

From CEU to Big Blue, a BMX Champion Too

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Jonas Harmon catching air in a race. Photo courtesy of BMX News.

Thirty-four-year-old Jonas Harmon looks more like a body builder than a man chasing the No. 1-ranked bicycle motocross (BMX) championship in the world.

The title was in his line of vision in July 2015 as he sat as the No. 4 racer in the world. Flying into Zolder, Belgium, Harmon had competed internationally many times and was ready to up his ranking with each successful race.

He said the race started with 90 riders and each race had scaled down the competition to the top-20 riders. "The top 16 move to the quarterfinals."

Known for his ability to explode at the beginning of the 35-45- second race, Harmon shot out in front of all the riders. At some point, going between 25-27 MPH, a rider from New Zealand collided with him, knocking him out of his pedal only to plant his leg straight into an oncoming

jump, coincidentally tearing apart every major tendon and ligament in Harmon's left knee.

"My ACL, PCL, lateral, medial and posterior meniscus were destroyed," he said. "I have never felt that kind of pain in my life; I have never sustained a major injury."

However, at that point in time, he had no idea the seriousness of the injury. "I wanted to continue competing so I asked if anyone had a knee brace I could borrow for the next race."

A USA-team member had one and offered it to Harmon. "It stunk so bad, but I had to use it to get my knee to work for the next race," he said. "I came out of the gate so fast; I didn't see a soul. I had the lead and the race was mine."

Next to Harmon was a rider from Great Britain whose bike started to wobble and finally crashed into Harmon, taking both out of the race.

Harmon still was not done. He spent another four days in Belgium hobbling and coaching Team USA before he boarded a plane to the United States to see Dr. Travis Maak, a University of Utah joint specialist and Utah Jazz doctor. "He promised me he could put my knee back together so I could resume my racing career."

Six weeks in a knee brace with no mobility or weight bearing was Harmon's worst nightmare. "I had never experienced anything like this. Mentally it was taxing, but I was in an emotional wasteland." Then rehab meant six months of not touching a BMX bike. He was released to begin training Feb. 22 and has six and a half weeks to prepare for the world championship BMX races in Columbia in May.

How did this football player, baseball player and wrestler get into BMX racing? "It was my dad's idea," he said. "One of his co-worker's sons raced and dad bought me my first bike at 14."

By the time Harmon was 15, he was the No. 1 racer in the Western U.S. At 17, he won the national championship in Japan and turned professional at 19. Harmon thought four years of racing was enough and decided to go to college in his hometown of Price, Utah.

He enrolled at College of Eastern Utah where he spent the next two years writing a column for The Eagle with Les Bowen, titled "Say What." "That was the most fun column to write and everyone read it," Harmon said. "We would bring attention to something on campus. It could be as simple as a hole in the concrete that needed fixed.

I think we got under the administration's skin a lot, but the students loved it."

He also joined the cheer, yell and song squad where the 38-member squad placed third in the nation at the USA Championships in Las Vegas, Nevada, both years he was there.

After graduation, he moved to Logan and tried out and made Utah State University's cheer and yell squad. It was here his love of Aggie football and basketball developed. After two years of cheering, an opening for the mascot was announced.

"Big Blue offered a better scholarship that included tuition, fees and books so I tried out and was selected," Harmon said. "That was the most fun and the fans love you. Big Blue is an icon at USU and it's amazing to be able to represent the university."

If that was not enough for his extra-curricular life, he spent three years as a member and vice president of the Sigma Chi fraternity plus played hockey. "Being in the fraternity taught me leadership and networking skills," he said.

After six years of college, he graduated, but not before earning three bachelor's degrees: criminology, sociology and health education plus minors in human resources and business management.

He also met his wife Devin while at USU. "She was an Aggie and I was on the cheer squad so we ran into each other all the time," he smiled. "I stood her up on our first date to go on a motorcycle ride. I'm glad she gave me a second chance."

"When I gave up racing at 23, I never told anyone, including my wife, of my love of bicycles and racing," he said. "We bought matching mountain bikes for our birthdays and started riding again. When I started racing again, I was so out of shape and would get beat by almost every racer. However, that first race opened the flood gates of my love for cycling and the need to get back into shape.

"Today Devin and my two girls are my biggest fans," he continued. "When my alarm goes off, she makes sure I get up to go to the gym. She watches my nutrition intake and makes sure I eat healthy meals. She wants me to be the best version of me. If I am going to be on the road competing every two weeks, I better be prepared and win."

Harmon is no slouch and trains seven days a week using his coach's guidance to make sure he is training correctly. To achieve his peak power output, his workout includes plyometric jumps, Olympic lifts, bike training, yoga and breathing exercises. At 1:15 p.m. on Feb. 22, he was cleared by his doctor to get back on his bike to begin intensive work to compete in the international competition in May.

He's already competed in Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Japan, Holland, France, Germany, Belgium, Australia and New Zealand. Since his injury, the past six months is the longest Harmon has been home in four years. He usually is on a plane heading to competitions every two weeks.

Watching Harmon compete is a family affair. "My family supports me to no end, win or lose, they are always there for me," he said. "My main goal is to inspire my girls to reach for greatness." |

Since BMX competitions were allowed as an Olympic sport in 2008, Harmon regularly flies to San Diego to the Olympic Training Center to identify and develop the 2020 Olympic BMX hopefuls. He also coaches the athletes competing in the Worldcup and Junior Elite World Championships.

"I couldn't ask for a better life," he smiled. "I love my job because I get to help people; I love competing throughout the world, and most of all, I love my wife Devin and two daughters, Hadley and Remi."

~ Susan Polster