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Father and Son from Pennsylvania Are Living Out Their Own Personal 'Field of Dreams' at Iowa Speedway This Father's Day Weekend

NEWTON, Iowa, June 17 — The 1989 film "Field of Dreams" revolves around baseball, not auto racing, but Sage and Jody Karam's story has so many similarities to the film that it's downright eerie.

On Saturday Jody Karam will be helping his 15-year-old son Sage participate in the USF2000 race at Iowa Speedway in Newton, which is about 113 miles from Dyersville, Iowa, where the film was shot.

The movie, which was adapted from the novel "Shoeless Joe" by W.P. Kinsella, deals with taking risks to follow dreams, following through on blind faith, destiny, going the distance and the complicated relationships between fathers and sons.

The fact that the Karams will be racing in Iowa on Father's Day weekend could be just a coincidence — or like so many things in the movie, perhaps it's not such a coincidence after all.

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Sage Karam goes into the fourth race of the series, which is presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda, as the points leader. How he got in that position and the role his father played in his story is a plot that would appeal to movie-goers as well as sports fans.

In 1999 Jody Karam and his wife, Karen, purchased a tract of land in Nazareth, Pa., across a field from the estates of racing legends Mario and Michael Andretti. Before the Karams could save enough money to build a house on the property, Jody Karam had a friend plow a rudimentary oval track into the field.

One day shortly thereafter, when Sage was just 4 years old, Jody asked his wife and son to wait for him in the field until he arrived in his pickup. After he pulled up, he wheeled a small kart out of the bed of the truck, and Sage Karam's racing career was born. The tot quickly figured out how to work the gas and brake pedals, and was soon buzzing around the makeshift dirt track at alarming speeds.

Jody Karam vividly recalls those days. "I had seen the movie 'Field of Dreams,' and I thought about it as I watched Sage practice in our own field for hours on end," he said. "The kid never got tired of driving, and he would practice until we ran out of gas.

"As he drove, there were times when I would glance over my left shoulder to Michael Andretti's home, and then to the right towards Mario's house, and I couldn't help but wonder if our family could ever race professionally like them. Hey, what red-blooded American dad wouldn't have those dreams?"

Eventually the Karams saved enough money so they could start building their own home on their property. The landscaping followed, and the dirt track cut into the Pennsylvania clay became just a memory.

But Sage Karam's racing career was just beginning, not ending. He started to compete at a local karting track, and quickly won some club championships. At 7 he made his first waves on the national karting scene, winning a national championship in the kid kart division at the finals in Las Vegas.

Thirty-five national karting championships later, Sage Karam is now competing on the first step of the Indy Racing League's 'Road to Indy' driver development program, driving a formula car powered by a Mazda engine in the USF2000 National Championship.

And who is his team owner? None other than one of those famous neighbors, Michael Andretti.

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Unlike the character Kevin Costner played in the movie, Ray Kinsella, Sage Karam already appreciates the sacrifices his parents have made for him. He doesn't have to wait for Father's Day to acknowledge the special bond he and his dad developed through countless hours on the road and at racetracks around the country.

"It's going to be very special to be in Iowa with my dad on Father's Day," he said. "He drove me to kart races all over the country in that pickup truck. I remember sleeping in that truck when we couldn't afford hotels. Karting was real tough on our money situation too, but my parents always found a way to get me to the races. I don't think my parents will ever realize how much I appreciate what they did for me."

"It's unbelievable how much we were inspired by the Andrettis, and now Sage is driving for Michael," Jody Karam said. "It's kind of magical how the whole thing unfolded. I think even Michael is amazed how Sage evolved from that little kid in the field to the driver he has become today."

The Karams admit that there have been times when it would have been easy to leave racing.

"In the movie, Ray's brother-in-law wants him to sell the farm and the ball field so he doesn't go bankrupt and lose everything," Jody Karam noted. "We've lived those times in reality. But Ray never listened to the doubters and he continued to build the field. He followed the dream. I have never had a doubt that Sage will make it in racing."

Just like the movie, it's all about going the distance.

Sage Karam will be in the red Andretti Autosport No. 8 sponsored by the Michael Fux Foundation and Comfort Revolution when the USF2000 cars take to Iowa Speedway's 0.875-mile tri-oval this weekend. He and his fellow competitors will practice at 11:30 a.m., 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Friday before qualifying is held at 9 a.m. Saturday. Their race is slated to get the green flag at 3:35 p.m. Saturday afternoon, right before qualifying for the IZOD IndyCar Series. A Star Mazda race and a Firestone Indy Lights race follow on Saturday's schedule, while Sunday is reserved for the headlining IndyCar event, the Iowa Corn Indy 250 presented by Pioneer, which starts at noon.

Live timing and scoring of the USF2000 race as well as live streaming video coverage are planned for the series' Web site at usf2000.com and indycar.com.

In addition to being part of the IRL's 'Road to Indy' ladder system, the USF2000 National Championship is part of the MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program.

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About Mazda:

On any given weekend there are more Mazdas on the road courses of America than any other brand of vehicle. MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models are all popular race cars 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, it is the most-raced production car in the world. Mazda's involvement in motorsports extends to its relationship with one of the world's premier road courses, Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Sonoma, Calif., and the Skip Barber Schools for driving and racing.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in the United States in 2010, Mazda North American Operations is headquartered in Irvine, Calif. It oversees the sales, marketing, parts business and customer service 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. Operations in Mexico are managed by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

For more information see MazdaUSA.com.

About Cooper Tire & Rubber Company:

Cooper Tire & Rubber Company is a global company that specializes in the design, manufacture, marketing and sales of passenger car and light truck tires and subsidiaries that specialize in medium truck, motorcycle and racing tires. With headquarters in Findlay, Ohio, Cooper Tire has manufacturing, sales, distribution, technical and design facilities within its family of companies located in 10 countries around the world.

For more information visit Cooper Tire's Web site at coopertire.com.

About the Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda:

Many top drivers in the IZOD IndyCar Series and endurance sports car racing honed their skills in F2000, and the Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda is an important training ground for rising stars.

Debuting in 2010, it is the revival of the very popular USF2000 series of 1990 through 2006. Sanctioned by the Indy Racing League, it is the first step on its Road to Indy ladder system, preceding Star Mazda and Firestone Indy Lights.

It is also part of the prestigious MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program. The top driver in the series' Championship class earns a scholarship package from Mazda valued at \$350,000 to help him or her advance to Star Mazda the following season.

USF2000 races are contested on road courses, street courses and ovals in order to give the series' drivers experience on all the different types of tracks they will face as they proceed up the ladder.

For more information visit USF2000.com.