

Alvord and Bottasso take Tandemonium title

Emmaus' Kim Geist keeps her streak going by winning in the women's omnium.

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By Gary R. Blockus, Of The Morning Call
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A little over a month ago, Jamie Alvord gave the crowd at the Valley Preferred Cycling Center in Trexlertown a huge scare.

Alvord had to be backboarded off the track and rushed to a hospital by ambulance after a crash in a six-lap scratch race on June 28. He broke a scapula and three ribs, and suffered a severe concussion.

Friday night, he not only showed he can race with the best of them, but that he can win, too.

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Alvord, from King of Prussia, served as the stoker, or back-seat pedaler, and teamed with Argentina's Leandro Bottasso to win Tandemonium in the bicycle-built-for-two sprint tournament in front of more than 2,000 people.

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Kim Geist of Emmaus continued an unreal streak by winning the women's omnium. She has won every omnium this season, and on Friday won the first Chairman's Cup for winning the omnium in the U.S. Women's Open.

"It's a bit of an honor," said the soft-spoken Geist, who may only be back to T-town for one more Friday night this season. "When you think of women like Janie Eickhoff and Rebecca Twigg and all the predecessors, this is truly an honor."

Geist, like many at the track, is heading to Los Angeles for next week's 2013 USA Cycling Elite National Championships. Geist will remain there after the championships to take part in the U.S. team pursuit camp with an eye toward the Olympics in 2016.

Bottasso and Alvord were by far the fastest tandem on the track. In the sprint final, veteran Matt Diefenbach, piloting for Tyler Nothstein, tried and succeeded in forcing the top bike high for a longer ride around the track, but still outpaced the driving force of Bottasso and Alvord.

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"I pretty much followed Leandro's lead," Alvord said. "We didn't want any surprises. Everyone in the finals was such an experienced tandem rider, especially between Leandro and Dief [Diefenbach]. I grew up on the back of the bike [with his dad, Jim, piloting]."

As far as not only coming back from a serious injury but coming back to win one of the fan-favorite events of the season, Alvord was direct.

"When you take rehab and recovery as serious as training, you can get back in a hurry."

The goal in the tandem sprint heats was to make it through safely. Bottasso clocked the fastest time in the pre-race flying 1-lap time trial by a mile, crossing the finish in 17.95. Second place in the time trial went to Diefenbach and Nothstein riding the formerly state-of-the-art EDS tandem.

Bottasso and Alvord easily defeated No. 8 seed Greg Hoffman and

Tim Jones in the first heat. In the second heat the wily Jim Alvord, Jamie's dad, did some amazing wheeling and dealing with sight-impaired stoker Lance Footer. He took the tandem up, down and dived above and below Diefenbach and Nothstein, forcing them to take the higher, and longer, path during the sprint. Diefenbach and Nothstein showed superior speed despite the increased distance and took the heat to advance to the semifinals.

Andy Kuklis and Dave Bonser, the No. 3 seed with a time trial of 19.6, defeated No. 6 seed Patrick Jones and Gus Gillies of Scotland, by playing the sprint close to the vest. No. 4 seed Nicholas Roeder and Zach Semian made the semis with a full out sprint from the final bell, defeated the team of Dave Gulick and his sight-impaired partner, Chester Triplett.

Roeder and Semian, who won the 12-lap scratch race with a well-time breakaway, tried to take a flier with a lap to go in the semis, but Bottasso and Alvord used their superior speed to pass on the backstraight and win going away.

Diefenbach and Nothstein held off Kuklis and Bonser in their semi after Kuklis and Bonser tried to slow them down by keeping them at the top of the track near the boards going into the final lap.

Geist won the sprints for points with 10 and five laps remaining and kept it going, breaking away to take the finals sprint en route to winning the women's 25-lap points race. Geist finished second in the women's 10-lap scratch race behind Colleen Hayduk. Hayduk's younger sister Hannah, who turned 20 on Friday, celebrated her birthday by winning the first three laps of that race but couldn't hold on.

"It was hard racing tonight," said Geist, who has a huge lead in the women's rider of the year standings that may dissipate over the next few weeks when she's not around. "That handicap race [the wheel race] was a very big effort. Having the young girls out there for a very, very long time was impressive. I would have like the opportunity to race against the pros when I was a junior."

Cath Cheatley, director of developmental programs for the track, put the idea forward to have some of the young developmental riders go into the handicap race, and some stayed at the front until the very end.