



Justin, right, battles for the lead.

During the summer between the 4th and 5th grades, Justin developed an interest in BMW bike racing. Sponsored by the American Bicycle Association, junior BMW races were held at small dirt tracks throughout most of the state. From the moment the starting gate slams down, up to eight young racers blast at full sprint toward the first obstacle. Every track has a start and a finish, but that's where the similarity ends — no two tracks are identical. For the contestants, once the race begins the next 30 to 40 seconds are like a wild ride on a dirt roller coaster. As best I remember, Justin competed in five races. The summer of 1985 was a bad one for me healthwise, but I managed to make all five. The one I remember most occurred on a hot Saturday afternoon at an event in Paulding County. Earlier that morning, Margene picked me up at Piedmont Hospital, where I'd spent the previous four days with a nasogastric tube down my throat. It was too hot for me to sit in the sun-drenched bleachers, so I found a place on the ground in the shade of a nearby tree. Weak from not having eaten in nearly a week, I was glad to eventually get home and crawl in bed. But as bad as I felt, it wasn't bad enough to pass on the chance to spend an hour or so watching one of my sons do something he loved.