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## Grayslake Kindergartner is a BMX Bike Racing Champ

At just 6 years old, Marshall "Major" Gehrke has won more than 80 awards and certificates participating in BMX bike races.

Posted by [Angela Sykora](#) (Editor) , December 25, 2012 at 09:06 PM

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Woodview kindergartner Marshall "Major" Gehrke is just 6 years old but he's outracing kids several years older than him on the BMX bike racing circuit. To date, Major has won more than 80 awards and certificates.

Last weekend he added to his collection of trophies at the Xmas Classic in Elkhorn, Wis. His next race is a state qualifier in East Moline on Jan. 6.

Proud dad Erik Gehrke, a [Lake Bluff police officer who races cars](#), said his son started participating in BMX bike racing in Nov. 2011 and has since captured two out of three national titles.

"He would have won three out of three, but we didn't know he was going to be a BMX phenom and didn't schedule enough qualifying races to get that third title."

### Future pro

When he was only 5 years old, Major, a member of the Nationals BMX Race Team or [USABMX](#), reached the highest experience level of BMX for his age group, "Expert," in just 10 months. When he turns 18, he'll have the opportunity to turn pro and get paid for racing.

"He says he wants to turn pro when he gets older, but also wants to be a professional demolition derby driver, so his 6-year-old mind is not too focused on the future yet," said Gehrke.

Major takes his nickname, which is written on his jersey, from Major Marshall Taylor, the first African-American cycling champion. His dad said Major wears his bright orange state champion backpack and Redline Cup jacket to school every day.

When asked what his favorite part of BMX bike racing was, Major said, "going to the big races like the Grand Nationals and doing well and helping the other riders that aren't as fast as me yet."

Major's parents said they knew their son had something special when he jumped on a neighbor's bike at age 3 with no training wheels and took off. By age 4, Major was jumping curbs and standing on his seat with one hand on the handlebars.

After beating 11-year-olds in a bike rodeo in Lake Forest, Major's parents knew he needed an outlet for his skills and found a BMX-sanctioned track in Waukegan. There is also an indoor BMX track in Walworth County, Wis., and plans to build an Olympic-sized BMX track in Milwaukee.

### Many BMX enthusiasts in Grayslake

Major also practices at a small dirt track behind Kohl's in Round Lake Beach, which belongs to the Round Lake Area Park District.

Gehrke said he'd love to see a dirt pump track built on Grayslake Park District property in the next two years for the area kids who now practice their jumps at the skate park.

"There are so many BMXers in the area, including Felicia Stencil, who is from the Grayslake/Lake Villa area. She will be in the 2016 Olympics for Womens' BMX, guaranteed," said Gehrke. "Not only does the Grayslake area have some serious BMX racers, there are several incredibly talented kids doing tricks on their bikes at the skate park."

BMX racing doesn't have to be expensive, said Gehrke. Competitors can choose to travel all over the country or stay close to home and race on weekends.

Gehrke said he and his wife, Michelle, did worry about the dangers of the sport at first, but compared to other sports, they feel it is pretty safe. Major always wears a helmet and elbow and knee pads.

"He's one tough kid," said Gehrke. "He occasionally spills, but it's not the pain that gets him upset, just the fact someone beat him."

"Last weekend, during a qualifying race at SteelWheels Indoor BMX racetrack in Hobart, Ind., Major slipped coming out of the gate and crashed. He gave all the riders a long head start, got back on his bike, and was only about 6-inches short at the finish line of still finishing first. All the crowd was cheering his comeback as he got up and blasted his way to the front."

Watch Major racing by [clicking here](#). Watch a recent BMX race in which Major participated [here](#).

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