

MPE Motorsports Report:

55th Mac Tools U.S. Nationals
O'Reilly Raceway Park
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Clay Millican
Drummonds, Tenn.
Hope4Sudan/Motorvation Top Fuel Dragster
Contact: Joe Sherk, jlsherk@aol.com/360.981.4806

Clay Millican clinches berth in NHRA's Countdown to the Championship

CLERMONT, Ind. -- Clay Millican took another step toward winning NHRA's Top Fuel Full Throttle Drag Racing Series championship late Sunday afternoon when he ended a tension-filled day by qualifying for Monday's U.S. Nationals at venerable O'Reilly Raceway Park.

Actually, Millican's nail-biting quest to clinch the 10th spot in the Countdown to the Championship officially ended about one minute before he whacked the throttle on the Hope4Sudan/Motorvation dragster. That's when Joe Hartley, his rival for the coveted position, failed to qualify.

"I was relieved . . ." Millican said when he realized Hartley was out of contention. "I don't believe in pressure, but I do believe in finishing in the top 10 and so it was nice to know no matter what our run was, we were going to be in the top 10.

"That's a huge accomplishment. No matter what happens here, we have finished in the top 10 for the first time in my drag racing career in NHRA. We certainly aren't planning that'll be where we end up, but it's nice to know we are in the top 10 and we can now get ourselves in position to go for this championship."

Millican's 3.941-second, 307.58-mph qualifying run was 13th quickest in qualifying and puts him up against No. 4 qualifier Larry Dixon (3.850 at 302.809 mph) in Monday's first round. And it also gives the team the opportunity to make some tune-up changes.

"We know we need to go quicker than what we have been, so we might as well try and learn something Monday," added Millican. "Lance (Larsen, crew chief) had the car set up to go down the race track, which is what it did, and it put us in the show. We have to be aggressively conservative."

And now the focus is on doing well Monday.

The Countdown's six-race series begins in Charlotte, Sept. 18-20.

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