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First Oval, First Checkered for McKenna As He Wins Round 3 of USF2000 Championship At 'Night Before the 500' Show at ORP

INDIANAPOLIS, May 29 — Ireland's Patrick McKenna has never even sat in the grandstands at an oval-track race, but that didn't keep him from winning Round 3 of the USF2000 National Championship Saturday night on O'Reilly Raceway Park's 0.686-mile oval. The event was the first race in the NOS Energy Drink "Night Before the 500" presented by the Comfort Suites of Brownsburg. It was also the first of two oval races for the series, which is presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda.

The quick learner from Dublin won the Cooper Tires "Don't Give Up a Thing" pole award by going just 0.043 of a second faster in time trials than Sage Karam did. Karam got the jump at the start and led the first 29 laps, although McKenna was always within striking distance of Karam's Andretti Autosport No. 8. After McKenna made numerous unsuccessful attempts to pass Karam on the inside, the driver from Nazareth, Pa. made a slight bobble in Turn 4 and McKenna was able to get around him in Turn 1.

Karam's car, which is sponsored by the Michael Fux Foundation and Comfort Revolution, developed an understeer after that and McKenna enjoyed a 7.377 seconds margin of victory with his winning No. 2, which is fielded by Cape Mo-

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torsports by Wayne Taylor Racing and sponsored by Motorsport Ireland and Willsborough Transport. Karam led the most laps in the 50-lap event, earning an extra point in the fight for the title in the Championship class of the series, which is part of both the Indy Racing League's Road to Indy ladder system and the MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program.

Mikhail Goikhberg of St. Petersburg, Russia started fifth in the JDC MotorSports No. 10 but passed Zach Veach of Stockdale, Ohio for third between Turns 1 and 2 with 28 laps complete to nail down the final podium position. His pass occurred two laps after the lone restart on the race on lap 26, which was necessary due to a full-course caution with 19 laps down when Joe Tovo of Glen Ellyn, Ill. and Josh Fielding of Chesterfield, England tangled. Luckily both drivers climbed out of their cockpits unharmed. Tovo, who is sponsored by a local company, Phoenix International, was leading the National class at the time, and has always wanted to drive in this event after attending it for years with his father.

In the end the top honors in the National class went to Ardie Greenamyre of AcceleRace Motorsports, who lives in Louisville, Ky. and is sponsored by Bidazzled.com, Sabelt and Sube Sorts.

The complete order of finish was McKenna, Karam, Goikhberg, Veach, Martin Scuncio, Terrick Mansur, Javier Barrales, Raphael Abbate, Greenamyre, Tovo and Fielding.

The drivers' top two laps were combined for time trials, giving McKenna a new track record for that format with a time of 44.466 seconds. Goikhberg set the fastest lap of the race, 22.381 seconds (110.344 miles per hour), which didn't break Bryan Sellers' mark of 21.016 seconds for that category.

The Tilton Hard Charger award went to Goikhberg, while Mansur earned an award from Staubli. PFC gave gift certificates to the car owners of the class winners, Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing and AcceleRace Motorsports.

The USF2000 National Championship will race again June 19 on the 0.875-mile trioval at Iowa Speedway in Newton, Iowa. That show supports an IZOD IndyCar Series headliner.

As for McKenna, he's going to attend his second oval-track race tomorrow, the Indianapolis 500. He'll be a spectator for that one, but he'll be introduced in IMS's victory lane around 11:15 a.m. to the crowd assembled for the largest single-day sporting event in the world as the winner of tonight's USF2000 race. He and all of the other USF2000 drivers are getting valuable experience in the Road to Indy ladder system that was designed to groom them for the IZOD IndyCar Series.

For more information see usf2000.com.

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Post-race quotes follow:

Patrick McKenna: “Winning my first race on an oval is brilliant! I have been staying in Indianapolis for about a month and I have a lot of friends here tonight, so it was great. I knew it was going to be a really close race, but Sage raced me fair, which I appreciate.

“After I got around Sage I was able to get a gap on him. When I was out in front it was a dream, really.

“My Cooper tires were excellent. Cooper has a very good, conservative oval-track tire for us. I wasn’t worried about my tires at all.

“I really want to thank my team, Cape Motorsports, for giving me such a good car, and my sponsors for allowing me to be here.”

Sage Karam: “It was my first race on an oval, and the first three laps when Patrick and I were running so close were the most fun I’ve had in my life.

“We raced clean. He was faster than me but I led the most laps, which gave me one point.

“I had a little bobble in Turn 4 and got loose, and he used that opportunity and got around me in Turn 1. My car developed a really bad understeer, but the whole race was a lot of fun. I want to thank Mazda, Cooper Tires and all my sponsors, as well as everyone at Andretti Autosport.”

Mikhail Goikhberg: “I think I passed Zach between Turns 1 or 2. It was a couple laps after the restart.

Ardie Greenamyre: “We were behind all weekend, and we made a change about a half-hour before we came to the grid that worked out well.

“My Cooper tires were very consistent. If you have problems with your tires in this series it’s your set-up, not the tires, because Cooper has given us very good tires.”

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

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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.

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.