

# Boy hurt at Speedway dies

■ **Struck by tire:** Christopher Hodge's first trip to a professional race track ends in tragedy.

By **SCOTT WILLIAMS**

The Register Star

ROCKFORD — Four-year-old Christopher Hodge was remembered Monday as "a little daredevil" who shared his father's love of racing and was thrilled to visit Rockford Speedway.

The Janesville, Wis., boy was

pronounced dead at Rockford Memorial Hospital at 7:30 a.m. Monday, about 18 hours after being hit by an airborne tire in the track's grandstands.

Winnebago County Coroner Sue Fiduccia said Christopher died of severe head injuries, but also suffered chest and abdominal injuries.

"It's just a tragic accident," she said. No autopsy is planned.

Christopher was watching a race at the Speedway with his father and friends when a tire broke off a race car and careened into the crowd about 2 p.m. Sunday. His fa-

ther, Aaron Hodge, 23, suffered a broken leg. Joshua O'Leary, 13, escaped with minor injuries.

It was a horrific ending to a father-son weekend arranged by Christopher's and Joshua's fathers.

Mike O'Leary, 34, who works with Aaron Hodge at a Janesville car dealership, said the weekend included camping, shopping and

Please see **Boy, 4A**▷

■ **How to help family**

■ **'No fault here'**

**Both on 4A**

## What happened

■ A day of racing at Rockford Speedway ended tragically Sunday when a tire broke off a race car.

■ Witnesses say the tire was struck by at least one race car before flying over a 15-foot barrier and into the south grandstands.

■ Christopher Hodge, 4, was hit and pushed into his father's legs. He died Monday morning at Rockford Memorial Hospital.

■ The father, Aaron Hodge, 23, suffered a broken leg. Family friend Joshua O'Leary was not badly hurt.



This image taken from a Rockford Speedway videotape shows the tire bounding on the track before it was struck and sent into the stands.