



Gary Emeigh photo

Brandon Givens, center, drives Getitandgo in the first race on Thursday at Harrington Raceway.

When the horseshoe ran out of luck

Before Brandon Givens could return to local tracks, he had overcome a tragedy

By Anthony Spaulding
Staff Writer

BERLIN — Harness racing accidents have occurred through the years, but some wrecks, like the one Brandon Givens experienced on May 15, 2006 during the first race at Harrington Raceway in Delaware, are ones that drivers will never forget.

"I was sitting last and Hal Belote's horse fell," said the 21-year-old driver, who has been racing this summer at Ocean Downs. "I was fourth over on the outside, and his horse was first over. He jumped the shadow, and then another horse went on top of him, and

then another horse on top of him and then me. When I went over top, it catapulted me and just shot me about 20-30 feet and shattered my tibia and fibula."

Before he got ejected from his cart, Givens, who was 18 years old at the



Gary Emeigh photo

Since coming back from the accident, Brandon Givens has won 289 races in 1,891 combined starts at Ocean Downs, Harrington Raceway and Dover Downs.

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time, tried to avoid hitting Belote with his horse, Buildafire. But with little time to react, Givens had to brace himself for impact.

"I was thinking how I can land," the Seaford High School graduate said. "I actually landed on my feet, but I was tilted back a little bit and tilted back to my right and all my pressure was on my right leg, so it just pushed the bones forward out through the front of my leg."

Despite laying on the ground severely injured, Givens knew Belote was in worst shape than he was.

"I sat there for a while and let them go and take care of Hal, because he wasn't breathing and stuff," Givens said. "I was just trying to think about something different besides the pain."

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Givens

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Belote, a 51-year-old driver and trainer from New Jersey, died on his way to Milford Memorial Hospital, where Givens was taken to be treated for his broken leg, according to an Associated Press story about the accident. Steve Warrington, the third driver involved, was flown by helicopter to Christiana Hospital in Newark, Del., to be "treated for injuries that included a fractured knee and head abrasions," also according to the AP report.

When he was in the hospital, Givens was notified of Belote's death by Sam Belote, Hal's brother.

"Brandon asked to see me and he was real upset," Sam said. "He kind of blamed himself, which it wasn't his fault that it happened. It wasn't his fault just because he was the first one in or second one."

Sam wasn't mad at Givens for what happened during the race on that tragic day.

"If there was any blame to the race, it was what happened afterwards," Belote said. "The rescue squad wasn't there on the post. They were late getting there to the track ... and that's their job."

In addition, Sam Belote was concerned about Givens, despite dealing with his brother's passing at the time.

"He was hurt pretty bad," Belote said. "Brandon is a young man. He'll heal, as long as he takes care of himself, but the mental aspect is what I worried about. The fact of being involved in an accident that somebody was killed (and) how he may get gun shy out there."

After being released from the hospital, Givens went back to his farm in Seaford, where he rehabbed his leg for almost seven months.

"I stayed out until I could walk," Givens said. "My dad told me that as soon as I could walk without no crutches or nothing, then I could get back on the cart."

While he was out, Givens didn't feel physically limited, despite his injury.

"I kept jogging and kept training with my dad. I just couldn't put my



Gary Emigh photo

Brandon Givens warms up Freedom's Light for the second race on Thursday at Harrington Raceway.

foot in the stirrup," he said. "I was just using one leg while I was training and stuff."

However, Givens had some mental troubles with his comeback.

"I had been in some previous wrecks before, but that there where a guy actually gets killed and stuff, it really puts a toll on you," he said. "You think about it all the time. Every time you get on the track, you think, 'Is this another time that you are gonna go down?'"

His true test would come on Nov. 26, 2006, as he returned to harness racing at Dover Downs. Givens felt nervous going into his first race.

"I thought a lot about all the accidents and stuff I been in," he said. "I was just going through my mind about them and then thinking about the accident that actually broke my leg."

But once the starting vehicle opened its gate, Givens was good to go. With nothing but racing on his mind, Givens trotted around the track with his horse, Amboyrocket, and picked up a second-place finish at the half-mile track.

"It felt great," Givens said. "I couldn't walk very good ... but it was just a great feeling. It felt like I hadn't lost anything from where I was before."

Sam Belote was at Givens' first race and he felt glad to see him return.

"Our business is a labor of love," Belote said. "It's like batting averages in baseball. We fail a lot because we get beat a lot, but it gets in our blood. We love the thrill of competition."

Givens was happy to return to the sport that he "grew up doing." Since coming back, he has won 289 races in 1,891 combined starts at Ocean Downs, Harrington and Dover Downs. This summer at Ocean Downs, he has won 17 races in 83 starts and collected \$32,634 in purse money.

"My dad loves it and I love doing it," Givens said. "I got a lot of friends in the business. ... I had to come back so I can be around them."

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Track

From Page C1

Russia's Anastasia Kapachinskaya down the stretch. "It does make up for it, but it starts to the healing process."

Entering the final track and field event, the men's marathon Sunday the U.S. leads with two medals at the Bird's Nest, five more than Russia, and seven gold one ahead of Russia and Jamaica.

Led by Usain Bolt, of the three gold medals and three world records in three events, Jamaica won five of the six high profile sprint races.

"I thought it was a great performance," Thornton said, rejecting the notion that America didn't fare well. "We had a couple things happen."

Nothing went wrong in the women's 1,600. Felix ran the fastest 1 of any of the 32 women in the final, a 48.55-second split that put the United States in front. By the time Richards got the stick, though, Russia was in the lead.

Richards closed the gap, then bided her time waiting ... waiting ... waiting for the right moment. With 30 meters left, Richards pulled the outside and zoomed past Kapachinskaya. Showing no sign of what she said was a both some hamstring after fading from first place.

