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## The Doctor Is In-I'm Just Ed From North Platte

Writing about IMCA mod driver Ed Raines isn't easy. Usually when a writer says 'I don't know where to begin,' it is because he doesn't have much of a story to work with. Well, I am not sure where to begin, but it is because a good fiction writer couldn't come up with a story like Ed's, and his is true. Let's just say that not only is Ed a driver, he is driven.

Raines is the son of a North Platte, Nebraska surgeon. Thirty five years before discovering dirt track racing, Ed discovered flying. By age 18 he had received all his ratings, and helped pay his way through college by running an air charter business. One of his assignments was flying Big 8 football officials to game sites. Standing on the sidelines near Oklahoma coach Barry Switzer was heady stuff for young Raines, though it did keep him from seeing many Nebraska games.

Raines graduated from UNL in 1975. He took a year off from school, and visited campuses across the east and southeast U.S. as a consultant for his fraternity. He entered law school when he returned to Lincoln. "I knew I wanted something other than medicine. My father worked terribly hard and was pretty well known, and I didn't want to follow in his footsteps," stated Raines. "Plus I didn't feel I was qualified." He finished law school in 1980 and passed the bar. While clerking at a Lincoln law firm Raines often worked on medical malpractice suits. "I became quite interested in the medical aspects of the cases," said Raines.

"Law was intellectually challenging," according to Raines, "but it was not really hands on, and I have always been a hands on person." Ed enrolled in med school, following the path of father Max after all, becoming a surgeon. Surgeons fix things, and surgery is definitely a "hands on" occupation. Naturally Raines became a heart surgeon. "Cardiac demands the best," stated Raines, and "you must strive to become better everyday."

Still a commercially rated pilot, who flies his own twin engine high performance plane, Raines is also an elected member of the Lincoln Airport Authority board. He is a non-practicing attorney, a member of the Nebraska bar. And he the Chairman of Cardiothoracic Surgery at BryanLGH East Medical Center, actively practicing as a cardio, thoracic, and transplant surgeon. Yes, Dr. Raines is driven. But, don't forget he is also a driver.

Six years ago Dr. Raines performed heart valve surgery on Lincoln sprint car driver Bernie Bryan. Normally the goal of such surgery would be for the patient to do well, to lead a good life. In this case though, the patient wanted to be able to go back to driving a race car, and Bryan told Dr. Raines "if you can fix

me up so I can race again, I'll let you drive my race car." Using a complicated technique known as the Ross Procedure, Raines did indeed help Bryan return to racing. And true to his word, Bryan did call Dr. Raines and asked him to come to Eagle Raceway to drive his car.

"I really wasn't interested in driving a race car, but I went, just to shut him up," laughed Raines. "The instant that car fired I was hooked." And at an age when many dirt track drivers retire from the sport, Dr. Ed Raines became a rookie modified driver at Eagle.

"I didn't know anything," stated Raines. "Actually my background hurt. I had to overcome my concept of competition. In school I always wanted to get the highest grade in the class, and of course I wanted to be the fastest driver on the track. But first I had to be able to get around the track without spinning out. I had to learn how to drive, hit my marks, be smooth, let things come to me. It was all about technique, learning to pass, how to find the fast lane, and to be patient. That took four years."

"I often tell my medical students it is OK to be an idiot, just don't stay an idiot. I worked hard to learn, and as we all know, persistence can be more important than talent. The last two years I have been competitive. I want to win, and I know that winning is the next step."

But winning is no easy task at Eagle Raceway. A field of 25+ modifieds can be expected every week at the eastern Nebraska high banked track. And tough, fast, experienced mod drivers like Doug Deterding and IMCA Central Region Champion/2007 IMCA National runner up Chris Alcorn call Eagle their home track.

Despite the stiff competition, Raines tied for 7<sup>th</sup> in points at Eagle this season, and is knocking on the door for a win. "Now when I go on the track, I think I can win, I should win," stated Raines. "Until you think that, it won't happen."

At age 54, you might think Dr. Raines needs to be in a hurry to get that win. However, his racing hero is Midwest legend Glen Robey, who has continued to race-and win-into his 70's. "I eat right and exercise. I can't play competitive basketball anymore, and I want to continue racing. I'll race as long as I am competitive," said Raines. It is a great stress reliever for someone with an incredibly stressful job. "Racing isn't so physically demanding, but in the race car, thoughts of my job are gone, I have to focus on racing," commented the Lincoln surgeon. Of course, Dr. Raines has one other good reason to continue. "It is awesome. It is so damned fun," he stated.

But what do his patients think about his unlikely hobby. "Well, some of them do ask me not to race until after their surgery," laughed Raines. "Being a

physician is my job, I didn't completely give up my life just to be a surgeon. I have an identity other than Dr. Raines. I know that racing can be dangerous, but part of racing is embracing the danger and overcoming the fear."

And Raines had an opportunity to embrace that danger this summer. A wild roll over on the fast Eagle Raceway front stretch frightened fans, and had wife Mandy calling for Raines to retire. However, Raines was quickly out of his car, chatting with the Eagle pit reporter. And like a jockey thrown from a thoroughbred, Raines saddled up immediately, racing his mod at Eagle the following week.

As in the operating room, Dr. Raines does not forget the importance of team in racing. "Racing really is an unseen team sport," stated Raines. "The driver may be most visible, but all kinds of people help put the car on the track." Raines team includes wife Mandy, children Alex and Anna(the AA of # 11AA, and the tail number of his airplane N711AA), Crew Chief Terry Vantine, Mike Gocke who takes care of the car during the week, Randy Bangert, and Brian Butler.

Pilot, lawyer, politician, surgeon. Driven, no doubt. "I have had fabulous experiences in my life," commented Raines. "It is worthwhile and very humbling to help a fellow human being. I don't need to be famous. And racing helps me remember I am still just Ed Raines from North Platte." Ed Raines, driver of the 11AA modified, and a great ambassador for dirt track racing.

#### Sidebar-The Doctor Is In

On June 30<sup>th</sup> at Eagle Raceway, a modified, accelerator stuck, careened off the track and up pit road, striking and critically injuring long-time track employee Mike Cecak. Although on the track at the time, Raines unbuckled and ran to the scene to help the track safety crew stabilize Cecak until a Life Flight helicopter arrived to transport him to a Lincoln hospital. In typical fashion Raines downplayed his role. "The Eagle safety crew does a great job," stated Raines. "Maybe I helped in a small way, but I just did what I do, and anyone else would do the same."

Still, the incident highlights similarities between Dr. Raines' profession, and his passion of racing. A surgeon needs to be calm and in control, and so must a race driver if he hopes to do his best. A surgeon must be prepared for the unexpected, and we all know anything can happen anytime on a race track. A surgeon needs great hand/eye co-ordination, like a race driver. A surgeon fixes things as a crew chief and crew fix an engine, chassis, or tires. Obviously there is an adrenaline rush when a driver mashes the gas pedal of a high horse power modified, and who could measure the adrenaline flow of a heart surgeon as the skill of his hands saves the life of a patient? And to be the best at either requires both talent and passion.

