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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Amber Balcaen: Beyond the Dirt**

(written by Greg Cybulski, NLSA Director of Media Relations)

Amber Balcaen has been surrounded by dirt track racing all of her life. From the tender age of 2 months to today, she has been part of her dad's racing life and the racing community for the past 18 years. As a child, Amber scraped mud from race cars. By the time she was a teen, she graduated up to changing tires and learning about the adjustments on the car and how it all worked.

The Balcaen name is synonymous with racing and with success. The same drive and desire that created championships for Amber's legendary father, Mike Balcaen, was now carrying over to the next generation. For 5 years, Amber started carving out her own journey in racing with a Kart. She was a regular visitor to the oval dirt track in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Mike's travels also allowed Amber to race at different tracks in North Dakota, Minnesota and as far south as Arizona.

Even with limited seat time, Amber managed to achieve an early win and top 3 finishes which fueled her desire to graduate to a full-sized race car. In 2009, Amber realized her dream when she joined the Northern Lightning Sprint Association and began racing at her home track at Winnipeg's Red River Co-op Speedway.

As the 2010 season approaches, Amber Balcaen shares her thoughts on racing, the racing community and the importance of family.

Greg Cybulski: Amber, when you decided to move up to a full-bodied race car, you went with a Lightning Sprint. Why did you chose this car class to start with?

**Amber Balcaen:** Since I was a little kid, I've always really wanted to race a full size sprint car, but with my dad running Late Models we really didn't have the budget for it. The Lightning Sprint seemed to be the closest I could get to a big Sprint Car, not to mention I would be able to race them in Winnipeg and other tracks close to home. I wanted a car that seemed fun to drive but still had a lot of power and that's why I chose to get a Lightning Sprint.

GC: What were some of the biggest adjustments you had to make as a driver moving from a Kart to a

Lightning Sprint?

**AB:** The difference in power from a Kart to a Lightning Sprint was definitely a major change but a good one. The thing that I had the most trouble adjusting to was being so tightly strapped into the car. In Karts we don't wear any seat belts, where in the Lightning Sprint we have 5 seat belts holding us in a full containment seat, with an attached Hans Device. Another big adjustment was the way the car drove into the corner. In Karts you tried to keep the wheels as straight as possible, only turning left. With the Sprint there are times where I have to turn the car right when in the corner. There is a lot more movement in a Lightning Sprint compared to a Kart because of the shocks and other bar adjustments.

**GC:** Your dad takes a very active roll in your racing program and it's great to see him preparing your car on race day. With his years of experience in dirt track racing, you must get a wealth of information and guidance. Just say a few words about what it means to you to have your family involved with your racing.

**AB:** Racing is my life. There is nothing I enjoy more than being at the race track with my parents. I've been going to the race track with my family since I was a baby and have rarely missed my dad's races. Having a very successful race car driver as a dad definitely has it pluses. I have learned so much from him... from the business side of racing like getting sponsors, to the technical side, such as understanding the car and set-ups, and even the emotional side of it, such as how to handle yourself after a race when you're all worked up. There are so many ups and downs of racing but I couldn't have done it without my parents by my side. They brought me into this addictive sport, and I know it will be in my life as long as I live.

**GC:** In 2009 you won your first Lightning Sprint race at Red River Co-op Speedway. Would you consider that your highlight of last season?

**AB:** That was definitely one of the highlights of the season, but unfortunately my dad wasn't there to share the victory with me because he was away racing. Luckily my mom was there to share the moment with me. I'm hoping I can have a few more feature wins this year so my dad can be there to see it and we can celebrate together.

**GC:** There are more women involved in racing than ever before. I for one think that it is good to see some barriers getting broken so that everyone can enjoy all aspects of auto racing. It's not just the good old boys club anymore. Would you comment on this?

**AB:** I think it's great that more and more females are getting into the sport. Once I put on that helmet and step into my car I really don't categorize myself as a woman. I'm just another race car driver trying to do their best. Everyone has their own opinion on female drivers, but to me it makes it that much sweeter when I am successful. I hope that I will encourage other females to join this sport as well.

**GC:** Who are some of your marketing partners?

**AB:** Imrie Demolition, Electra Sign, Atek Parts, Roadrunner Fabrication, Derrick's Sandblasting, Direct Autoparts, S&S Autoworks and Snap-on.

GC: Have you set goals for yourself for 2010 based on lessons learned on the track from last season?

**AB:** I would like to improve on my adjusting to different track conditions. I had a hard time with dry-slick tracks last year so I am hoping to gain some patience and have better throttle control when it comes to different types of track conditions. Overall I want to become a smoother driver. Some other goals I have are to win more features, and to earn a top 3 position in the final point standings.

GC: As we conclude this interview, please share with our readers your thoughts on the following question. Racing is a family-oriented sport and we see it especially with the racing teams. There has been some concern, however, that there has not been enough effort to attract new people into our racing community. Representing a new generation of racers, what would you like to say to those who have never been to a speedway to get them to come out and experience dirt track racing?

**AB:** Dirt track racing is one of the most fun sports you can watch. Whether you know someone who is racing or not, it is definitely worth giving a try. Going with a group of friends makes the experience even better. I guarantee that you won't be disappointed! On race night, the speedway takes on a party-like atmosphere. Its all about fast cars and FUN.

**About the Northern Lightning Sprint Association:** Created in September of 2008, the Northern Lightning Sprint Association is a rapidly growing organization committed to the creation and maintenance of safe, fast, fun, and affordable open wheel racing. Many of the organization's members are dedicated to helping charities such as the Children's Hospital Foundation and Cancer Care of Manitoba. More information can be found at <http://www.nlsprints.com>