

By: Andrew S. Hartwell - Through The Esses

10 Aug 2010

As a young teen, Ashley Freiberg (pronounced FRY-BERG) studied astronomy and when she wasn't concentrating on constellations and galaxies, or perfecting her basketball skills, she worked the timing stand at the kart races in which her two brothers were competing. After being urged by competitors to try karting for herself, she asked her dad how she could go karting too. He signed her up for the Jim Hall School of Karting, in California, and after one day behind the wheel...she was hooked. And she was fast. And before too long she was racing her kart on the high banks of the Daytona International Speedway in a World Karting Association (WKA) race.

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That has to be considered a 'fast start' in racing for a then-13 year old basketball-playing, star-gazing, young woman.



**Ashley, 18, has a love for driving few girls would understand.**

Now 18, this determined teenager from the Midwest has logged close to five years behind the wheel of karts and Skip Barber race cars with a number of race wins and championships to show for it all. She has won karting championships five times. She finished fourth out of 15 cars in her very first Skip Barber race. She has 12 Barber regional race wins to her credit this season and she just became the first female driver ever to win a Barber Series Championship and the first female to win a Barber National Series race (at New Jersey Motorsports Park). Next up is a shot at a Star Mazda race which she hopes will open the door to a 2011 full season ride in that series.

We talked with this bright and personable young woman recently, and we asked her to tell us how she got into the world of speed and where she wanted to have four wheels take her. We learned she has her internal GPS set for Indianapolis, where the real stars of racing are found. After all, she always enjoyed the stars so why not try to become one?

Ashley's story:

"My brothers raced karts for a few years while I worked in the scoring tower. Everybody kept asking me why I didn't try driving too, but I didn't see many girls driving and I really didn't think I would be good enough. When the kart races moved to road courses I started to think this looked really interesting and maybe I could do it too. I saw a few more girls in karts, and I loved going fast, so I decided to give it a try.

"I have a really big fascination for astronomy. I have always been fascinated with looking up at the sky ever since I was little girl. I took astronomy classes in school and I loved it. I thought it might be something I would pursue as a career. I was also on the school basketball team and I always thought I might go in that direction too, but once I tried racing I fell in love with it. The very first time I sat in the kart it was like, this is it! This is all I want to do! I had a grin from ear to ear! I loved it! "

With a newly acquired adrenaline level equal to that of a championship athlete, Freiberg powered her way to a highly successful run in karts.

"My dad got me a kart and my very first race was at Daytona! We ran the 24 hour course and it was awesome! I don't remember how I did but I was so excited to be there!

"I then ran a full season in WKA and also in a regional series, and I finished seventh in points in WKA my first year. That made me think, 'oh my gosh', this could really be something for me to do as a career. I decided right then that I would work hard to learn as much as I could and I made it a goal to always run for the front. I won a WKA championship and was undefeated in the regional championship. This level of success told me I should definitely pursue making racing my career."

That desire was whetted yet again when she moved up to cars entering her first Skip Barber Series race where she managed to finish in the top five.

"I have been running in Barber but I also ran one race in Star Mazda. I did that to get my feet wet in a different series and see what it was like. I am running another Star Mazda race this season because I really want to run a full season in that series next year. This upcoming race will really help me see where I am at as a driver and what I need to work on to be competitive.

"I was told I should probably take an engineering class so I can learn more about set up. I try to ask a lot of questions about what changes they made to the car and why. I am interested in learning more about this part of the sport. Right now though, the guys won't let me handle a wrench!"

Racing people – like many professional athletes in all sports - are a breed apart and they enjoy a passion and commitment level that others find difficult to understand and at times, embrace. Ashley Freiberg has friends inside and out of the racing game and for those on the fence looking in, it can all seem a bit too, well, different.

"My friends think I am a bit too focused on racing. My friends in racing understand but my other friends tell me I always somehow find a way to bring things back to racing. They just laugh at me! But I work very hard at my racing. It is my whole life. I try to learn as much as I can. It can be frustrating because it sometimes takes me a little while to catch on to things. For example, there was one point in my career when I plateaued in terms of how fast I could go. I was stuck at that level for what seemed like forever. I tried so hard but I just couldn't get to the next level. I remember seeing other people start bypassing me and I found I simply wasn't keeping up. I remember being in my room many nights asking myself what I was doing wrong. I would ask a lot of questions but it seemed while I thought I understood the answers, I wasn't getting any faster on the track.

"I then attended a racing school with stock cars – I always want to try new racing experiences - and I was a passenger in a two-seater. The time we spent on the track was the first time I actually felt the car set into a corner. I never really recognized that sensation in the open wheel cars. It was a revelation to me. I could feel the tires gripping the pavement in a way I had never felt before. That experience really helped me when I got back into the Barber cars.

"I now have a coach, his name is Mike Zimicki, and he has coached many people from Danica Patrick to Graham Rahal and Jon Fogarty, among others. He travels with me to help me build my skill levels. I know that I need to continue to develop my skills if I am to continue moving towards my goals."

For someone so young, we suggest a world of varied experiences and many successes awaits. There will be failures too but as she moves closer to the level of stardom we think the world will soon come to equate the name Ashley Freiberg with positive results. We would not be surprised if we were telling you today about the next Danica Patrick or Janet Guthrie. We suggest you remember the name Ashley Freiberg.



**Ashley has a lot of podium finishes under her belt and is looking towards a Star Mazda ride for 2011.**

"I love everything about racing. I love the sounds and the smells. I love being able to drive wheel to wheel with other people. I love being able to drive on the verge of crashing at all times. It is just such an adrenaline rush. I love it! My ultimate goal is to go to IndyCar. Open wheel racing is definitely my thing but if I ever get a ride in something else I will take it because I love having new experiences. I just love to drive!"