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RACING TOWARD THE FUTURE -- WITH THE END OF THE 2012 SEASON IN SIGHT, TEAMS IN THE STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP PRESENTED BY GOODYEAR ARE ALREADY ACCELERATING TOWARD 2013

Road Atlanta / October 15, 2012 – The energy and momentum that a racing series brings to the final event of the season is always a useful indicator of its health and prospects. With the end of the 10-weekend, 17-



race 2012 season taking place this weekend at the Petit Le Mans, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will see some of the most competitive, wheel-to-wheel action of the year as drivers battle to move up the championship rankings, and

top teams debuting new drivers looking to gain experience ahead of a full 2013 campaign.

With the driver championship, rookie of the year title, and team championship all having been decided in the previous round at Mazda Raceway – and all won by English racer Jack Hawksworth and Team Pelfrey with eight victories and ten pole positions – what remains to battle for is every place in the championship from 2nd on down. And with both bragging rights and a not-inconsiderable amount of money at stake – 2nd-place is worth \$70,000 while 3rd is \$50,000, 4th is \$40,000, etc. – the competitive fire and financial incentives coupled lack of championship pressure will unleash these young lions to put forward that level of performance that you only see when next season's ride is not at stake, when everything there is to win is right there on the table.

There are 31 points available to win this weekend; 29 for the outright victory and 1 each for pole and fastest race lap. With 2nd-place Colombian racer Gabby Chaves at 330 points and 3rd-place California driver Connor De Phillippi at 303 points, it's going to be a stretch, but not an insurmountable one, for any swapping of places on the championship ladder.

Both have won races this season, Chaves, driving the #19 JDC Motorsports / CLARO / Marca Colombia / Tecpro Mazda in Race 2 of the double-header at Mazda Raceway, and De Phillippi, at the wheel of the #2 Juncos Racing / ModSpace Racing / One24 Mazda, in the season-opener at the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg and on the Lucas Oil Raceway oval at the Night Before the 500 in Indianapolis on Memorial Day weekend. Though De Phillippi has won more races, and in fact won the Star Mazda race at Road Atlanta the last time the series raced here in 2010, Chaves has had the more consistent season with eight podium finishes. Chaves recently tested an Indy Lights car, and like Hawksworth, is a rookie on his way to the next level in 2013.



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Next on the list is Sage Karam, the 2010 USF2000 national champion who won his 2011 Star Mazda ride with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy. That inaugural season produced three wins, the Rookie of the Year title and 4th-place in the championship. 2012, his second season, though also with three wins, has proved somewhat more problematic in terms of plain bad luck and mechanical maladies, though he has left no doubt about his abilities to both win and race his way up through the pack from the back to the front. He drives the #88 Andretti Autosport / Comfort Revolution Mazda, and would love nothing more than to finish off the season with yet another victory. With 299 points, his ability to move ahead of De Phillippi at 303 is a source of motivation to the former and concern to the latter. Karam has also tested an Indy Lights car recently and, along with his 2012 Andretti Autosport teammate Zach Veach, seems set to move up next season.



As an interesting side note, though Veach has had a very up-and-down season with just two podiums and currently sits 10th in the championship, he has shown plenty of raw speed in his #77 Andretti Autosport / K12 / Zakosi Data Backup Mazda, and, in fact turned the fastest lap among both rookies and veterans in Indy Lights test at last weekend's second annual Chris Griffis Memorial Mazda Road to Indy Open Test on the F1 circuit at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Fifth in the championship, although, at 256 points, not within striking distance of Karam, is Finnish Racer Petri Suvanto. Like Karam, he won the USF2000 championship, albeit in 2011, and moved up to race this season in Star Mazda with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy. After a championship season, and despite driving for the championship-winning Team Pelfrey, Suvanto also had an up-and-down season in the #81 Team Pelfrey / Mazda Road to Indy Mazda, scoring just two podiums, but also finishing 13 times in the top-6. He, too, would love nothing more than to end the season with a victory and help ensure a second season of Star Mazda competition in 2013, one in which he would be the odds-on favorite.

In addition to these points battles, there are also some new, and some interesting drivers, on the Star Mazda grid this weekend. Heading the 'interesting' category is one of the top racers in the AMA World Superbike series, Larry Pegram. An occasional competitor in the Star Mazda Championship along with his racing buddy Walt Bowlin, an oral surgeon from Tampa, FL, both compete in the Expert Series, a race-within-a-race for drivers 30 and older. Pegram has won four in-class victories at the first two races of the season driving the #72 AIM Autosport Foremost Insurance Mazda.



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Among the new drivers making their debut this weekend with a view toward a 2013 campaign is Juan Camillo Acosta, 22, of Cali, Columbia, who will be joining series regular Andres Méndez at Team GDT. Acosta will be making his first Star Mazda start ever after testing with the team on the road course at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Oct. 10-11 where he set the team's fastest lap. Interestingly enough he brings with him sponsorship from two young women's clothing lines: Studio F and Ela.

Another new face is Scott Anderson, the 2011 Skip Barber National Champion and MAZDASPEED Motorsports Development scholarship recipient. The Colorado native is coming off a stellar 2012 Cooper Tires USF2000 Series presented by Mazda season that saw him net third place in the overall championship. He carried that momentum into a recent test with the multi-time Star Mazda championship winning team JDC Motorsports of Lakeville, MN, and will be driving for the team at Road Atlanta. This could be a particularly significant debut as Anderson is managed by F1 and IndyCar legend Derek Daly, who also manages the career of his son, Conor Daly; Daly is the 2010 Star Mazda champion and now racing GP3 in Europe.



Star Mazda on-track action at the Petit Le Mans weekend on Road Atlanta's 2.54-mile (4.088 km), 12-turn road course will come during Tuesday's promoter test day, with sessions at 10 am and 2:50 pm. Official practice begins with a pair of half-hour sessions, at 10:15 am and 4:15 pm Wednesday, Oct 17. Qualifying for the PEAK Performance Pole Award takes place at 12:15 pm, Thursday, Oct. 18, with all the drivers aiming to the Star Mazda track record of 1:18.328 set by Peter Dempsey in 2008. The 2012 season finale of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is scheduled for 50 minutes and will take the green light for the series' spectacular F1-style standing start at 3:45 Friday, Oct. 19.

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, November 24. 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. Follow the series at <http://www.twitter.com/starmazdaseries> <http://www.facebook.com/starmazdaseries> and live timing at <http://starmazda.com/timing>



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