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INDYCAR'S STARS OF TOMORROW RACING HARD AROUND 'THE YARDS' IN ROUND 8 OF THE 2012 STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY GOODYEAR AT THIS WEEKEND'S GRAND PRIX OF BALTIMORE

Baltimore, Inner Harbor / August 28, 2012 – The location of this weekend's Indy Grand Prix of Baltimore – racing around Oriole Park at Camden Yards in the Inner Harbor – presents an apt baseball metaphor for



the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear; the High School Varsity of IndyCar racing... a high-speed training ground for future stars of the sport who will move up to triple-A (Indy Lights) and then the major leagues (IndyCar).

Unlike the ladder young baseball players climb to get to 'the bigs,' however, all the steps that a driver must take to get to auto racing's major leagues – including the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda (High School Varsity) – will be competing this weekend in the

same stadium, in front of the same fans. All three series are part of the prestigious Mazda Road to Indy, the official driver development program of IndyCar. And all will be racing for a similar prize; the champion in each series is awarded scholarship funding to move up and race at the next level.

French racer Tristan Vautier, who won the inaugural Baltimore Star Mazda race last year, is now a top contender in the Indy Lights championship and will be looking to win again this weekend. And Brazilian driver João Victor Horta, who finished third, has also moved up and is competing in Indy Lights.

The drivers on the starting grid for the Star Mazda Championship double-header this weekend are racing for a champion's prize valued in excess of \$600,000 and represent an intriguing mix of Baltimore veterans like Sage Karam, Gustavo Menezes, Jerimy Daniel, Connor De Phillippi and Carlos Linares and brash young hotshoes like Jack Hawksworth (the current championship leader with six wins), Gabby Chaves, Petri Suvanto and the series lone female driver, Ashley Freiberg.

We'll begin by giving veterans their due. Second year driver Sage Karam, racing the #88 Andretti Autosport / Comfort Revolution Mazda, finished second here last year and went on to win the 'Rookie of the Year' award; he has won two races this year, scored eight podium finishes and sits second in the championship. And, having won Race 2 on the GP3R street circuit in Trois-Rivières three weeks ago, he comes to Baltimore with a winner's momentum.



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Menezes, driver of the #83 Team Pelfrey / SafetyPark / Oakley Mazda, is 8th in the championship this year with eight top-10 finishes and is planning to make his Indy Lights debut at the IndyCar season finale in Fontana, California. Quebec racer Jerimy Daniel, driving the #10 The Racing Company / FixAuto / Sherwin-Williams Mazda for his family-owned team, The Racing Company, finished 5th last year and is back, counting on experience to produce a podium.

The final two drivers represent opposite ends of the spectrum; Californian Connor De Phillippi came into this race last year second in the championship with three wins but bad luck consigned him to a 9th-place finish. He re-bounded to win the season finale from the pole at Mazda Raceway, but still finished 2nd in the championship. This season, driving for a different team, he won from the pole racing the #2 Juncos Racing / ModSpace Racing / One24 Mazda in Race 1 at the series' season-opener at St. Petersburg, and scored another convincing win from the pole on at the Night Before the 500 on the Lucas Oil Raceway oval in Indianapolis. But, through a combination of bad luck, bad timing and being in the wrong place at the wrong time, De Phillippi's season has come to a crossroads with three finishes outside the top-10 in the last five races. Coming back to a place where luck was no lady last year and trying to get it all turned around will be a considerable test of character.

Venezuelan driver Carlos Linares finished 10th here last year, and 7th in the championship, but this year, with his team expanded to two cars and sharing technical data and expertise with Team GDT, Linares racing experienced its first-ever victory when Camilo Schmidt, a top-level Venezuelan kart racer now driving the #21 Linares Racing Mazda, scored a surprise – but well-deserved – victory in the wet during Race 1 at Edmonton. Having proved the team can win, it must now prove that Edmonton was no fluke.

Making hash of the idea of experience providing an advantage is rookie English racer Jack Hawksworth, a top European kart racer who only made the jump to open-wheel cars in 2011. In his first-ever season of Star Mazda competition, he leads the championship with six wins, eight poles and ten fastest race laps. A pair of crashes, one due to a mechanical malfunction on the Iowa Oval and a mistake in the rain during Race 2 at Trois-Rivieres (after winning Race 1), have whittled down his points lead to 41 over Sage Karam. As a result, despite his dominant performance so far, with a maximum of 62 points up for grabs this weekend, and 155 left during the season, the championship battle is far from over and he will need to maintain a laser-focus in Baltimore and the remaining races.





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Another rookie making waves in the Star Mazda driver pool this season is Colombian racer Gabriel 'Gabby' Chaves. With experience in European open-wheel ladder series, and membership in the prestigious FIA Institute Young Driver Excellence Academy, his 'fast but steady' approach to the season driving the #19 JDC Motorsports / CLARO / Marca Colombia / Tecpro Mazda has resulted in six podium finishes, and eleven top-5s, placing him third in the championship... well within striking distance if he can break through the 'podium ceiling' and win some races.

Mixing both rookie status and experience at Baltimore is Finnish racer Petri Suvanto, driver of the #81 Team Pelfrey / Mazda Road to Indy Mazda. Currently 6th in the championship with three podium finishes and six top-5s, Suvanto was the 2011 USF2000 champion and is racing in Star Mazda this season with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy. In the USF2000 race at Baltimore last year he finished 2nd in both Race 1 and Race 2, so although driving a different, faster car this year, he knows the track well and is hungry to score his first win.



Other contenders worth watching include Chilean racer Martin Scuncio in the #22 Juncos Racing / Pullman Bus / Gobierno Regional del Bio-Biol Mazda; he has one win so far this season and is 6th in the championship. Colombian driver Juan Piedrahita has had an up-and-down season in his #9 JDC Motorsports / Petrosur / Colombia es pasión / GFK Motors / Lamd Link Mazda, but still sits 7th in the championship with two podiums, five top-5s and ten top-10s.

For full results of the season so far, click [here](#).

Star Mazda on-track action at the Indy Grand Prix of Baltimore begins with a 30 minute practice session from 8:40 -- 9:10 am Friday, August 31, followed by qualifying for the PEAK Performance pole for Saturday's Race 1 from 1:55 pm -- 2:25 pm. Race 1, scheduled for 305 minutes, will take the green light for the series' spectacular F1-style standing start 2:35 pm on Saturday, Sept. 1. Race 2, a 40 minute contest with the starting grid determined by each car's fastest lap on Race 1, takes the green at 11:35 am on Sunday, Sept 2.

Star Mazda Championship cars all carry two Replay XD1080 cameras to provide exciting driver POV footage for races that are part of the Mazda Motorsports Hour broadcast tape-delayed on Discovery's Velocity Channel in the U.S. and globally on ESPN International. In the U.S., the race will air on Velocity at 12 Noon, Saturday, September 29. For information on international and Canadian air times, click [here](#).



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Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear

The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is a part of the [Mazda Road to Indy](http://www.mazdausa.com), the official driver development program for IndyCar. The 2012 schedule includes 17 races on 10 weekends, most with IndyCar. Rising stars from around the world are competing on road courses, street circuits and ovals in front of more than a million fans as they compete for prizes valued at \$1.2 million, including a scholarship to move up and race in the 2013 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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