expulsion of oil out the small peep-hole on the side of the head, and they made the decision that my bike wasn't losing enough oil to cause a massive problem, so I rejoined the race around tenth or eleventh, but right in the thick of the Pro-2 class—the second wave of riders that had left the start line.

I spent the rest of the race playing catch-up, coming into the pits one more time for a fresh set of roll-off goggles, and as the race wound down I had made my way up to seventh place. I was

catching two riders just ahead of me, one of whom was Justin Wallis, and I could see that he had tossed his goggles, which made the pass a little easier as he had slowed to save his eyes. The next rider in line was Ryan Reina, and as the course hopped onto a short asphalt road with a slight bend, I held the throttle on around the outside of Ryan and took the position. With just over a lap to go, and quite a gap to my teammate ahead of me, I wouldn't be able to make any more progress and would have to settle for fifth place on the day.

I'm definitely disappointed in getting a fifth place finish. I've had some excellent races at Primm recently and needed a win to close the points gap in the standings, as I now sit third. All things considered, though, salvaging a fifth after the down-time I had in the pits wasn't the worst result, and I'm thankful my bike stayed together, which is a credit to my mechanic, the CryoHeat process we put the motor through, and the Maxima oil we run. As the BIG 6 series takes a summer hiatus, all I can do is focus on getting wins at the final three rounds and letting the final standings sort themselves out.

I want to thank my mechanic Phil, suspension tech John, my wife (and McKenna), my family, all of my personal supporters—Precision Concepts, MSR, Shoei, Sidi, 100%, EVS, USWE, Focus apparel, BRP, RAD custom graphics, GoPro, A'ME grips, IWC motorsports, ATP mechanix, Rekluse, CryoHeat, and the MotoXerciser—and all of our race team sponsors for the continued support.

I feel I've been on a bit of a dry-spell lately as far as my results go. I don't feel like I've been riding poorly by any means, but I think I've held myself to a high standard after the success I've enjoyed over the past couple years. The next generation (Shirey, Yorba, Thompson, et al.) is definitely getting faster, and learning how to win, which is fantastic for the future of our sport, and it's presenting me with the challenge of stepping my game up. I'm looking forward to next weekend's WORCS race in Mesquite, NV to see if I can get back on top of the podium.

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