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Northwest Autosport survives the storm at Sebring International Raceway

Mandarino scores top five finish in series debut

March 16, 2007. Sebring Florida. The skies let loose over Sebring International Raceway this afternoon for the opening round of the 2007 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, dropping several inches of rain in just a couple of hours, but Northwest Autosport drivers Lorenzo Mandarino, Eric Freiberg and Phil Fogg Jr. weathered the storm to place fifth, eleventh and thirteenth respectively.

Mandarino, from Vancouver, British Columbia, led the charge for the team this weekend in the #23 Newway Forming Northwest Autosport Mazda. The runner-up in the Discovery Channel Star Racer driver search program, despite winning the series finale, was thrilled to post a top five finish in his series debut.

"After not getting selected as the Star Racer I was emotionally down on myself but I started talking to my sponsors and some teams and we got together with Northwest Autosport and I'm super happy with the outcome," Mandarino explained. "The team did an excellent job all weekend, giving me every thing I needed and the car was fast."

"I hadn't driven one of these cars in the rain before so today's race was interesting. I started eighth on the grid and by turn five I was up into fifth when a full course caution came out, as a result I came up upon the cars in front of me that had already taken the flag pretty quick and locked things up and spun through the apex and dropped back down to ninth place as a result. There was so much mist and spray out there making it difficult but on the restart I was able to gain back a couple of spots, then another and on the final lap I was able to get the inside line on the final corner and get that fifth place finish."

Freiberg, from Homer Glen, Illinois, worked his way up several positions as well in the race, which was shortened to thirty minutes due to the conditions, despite several caution periods after starting thirteenth on the grid in the #3 Northwest Autosport Mazda. "This weekend was a roller coaster," the Lockport Township High School graduate explained. "We came in expecting to be fast and had some fuel pump difficulties which hurt us a bit. We had worked past those problems when the rain just dumped down on us two hours before the race. This was my first time running the car in the rain and after a few laps was just starting to get a feel for it when the checkered flag came out."

Fogg completed the finishing order for the Northwest Autosport drivers with his thirteenth place finish after starting seventeenth in the field of thirty-two drivers, bringing home the #29 Consonus Northwest Autosport Mazda at the top of the class for the Star Mazda Expert Series, for drivers aged 30 through 44 years of age.

The opening round of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, won by Marco DiLeo, will be broadcast by Speed Channel on Saturday, March 24, at 8:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time with a rebroadcast scheduled for Wednesday, March 28, at 3:00 PM Eastern Daylight Time. The next round of the championship will be held on the Reliant Park Street Circuit in Houston, Texas, on April 20-22.

Based in Milwaukie, Oregon, Northwest Autosport is one of the top teams participating in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, which will feature twelve races across the United States and Canada supporting the American Le Mans Series, ChampCar and the GrandAm series. The team is dedicated to developing young driving talent and will award the highest finishing driver on their team a test in an Indy Pro Series car prepared by Sam Schmidt Motorsports, which is currently running a car for Northwest Autosport alumni Ryan Justice. For more information please visit www.northwestautosport.com.