



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

Media inquiries:  
Linda Mansfield, Restart Communications  
Cell: (317) 201-0729  
E-mail: [LindaKMansfield@cs.com](mailto:LindaKMansfield@cs.com)

## USF2000 Season-Opening Doubleheader Saturday and Sunday at St. Pete GP Kicks Off Series' Revitalization And New 'Road to Indy' Program

PALMETTO, Fla., March 25 — The Road to Indy starts on the streets of St. Petersburg, Fla. this weekend.

History will be made on Saturday and Sunday at the Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg when the revitalized USF2000 National Championship opens its 2010 season.

The series' qualifying session is set for 8 a.m. Saturday before the series' first two races of 2010 will be held at 12:20 p.m. Saturday and 8 a.m. Sunday.

Two practice sessions on Friday at 10 a.m. and 3:25 p.m. will set the stage for the weekend action.

Although Formula 2000 cars raced in earlier editions of the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, they haven't been on the card here in many years. The USF2000 Na-

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tional Championship has been revitalized for 2010 with the blessings of the Indy Racing League (IRL), which has deemed the series the first step on its official "Road to Indy" program. The other steps on the ladder are the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear and Firestone Indy Lights.

Indeed, this weekend's races at St. Petersburg mark one of only two times this season that all three of the IRL's developmental series will race on the same card as the headlining IZOD IndyCar Series. The other event will be at Iowa Speedway June 19-20.

They'll all also converge on Indianapolis in May. The USF2000 and Star Mazda set will be at O'Reilly Raceway Park on Saturday, May 29 while Firestone Indy Lights competes at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway on Friday, May 28 prior to the Indy 500 on Sunday, May 30.

In addition to the IRL, the USF2000 Championship has other big supporters too, like Cooper Tires and Mazda. Cooper Tires is the series' presenting sponsor and official tire supplier, while Mazda engines will power many of the cars. Mazda has also incorporated the series into its MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program. The 2010 champion of the top USF2000 class will receive a scholarship from Mazda to help him or her advance to the Star Mazda championship next year.

All sorts of stars have used F2000 cars as a stepping stone to big-league racing, including Indy 500 winners Buddy Rice, Sam Hornish Jr. and Dan Wheldon. Many drivers, team owners, engineers and mechanics have honed their skills in Formula 2000.

Whoever wins the USF2000 doubleheaders here in St. Petersburg this weekend will go into the record books for all time. And if history holds, some drivers who will compete in Saturday and Sunday's races will also go on to appear in the record books in the years to come. Some will even go down in history as Indy 500 winners.

Who are some of these drivers?

As of Thursday morning 13 hopefuls have entered this weekend's USF2000 doubleheader at St. Petersburg, the first two of 12 races in the series for 2010.

JDC Motorsports, the reigning Star Mazda team champion, leads the way with three entries. One of its cars will be driven by Mikhail Goikhberg. He's from St. Petersburg, but the city in Russia, not the one in Florida. His teammates are Raphael Abbate of Sao Paulo, Brazil, site of the IZOD IndyCar Series season opener, and Martin Sala of Bogota, Columbia.

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Three other teams have entered two drivers each. Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing will field cars for Patrick McKenna of Dublin, Ireland and British karting champ Josh Fielding of Chesterfield, England. McKenna is the reigning Motorsport Ireland Young Racing Driver of the Year.

Liberty Motorsports is counting on the talents of Terrick Mansur of Aruba and Matthew Powers of Danville, Calif. Pabst Racing Services believes it will have the edge with its drivers, Martin Scuncio of Concepcion, Chile and the only National class competitor in the race, J.R. Smart of Fitchburg, Wis.

Rounding out the field are single-car entries from AcceleRace Motorsports (Ardie Greenamyre of Louisville, Ky. driving); AIM Autosport (represented by Anthony Furfari of Woodbridge, Ontario); Andretti Autosport (with top karter and Skip Barber National driver Sage Karam from the Andrettis' hometown of Nazareth, Pa. behind the wheel) and Z Sports Midwest (which is banking on Benjamin Searcy of Tuscaloosa, Ala., who was the Rookie of the Year in another F2000 series in 2009).

All but Smart are competing in the top class, which is called the Championship class. It is open only to 2001-2010 Van Diemen chassis. This year Championship class cars may be powered by either a Zetec 2-liter engine or a Mazda MZR engine, but beginning in 2011 only the Mazda powerplant will be used in the top class.

If there are no other National class entries received Smart has already won that division here, as he's the only entry so far in that class. It is open to Van Diemens as well as any other chassis that conforms to current SCCA Formula Continental class regulations. National class cars will only use the Zetec 2-liter engine this year.

Live timing and scoring and much more information can be found on the Internet at [usf2000.com](http://usf2000.com).

Although the Road to Indy starts on the same streets that St. Petersburg residents drive on daily, another town in the area also plays an important role in developing tomorrow's superstars. The USF2000 series is administered by Andersen Promotions, which is based at Andersen RacePark in Palmetto, Fla.

***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](http://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](http://coopertire.com).