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-- AND THEN THERE WERE THREE --

A trio of top young racers, two Americans and an Irishman, are in the fight of their young careers for one of auto racing's most coveted prizes – the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder scholarship

FAST FACTS -- Final round of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, Oct. 16 -- 18

- Coming into Round 12 at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca is the final race of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship season, three drivers remain in contention for the series championship and the big prize that goes with it – the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder scholarship to move up and race in the 2009 Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda.
- The two hottest Star Mazda Championship drivers are American John Edwards and Irishman Peter Dempsey. Edwards has won four races, including Round 11 two weeks ago at Road Atlanta, and comes into this weekend leading the championship. Dempsey, who has also won four races started from the pole but finished 17th at Road Atlanta and is third in the championship.
- Also in contention is American Joel Miller, the 2007 Skip Barber Pro Series champion who won his 2008 Star Mazda Championship ride courtesy of the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder, won the season-opener at Sebring from the pole. He has scored seven podium finishes and sits second in the championship.
- The Star Mazda Championship is the college football of Indy Car racing, the high-profile, intensely-competitive series where the stars of tomorrow hone their skills and accelerate their careers. Alumni include Indy-car stars Marco Andretti and Graham Rahal and NASCAR rising star Michael McDowell.
- The Star Mazda Championship is a major step on the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder in which Mazda funds rides for the champions in various series reaching all the way from karting to the Atlantic Championship. 2007 Star Mazda Champion Dane Cameron competed this year in the next step up the ladder, the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda, and the winner of this year's championship will move up to fill Cameron's Atlantic seat in 2009. Connor Daly, son of racing legend Derek Daly, won the 2008 Skip Barber Championship and will be the MAZDASPEED Ladder driver in the 2009 Star Mazda Championship.

The 2008 Star Mazda Championship season has been simultaneously lop-sided and exciting; two drivers have won eight of the 11 races so far, but each of them has experienced the sort of adversity that either builds character or de-rails careers.

American John Edwards (right), who raced in the Atlantic Championship last year but lost his ride, decided to compete in the Star Mazda Championship this year in hopes of winning his way back to Atlantic in 2009. Driving the #7 AIM Autosport / Mobil1 Mazda, he won his debut event from the pole in Round 2 at Miller Motorsports Park, following up with wins in Race 2 Portland, Race 1 at New Jersey and Road Atlanta. But he missed the first race and finished 19th in Race 1 at Portland.



Irishman Peter Dempsey started the season with a podium, followed by a pair of top-5s, but finished 18th in Race 1 at Portland and 19th in Race 2 and looked to be done for the season as his funding had run out. A last-minute savior in the form of LotusWorks, an Irish-American software company, stepped in to provide funding for one more race and he rose to the challenge with a win at Road American, the first of three wins in a row at the wheel of the #21 Andersen Racing/LotusWorks/Center Jewellers.ie/Quayside.ie/ Allied Building Products Mazda. He scored a podium finish in Race 1 at New Jersey, and won Race 2, but then, despite starting from the pole, finished 17th at Road Atlanta due to a crash.



The season started with a dominant win from the pole at Sebring for American Joel Miller (left), who won the 2007 Skip Barber Pro Series championship and raced #20 JDC Motorsports / K&N Air Filters Mazda in the 2008 Star Mazda Championship with scholarship funding from the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. With the exception of a 16th-place finish in Race 1 at Portland and a 15th at Road America, Miller has had a very steady season with seven podiums, two poles and a pair of top-5s. Miller is racing for the same team that produced 2007 Star

Mazda Champion Dane Cameron, who, with funding from the MAZDASPEED Ladder raced this year in the #19 Genoa Racing/MAZDASPEED/Finlay Motorsports /Lynx Racing Swift 016.a.

The ultimate goal they are all fighting for is the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder scholarship to race in the 2009 Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda. This remarkable program, the first-ever established by an auto manufacturer, provides scholarships to young champions on their way up the ladder. The karting champion gets sponsorship to race in the first step up the open-wheel ladder, the Skip Barber series. The Skip Barber Champion moves up to race in the Star Mazda Championship, while the Star Mazda champion wins a ride in the series at top run of the open-wheel development ladder, the Atlantic Championship.

While the big prize remains to be won, the remaining championships that are part of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, have been decided. Florida-based Andersen Racing, with two of the four remaining contenders (Dempsey and Gladdis) and seven of eleven wins, has already clinched the team championship. The Expert and Master Series championships have already been clinched as well, with Vancouver, B.C.'s Chris Cumming (right) winning in the Expert (drivers 30 to 44) category after scoring seven class wins and four class top-3 finishes in the #16 World Speed Motorsports / Inviro Medical Mazda. Cumming is 12th in the series championship headed into this weekend. Chuck Hulse, of Yorba Linda, California, also clinched his first Master category (drivers 45 and older) championship with seven class wins and four class top-3 finishes. Hulse (left) drives the #12 JDC Motorsports / Silicon Salvage Mazda and is currently 14th in the overall series championship.



Round 12 of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship will take place at during the American Le Mans season finale, the Monterey Sports Car Championships, at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, October 16 – 18. On track action begins with a promoter's test day Thursday, Oct. 16. Official practice consists of two sessions, 8:00 – 8:40 am and 1:04 – 1:45 pm, Friday, Oct. 17. Qualifying for the race takes place from 9:00 to 9:45 am Saturday, Oct. 18, with the green flag scheduled to wave for the final 45-minute round of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship season at 12:15 pm. The race will be broadcast on SPEED TV Saturday, November 8 at 1:30 pm (ET).

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit and www.mazdausa.com. For interviews, photos, etc., contact Star Mazda Championship Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 906-6997 / StarMazdaPR@aol.com.

On any given weekend, there are more Mazdas on the road-race tracks of America than any other brand of vehicle. At the track, you'll see MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car.

For more information on the various Mazda spec series, visit:

www.atlanticchampionship.com

www.starmazda.com

www.skipbarber.com

www.mx-5cup.com

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