

# Doug Clark: 'J.R.' is a hundred years old and he's not slowing down

Doug Clark/SR

James R. Cox, better known as just "J.R." to his pals, turns 100 years old today.

And all J.R. wanted for his birthday party, his daughter Becky told me, was a visit from yours truly.

I know what you're all thinking. You're all thinking ... "Aw, isn't that sweet?"

No, as a matter of fact, sweet is not the word I'd use for J.R.

Hilariously competitive scoundrel is more like it.

Sure, J.R. wanted to see me again. And you know why?

He wanted to relive the way he humiliated me on a go-kart track a little over 14 years ago.

Well, everything doesn't always have to go J.R.'s way.

Truth is, I have other plans and can't attend his party.

But being a complete glutton for punishment, I drove to the Fairwinds retirement community on Friday and surprised J.R. with cupcakes, a happy birthday helium balloon and a trademark trailer ball cap, just like the one I wear.

I had a little trouble picking out an appropriate card.

The store I shopped at didn't have any centenarian cards. I thought about buying him the happy 95th birthday card and plus the one for a kid turning 5.

In the end, however, I settled on a card that featured a stern-looking nun who said: "I expect you to behave on your birthday!"

That made J.R. laugh.

"Don't think that's gonna happen," said my nemesis.

No kidding.

J.R. actually tried to arm-wrestle me two seconds after I met him in the Fairwinds lobby.

He seemed remarkably strong, too.

“To J.R. Cox, the fastest cat on the track,” I wrote in his nun card. “From your whipping boy and pal, Doug Clark.”

J.R. laughed again and told me that up in his room he keeps a copy of the column I wrote on our race.

“Why am I not surprised?” I replied.

Allow me to recap that fateful meeting in August 2001.

It all started with harassing phone calls.

“When we gonna square off and race?” he asked in this sneering tone, to which I replied, “Who is this?”

Eventually I learned Cox was an 85-year-old delinquent who wanted to challenge me to a go-kart race at the Fastkart Indoor Speedway on East Front Avenue. When I tried to waffle, J.R. said he’d settle for me coming to the Speedway wearing makeup and a dress.

“An’ high heels, too,” he cackled.

My manhood at stake, I arrived at the track to find a cane-toting man who wore a hearing aid and had one arm in a sling.

“I’m gonna cream this ol’ crackpot,” I started thinking.

He wanted me to look at the photo album he happened to bring along. “J.R. Cox Racing Days, 1948-1952,” read the ink-scrawled title on the cover.

Inside were yellowed newspaper clippings and black-and-white photographs featuring a young J.R. and his ’32 Ford.

Hmm. My challenger, as it turns out, is a two-time former Kansas state stock car champ. He earned each title by whipping Bill Mears, father of Rick Mears, who won at Indy four times.

“This doesn’t bode at all well,” I muttered to myself.

A couple things happened next.

J.R. took off his fake sling. We slid into our low-slung karts that will go 30-plus mph.

I reminded J.R. that he’d agreed to spot me five laps.

“Can’t hear ya,” he barked. “Turned my hearing aid off.”

It was over in 10 minutes. J.R. lapped me seven times.

“Never use the brake,” he told me Friday. “Gotta go all out.”

He probably would’ve lapped me eight times. But during one of the laps he paused to playfully ram the back of my slow-kart.

J.R. was a fixture at the track, racing practically every day into his 90s.

“Want to do it again?” asked J.R. as we reminisced in the Fairwinds lobby. “My heart won’t let me race, but we could just make it a show.”

Let me put this in blunt terms.

I don’t care how old this man is. I’d rather work a week as a naked beekeeper than get onto a track with J.R. again. He still looks fit enough to kick my butt.

I’ll be honest. It was great to see J.R. again. He showed me the card he received from the Obamas for turning 100.

He may not be racing these days, but he plays a lot of poker at a nearby casino.

“He’s amazing,” Becky said of her dad.

He sure is.

Time to go. I wished him happy birthday. J.R. sprang up from the couch, grabbed my arm and quickly escorted me to the parking lot.

“I still get around pretty good, huh?” he asked as I gave him a hug.

Like I said, “The fastest cat on the track.”

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