

Chris Slone

[cslone@civitasmedia.com](mailto:cslone@civitasmedia.com)

Walking through the infield, the crowd embarking on the race track, Emily Jordan knew it was going to be a memorable day. As a rainy weekend started to slowly unveil blue skies, local vendors and campers had staked their claim to prime real estate for the historic occasion.

When Jordan climbed behind the wheel of her idol machine on pit road, her finish was of little consequence. The 19-year-old driver was the youngest female to ever start a feature event in the Dirt Track World Championships at Portsmouth Raceway Park.

The South Webster native finished 17th after starting 20th in her first feature race. However, the outcome was anything but a forgone conclusion when Jordan unloaded her 13E modified machine.

As the weekend progressed, Jordan wasn't sure if she had a legitimate chance to make the feature event as one problem after another arose.

Her challenges began during practice, when she wasn't able to make a run due to unforeseen circumstances with the car, which began to unsettle her nerves slightly. Then, as she was preparing to qualify on the tough-track surface at PRP, the driver taking his time trial before Jordan ran into some trouble and eventually wrecked his machine.

As she was prepared to make her qualifying attempt, Jordan was forced to sit in her machine while the track-safety crew tended to the carnage on the racing surface, which made the 19-year old racer even more nervous about her situation.

After qualifying, Jordan enjoyed success during her heat race as she finished fourth. But to make the feature event, she needed to finish in the top three.

With her finish in the heat race, Jordan had one final attempt to make the feature race. She was placed in the "B" main event, where she needed a victory.

To make things even more unsettling for the young driver, one of her idols, Jeff Hartmen, was starting along side her. Because of her fourth-place finish, Jordan started on the pole with Hartmen rolling off the grid in second.

Once the green flag waved in the "B" main, those uneasy feelings quickly subsided as Jordan led all 12 laps and took the victory, securing a spot in the main show.

Jordan surpassed all the odds, making a 27-car field out of 84 entries. She became the second female to start in the feature and the youngest women in the history of the track to race in the event.

Before the historic moment came to fruition, Jordan had to enter the event, which was a late decision.

Jordan has been running sport mods for the majority of the season while running modified cars on select weekends. Without a Sport-Mod event to attend, Jordan's family decided at the last second to enter her modified car at PRP for the Dirt Track World Championship.

"That's what made it even more surprising. It was a last-second decision and it turned out the way it did, it was just phenomenal," Jordan said.

With her 17th-place finish, Jordan finished one spot ahead of her father, Adam, a former PRP track champion. That made the historic moment even more special.

"I've watched my dad race since I can remember," Jordan said. "He's raced against the best. I've always thought of him as one of my heroes, my idol and what I wanted to be like when I got in a car. Actually, that's the first time I have ever out-run him in a race. It was a win-win situation. I was finally able to beat him and I was excited that I made the race."

Jordan spent her childhood at the track, watching her father compete. Before she was old enough to roam around the garage area, Jordan (along with her older brother, Luke) would play with matchbox cars in the bleachers.

The two siblings were destined to get behind the wheel of a race car. At the age of nine, Emily and Luke were allowed to try their hand at go-kart racing. However, a month before Emily's ninth birthday, her racing career suffered its first setback. Luke was injured in a go-kart accident, walking away with some major bumps and bruises. After the accident, Jordan's father wouldn't allow them to race go-karts because he deemed the safety features were too inadequate. Go-karts lacked roll cages and neck restraints, which was enough to delay Jordan's racing career another six years.

"We didn't have any go-karts around that were full roll cage, safety-wise," Jordan said. "It was more of a safety thing, he would rather wait until we were in a big car that was safer."

"We started in go-karts and I had a go-kart ready to go, but that happened to my brother and we decided to get out of the go-karts."

In 2010, at the age of 15, Jordan finally got behind the wheel and the success immediately followed. Driving Sport Mods, Modifieds and Limited Late Models, Jordan has 10 wins at five local dirt tracks. She is also the only female to record a victory in feature events at Southern Ohio and Willard Speedway.

Jordan won the 2014 Sports Mod championship at Southern Ohio Speedway.

Now that Jordan has found success in racing, the debate of male versus female has grown louder and louder. With each victory and every historic moment, Jordan finds herself at the center of that debate.

"Now that I've started winning races and running really well, it seems like more and more people are looking at me as a female, and not just another racer," Jordan said. "It's more of, 'I've got to beat her because she's a girl,' or 'she's obviously cheating because she's doing good.'"

"It's surprising how many people actually put you down because you're a female and they think females shouldn't be in this sport. It's nice to go out and run with other drivers that have been doing this for 20 and 30 years, and show them that it doesn't matter who you are. You can still do it, it doesn't matter that you're different."

Despite mounting success so quickly, Jordan hasn't lost focus on her main priority, which is finishing her degree. She is a Chemistry major at Shawnee State University with a pre-pharmacy declaration. Jordan loves racing but realizes at this point in her life, living on the dirt is a part-time career.

"School obviously comes first," Jordan said. "Most people aren't lucky enough to make a living in racing. School is always the No. 1 priority. But any free time I have goes toward the race car. I have a lot of people who help me out. If I'm not able to be home to fix the car then my dad, or one of our friends, or my uncle Chuck will go out and help put the car back together."

“They all know that school comes first. If we can’t race, it’s not a big deal. But if we can get the car ready and race, it’s great.”

Jordan’s part-time gig motivates her to perform at a high level given the limited opportunities.

“I’m always going to try. It might not happen but I’m always going to try to do better every year and get noticed by people. You never know whose going to be in the stands one night that sees you when you do good and wants to talk to you,” Jordan said.