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Nearly \$47,000 raised for Gwynn Foundation

By **Brian Rippey**
Reading Eagle

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Darrell Gwynn may have piloted the slowest car down the Maple Grove Raceway drag strip, but he was the biggest winner.

Actually, the Darrell Gwynn Foundation, an organization Gwynn founded to prevent spinal cord injuries, was the major beneficiary the past four days in Berks County.

Gwynn, who was left paralyzed by an accident in England 20 years ago, drove an electronic dragster down the Maple Grove quarter-mile to the cheers and a standing ovation from a standing-room-only crowd.

It was just the second time Gwynn has been back on the track since his injury. His last NHRA win before the accident came at Maple Grove in 1989.

Prior to final eliminations Sunday in the 26th annual Toyo Tires NHRA Nationals, a special Walk the Track for Those Who Can't event was held. A total of \$5,600 was raised from 280 fans who paid \$20 each to make the quarter-mile walk.

That money was doubled when former NHRA racer-turned-owner Kenny Koretsky matched the sum, then tripled when Roger Brogdon Racing also matched it.

The total of \$16,800 was added to the \$30,000 that was raised Thursday night during an All-Star Salute to Darrell Gwynn at the Crowne Plaza Reading Hotel.

The events to honor Gwynn came 20 years after the famous softball game between NHRA and NASCAR drivers drew 15,000 fans to Reading Municipal Stadium to help pay for Gwynn's medical expenses.

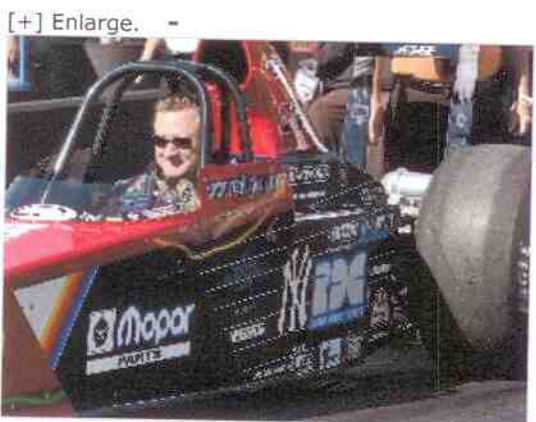
•Family matters: The Forces may be the most famous NHRA family, but they have plenty of company.

Fans at Maple Grove Raceway saw two family battles Sunday during final eliminations in the 26th annual Toyo Tires NHRA Nationals.

In a Funny Car quarterfinal, Cruz Pedregon defeated brother Tony by just more than one-hundredth of a second on this way to the title.

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Reading Eagle: Bill Uhrich
Darrell Gwynn takes a run down the quarter-mile in his specially outfitted electric dragster.

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"I hate racing Tony," Cruz Pedregon said. "Besides John Force, he's the best driver I've ever lined up against. Plus we share information. We're just real happy to get the win against Tony."

In a Pro Stock quarterfinal, Shane Gray defeated his father, Johnny, for the fourth time in four tries this season. Johnny was disqualified when he red-lighted off the starting line.

Also in Pro Stock, No. 16 qualifier Warren Johnson knocked off No. 1 qualifier Allen Johnson, who is no relation. Warren's son, Kurt, was knocked out in the Pro Stock first round by Jason Line.

In Pro Stock Motorcycle, Matt Smith lost to L.E. Tonglet in the semifinals after Smith's wife, Angie, lost in the quarterfinals to eventual winner Andrew Hines.

•Reign over? Tony Schumacher's record run in Top Fuel could be nearing an end. But instead of seeing his chance for a seventh straight title halted by rival Larry Dixon, it was a quarterfinal loss to teammate Antron Brown that all but eliminated Schumacher from the points race.

"That was a tough one," Schumacher said. "Obviously, this second-round loss hurt our championship hopes. But I can tell you that we're going to keep working hard and will never give up."

With just two races remaining, Schumacher is in third place, 154 behind Dixon. Cory McClenathan, another of Schumacher's teammates, is 89 points back after losing to Dixon in the final.

"We'll try to win the last two races and see what shakes out," Schumacher said.

•Huge crowds: Although official attendance figures weren't disclosed, perfect weather helped fill the Maple Grove Raceway stands for three straight days.

Not only were nearly all the seats filled, but fans stood six to eight deep between the fence and bleachers.

The annual event at Maple Grove reportedly is one of the best-attended races on the NHRA circuit. The fans, coupled with the crisp autumn weather conducive to setting national speed records, are two reasons Maple Grove once again will be involved in the NHRA Countdown to One playoffs next year from Sept. 29-Oct. 2.

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