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Brands BSB opener

Opinion
Gary Pinchin
MCN SPORT EDITOR



gary.pinchin@motorcyclenews.com

'It's so close and the racing is just brutal!'

So what should we read into what happened in the opening round of the MCE British Superbike championship over the Easter weekend? Qualifying showed just how closely matched everyone is this year. The top 20 riders who made it through to Qualifying 2 were separated by 0.623s. Brands Indy circuit is a short lap, but even doubling that for a normal track, the spread would only be 1.2s. Pretty phenomenal.

And the racing was just brutal! The day kicked off with Kiyono's wild ride to the gravel in warm-up – and Hickman's astonishing evasive action. Then came the first BSB race punctuated by incredible scraps and more crazy crashes. Race two was another great battle between the HM Plant Hondas and Swan Yamahas – a battle that could characterise the championship.

But hang on. This is early days. John Hopkins was on the pace, but things didn't quite pan out for him in the Brands bull ring. Team-mate Jon Kirkham showed he's stepped up to the big league, but was robbed of a race two run. Josh Brookes was

seriously fast on the Suzuki until his unfortunate crash. And Easton wasn't far off with the Kawasaki. Rutter's still adapting to the Ducati ride-by-wire.

Think of Brands as just a taste of the action we're going to see this year.

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The teams and riders see Brands Indy's short lap as relatively simple to set-up a bike for and gives you time to make several stops in one session to make bike changes. It's fast and flowing, but it's also a ballsy place where you can bite the screen to do fast laps.

There's clearly more to that when it comes to winning races, as Shakey and Tommy Hill showed on Monday, but it does mean some pretty fierce action through the field – and those closely-matched lap times.

Oulton, on the other hand, is far more technical with blind apexes, awkward cambers, ballsy fast corners and massive undulations that send the front wheel skyward. This is where bike set-up, technical knowhow and circuit knowledge really come into play. It's where people like Hopkins, Rutter and Easton will feature much more in the mix.

So what we learned from the weekend is that BSB is as fiercely competitive as ever. See you at Oulton this weekend!

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Hill clips Laverty (on ground) after latter's highside at Clearways



Westmoreland's Motorpoint Yamaha slides off at Graham Hill bend



Ex-MotoGP man Hopkins lost it at Druids but rejoined in 27th

Kiyo survives monster crash

Defending BSB Champion Ryuichi Kiyono's season didn't exactly get the start he had hoped for.

After being beaten to pole position in qualifying by just 0.08s by team-mate Shane Byrne, Kiyono's race day started in horrific fashion when he crashed at Clearways after snagging the back of Scott Smart's BSB Evo Ducati.

Tyco Honda's Peter Hickman was right behind Kiyono when the crash unfolded and had to take to the grass at 130mph to avoid him.

Hickman said: "I was following Kiyono and just in front of us were James Hillier and Scott Smart. One of those two missed a gear and Kiyono ran into the back of Smart's Ducati and went down. He was lucky he didn't fall right in front of me.

"I ducked my shoulder down as I clipped him, otherwise he might have clipped my front brake lever and I'd have crashed at 130mph, too."

Kiyono was unhurt and said: "Smart either missed a gear or had some kind of engine problem and I hit him. My machine was very badly damaged after the crash but I thank my team for repairing it.

Kiyono's luck didn't improve in race one. He was running fourth when the engine started to tighten, so he pulled off track. He bounced back in the second with a fighting second place, but said: "Today there was many bad things. The crash this morning. Then engine broken in first race. Second race was OK, but I'm not happy. My target is to win every race. Machine is much better than last year. Maybe problem is rider not pushing hard enough." "Kiyono didn't spray champagne on the podium as a mark of respect to friend Kouki Takahashi (younger brother of Moto2 racer Yuki) who was killed in a road accident last week.

CLIVE CHALLINOR



Kiyo broke down in race one

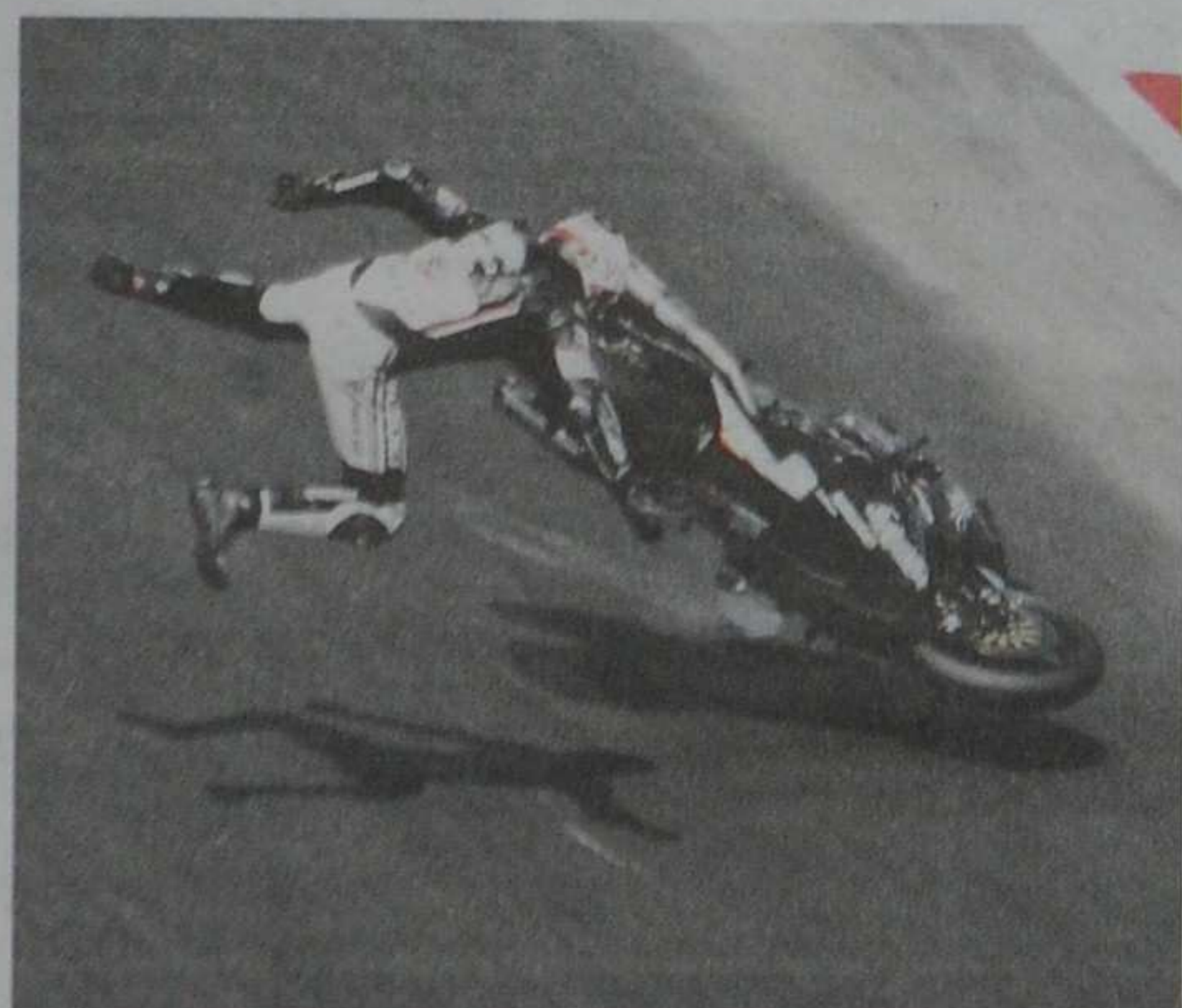


FULL THROTTLE

DOUBLE END



... he lost it at the bottom of Paddock Hill bend...



... and was spat off his bike in a classic lofty highside