

## Chuck "Rookie" Woodruff's Memories of The Miami Marine Stadium

Being raised in Miami and going to the Miami Marine Stadium from 1966 to 1993 as a spectator and boat racer, I have so many fond memories of the Marine Stadium, I would like to share a few:

My first visit to the Stadium was the Orange Bowl Regatta. That was my start of a love for the stadium and boat racing that is still with me today!!

In my first year of racing (1968) at the Marine Stadium, I was a riding mechanic in the famed "Second Mortgage" an E-Service Runabout owed by my roommate and good friend Ted Neuwieler. In 1969 Ted and I won the National Championship and National High Point Championship. In 1970 I purchased my own E-Service Runabout named "Nuther Mortgage" and I was named Rookie of The Year. Rookie became my nickname that has stuck with me ever since. It was given to me by my good friend, the great hydroplane driver "Charlie Dunn, Jr".

Ted and I battled for the next two years, every one of our heats of racing at the stadium was side by side, and after two years of battling my roommate and close friend, I won the National High Point Championship both years. Ted retired from racing after our E-Service and F-Service Runabout classes were dropped from APBA in a way to reduce the amount of race boat classes.

I kept on pursuing my passion for boat racing, driving anything I could get my hands on; 225's; 7 Liter's; 280 Hydro's. In 1978, FIRC (Florida Inboard Racing Club) hosted the National Championship for the Grand Prix Restricted Hydro Class in the stadium. I won the National Championship in the 225 hydro "Miss Prime Mover", it was my first championship in a Hydroplane.

The next wonderful memory I have about the stadium; in 1979 I had a bad accident in the 225 Hydro "Miss Prime Mover" at the Southland Regatta in St. Petersburg, FL, where I blew the boat over and broke my back. I was paralyzed from the waist down and told I would probably never walk again. Well 8 months later; my first race after the injury was in the Miami Marine Stadium at The Lee Evans Memorial Regatta, which was the restart of my racing career; it is hard to explain how emotional this was. Racing at the stadium was so wonderful and exciting, that I could not see myself never racing in the stadium again.

In 1980 I started driving "The Buckeye Kid" a 280 cu.in. Hydro, this boat was owned by the famous Unlimited Hydroplane driver Joe Taggart and his son John "Doc" Taggart. We were very successful in the stadium winning more than 90% of our heats. In 1980 we won the Mike Gordon Silver Helmet Award and in 81' we set a stadium course record for the 280 class and won the first televised hydroplane race on ESPN. The last televised race was the Orange Bowl Regatta that had been shown on ABC's Wide World of Sports in the mid 60's.

In 1985 at the Stadium, the Unlimited Hydroplanes came for their annual regatta that started back in 1976 (I think) and continued to 1993. We had a 7 Liter Challenge Race in 1985 and 1986 as part of the show. I won the challenge race both years. In 1985, Dick Crippen, who had been announcing races at the stadium for years, going back to the late 60's, was announcing the Challenge race. Dick knew me well, he explained to about 4,000 people in attendance how I had been paralyzed and told them of my come back. Being a local, I'll never forget when they took me to the stadium after the final heat to receive the Trophy. The crowd went crazy, they were tugging on me, screaming and hollering. "That was an unforgettable moment". The Radio station that sponsored my boat that day had a concert that night in the Marine Stadium; The Charlie Daniels Band. As the winner of the race, I got to go backstage before the concert and meet Charlie and the band. WOW!!

There were a lot of funny moments that we had at the stadium too. I remember one in particular; I was driving the new 7 Liter "Miss Prime Mover" owned by Alan Vordermier of Ft. Lauderdale. Earle Hall came from Virginia Beach, VA., to run his "Bluewater Special" 7 Liter Hydroplane at the stadium before the Southland Regatta in St. Petersburg. We were asked to run our boats in an exhibition race; we were running side by side for three laps and Earle had broken out front before the last turn on the last lap, he cut in front of me and hosed me down with his rooster tail of water from his hydroplane. Well after the race I asked Earl what the heck was that for? He said "when you are out front you don't get wet". Well sometimes pay backs are a pleasure and I had one!!

After the regatta was over, we were able to do some testing on the race course with our boats. I went out in the "Buckeye Kid" and saw Earl, his brother Chris and David Iwrin under the stadium in a rubber boat having some cocktails and enjoying themselves; well, I pulled up and stopped the "Buckeye Kid", turned her around with the back facing them, they knew what was coming, I accelerated real fast and sent a ton of water their way and the force blew them out of the boat and soaked them. In the pits after my run, they came walking towards me, looking like drowned rats, saying what was that all about!! My reply was; "when you are out front you don't get wet"!!

I could go on and on about what the stadium means to me. We used to call the Miami Marine Stadium "The Eighth Wonder of the World" and when it faded away, it was heartbreaking. There was just nothing like it, all the racing; concerts and friends that were made at the stadium. Now, to think the Stadium is coming back!

**Thank you** Friends of the Miami Marine Stadium for your efforts in bringing the stadium back to her glory and giving the chance of many to remember their good times at "The Miami Marine Stadium"

