

BAJA RACE:
Gabe Willitts is set for college

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leakage.

“The plug went another 112 miles before we could repair it,” Willitts said.

The course punishes equipment — and it has pitfalls for the riders, especially when it’s shrouded in dust. That makes the advance week of pre-ride opportunities crucial.

“You memorize spots where you can go fast and spots where you can die,” Greg said.

Gabe had “a pretty good crash during pre-run,” which let him know just what he was getting into.

The Willitts took the most fraught portions of the race, when crowds of motorcycles and spectators make things sketchy. Attempting to pass in clouds of dust is a dangerous maneuver.

“Starting the race is perilous and finishing the race is perilous,” Greg said. “I started the race and Gabe finished it.”

Gabe acknowledged some nerves going into the week of prep.

“I was kind of scared at first, then I got super-excited,” he said. “Everybody was really understanding of where I was, level-of-riding-wise. I got comfortable later on in the trip. I’m glad we got to pre-run.”

As he rode toward the finish, Gabe believed he was closely pursued by another

rider, which put the pressure on. It turned out that the other rider’s bike had broken down and he dropped out.

“I was running away from a ghost,” he said.

There was another concern to navigate, though.

“Pretty much the whole town is on the course in their minivans and stuff and driving backwards on the course,” Gabe said.

He made it through the throngs and across the finish line. He couldn’t know for sure he had capped a victory for his team, because penalty points can be assessed for course violations.

“I didn’t want to assume that I’d won, but I had a feeling,” he said.

The feeling was on the money: his team had pulled out a victory. And that victory was sweet for his dad, too.

“We’ve never won this race,” he said. “I have two second-place trophies... Now my buddies are clamoring to have (Gabe) back on the team, because he’s smart and fast.”

Of course, for Greg, the thrill of winning a tough race was the least of the emotions coursing through his consciousness.

“It was emotional for me,” he said. “I had a desire to see him, see him healthy. I had a high level of anxiety. Normally, I get off the bike and I’m relaxed. I had to run after him, chase him down, give him a big hug.”

The race is physically and mentally exhausting. The nature of the terrain forces a rider to stand up on the bike



PHOTO PROVIDED

The hardware marks a moment.

— sitting won’t get it done and could put you on the ground. Handling the bike like that taps every bit of strength.

“Afterwards, I felt like I’d gone rock-climbing for four days because my arms were completely dead,” Gabe said.

Greg put in some training in advance to make sure his middle-aged body could handle the strain. Crossfit-style training and hot yoga did the trick.

For the father-and-son duo, the race was a big moment, since Gabe will be heading off to college next year. He plans to major in mechanical engineering.

“He got a lot out of this trip,” Greg reflected. “Dad got five times more out of this trip.”

And Greg has plans to take on similar challenges with another Willitts rider, just a couple of years younger.

“I look forward to doing a similar-style trip with my son Sean in the near future,” he said.

SELMA: Students were moved, angered by movie depiction

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in this southern town with one specific reason: votes for African-American citizens. Although the 14th Amendment gave them the technical right, apathy from the White House and overwhelming racism from local governments kept blacks from the polls for years, through intimidation and outrageous requirements. The movie documents these atrocities and the brave men and women who stood up to say enough is enough. Other notable actors included Oprah Winfrey and Tom Wilkinson.

The high school teachers were thrilled by this opportunity. They all emphasized both the generosity of the donor and the impact of the experience. Gail Greaney, SHS history teacher, was quick to point out that many civil rights activists were also high school students, enforcing just how relevant and applicable the movie was. Other teachers raised awareness as to how important it was the event be taken seriously. They all firmly believed the events depicted in “Selma” were significant events in history and that every student should understand their effect on the United States.

The story was heartbreaking. As Sisters Movie House

owner Lisa Clausen said, during viewing “the only sounds were some tears.” Time and time again students brought up the death of one of the protesters, a young man, who was shot and killed by a police officer. The movie focuses intensely on his family’s grief. In a world where people are easily desensitized to brutality this movie brought it to the forefront and forced its viewers to realize just how bad things were. As many students noted, white people hated blacks with such a passion it drove them beyond logic and into monstrosity.

The movie loses none of its punch in recording events from 50 years ago. If anything, it is even more relevant, as freshman Shae Gascon pointed out. In light of recent events in New York and Ferguson, the question of race relations has risen again. Selma highlights how far the nation has come, and also how far there is to go. The anonymous donor and high school staff both believed that it is important for students to be aware of these facts, stomach-churning and heartbreaking as they may be.

Approximately 90 percent of Sisters High School students were able to attend and are grateful for this unique opportunity. As 11th-grader Tara Greaney said, “Understanding the events of the past will help us make a better future as we ourselves become adults.”

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