



Jeff Decker
FULL THROTTLE

Byrd flock headed to Speedrome

Jonathan Byrd II was looking for a fitting tribute to his father on the 25th anniversary of the elder Byrd's involvement with the Indianapolis Speedrome.

His idea: He and his brother, David Byrd, would sponsor a team of three drivers in the Speedrome's top division, late models, and chase a track championship.

Byrd II, of Greenwood, announced this week that Bill Tunny Jr. of Fairland, a veteran of nearly three decades at the eastside short track, and Tunny's sons, Ben and Jesse, will drive the Jonathan Byrd's Cafeteria/US Foodservice cars this season.

Cars owned by Jonathan Byrd first raced at the Speedrome in 1982. Standout drivers including Mike St. John, Bruce Tunny, Kenny St. John, George Sutton and Charlie Reed have raced Byrd's late models at the Speedrome. But no one has driven one of his cars to a season championship or a win in the track's most prestigious race, the World Figure-8 Championship Three-Hour Endurance Race. Byrd hasn't had a late-model entry at the Speedrome since the late 1980s.

Jonathan Byrd II hopes that changes this season. His father, whose drivers have succeeded in the United States Auto Club National Midgents Series, Indy Racing League and IndyCar Series, still is recovering from a stroke suffered in 2004.

"I like numbers, and I like anniversaries, and I really felt like this would be something that would be a fitting tribute to his work and his racing efforts," Byrd II said.

The younger Byrd doesn't want only to win a championship for his father. He also wants to help Bill Tunny Jr. earn his first track championship.

Tunny has been one of the track's top drivers for several years. He is first in career laps completed in the three-hour race, making 6,304 circuits around the figure-8 track in 27 starts. After several near-misses, he earned his only World Figure-8 Championship victory in 2003.

The season title has eluded Tunny, though. He was ninth in the Chase for the Speedrome Cup standings in 2005. Ben Tunny tied for fifth, and Jesse Tunny was 15th in his rookie season.

Bill Tunny Jr. seemed like a natural when Byrd went looking for a driver to support.

"I wanted a winner, and I wanted someone to represent the Jonathan Byrd name well, and there was no doubt Bill Tunny would be that person," Byrd said. "He's always (raced) with his (equipment). He's never had a lot of sponsors or a lot of help."

"We're going to change that this year."

Byrd also is working on securing more sponsors for the Speedrome racing effort and wants to find a way to give figure-8 racing more exposure through the media.

"I want figure-8 racing to thrive. I want figure-8 racing to grow. I want it to explode," Byrd said.

Pit stops

- One of my favorite places to race, Muncie Dragway, has changed its affiliation with drag racing's sanctioning bodies, switching from the International Hot Rod Association to the National Hot Rod Association.

- The move was announced by the NHRA this week.

- The switch allows Muncie Dragway bracket racers to compete in the NHRA Summit Racing Series, with an opportunity to compete in the North Central Division finals Sept. 14 to 16 at O'Reilly Raceway Park at Indianapolis.

- The track also will host special NHRA events, including the National Dragster Challenge, King of the Track race and O'Reilly Auto Parts Jr. Dragster Challenge.

- ORP announced this week that it will offer free parking on the facilities' grounds during the 2007 Kroger SpeedFest, July 26 through 28.

- Preferred parking also will be available for those who purchase tickets to SpeedFest races. Preferred parking will be \$7 for the United States Auto Club Silver Crown Series race and \$10 for each of the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series and NASCAR Busch Series races. The preferred parking must be purchased in advance of the events.

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Biffle bounces back from offseason crash



Greg Biffle prepares to get in his car at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla., on Wednesday during NASCAR testing for the upcoming season.

Driver has high hopes for season under new crew chief

By JENNA FRYER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

Greg Biffle was cruising around Las Vegas Motor Speedway at 204 mph when his tire exploded, sending him crashing into the wall. Knocked unconscious, he dislocated his right shoulder and briefly had blurred vision.

The most vicious accident of Biffle's career, the fiery December crash confirmed his faith in the improved safety standards NASCAR has implemented since Dale Earnhardt's 2001 death.

"I'm a firm believer that there probably would have been more than one death in our sport if it wouldn't have been for the safety stuff that came from Earnhardt's death," Biffle said Wednesday at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway.

"I know for a fact there is no possible way I would have survived that (crash) without what we have today."

This week's three-day testing session at Daytona is the first time Biffle has been back behind the wheel of a race car since the Dec. 7 accident, and he admitted being nervous.

Although his shoulder has healed, he wasn't sure what kind of limitations he might have with getting his helmet on, grabbing his seat belts and hooking up the safety devices, all of which require a full range of motion.

Biffle said he was sore after Monday's session but felt a little better Tuesday. He raised his arm above his head Wednesday to demonstrate how well he was doing.

But he acknowledged Wednesday that the emergency response team that responded to

him in Las Vegas was slow and unprepared to treat his injuries. Instead of taking him to the hospital or infield care center, Biffle said he was given a ride back to the team truck.

After receiving no medical advice, Biffle said he drove out of the racetrack and immediately flew home to North Carolina to see a doctor. Once there, he learned the injury to his brain made it dangerous for him to fly.

The accident destroyed his favorite racecar (the one that won the past three season finales at Homestead-Miami (Fla.) Speedway) and limited his activity during NASCAR's brief offseason.

It did not diminish his love of racing. "We know it's dangerous, but anything's dangerous," he said. "That stuff is not supposed to happen. You could say being an airline stewardess or being a pilot is dangerous, but everything in place, everything working properly, everything done the way it should be done and followed properly, it's not dangerous."

As he prepares for this new season, Biffle is focusing on building a relationship with crew chief Pat Tryson. Biffle was teamed with the veteran in a companywide Roush Racing shake-up, the fallout of a disappointing 2006 season.

Only two Roush cars made the Chase. Neither challenged for the title, and Biffle finished 13th overall.

Although much of what happened last season falls under the watch of former crew chief Doug Richert, Biffle refused to point fingers and said he wasn't opposed to keeping the crew chief.

Still, Biffle was paired with Tryson, who put Mark Martin in the Chase the past two seasons.

Still, Biffle doesn't expect to cruise his way back into championship contention.

History will judge steroids era harshly

By RONALD BLUM
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK

Mark McGwire's evasions were met with a denial.

While the door to Cooperstown swung open for Cal Ripken Jr. and Tony Gwynn on Tuesday, McGwire was denied baseball's highest honor, picked by less than a quarter of voters.



McGWIRE

After hitting 583 home runs to rank seventh on the career list, McGwire appeared on 128 of a record 545 ballots in voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America. The result that raises doubts about whether Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa or other sluggers from baseball's steroids era will ever gain entry.

"I hope that as time goes on, that number will increase," Gwynn said. "I hope that one day he will get into the Hall of Fame, because I really believe he deserves it."

The 23.5 percent vote McGwire received represented the first referendum on how history will judge an age when bulked-up stars came under suspicion of using performance-enhancing drugs. Baseball didn't ban steroids until after the 2002 season.

"We knew," Gwynn said. "Players knew. Owners knew. Everybody knew, and we didn't say anything about it."

Gwynn, with an infectious laugh and smile, and Ripken, with cool professionalism, were different on and off the field. They both said they knew McGwire would take some attention from their elections, but while Gwynn was open with his opinion on Big Mac, Ripken was guarded. Ripken said Goose Gossage and Jim Rice belong in the Hall but stayed away from whether McGwire should gain the honor.

"I don't think it's my place to actually cast judgment," Ripken said.

He also rejected Gwynn's assertion that steroid use was common knowledge.

"I didn't know," Ripken said. "Looking back, maybe I can be the most naive and most ignorant person around."

As the announcement approached, fans, players and man-

COLUMN

agers voiced their views. Many voters said McGwire was hurt by his 2005 congressional testimony, when he repeatedly evaded questions.

Jim Milner, McGwire's business representative, did not return telephone calls. McGwire, who lives in a gated community in Irvine, Calif., has made few public comments in recent years.

Commissioner Bud Selig declined comment on McGwire but readily praised Ripken and Gwynn. "I have enormous affection for both individuals," he said. "They not only obviously had historic achievements on the field, but they represented the sport as well as it could be represented."

Ripken and Gwynn were rarities in the age of free agency, each spending his entire career with one team. They will be inducted during ceremonies July 29 at the Hall along with anyone elected from the Veterans Committee vote, which will be announced Feb. 27.

Ripken, the Orioles shortstop who set baseball's ironman record, was picked by 537 voters and appeared on 98.53 percent of ballots to finish with the third-highest percentage behind Tom Seaver (98.84) and Nolan Ryan (98.79).

Gwynn, who won eight batting titles with the San Diego Padres, received 532 votes for 97.61 percent, the seventh-highest ever, also trailing Ty Cobb, George Brett and Hank Aaron.

A 19-time All-Star and two-time AL MVP, Ripken played in a major-league-record 2,632 consecutive games to break Lou Gehrig's mark of 2,130. He also set a new standard for power-hitting shortstops with 431 home runs and 3,184 hits.

Gwynn, a 15-time All-Star, compiled 3,141 hits and a .338 batting average during his 20-year career with the San Diego Padres. He woke up at 4 a.m. on Tuesday, couldn't get back to sleep and was fidgety and nervous before he received the call from Jack O'Connell, the BBWAA secretary-treasurer.

Gwynn hit only 135 homers — matching McGwire's total in 1998 and 1999 — and joked that he'd be the "Punch and Judy" spokesman for the next few months.

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Barbaro suffers significant setback in injury recovery

By DAN GELSTON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KENNETT SQUARE, Pa.

Every time the outlook was grim for Barbaro, the Kentucky Derby winner pulled through like a champ.

After months of upbeat progress reports, news came of a significant setback Wednesday because of the laminitis, a painful, often fatal disease afflicting his left hind hoof.

Chief surgeon Dean Richardson removed damaged tissue from Barbaro's left hind hoof, the first bad news weeks after owners Gretchen and Roy Jackson and New Bolton's chief surgeon Dean Richardson talked about releasing the colt from the hospital by the end of the month.

"Things were marching along pretty smoothly until this," Gretchen Jackson said. "We've been there before with him. He's a horse that wants to live."

Richardson was pulling out all the stops to save Barbaro, placing him back in a protective sling in his ICU stall at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center. The bay colt has been at the center since shattering three bones in his right hind leg just a few strides into the Preakness on May 20.

"They're taking extreme measures," Jackson said. "They're treating it very aggressively. They're really pulling out all the stops to help him."

Barbaro was in stable condition, according to a statement

released Wednesday morning by the Center. The tissue was removed Tuesday night.

Jackson said she brought Barbaro grass on Wednesday morning and said the colt's appearance was not as bright. But she added her husband, Roy, visited Barbaro later in the day and he had visibly improved.

The latest blow comes one week after a new cast was placed on Barbaro's laminitis-stricken left hind foot to help realign a bone.

The cast change could have caused some inflammation, said Dr. Kathleen Anderson, Barbaro's attending vet when the horse was racing and stabled in trainer Michael Matz's barn at the Fair Hill Training Center in Elkton, Md.

Anderson said Barbaro has proved he was strong enough to overcome his latest medical obstacle.

"We all know most horses don't get this far," she said. "The bottom line with Barbaro is the fractured leg is the one that would have been the end of most horses. He won't be getting to the big green field any time soon, but I don't think this is insurmountable."

Barbaro had become uncomfortable on his left hind foot, and a cast was removed after some new separation on the inside portion of his hoof was found.

After his injury in the Preakness, Barbaro developed severe laminitis, a potentially fatal disease caused by uneven weight distribution in the limbs, in mid-July. The result was that 80 percent of his left hind hoof was removed.



Dean Richardson, chief surgeon at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center for Large Animals, walks Barbaro on Sept. 26.

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