

# Supercross riders Monks, Martinez ready for home crowd

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(Photo: Dominic Valente/azcentral sports)

Two Novembers ago, Conner Monks woke up in a hospital bed. The diagnosis: five broken ribs, both collarbones cracked, a collapsed lung and a third-degree concussion.

When asked how he got there, the 22-year-old motocross rider said he couldn't remember much. He just remembers the Milestone MX track in Riverside, Calif. and the decision to do three more laps before wrapping up the day.

He ended up in the corner, with his KTM 250 SX-F bike on top of him.

"This isn't going to last forever, this is the only body you get," doctors warned him. "I'd really consider changing your hobbies."

He chose not to.

Saturday, Monks will be at University of Phoenix Stadium for the fourth round of the Monster Energy Supercross Series. His first race of the year will have a home crowd; he's lived in Mesa since he was 12. It's the second time the tour has been in Glendale.

Monks missed out on the first time, due to the accident keeping him off the track for the start of last year's West Coast SX season.

As a rider, injuries come and go. By April, he found a way to Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis for the 250SX. With his muscles returning to race form, he made his way through the last four East Coast rounds, ending in Las Vegas.

"It's an addiction, it's something that I love to do" he said. "I can't stop."

## Matching struggles

Cole Martinez has bruises and broken bone stories of his own to share. The 24-year-old Rimrock, Ariz., native said they are all from the bike: two reconstructed shoulder surgeries, several broken wrists and a couple of broken ankles; one of which kept him from his bike until two weeks before the first round in Anaheim.

"This sport, most of the people in it, have raced with some sort of injury that's nagging at them," he said.

Martinez races for IBCorp Yamaha, a team that didn't exist until two months before the first round. Willing to work with him despite the ankle injury, they convinced him to suit up for the first three rounds in Southern California.

His best finish is 12th place in San Diego.

"They're doing whatever they can to help me," he said. "It's definitely been a process for myself to do better. There's definitely better races to come. But (the ankle) is coming around finally."

Martinez and Monks have been on the handlebars since ages three and four. For his third Christmas, Martinez got his first bike, a Yamaha PW50 with training wheels "that came off pretty fast."

At some point, they both decided to turn riding into a serious pursuit.

Monks has managed to fit in riding with a schedule that includes online classes at Mesa Community College and a full-time day job at Mazatzal Dirt Works, a family-owned construction company. As soon as he's off work at 2 p.m he hits the dirt or takes to his studies.

But the night before race day, he said sleep seems to come harder than normal. In the morning the nerves bring the butterflies.

"During that day you feel every emotion that you can think of," Monks said. "From happiness, to excitement to anger, stress. But as soon as the gate drops all those feelings are gone. It's time to put forward everything you've worked for."

Adrenaline takes control of the feelings.

"I feel like we (riders) have done it so long it's normal for us now," Martinez said. "We line up next to 20 other guys each time we go out and want to do better than the next guy. All-in-all, everyone is kind of going for the same thing. They want to win or do the best they can."

Mental strength helps keep riders on the bike.

Accidents happen.

Monks knows if he focuses on that November day, it might happen again. The threat of injury can't cross the mind.

"You lose focus, you end up crashing," Martinez said.

Saturday schedule

Noon: doors open, practice and qualifying rounds

6:30pm: opening ceremony

7 pm: racing begins

Tickets: online via [supercrosslive.com/en-US/tickets](https://supercrosslive.com/en-US/tickets) or in-person at the University of Phoenix box office.