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-- STAR MAZDA'S RISING STARS SET TO MIX IT UP AT MILWAUKEE --

Round 4 of the 2011 season is the second of three ovals in a row for and with the top-2 drivers just one championship point apart, it promises to be a wheel-to-wheel battle from start to finish

The Milwaukee Mile (June 13, 2011) – With just one point separating the top two contenders – and twelve other young hotshoes from around the world within one-race striking distance of turning the points battle on its head – Round 4 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear at the Milwaukee Mile, June 17-19, is shaping up to be a wheel-to-wheel battle with both dominance and redemption on the line.

The Star Mazda Championship last visited the Milwaukee Mile in 2009, with that race won by Norwegian racer Anders 'the Viking' Krohn; he is currently racing in the Indy Lights series and, returning to a track where he has already shown he can win, will be a force to be reckoned with this weekend. None of the current crop of Star Mazda's rising stars have raced here before, but there are indicators of who to watch.



For the 2011 Star Mazda Championship, the college varsity of IndyCar racing, this is the second of three oval-track races in a row. Californian Connor De Phillippi (left) won the first one, the prestigious Night Before the 500 at Lucas Oil Raceway at Indianapolis, from the pole. It marked his second victory of the season; he also won and set the fastest lap in the season-opener at the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. De Phillippi also won the final race of the 2010 season and was the 2009

Skip Barber Pro Series champion; as a result, he raced the 2010 Star Mazda season with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy program. This year, he drives for Team Pelfrey, formerly an IndyCar team from 1998-2001 noted for giving young drivers their 'big break.'

However, due to a 10th-place finish in Round 2 at Barber Motorsports Park, De Phillippi, driving the Team Pelfrey / Justice Brothers Products / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda, comes to Milwaukee trailing current championship leader Tristan Vautier by one point, 117 vs 116. Vautier, the young French racer who finished on the podium in Round 1 of the 2011 season, won from the pole in Round 2 driving the #5 JDC Motorsports / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquais Mazda. With 6th and 8th-place finishes on ovals last year, Vautier might be dismissed as a European road-course specialist... except that he finished a very racy 4th at the Night Before the 500 and, having changed teams between seasons, is enjoying the confidence that comes from driving for a championship-winning team, JDC Motorsports, and having a vastly-experienced engineer, Rick Cameron, setting up his car.



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Another top contender this weekend, particularly in light of the fact that it was a bright-yellow all-Pelfrey front row at the Night Before the 500, is De Phillippi's teammate, St. Petersburg, FL racer Nick Andries. He started from the front row at Round 1 and finished 2nd at both Rounds 2 and 3, setting the fastest lap of the race in the process at Lucas Oil Raceway. Andries, driving for another team, also ran most of the Star Mazda events on the schedule in 2010, and this season, obviously well in sync with his new team and driving the Team Pelfrey / Lithionics Battery / GS610 Brake Fluid / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda, he moved from 5th to 3rd in the championship battle with his most recent podium finish. The team owner, Dale Pelfrey, recently sold his aerospace company and is focused on the talents of this hot young duo to help take his team back up to the IndyCar level.

Nazareth, PA native Sage Karam, a family friend of the Andretti clan and racing the #88 MAZDASPEED /



Comfort Revolution Mazda for Andretti Autosport, was the 2009 USF2000 champion and is racing in the Star Mazda Championship in 2010 with backing from the Mazda Road to Indy program. After a pair of undistinguished finishes in Rounds 1 (14th) and 2 (9th), Karam has come to grips with the differences between the driving style of a USF2000 car and a Star Mazda car – and it showed in his

podium finish (3rd place) at the Night Before the 500. If his new knowledge translates from the bullring confines of a short oval like Lucas Oil Raceway to the no-baking, concrete surface of the Milwaukee Mile, he will be a serious contender for top honors this weekend – and he was 3rd-quick in a an official Star Mazda series test at Milwaukee last month.

"Last year the ovals were good to me," says Karam, a native of Nazareth, PA, hometown of the famed Andretti racing family. "And the whole team felt like the result we achieved at the Night Before the 500 was a turning point for us. Last year, on the Iowa Speedway oval, we qualified pole, set track record, had fastest lap and lapped the whole field but one car, on our way to a victory. So I think we were pretty comfortable on the ovals last year. It hasn't been difficult to remain humble this year, but each of this year's three ovals has its own unique challenges and the remaining two give me a renewed sense of optimism.

Having now brought up both the unique nature of the Milwaukee Mile track and the Star Mazda series test here on May 21, it is at this point that we should begin examining the results of that test to see who the other serious contenders are.



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With the top-5 drivers on the time sheet surpassing the existing lap record, it was French racer and current points leader in the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, Tristan Vautier, who turned the quickest time; driving the #5 JDC Motorsports / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquais Mazda, his 44th lap of the famed oval, a mile of concrete with virtually no banking, was 27.489 sec. (103.961 mph) – almost half a second faster than Richard Kent's pole time of 27.971 (128.705 mph) from the last Star Mazda race held at this track in 2009.



"I really like racing on ovals; it's a lot of fun and it's totally different from road courses in many ways," says Vautier (right). "Once you get on track, the window you have to adapt your driving style to the car balance is much smaller than on a road course, so getting the perfect set up is even more crucial, and I know that my feedback and my work with the JDC guys is going to be an ever bigger key to succeed."

Second-quick at the Milwaukee test was Nick Andries with a lap of 27.637 sec. (130.260 mph), followed by Sage Karam with a lap of 27.709 sec. (129.922 mph). Next up on the testing time sheet is the lone female racer in the series, Colombian driver Tatiana Calderon. Demonstrating clearly that her significantly improved 2011 form is no fluke, and that she is now a serious contender for the top spot on the podium on any given weekend, she set the 4th-fast time of 27.758 sec. (129.6932 mph) of the test. Calderon is a South American karting champion who ran with Juncos Racing before they moved to the U.S., 2010 was her rookie Star Mazda season and she ran a credible campaign to score six top-10 finishes and finish 10th in the championship. In the off-season she embarked on a determined program of physical training with the Pit Fit Training organization in Indianapolis and her 2011 on-track results have shown a marked improvement, including her first-ever podium finish in Round 2 at Barber Motorsports Park driving the #10 Juncos Racing / JAC Motors Mazda .

Rounding out the top-5 at the Milwaukee test was Californian Connor De Phillippi with a lap of 27.923 sec. (128.926 mph), but the 6th-quick driver, Brazilian racer Joao Victor Horta with a lap of 27.994 (128.599 mph) in the #18 Juncos Racing / Programa Leilões Mazda is another serious contender. He qualified 3rd and finished 3rd at the 2010 Night Before the 500 and improved at Iowa Speedway (a much faster track) to qualify and finish 2nd. He finished 7th in the championship in 2010 and currently, three races into the 2011 season, is 5th in the championship battle.



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"Last year was my first time racing in an oval and thanks to Mazda and Road to Indy it was amazing being part of the activities of the biggest race of America," says Horto, who changed teams between seasons to the drive for the championship-winning Juncos Racing. "All the activities provided to Star Mazda's drivers were very helpful to improve my driving on an oval track, especially the laps with Rick Mears teaching us at Indianapolis Speedway. An oval track is much harder than it looks. And the Milwaukee Mile is a very technical and challenging track with no banking a very hard wall -- which it makes important that you not make any mistakes."



Another driver to keep an eye on is Chilean racer Martin Scuncio, who finished 6th in the 2010 USF2000 championship ran the final race of the 2010 Star Mazda season, very nearly taking the pole and racing for the lead throughout the event. He has moved up to race full-time in Star Mazda in 2011 driving the #60 Juncos Racing / Bia Comunicaciones / Cable Del Pacifico Mazda and brings with him

USF2000 oval experience that includes a 6th to 5th drive at Lucas Oil Raceway in 2010, and a 5th to 4th run at Iowa Speedway. He is currently 4th in the Star Mazda Championship with a pole and podium finish in Round 1 in the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg and a 6th-place finish at the Night Before the 500.

On-track action for the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear at the IndyCar225 at the Milwaukee Mile begins with test sessions on Thursday, June 16. Single-car qualifying will take place from 3:00 – 3:40 pm Saturday, June 18. The one-hour Round 4 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship will take the green flag at 11am, Sunday, June 19

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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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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