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A DANCE OF CHANCE AND ENGINEERS – UNIQUE SCHEDULE FOR STAR MAZDA ROUND 2 AT THE INDY GRAND PRIX OF ALABAMA PLACES A PREMIUM ON EDUCATED GUESSWORK AND ADAPTATION

Pacoima, CA (April 1, 2011) -- Tristan Vautier, the French racer who dominated Star Mazda pre-season testing at IndyCar spring training and finished on the podium in the season-opener, hit the nail on the head in a post-race interview when asked about his results at St. Pete and predictions about Round 2 at Barber Motorsports Park.

"The track changed so much during the weekend that we did not have exactly the right setup for Saturday afternoon," said Vautier, a second-year Star Mazda driver who won two races last season and finished 5th in the championship. "And it will be even more difficult at Barber because of our schedule; we have one practice on Thursday morning and then we qualify an hour later. Then we are not on track for two days. Finally we have a 15-minute warm-up Sunday morning the race Sunday afternoon. Nobody knows what the track will be like then, so our engineers will be guessing on setup and the drivers will be doing their best to adapt."

And he's right – Round 2 of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will most likely be

won by the team and driver who make the best of an this unusual situation. Such circumstance would seem to lend themselves to an upset, but before we begin counting the 'dark horses,' a rundown of the established favorites seems in order.

California racer Connor De Phillippi is coming off back-to-back Star Mazda wins – albeit six months apart. He won the 2010 season-ender at Road Atlanta from the pole, and backed it up with a win from the second row in the 2011 season-opener at St. Pete driving the Team Pelfrey / Justice Brothers Products / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda. He was, however, somewhat off the pace in the series' pre-season test at Barber, just 7th-fast and more than 1.5 seconds off the pace set by Vautier. That said, testing is testing and racing is racing.... and he's proved he can race.

De Phillippi, the 2009 Skip Barber Pro Series



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champion, moved up to compete in Star Mazda via the Mazda Road to Indy and wound up third in the championship and taking 'Rookie of the Year' honors. He's driving for Team Pelfrey, formerly a competitive IndyCar team in the 1998-2001 time frame, with a reputation for giving young drivers their 'big break.' Team Pelfrey is a rookie operation, but made up of highly-experienced personnel and headed by an aerospace entrepreneur Dale Pelfrey, who intends to grow his team from Star Mazda to Indy Lights to IndyCar over the next couple of years... and the St. Pete effort, despite Team Pelfrey teammate Nick Andries' first-lap crash after starting on the front row, was an admirable way to begin the evolution.



Another contender to be reckoned, Chilean racer Martin Scuncio, with came into the series with a flourish, showing up for his Star Mazda debut in the final race of the 2010 season at Road Atlanta – and very nearly taking the pole, then dicing with the leaders throughout the race. He returns for a full 2011 season at the wheel of the #60 Juncos Racing / Fuerza Chile Mazda showing similar form; he was 2nd-quick overall in the series' testing at Barber, won the pole at St. Pete and was clearly devastated to finish 2nd... but he drives for the team, Juncos Racing, that dominated the 2010 championship with Conor Daly, and will surely be both motivated and equipped for redemption at Barber.

The afore-quoted Tristan Vautier will be another 'man on a mission' at Barber; after dominating five of the six on-track Star Mazda sessions during IndyCar spring training (with Scuncio topping the afternoon session of Day 1), Vautier could climb no higher than 5th on the starting grid at St. Pete and finished 3rd with several well-judged passes... and the early retirement of Nick Andries. He won two races in 2010 driving for a now-defunct team, the members of which formed the nucleus of the new Team Pelfrey. He finished 5th in the championship, scored three podiums and five top-5s, but his season was sabotaged by off-form finishes like 13th at Mazda Raceway, 19th at Autobahn and 10th at Trois-Rivières. Now driving the #5 JDC Motorsports / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquais Mazda for the championship-winning JDC Motorsports team (2007 with Dane Cameron and 2009 with Adam Christodoulou), the team's focus on engineering expertise may give him an edge on Sunday.

And the performance of Irish driver Patrick McKenna, runner-up in the 2010 USF2000 Championship, gives a good indication that his combination of speed and a steady manner will make him a long-term contender. Driving the #48 Team GDT / Motorsport Ireland / Irish Sports Council / General Data Tech Mazda, he qualified 4th and finished where he qualified. This despite the fact that he's not the



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highest-profile USF2000 graduate in the field; Sage McKenna won the St. Pete USF2000 round, and the championship, in 2010... and he's the youngest driver in the field, turning 16 just days before the race. He qualified his #88 Andretti Autosport / MAZDASPEED / Comfort Revolution Mazda 7th on the grid, and quickly moved up to 5th, but deteriorating handling put him into the wall on lap 17 of 29 and he was credited with a 15th-place finish. Certainly not a reliable indicator of future performance, but the battle between these two will be something to see over the course of the season... particularly since McKenna is driving for a championship-winning team (Team GDT owner/driver J.W. Roberts won the Expert Series for drivers 30 and older in 2010, and finished 11th overall and first in Expert at St. Pete) while Andretti Autosport, despite its powerhouse name and resources, has yet to prove itself in the heat of Star Mazda competition.



Which brings us to the dark horses – not that there aren't a number of other quick drivers (J.V. Horto, Tatiana Calderon and Chris Miller, to name a few) more than capable of surprising all involved. However, the story of Quebec racer J rimy Daniel, driving the #26 Daniel Racing / FixAuto / Sherwin-Williams Mazda for his family-owned and operated team, is worth noting – particularly in light of the fact that he started 18th and last, moving up to finish 10th in his first-ever Star Mazda Championship race... the most places gained by any driver during the race. Daniel, a top kart racer before switching to open-wheel cars in 2008, was the Formula Ford 'Rookie of the Year' in 2009 with one win and five podium finishes.

Next up on the 'most places gained' list is perhaps the most unlikely driver in the 2011 Star Mazda Championship, Nick Mancuso, a National Merit Scholar and extreme adventurer who likes to capture large reptiles in the wild. An accomplished sports car racer, he is making his open-wheel debut with Star Mazda driving the #27 JDC Motorsports / Jimmy John's / Indeck Mazda and finished 7th after starting 13th.



Another surprising performance came from Venezuelan driver Carlos Linares in the #20 Linares Racing / Mindeporte Mazda. He's a second-year driver who – though showing occasional flashes of speed – finished in the top-10 only once in 2010. Linares Racing underwent a major re-organization in the off-season, bringing in experienced team





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manager Martin Bates – and the improvement was immediately apparent with a run from 11th on the starting grid to a 6th-place finish.

Another interesting driver with considerable potential is Gustavo Menezes, a top international kart racer from California who made the jump directly from karts to Star Mazda driving the #28 Juncos



Racing / Truecar / Safety Park Mazda. Despite some tumult in the pre-season that limited his practice time, including missing the Barber test entirely, and never having made a standing start of the sort that Star Mazda utilizes, he drove a clean race from 10th on the grid to an 8th-place finish.

The unique Star Mazda schedule at the Indy Grand Prix of Alabama begins with practice from 10:15 am–11:00 am on Thursday, April 7th, followed by qualifying 12:30 pm–1:15 pm. Then, two days of going over data and polishing the cars before a 15-minute practice session 8:30am-8:45am Sunday, April 10th. Round 2 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take the green light for the series' spectacular F1-style standing start at approximately 12:30 pm. Immediately following the 1-hour Star Mazda race will be the start of the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama presented by Legacy Credit Union.

Fans can follow the drivers through the course of the weekend via the series' web site at www.StarMazda.com, or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/starmazdaseries> and Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/starmazdaseries>. Follow the actual race on your computer or smartphone at <http://livetiming.net/starmazda/>.

ABOUT MAZDA

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, Mazda2, Mazda3, Mazda6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car. In fact, the largest road-racing class in the world is Spec Miata, with more than 2,500 first- and second-generation Miatas tearing up America's racetracks, making it the most-raced production car in the world. Mazda's involvement in motorsports extends to its relationship with Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, one of the world's premier road-racing circuits, the Skip Barber Schools for driving and racing, and the Mazda Road to Indy.



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Mazda North American Operations is headquartered in Irvine, Calif. and oversees the sales, marketing, parts and customer service support of Mazda vehicles in the United States, Canada and Mexico through nearly 900 dealers. Operations in Canada are managed by Mazda Canada, Inc., located in Ontario; and in Mexico by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

For information, contact Dean Case / Communications Officer /MAZDASPEED Motorsports (310) 318-4582 / mazdaspeed@mazdausa.com.

About Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear

For 2011, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will be a major part of the Mazda Road to Indy and will feature a 10-weekend, 11-race schedule, all on major race weekends and most with IndyCar. Two weekends are with the American Le Mans series, and one is a double-header with Indy Lights. Rising stars from around the world will be watched by more than a million fans as they compete for prizes valued at \$1.5 million, including a scholarship to move up and race in the 2012 Firestone Indy Lights series. Drivers 16 and older are welcome to compete and the Star Mazda Championship also features the Expert Series for drivers 30 and older. The Star Mazda Championship features standing starts, wheel-to-wheel racing at 160 mph and budgets a fraction of other top open-wheel ladder series. For more information on the Star Mazda Championship please visit www.starmazda.com.

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit www.starmazda.com and www.mazdausa.com. For information, interviews and photos, please contact Star Mazda Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 398-5733 or StarMazdaPR@aol.com.

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