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Karam Earns Pole for Round 1 Of USF2000 National Championship Saturday at St. Petersburg

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., March 27 — Saturday morning Andretti Autosport's Sage Karam set an automatic track record and earned a \$500 bonus from Cooper Tires when he won the "Cooper Tires, Don't Give Up a Thing Award" for winning the pole position for Round 1 of the Cooper Tires presents the USF2000 National Championship powered by Mazda. That race, the first half of a doubleheader, will start at 12:20 p.m. Saturday on the St. Petersburg street circuit, while the second half of the doubleheader will be at 8 a.m. Sunday.

The 15-year-old from Nazareth, Pa. took just 1:13.384 to travel over the 1.8-mile, 14-turn street circuit Saturday morning as the revitalized series made its first appearance ever on this particular course configuration set up on alongside Tampa Bay. That works out to an average speed of 88.303 miles per hour.

Karam's qualifying time was significantly faster than the 1:14.675 (86.776 mph) he ran when he set the fastest time recorded during the series' two practice sessions here yesterday in his Van Diemen Mazda, which is sponsored by the

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Michael Fux Foundation, Comfort Revolution, Bell Helmets, Alpine Stars, Walters Web and artrotundo.com.

"We ended up qualifying P1 by seven-tenths of a second," Karam said. "We definitely picked up some speed. It really gives me a strong mental game going in knowing that I'm on the front row, and I really have a good shot at winning the race. I couldn't have done it without the crew; my manager, Michael Fux; Michael Andretti; Comfort Revolution and all of our sponsors. I'm so happy with our results today!"

Although Karam threw down the gauntlet early by dominating the practice sessions on Friday, Pabst Racing Services' Martin Scuncio made a statement of his own when he qualified second, just 0.715 of a second off Karam's time.

Scuncio, of Concepcion, Chile, didn't turn any laps in the first practice session Friday and he was sixth in the second practice session that day, but on Saturday morning he earned the other spot on the front row with a 1:14.099 in the No. 6, which is sponsored by Fuerza Chile. Scuncio led the early portion of the qualifying session until Karam set his fastest lap on his 12th of 16 laps, right before a red flag waved so the track crew could tow in a car that was experiencing mechanical difficulties. Scuncio's average speed was 87.451 mph and his fastest lap came on lap 14 of the 17 he ran in the qualifying session.

Qualifying third was Patrick McKenna of Dublin, Ireland, who drives the No. 2 Van Diemen for Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing. McKenna's fastest lap was a 1:14.516 (86.961 mph). He is sponsored by Motorsport Ireland, Willsborough Transport and the Irish Sports Council.

Sharing Row 2 with McKenna for the start will be Benjamin Searcy of Tuscaloosa, Ala., who represents ZSports Midwest. His qualifying time was a 1:14.574 (86.894 mph) in the No. 20, which carries advertising for Combustion Technologies.

Rounding out the top five in qualifying was Martin Sala of Bogota, Columbia, who drives the Aero Gal/Lubricantes Gulf No. 19 prepared by JDC MotorSports. His fastest lap in qualifying was a 1:14.691 (86.757 mph).

One of his teammates, Raphael Abbate of Sao Paulo, Brazil, will be one to watch in the race. He had the second-fastest time in practice but only made five laps in the qualifying session due to mechanical difficulties. If his car can be repaired he'll start scratch and will try to come from the rear of the field this afternoon.

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The complete 13-car grid, as well as live timing and scoring, can be found on the Internet at usf2000.com.

Each driver's fastest lap during Saturday's race will determine his starting position in the second half of the doubleheader on Sunday at 8 a.m.

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 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 Monterey, 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.