

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

O. D. LAVELY

Born in 1887 in Watervliet (Michigan), Oral Daniel Lavelly became interested in auto racing while operating a restaurant in Inglewood (Calif.) near the shop of Fred Offenhauser. Many of the car owners, mechanics and drivers would eat lunch at the restaurant.

O.D. and his son Ray opened a race track known as the Houston (Texas) Speedbowl, across from Buffalo Stadium, in late 1937. The track was closed in 1942 due to the emergence of World War II. O.D. and his family returned to Southern California to work at Lockheed Aircraft as a guard.

After the war, O.D. and Ray opened Taft Stadium in Oklahoma City (Okla.) for auto racing. The year was 1946 and, at the time, the stadium was used for high school football

games. A clay oval was installed around the field and railroad ties were placed in the turns to protect the turf.

In 1949, O.D. and Ray opened a second track at Playland Park in Houston. Playland Park was an amusement park with a large roller coaster and many rides. The Lavelly's ran midgets at both tracks for approximately two years, one on Fridays and one on Saturdays. They introduced stock car racing to sell-out crowds at both tracks in the early Fifties.

In 1953, they promoted Taft Stadium only on a weekly basis. Most of the top drivers in the nation, including Jud Larson, Johnnie Parsons, Rodger Ward, Lloyd Ruby, Troy Ruttman and Sam Hanks, competed at one or both of the tracks against the best drivers in the Southwest. Indeed, A. J. Foyt started racing at Playland Park in 1953.

O.D. Lavelly's accomplishments were due to the support and hard work of the entire Lavelly family, under the banner of "Lavelly Racing Promotions." O.D.'s wife Virginia, known as "Virgie," and Ray's wife Joyce ran the ticket and pit pass office while their husbands ran the races. Additional help was supplied by Joyce's parents, Al and Capitola Burger, Bill Jones and Bill Reynolds.

O.D. Lavelly passed away in Oklahoma City in 1953. O.D. Lavelly's grandson, Duane A. Lavelly, currently lives in Houston.

Ray Lavelly continued promoting races, including road races in the late Fifties at Denver's Continental Divide Raceway until 1963 when he went to work for Roy Richter at Bell Auto Parts/Cragar. Ray passed away on November 5, 1980.