

Driving success

Bellevue High's Jake Perkins juggling school, sports and successful racing career



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By Jamie Voisine

There are a lot of words that can be used to describe teenage race car driver Jake Perkins, but perhaps none are more accurate than exceptional.

The Bellevue High School senior, also known as "No Brake Jake," has excelled on the racing circuit for the past 10 years, but he brings much more to the table than just exquisite driving skills.

In addition to currently competing in three different racing series, the 18-year-old is a four-year member of the Rattlers' tennis and golf teams. He is currently ranked No. 1 in his class academically with a 4.93 weighted GPA. He is a weekly fixture on the sports radio scene and has recently begun a push to promote race car safety through his Safe Racer Project.

While anyone with a list of accomplishments such as Perkins' would be applauded, his ability to juggle home, school, sports, promotions and philanthropy with such success is what makes him truly exceptional.

"I'm so grateful for all the things that I've been able to do so far, and I feel really prepared for whatever I do later on," he said. "Having taken on the Safe Racer Project and having to learn to work as a team with a lot of adults and live a life a lot different than the typical high school student (has really taught me how to manage my time). Also, having done the radio show (Racin' Nation on Florida Sports

Talk) and having raced my whole life, I've been in an atmosphere that has forced me to prioritize and organize myself."

With college on the horizon, Perkins expects the next phase of his life may be even more challenging to navigate through. But he's not the least bit intimidated.

"I do expect that (juggling school and racing) will be harder once the curriculum gets tougher and I put more on my plate," he said. "But I feel prepared and that I'll be able to take on the endeavor pretty well."

With his father and grandfather both graduates from the University of Florida, Perkins admits the thought of carrying on the tradition intrigues him. His recent acceptance into Georgia Tech has a really good chance of putting a kink in that idea though.

"Having worked on race cars my whole life and being a mechanically minded person, I feel like Georgia Tech is a good fit for me," said Perkins, who plans on pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering. "Being in Atlanta allows me to study what interests me and also continue to race. When out of college, it gives me the marketability of being an engineer and being able to race at a higher level."

For Perkins, an opportunity to race at a higher level may come even sooner than expected. The young man, who has worked all the way up the ranks from go-karts to Bandoleros and on to Legends cars, has had inquiries in recent months about the possibility of joining a few different NASCAR teams.

"We're actually going to probably be running in a significant number of dirt races for a while because we've been approached by a number of asphalt teams that have given us the opportunity to run in NASCAR," said Perkins, who currently participates in the NASCAR Whelen All-America Series, Bright House Challenge Series and United Dirt Late Model Challenge Series. "Of course, it all weighs heavily upon the partners that are willing to come to the table, among other things, but we are stepping back from running pavement racing on our own (for now) ... simply because we've been given the opportunity to run with other teams at a higher level, and that's something that I've been seeking for a long time."

One thing that goes hand-in-hand with Perkins' career is the Safe Racer Project initiative that he launched after the death of 15-year-old Niokoa Johnson, who suffered fatal injuries when she crashed her car at Bubba Raceway Park last March.

"It was a project I took the initiative to start with my dad and manager (Chuck) Rhoades," he said. "We started it to hopefully aid race tracks and drivers and educate them on what they need to be responsible."

"This is something that's been on the ground for longer than I intended ... but our website is up and running now – SafeRacerProject.com – and we're looking forward to getting our first few tracks on board in the next few months and getting it going on a state level after that. Hopefully it just keeps growing from there."

To learn more about sponsorship opportunities, visit NoBrakeJake.com.