

## SPORTS

## Cyclist determined to overcome devastating crash

By Jack Borenstein  
Tribune Correspondent

Don't tell Leah Goldstein that cycling is merely a recreational sport.

During a descent in the first stage of the July 11 'Cascade Classic' in Bend, Oregon, Goldstein crashed and suffered traumatic injuries. She broke seven bones in her pelvis, broke her humerus and some ribs, received numerous stitches down her right leg and face, lost some teeth and underwent surgery on her face, lips and shoulder. She will be in a wheelchair the next two months, and only has use of a left leg and left arm. Her time in the Israeli Army is helping her overcome this latest obstacle to a very promising cycling career.

The 5-foot, 6-inch Goldstein, 36, was born in Vancouver but was conceived in Israel. "My father Simcha was a sailor. He and my mother Ahoova happened to dock our boat for a month in Vancouver. They saw a better opportunity to raise a family in Canada and decided to stay, and I was born shortly thereafter."

Goldstein always felt she belonged to both countries, with the family deciding to move to Israel when she was 10 to continue her education. Raised in a family that included senior military officers she enlisted in the Israeli Army and served from 1987 to 1994. After the mandatory two years of military service, she became a commando for a time and subsequently transferred to secret police services, where she conducted detective and anti-terrorism duties. She eventually ended up becoming an instructor.

However, the lure of competition never waned during Goldstein's time in the military, as she found time to win the 1989 World Bantamweight Kickboxing Championship, and became Israel's Duathlon champion shortly afterwards.

"One of the officers training at the Wingate Sports Institute



Leah Goldstein in better times (above) has the will and determination to get back on the road after terrible crash.

(Israel's national centre for physical education and sport) mentioned competing in a duathlon," she said. "After his suggestion, I tried the sport. While not being an exceptional runner, I did enjoy the cycling aspect and was intrigued enough to pursue it further."

After spending some years in civilian police work in Haifa, Goldstein felt she had accomplished all she could in Israel and returned to Vancouver in 1996 to resume her cycling career.

A coach who urged her not to pursue cycling upon her return to Canada is, ironically, now her current coach - former Canadian Olympic cyclist Sarah Neil who still competes in local races. She remembered being in sporadic contact with Neil at the beginning and eventually took Neil's offer for assistance, and began training with her in earnest. Training continues year round for Goldstein ranging from cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in winter, along with 15-23 hours a week cycling during the outdoor season.

She finished third in the 1996 Victoria Wheelers Road Race, and second in the same race during 1997. She subsequently made the Canadian National Cycling team, and raced in the 1999 women's Tour de France. She provided the hard cycling work to get high-profile teammates, like Alison Sydor (former Canadian Olympic medalist and three-time world champion), in position to win individual stages.

"Cycling is a different mentality competing in Europe, and that made it easier for me to focus and compete well when returning to North America."

Goldstein went on to capture bronze during the 2001 Canadian National Road Championships. In 2002 she won Silver

of the SISU BC Cup Race Series and also winning the fifth stage).

Neil said Goldstein asked for her assistance in training in late 2003, remembering having competed against her in previous races over the years. She acknowledged Goldstein was winning by huge margins before the accident, which she categorically stated was not her fault.

"She's a 'safe wheeler' who's always leading during races, and is solid in terms of technique and quartering," Neil said, adding that Goldstein goes solo early in races, thanks to superior sprinting skills. "If any course is slightly uphill, there's usually no chance of catching her. Nothing has come easy for her. She wants it all, and I believe she has the drive and the will to excel in cycling."

Goldstein remembered being in the trauma section of the local hospital in Oregon for eight days with her father and sister Iris staying by her side throughout. She has received tremendous support from fellow racers, her Trek - Red Truck Beer Team teammates as well as friends she had not heard from going back to high school.

"Everyone has been so kind with their cards, running errands and taking me to medical appointments," she said. "I keep myself busy and am confident of quickly returning to competitive cycling."

She anticipates travelling to Israel early next year to resume training, and resume racing in North America. Goldstein makes no promises about competing for Israel in the 2008 Summer Olympics, taking things year by year for now.

"As long as I progress in cycling, anything is possible. If I regress, it will indicate more work will be needed to return to previously achieved levels."

Goldstein normally travels to Israel every winter to work as a commando and police trainer, to supplement her income and continue bike racing, but will have to defer this time around for obvious reasons. The dichotomy of Israel and Canada has helped shape Goldstein's character and athleticism. She'll undoubtedly show her fellow cyclists, as well as her Israeli military cohorts, that the desire and passion to compete at the best of her ability in both venues, will never wane.

Goldstein won nine of her first 11 races in 2005 before the Oregon race, including the initial Time Trial, the BC Provincial Road Championship and Westside Cycling Classic (fourth part



Until recently, Goldstein rode for Canada like the race above.

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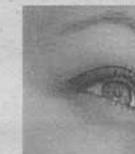


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