

FIVE MINUTES WITH...

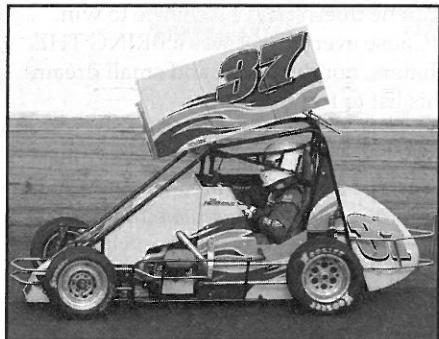
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DEB AND SHANE, A LOVE STORY

by Chris Romano

Norm Marx



In April of 2008, the NEMA Midgets opened their season at Thompson Speedway. On lap three, Shane Hammond touched wheels with another car and his machine flew out of the track in turn four, striking a billboard. The likable 27 year old was killed instantly; NEMA had not suffered a fatality since 1965.

No one, absolutely no one would have blamed Shane's mother, Deb Marvuglio, had she walked away from the sport forever. But Deb, who's other son Anthony was racing go karts, had other plans.

"Shane started racing karts when he was young," said Deb. "At 15 he was diagnosed with a brain and spine tumor and needed emergency surgery. It was benign but there was no guarantee he'd have the use of his arms, legs, respiratory system. So we made a pact before he went into surgery that when he came out I'd ask him to wiggle his toes. And when he came out he was able to do that and we both cried. He continued his go

karting, and he fought through all that pain, all the physical and occupational therapy. We bought him a very expensive Kevlar helmet because his head was so expensive now!

"He fought every day of his life through pain. For seven years we tried everything. Acupuncture, massage therapy, whatever was out there I tried. And he never gave up. He went to school every day, he went to work every day because he said he wanted to race. He felt that if he couldn't do the everyday stuff then no one would let him race.

"He was my inspiration. As a mother, you see your son in pain every day of his life, it wears you down, don't get me wrong. It was tough, and that's why I have to walk the walk I'm walking because I watched him walk it. I know he'd be disappointed if I didn't say I can get through this and I can turn something negative into a positive because that's what he did with his life. He never complained. There were people for years that stood side by side with Shane and never knew he had surgery, never knew he had a deficit.

It would be easy, even justified, to blame the sport, but Deb has never felt that way. "I don't blame anyone," she said, "If it's your day, it's your day, and I believe that. You can protect yourself as much as you want, but you can step off a curb and be gone."

From the grief, the inspiration, and sheer will Deb started the Shane Hammond Believe Foundation (www.shanehammond.org), an organization

dedicated to safety in racing.

"I started asking questions," said Deb. "How much experience do you need? I wouldn't let Shane get a car ready for my son Anthony for Thompson

because he didn't have enough experience. Who gets to race and who doesn't? I found out that not everyone wears a HANS device, not everyone has the right equipment. Every year we're going faster and faster and that's what everybody loves, but everyone, and not just drivers, weren't taking the right precautions. "I had just lost my job in February, and he died in April. People sent me money to try to help me. I couldn't just keep the money. Shane would help anybody. He didn't care if you tried to beat him, he'd help you. I decided I had to give back. "I was divorced when Shane was two, so we spent a lot of time growing together. I decided I had to do this."

With help from NEMA President Mike Scrivani, former champion, veteran open wheel car owner and businessman Bobby Seymour, and the rest of NEMA the Shane Hammond Believe Foundation puts on driving schools and assists those involved in the sport with assessing their safety needs. Deb acknowledges that she's taking "baby steps" with all she wants the organization to do, but the need to focus on safety is real.

"I want to be able to help people buy safety equipment," said Deb. Legally I can't buy it for them. I also want to educate people that without the proper equipment you're taking a risk. You'll buy four sets of tires and then say I'll replace my belts next time.

"As a racer you don't want to think about the risk, but you've got to start thinking about it."

The reception, so far, has been encouraging, but not surprising. If you said "hello" to Shane you were his friend, and his legacy in NEMA is firmly in place.

"People are welcoming it," said Deb. "People have thanked me. I want to develop schools all over the country. I want to teach people how to fit a seat properly, teach them how the belts should be. I want to do more training on a race car. People are willing to learn if the venue is right, so it's how it's approached."

No one would have blamed her if she walked away but racing is better off that she stayed.

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