

(McKenna gave this speech at the 2016 English Creek Speedway banquet at the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum outside of turn two at Knoxville Raceway. English Creek Speedway is an outlaw kart track south of Knoxville where McKenna first began her career).

I can't really stand up here at 19 years old and speak as someone who has 50 years of experience and knows all the answers, so even though I don't even come close to someone like that, I just wanted to share some of what I've learned after being blessed with a little more experience and a little success since standing up here with the box stock kids five years ago.

I decided to identify three main areas that I hope you can take with you tonight and apply next season. As cliché as some of them may sound, it's often easy to forget until it happens to you, so I hope I can share these in a way that sticks with you.

Number 1 - Cherish these days, I can't stress that enough. It's so, so easy to get caught up in the drama and the negatives in racing, but I believe our sport is too small to allow for too much negativity. The word racing might mean different things to different people, but to me, racing is all of us. We make racing and we are responsible for the future of the sport. Together we are much larger than any single track owner, any single racer, or any single series. I think if we can all learn the power of forgiveness, and, as unpowerful or corny as it sounds, the power of love, we can make our sport a better place. For me, that's a message that these kids remind me of frequently.

Going off of cherishing these days, I don't mean to scare anyone with this portion by any means, but racing is a dangerous sport. I've lost friends and had friends seriously injured (including one special boy here tonight), as have some of you. On June 21, 2014, I experienced the worst wreck of my career and one of the worst nights of my life out there in turn three. After all of the horrific experiences I've had involving the dangers of the sport, I try to live each and every day of my life to the fullest and like it's my last, as I know that very easily could be the case on any given Saturday night. I've spent a lot of time with parents whose drivers have been paralyzed, burned, have had TBI's, or are no longer with us. I've had Mom's that have told me watching their son take his first steps for the second time is a lot more emotional than the first time. Because of those conversations, I can't stress enough how important it is to cherish the time you get to spend with your sons, daughters, family, and friends every time you go to the track. I know racing can be stressful and frustrating and an emotional roller coaster, but never forget to make room for fun, for laughter, and for joy. As you all know, kids grow up fast, and when your kid goes 45, 70, or 100 miles an hour, it makes life seem to go even faster. So yes, even I will say, sometimes you don't always have to be running full throttle. Enjoy every second of this ride, wherever it might lead you.

Number 2 - To all of the younger people in the room, for many of you having a job is a little ways away, but there's something I feel racing neglects to touch on as kids are raised in the sport that I think is important for them to know. Someday, whether that day is many years away or coming up soon, you are probably going to have to get a job. (Ask your parents, they know all about it). If you want to be a racecar driver, chase that dream with all of your heart,

and I hope with all of my heart that you will succeed. It takes a lot of hard work, it's not easy, but it is possible. However, if you just kind of like racing for fun but don't want think you want to be a professional racecar driver, please, please don't forget about racing while you're trying to decide what you want to do. You can apply almost any subject in school to racing. If you like history, science, math, writing, art, the list goes on, you could use those to design racecars or racing products, manage a racing business, design motorsports websites, again, the list goes on. You can combine both of your interests, and make money doing it, which is pretty cool. One last thing on this topic, whether you want to be a racecar driver or a doctor or a police officer, try your very, very best in school. It's kind of like racing, the more you excel at one level (like R-Box) it's easier to move up to the next level, and so on and so forth. College is kind of like the highest level in racing, so to be really good at that level, you have to try hard at the lower levels. I truly don't believe I would have ever made it as far as I have in this sport if I hadn't tried my best in school, so always try your best.

Number 3 - This one is brief, but kids no matter where you go in life, never forget where you came from. English Creek isn't perfect, Knoxville Raceway isn't perfect, NASCAR isn't perfect, but a home track has the word home in it for a reason. I'm thankful I've been blessed with the opportunity to return to English Creek, and I did that because I love it. Thank you all for being a part of this, and I hope you continue to support your home track, both in the years you race there, and the years after you leave. Again, we make up our sport and our track together, and together we can make it great.

I've learned a lot in a short amount of time, but I felt those were three topics that are important to me and have made a big difference in my career. I hope that in 2017 and beyond, all of you can find a way to cherish every second, take racing with you wherever you go in your life, and never forget your way back home.

Enjoy the ride, best of luck, and as they say, life is a journey, let your heart be your compass.

Thank you.