



Andersen RacePark
10101 U.S. Highway 41 North
Palmetto, Fla. 34221
Tel.: (941) 723-3900
Fax: (941) 723-3992
E-mail: info@usf2000.com
Web site: usf2000.com

Media inquiries:
Linda Mansfield, Restart Communications
Cell: (317) 201-0729
E-mail: LKMRestart@gmail.com

Andretti Autosports' Karam Wins 'Cooper Tires, Don't Give Up a Thing Award' At Mazda Raceway Saturday in Earning Pole For First Half of Non-Points USF2000 Show

SALINAS, Calif., May 22 — Andretti Autosports' Sage Karam continued his perfect record in USF2000 action Saturday at Mazda Raceway by winning the pole for Sunday's first race in a non-points doubleheader for the series, which is presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda.

After leading both practice sessions on Friday, the 15-year-old from Nazareth, Pa. won the \$500 "Cooper Tires, Don't Give Up a Thing Award" after setting the fastest lap in the qualifying session with a new lap record of 1:23.959 (95.96 miles per hour) for the 2.238-mile, 11-turn road course. His flyer came on lap eight of the 13 he turned during the session, which was halted three times for red flags. Karam's Van Diemen Mazda No. 8 is sponsored by the Michael Fux Foundation, Comfort Revolution, Bell Helmets, Alpine Stars, Walters Web and artotundo.com.

Mikhail Goikhberg of St. Petersburg, Russia will line up beside Karam for the start of the first race on Sunday in his JDC MotorSports No. 10. His team made

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a change in the late stages of the qualifying session which was just what Goikhberg needed to grab the other spot on the front row with about 2 minutes to go with a lap in 1:24.436 (95.42 mph). Goikhberg's fastest lap, the 13th and final one he ran in the session, was just 0.477 of a second off Karam's pole-winning time

Andretti Autosport and JDC MotorSports will also hold down Row 2. Zach Veach of Stockdale, Ohio qualified third in the Andretti Autosport No. 7 sponsored by ADS, Retail Pro, Secure IT, Arai, OMP and Artrotundo. Martin Sala of Bogota, Columbia qualified fourth in the JDC MotorSports No. 19, which advertises Aero Gal and Lubricantes Gulf.

The top four cars compete in the series' Championship class.

Winning the pole in the National division was the fifth-place qualifier overall, David Cheng of Sammamish, Wash. He drives for PR1 Motorsports, which fielded the top three National-class cars. Cheng's time of 1:26.652 (92.98 mph) was also a new track qualifying record, which is sure to please his sponsors, Speedware Motorsports and Zerolag Communications.

Peter West of Malibu, Calif. was examined and released from the track medical care center after he crashed to bring out the last red flag of the qualifying session.

Sunday's 30-minute races are slated to start at 10:15 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. The starting lineup for the afternoon race will be established by each competitor's fastest race lap posted during the race in the morning.

The series, which is part of the Road to Indy ladder system and the MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program, will hold its first oval-track race of the year next Saturday night, May 29, at O'Reilly Raceway Park in Indianapolis, Ind.

For more information see usf2000.com.

Driver quotes follow:

Sage Karam (pole winner): "The weekend is going great! The crew is working hard to keep us on top every session. When you get the pole it's good because it means you have a great chance to win the race.

"I've never raced here before. I practiced on the iRacing simulator and watched some in-car camera footage on YouTube, and it's paying off. Now I'd say this is one of my favorite tracks. The Corkscrew is great and with all the elevation changes, it's an awesome track. It's a great opportunity to be here."

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Mikhael Goikhberg (qualified second): “It was frustrating because of the red flags. We made some changes with about 5 or 6 minutes to go and then I stepped on it. The last change the team made really helped.

“We’re going to have to work on getting fast out of the box tomorrow.”

Zach Veach (qualified third): “We started knocking down some fast laps early, and then we came in to change tire pressures. We’ve been dealing with understeer on exit, which really affected the power down. If we didn’t have that red flag at the beginning of the session I think we could have gone faster.

“We’re going to work hard to get Andretti Autosport a one-two finish in both races. That’s our goal.

“I’ve never raced here before. I practiced on iRacing. It was one of my favorite tracks when I played it on video games, and now it’s an honor for me to be racing here.”

David Cheng (National class polesitter): “The car felt good; the team did a wonderful job. We’ve been on scrubs all weekend and we put on new tires for qualifying, so our set-up had to be changed quite a bit. We had some understeer we were dealing with. Set-up is everything here.

“I just tried to get a rhythm going, but it was hard with the red flags. But then I got a good lap in.

“The Cooper tires felt really good. They don’t take huge steps; they’re consistent. Once we get our set-up tuned with the tires, we’ll be good.

“This is my first pole in F2000, so to do it this week is amazing. I did three Pacific F2000 races last year and I didn’t do too well at Mazda Raceway, so this is redemption for me.”

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.

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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.