

## Leffler planned for young son in case of death

Written by Nancy Spencer  
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### Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Jason Leffler, like every other racer, understood the risks of his profession. It's a conversation he had with his long-time girlfriend when his NASCAR prospects dried up and a return to the sprint car circuit was the only way he could compete on a regular basis.

It wasn't a glamorous life and it certainly wasn't going to make him rich. But it was a chance to race and, man, did Leffler love racing.

"We'd talked a lot about these cars and the dangers involved and Jason accepted it because he said all the time, 'I'd rather my son see me live a happy life then see me sitting in a job I hate being miserable'," Julianna Patterson told The Associated Press on Monday. "Jason was amazing. He was ornery. His life was Charlie, racing, family and friends. In that order. But Charlie was the most important. Charlie was his entire world."

That was evident long before Leffler's death in an accident at a dirt track in New Jersey last Wednesday. The 37-year-old divorced father's Twitter feed and Instagram account were a loving tribute to 5-year-old Charlie Dean, his only child. There were photos of the first day of school, the two eating ice cream together, playing on the floor, hanging out at a race track, wearing matching sunglasses and, last month, Charlie's kindergarten graduation.

"Everybody knows how racers are; it's all they focus on," Leffler's older brother, Chris, told AP. "But fatherhood really changed him, that's for sure. It was all about Charlie. Jason took Charlie wherever he could, tried to show him everything. He really grew as an adult after Charlie was born because all his best intentions were for Charlie. He wasn't worried so much for himself anymore."

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Although Leffler spent a decade racing in NASCAR, he wasn't a star and he certainly wasn't a household name. But he was extremely popular among his peers and everyone knew about his love for Charlie. It was plain to see on Sunday, as Greg Biffle held his own daughter in Victory Lane at Michigan, lamenting how Leffler didn't get to spend Father's Day with his son and after Kasey Kahne climbed from his burning car, he spoke not of the cut tire that cost him a win but of the friend he lost.

"Jason Leffler was a good buddy of mine and it's neat to see how the racing world and the fans and his friends and everybody has supported him for the last four or five days," Kahne said. "That showed the person and the racer that he was."

Far more important than a racer was Leffler's job as father.

On Monday, Leffler's girlfriend, brother and representatives at Spire Sports discussed his financial situation to clear up growing misconceptions and rumors about the estate he left behind for Charlie.

His former sister-in-law told Sporting News on Friday that Leffler did not have life insurance when he died. But it's not that simple and some believe that was a deliberate attempt to solicit donations to an account that had been established for both Charlie and Leffler's ex-wife.

"It's insane that someone would bring this up, would bring up life insurance, within a day of this happening. We haven't even had the funeral yet," Patterson said. "Jason would never have left Charlie with nothing. Never. To suggest otherwise is not true and it's evil."

"I remember he went into Charlie's room one night before bed and said to him, 'Everything I do is for you,' and Charlie hugged him and said, 'You almost made me cry, Dad.' Those two loved each other more than anything in the entire world."

The reality is that disability and life insurance for race car drivers are expensive and difficult to get — usually issued only by Lloyds of London — and the premiums are substantial. Leffler's last full Nationwide season was in 2011 and he'd run just 12 NASCAR races in 2012.

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He didn't have deep resources to buy insurance anymore; the night he was killed, the winner was guaranteed just \$7,000. So perhaps Leffler didn't think life insurance was the best investment for Charlie Dean's future.

But Leffler still invested specifically with his son in mind, his loved ones say, and took steps to ensure his son would be cared for before his death and in the event of his death. He had disability insurance and other policies and funds established for Charlie.

"He absolutely bent over backward to do whatever was best for Charlie," said Chris Leffler, executor of the drivers' will. "He probably could have held on to a lot more in the divorce. But he sacrificed, did without and has done whatever necessary to make sure Charlie is taken care of. I've seen a little bit of what's been insinuated and it's disappointing."

Although Leffler made sure Charlie was provided for, The Charlie Dean Leffler Discretionary Trust was announced Saturday with three trustees. It was created in part because the racing community and fans often contribute regardless of need — more than \$650,000 was raised for 2-time Indianapolis 500 winner Dan Wheldon's family following his 2011 death — and to ensure any money donated went solely to Charlie's needs.

Leffler, Charlie and Patterson had planned to move into a new apartment this weekend and Charlie had been so excited for his new bed and the flags that were going to be hung in his new room. He'd only in the last year begun to understand his father's place in the racing world and at Christmas when he was given Jimmie Johnson and Kasey Kahne trading cards, Charlie only wanted cards of his dad.

He'd recently learned how to Google his father, Patterson explained, and once even asked Leffler for his autograph. They lived together as a little family for two years, baking cookies and making every color of Jell-O possible, taking long walks with Charlie's compass and binoculars and playing sprint cars on the floor.

"All Jason would want now is for Charlie to know who his dad was, to be cared for and to know how much he loved his little dude," Patterson added. "He wasn't irresponsible, he wasn't

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careless and he wasn't reckless. He took every step possible because Charlie was his world."

**Tough day for Hendrick drivers:** Sunday was a rough day for Hendrick Motorsports.

Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt Jr. had promising rides derailed by car problems and Hendrick teammate Jeff Gordon's shot at winning at Michigan International Speedway ended less than 10 laps in because of a crash.

Throw in a cut tire that left Kahne 38th and none of the racing giant's four entries cracked the top 25.

Greg Biffle took the lead after a late restart and pulled away for his first Sprint Cup victory of the season and second straight at MIS.

Johnson, whose points lead shrunk to 31 points after he finished 28th, was chasing Biffle in the closing laps but a tire gave way. He has never won a Cup race at MIS.

"I hate having that problem at the end," Johnson said. "I had to run the car really hard to get through all those guys and must have worn through that right front tire with two or three (laps) to go."

Earnhardt led for 34 laps but a blown cylinder took him out of contention.

"We had such an awesome race car. We actually improved the car on the last stop," he said. "It's frustrating but you'd rather be leading the race than be running at the back and have problems. At least we were strong."

Earnhardt started the season with five straight top-7 finishes, including two seconds, but he has

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dropped to seventh in the standings. A blown engine left him 39th at Charlotte on May 26.

“We’ve run good but we’ve just got to figure out what’s going on under the hood,” he added. “I’m sure they’ll get it sorted out. We’re pushing these engines hard, trying to get all we can out of them.”

Johnson and Earnhardt at least could look back on competitive moments Sunday. That was hardly the case for Gordon, who started 29th and finished 10 spots lower after Bobby Labonte’s early spin collected him in Turn 2.

“(Labonte) just did one of those slow spins where I couldn’t tell which direction he was going to go, so I had to guess and I guessed wrong,” Gordon said. “I didn’t really have anywhere to go.”

It was the fifth time this season Gordon finished worse than 20th.

“I don’t want to see the team get down and I don’t want to see myself get down,” he added after falling to 16th in the standings. “I have a lot of fight in me and so does this team.

“I’m looking forward to going to Sonoma.”

The California road course is the series’ next stop.