

Q&A: The world of drag racing

Drag racer, Texas A&M grad, first female winner of the Pro Stock World Championship — Erica Enders-Stevens has spent time turning dreams into reality. Enders-Stevens, who was the inspiration behind the Disney Channel original movie "Right On Track," stopped in College Station before her race in Houston this coming weekend to throw out the first pitch at the Texas A&M vs. UT-Arlington baseball game. The Battalion Life & Arts reporter Mary Reyes spoke to Enders-Stevens about being an Aggie and pursuing a career in drag racing.

THE BATTALION: What got you into the world of racing?

ENDERS-STEVENS: My dad drove his whole life and my sister and I grew up around it. We actually started racing at the age of eight in "Junior Dragster," which is a class for kids from eight to 17 — kind of just a way to get your feet wet in the sport. So I drove "Junior Dragster" for nine years and then once I turned 16 I moved up to a class called "Super Comp" and there's another class called "Super Gas." Those are the sportsmen ranked. I raced those for five years and then "Pro Stock." I'm in my 11th year of Pro Stock now.

THE BATTALION: How did the world of drag racing react to you being the first female winner of the Pro Stock Championship?

ENDERS-STEVENS: It's been really positive for the most part. There have only been two other female world champions in our entire sport's history. I was the first one in my class at Pro Stock. So it was a pretty positive reception. It's been pretty surreal for me because it's been my dream since I was a kid to become a world champ. For the most part everybody has been supportive. There is just a handful of people out there left with a chauvinistic mentality so you have to just take that with a grain of salt.

THE BATTALION: What was your Aggie experience like?

ENDERS-STEVENS: I had

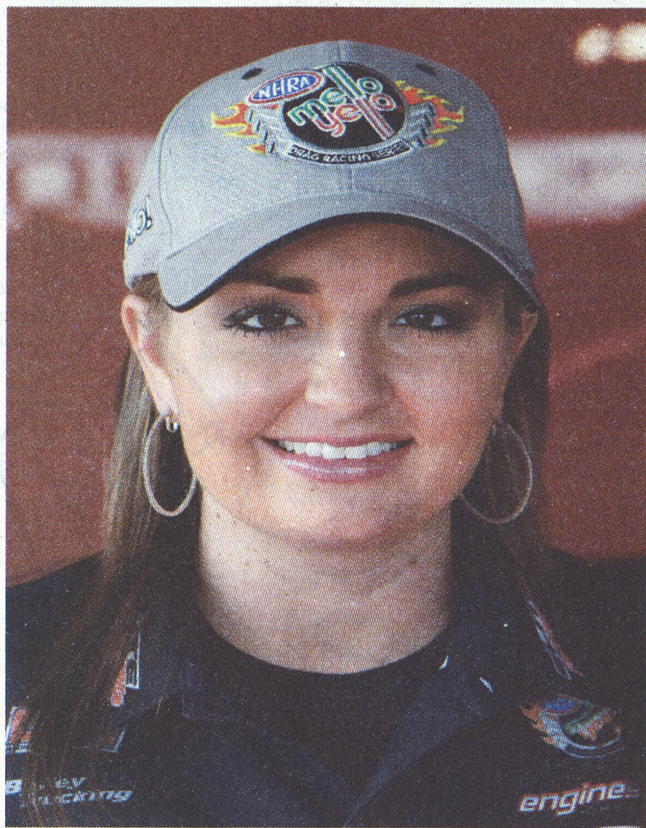
a blast. I wish I could go back. I was actually just taking to my PR guy about it and I can't believe it's been nine years since I've been there. I don't feel that old and it doesn't feel like it's been that long. I had a really good time. I was there for four years and my sister was a freshman when I was a senior so I got to spend one year there with her and we had a good time. We lived over there in a townhouse by Sorority Row and we were always up to something: drag racing on the weekends but College Station during the week.

THE BATTALION: How has being an Aggie impacted your career?

ENDERS-STEVENS: It has actually been awesome. No matter where I go, it's still neat to see how the Aggie network works. I mean, from being on airplanes and just random hotels across the country, the Aggie Ring is always a way to start a conversation. Anybody that is familiar with me and drag racing knows that I was an Aggie so it's always something that fans bring up. It's really neat to talk about. I had a blast when I was there and certainly wish that I could go back.

THE BATTALION: What was it like having a movie based on your life?

ENDERS-STEVENS: That was pretty surreal. I was actually at A&M when the movie was released so it was a little bit chaotic and a lot of fun. When I



Drag racer and former student Erica Enders-Stevens was the inspiration for a Disney Channel original movie.

say surreal, it blows my mind because I'm just a normal goofball kid. I'm 31 now and it's crazy. I have been really blessed to be able to follow my dream and have a lot of really inspirational people work with me along the way and it has been super fun. To have a movie based about my sister's and my life story is pretty neat. We had a huge impact on our sport and [the movie] still does to this day since it still airs on Disney Channel. Even though it was released in '03 when I was at A&M, it's still playing. The kids who saw it initially have grown up with me and then there's a whole new generation of kids who are seeing it now that are getting involved in drag racing because of it. It's pretty cool.

THE BATTALION: What is next for you?

ENDERS-STEVENS: I just want to keep going. Everybody else asks if I plan on moving to Top Fuel or "Funny Cars" because

those two classes are faster than Pro Stock, but I don't see it as upward movement at all. My heart's in Pro Stock. So I plan on racing Pro Stock as long as I possibly can. I'm with a really great team now for the first time of my life, I've got a tremendous group of guys around me.

THE BATTALION: Do you have any advice for any A&M graduation seniors?

ENDERS-STEVENS: Just follow your dreams. I mean, it sounds cheesy, but you know, my dad told me when I was a kid, "Love what you do for a living and never work a day in your life." It's so true. I spend 300 days a year on the road so my race team is my family. I don't get a lot of time at home but as hard as we work it doesn't feel like work because I love it.

APOCALYPSE CONTINUED

leading to graphics, videos and potential new story plot lines that students can invent.

Pourteau said Wonderment has helped create a website where fans can upload their own work to be read. If the feedback is positive and Wonderment is interested, they may even offer a contract.

"All of us are contributing something — it's a community-created bookverse," Pourteau said. "So what that means is it's just a group of writers and we are all working together. It's not a competition. If my book does well, they do well, so it's a collaborative work and that's a great feeling to be part of a community that wants to help you."

Pourteau said he feels overwhelmed at getting to share his writings with his alma mater, and incorporated a little something special in honor of his Aggie family.

"I'm excited because when I was here I was a member of the MSC sci-fi community and I was part of the literary arts community at the MSC," Pourteau said. "It's a wonderful feeling to put my stories out here and hope other Aggies can read it. As an Aggie I made sure that one of my Easter eggs was making the evil professor that created the deadly virus a professor from UT."

Michael Bunker, an executive producer of "Apocalypse Weird" and author, said the apocalyptic genre is not only for Walking Dead fans or horror movie geeks — it can also appeal to anyone interested in science fiction or fantasy.

"I think that it is something that is new — it is really just something that can identify with this generation," Bunker said. "This is really the first type of publishing company that is doing things through means of social media, through collaboration, through open-source work."

"Apocalypse Weird" has a long-term goal of publishing two novels each month for the next five years. For each novel, a launch party is held, where participants can interact with authors and receive giveaways.

BASEBALL CONTINUED

three frames of play.

"[Allemand] started it off with a bang with a home run, then [Melton] started off the other with a home run," Banks said. "Those were two big hits that put momentum our way."

Logan Nottebrok had arguably the highlight defensive play of the season for A&M at third base. With A&M in a jam and the bases loaded, UTA hit a line drive right at Nottebrok and he made a diving grab. While on the ground, he tagged third base for the double play to end the Maverick attack.

The Mavericks (17-22) shaved two runs off the Aggie lead to make it a 4-2 game, but A&M and its pitching staff ended the UTA threats. On the day, UTA hit 1-for-9 with runners in scoring position.

Starter Turner Larkins saw his day end after three innings of solid work, and behind him a combination of Blake Kopetsky, Corbin Martin, Kyle Simmonds and Mark Ecker kept the Mavericks mostly in check. Ecker earned his eighth save of the year in the win.

"I was just ready to get back on the field, and ready to get that sour taste out of our mouths," Ecker said. "It was kind of rough on Sunday for everyone. We were just ready to get back out here."

The Aggies have won the last 12 meetings against the Mavericks. The game concludes a nine-game home stand for A&M, a stretch in which it went 7-2. The Aggies now travel for the biggest SEC series of the season this weekend, as they will take on No. 1 LSU in Baton Rouge. First pitch is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

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