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AMERICANS RULE THE OVALS WHILE HOTSHOES FROM ACROSS THE POND LEAD THE POINTS – INTRIGUING BATTLE SHAPING UP AT THE IOWA SPEEDWAY FOUNDATION STAR MAZDA 100

Iowa Speedway / June 14, 2012 – Fresh from a victory in which he dominated the prestigious Night Before the 500 – and American drivers finished 1-2-3 – Californian Connor De Phillippi is looking to this weekend's



Iowa Speedway Foundation Star Mazda 100 as a golden opportunity to level the playing field between he and arch-rival English racer Jack Hawksworth, the current Star Mazda Championship points leader. Both drivers have scored two wins, each victory coming from the pole, but Hawksworth's four podiums to De Phillippi's three have kept the Englishman in the points lead (129 vs. 117) despite finishing 7th at the Night Before the 500.

So this weekend's Iowa Speedway Foundation Star Mazda 100 presents an ideal opportunity for De Phillippi, racing his #2 Juncos Racing / ModSpace Racing / One24 Mazda, to close the gap – and perhaps move into the lead – except that last year's winner of this race (and winner of the Rookie of the Year award), Sage Karam is determined to have some say in the matter. Karam, back driving the #88 Andretti Autosport / Comfort Revolution Mazda, is currently 6th in the points, but he did finish a strong 2nd at the Night Before the 500, and his win here last year was from the pole (he also set the fastest race lap)... while De Phillippi finished 11th.

"Last year we were five laps from the end and I had a tire go down so I had to make a pit stop," recalls De Phillippi. "Nothing you can do about that, but Juncos Racing is a very detail-oriented team and we've spent a lot of time in the shop making sure the cars are perfect for this race, that the bodywork fits perfectly flush to reduce downforce and that everything is in place for us to come away from Iowa with the points lead. Lucas Oil Raceway is a track that requires maximum downforce and letting up on the gas a bit as you enter the turns, while Iowa is a minimum-downforce track where a few tenths or hundredths of a second will win the pole and may make the difference between winning and losing."

Note must also be taken of the faultless performance by Karam's Andretti Autosport teammate, young Zach Veach, on the Lucas Oil Raceway Oval, finishing third in a 100-lap race that went the distance with only one minor interruption. It was his first podium of the season so far in his #77 Andretti Autosport / K12 / Zakosi Data Backup Mazda, but likely not the last, particularly in light of the fact that he scored a podium in his second-ever Star Mazda race, the 2011 season-finale event at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.



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Confusing the issue still further is Martin Scuncio, the Chilean driver of the #22 Juncos Racing / Pullman Bus Mazda who finished 4th at the Night Before the 500 -- and qualified on the outside of the front row here last year. He is one of three race winners so far this season, taking the top step of the podium in Race 2 at Barber Motorsports Park, and is third in the points. In addition to De Phillippi, Karam and Scuncio, two other drivers in the field – Gustavo Menezes (who scored a podium finish here last year) and Carlos Linares – have Star Mazda experience on the 7/8ths-mile Iowa Speedway oval.

Of the other titles being contended this weekend, Hawksworth not only leads the championship but also the Rookie of the Year standings, while the results of the Night Before the 500 have moved Juncos Racing (the team that won seven races on the way to the championship with Conor Daly in 2010) ahead of the powerhouse Team Pelfrey organization that fields Hawksworth's #82 Team Pelfrey / TORGOEN Swiss Watches / EXA Networks Mazda.

This weekend's Round 6 of the 2012 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is the second of two ovals on a 2012 schedule that includes a well-rounded menu of ovals, street circuits and natural-terrain road courses. Most are double-headers with two races per weekend, and most are with IndyCar. Following these two ovals in a row is a string of three Canadian races in a row, beginning with the Indy Toronto, followed by Indy Edmonton and then by the legendary GP3R Grand Prix de Trois-Rivieres, where Star Mazda will share the stage with Indy Lights.

On-track Star Mazda action begins with a 30-minute practice session from 12:45 – 1:15 pm Friday, June 22, followed by a second half-hour session from 3:30 – 4:00 pm. Star Mazda drivers from eight different countries and three continents will get an extended practice session on Saturday from 11:00am – 1:55pm, followed by single-car qualifying from 3:10-2:55 pm. The green flag for the start of the 1-hour Iowa Speedway Foundation Star Mazda 100 will wave at 5:20 pm Saturday, June 23.

Star Mazda Championship cars all carry two Replay XD1080 cameras to provide exciting driver POV footage for races that are broadcast tape-delayed on Discovery's Velocity Channel and globally on ESPN International. In the U.S., the race will air on Velocity at 12 Noon, Saturday, July 28.

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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