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SASKATOON RACER FEELING CONFIDENT

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If there is pressure associated with being in a tight title fight, motorcycle racer Brett McCormick is showing none of it.

The 18-year-old from Saskatoon comes into this weekend's final round of the Parts Canada Superbike Championship at Shannonville Motorsport Park with a shot at claiming his first professional national crown.

He trails series leader and three-time defending champion Jordan Szoke by 14 points, 296-282 with 56 points available this weekend, including 50 for first place in

Sunday's feature race.

"I don't mind being in second place at all," said McCormick, who races for the Team Suzuki / Blackfoot / Picotte Racing factory team. "I get paid to win races. Every round I go out and just try to win. I don't feel any added pressure. I'd rather be in this position that protecting a lead. He [Szoke] has a lot more to think about."

McCormick has plenty of reasons to feel optimistic. In a season that has seen the momentum shift between himself and Szoke with every round, the westerner is coming off a dominant performance at the most recent Parts Canada Superbike round at Nova Scotia's Atlantic Motorsport Park in early August.

He started from pole position despite nearly crashing on his qualifying lap and then led almost all the way to claim his third win of the year. And almost exactly one year ago McCormick scored his first ever national Superbike win at Shannonville.

"I love Shannonville and I've always done well there," he acknowledged. "My win last year gives me a little extra confidence boost. We're coming off a dominant weekend at Halifax and I have no doubt we can carry that success over to this weekend. We've had really good success the last few rounds."

The season long battle between Szoke and McCormick has been one of the most fascinating confrontations in the 30-year history of the Canadian Superbike series. After a stellar amateur career McCormick made his professional debut as a 15-year-old in 2007, riding as Szoke's team-mate in the Canadian Kawasaki Motors factory team.

While Szoke won the national title in 2007 and 2008, giving him three in a row, McCormick ran away with the HJC Pro Rookie of the Year title in 2007. Injuries, however, slowed his progress last year and during

the off-season he made the switch to the Suzuki team managed by Canadian racing legend Pascal Picotte.

The new partnership bore fruit almost instantly, with McCormick finishing a close second to Szoke in the 2009 Parts Canada Superbike series opener at Calabogie Motorsports Park, near Ottawa.

In the next round, at Circuit ICAR, just north of Montreal, McCormick was in dominant form and claimed an impressive victory. Two weeks later at Calgary's Race City Motorsport Park the Saskatchewan racer won again after pulling off a surprise pass of Szoke just a few corners from the finish.

The tide turned back in Szoke's favor at Mosport International Raceway, near Bowmanville, Ont., in July as the Kawasaki rider swept both ends of a doubleheader and reclaimed the series lead. However, McCormick's win at AMP has ensured the title will come down to the final race of the season at Shannonville.

McCormick admits he has learned a great deal from Picotte, himself a two-time Canadian Superbike champion, and his experienced crew this season. In addition to his performance on the track, the 18-year-old says he has made big improvements in his ability to set-up his motorcycle and work with the crew.

"This year has been awesome for that," he said. "The whole team has encouraged me to pay more attention to the little stuff and made me focus myself a little bit more. I think I've been improving with every race."

The almost month-long gap between the Nova Scotia race and this weekend's finale is the longest break in the schedule this year, and McCormick is anxious to get back on the track and try to maintain his momentum.

"It seems like we've had the whole season off," he said. "I'm super-pumped and anxious to get back out there. Ideally I'd be out racing every weekend. But the time off has not been a bad thing. The break was nice. It's pretty draining racing all the time and it's nice to get home."

McCormick has been spending his down time keeping fit with bicycling, working out in the gym and riding his motocross bike.

And while he can still walk the streets of Saskatoon fairly anonymously, he has seen his media profile in his hometown go up with his success this season.

"The way this year has gone I'm getting way more press back home," he explained. "Before this there wasn't really anything at all. No one here really knows what the sport is; we're kind of isolated from it. It's been pretty tough but it's getting better."

McCormick also found some time to celebrate his 18th birthday on August 20, although he insists it was a very low key affair.

"I did absolutely nothing," he said. "I think I slept in late and maybe went out with friends, but that was it. I don't think I've celebrated my birthday since I was six."

Perhaps on Sunday afternoon at Shannonville McCormick will have something else to celebrate.

The final round of the Parts Canada Superbike Championship take place this weekend, Sept. 4-6, at Shannonville Motorsport Park in Shannonville, Ont. For ticket information phone (613) 969-1906 (toll free 1-800-959-8955) or email  info@shannonville.com .