

Veach Claims Dominant First Indy Lights Win at St. Petersburg

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ST.PETERSBURG, FL, March 30, 2014 - Zach Veach had to be content with a starting position on the outside of the front row when qualifying yesterday for the St. Petersburg 100 was canceled due to inclement weather. He more than made amends this afternoon as he took the lead from polesitter Gabby Chaves at the start and was never seriously challenged in the opening round of the new Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires.

Veach, 19, from Stockdale, Ohio, began his second season in Indy Lights with Andretti Autosport precisely as he would have wished by taking advantage of a slight mistake by fellow series sophomore Chaves (Belardi Auto Racing) in Turn One and slipping into the lead. The yellow lights flashed on moments later after rookie Scott Anderson (Fan Force United), who started fifth, endured a heavy impact with the wall in Turn Three.

After six laps behind the pace car, Veach took off into the lead with the #26 RePLAY XD/The Young Marines/Ads IT Solutions/Zakosi Data Back Up Dallara and soon began to edge clear of Chaves. The Colombian-American maintained the deficit at a little less than two seconds until Lap 16, but then Veach's admirable consistency began to pay dividends and the gap increased slowly but steadily. Veach finally took the checkered flag with a 5.4610-second advantage after 39 laps.

Matthew Brabham held third place at the restart, but only for an additional two laps before he slid wide on the exit of Turn Three and brushed the wall. The impact was enough to puncture his left-rear tire. Brabham limped around to the pits where his Andretti Autosport crew quickly mounted a replacement. He rejoined in the thick of the midfield battle but remained a lap down and had to settle for a ninth-place finish.

Fellow rookie Vittorio Ghirelli (Team Moore Racing) gratefully took over in third but was unable to maintain the pace of the two leaders and soon came under increasing pressure from a string of cars headed by Alex Baron (Belardi Auto Racing) and the Schmidt Peterson Motorsports trio of Jack Harvey, Luiz Razia and Juan Piedrahita.

This quickly became the focus of the race. Harvey found a way past Baron on Lap 20, and five laps later also passed Ghirelli to move into third. The Englishman inched a little closer to Chaves as the race ran toward its conclusion but was never close enough to challenge.

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Baron's hopes of a strong finish ended on Lap 26 when his attempt to pass Ghirelli on the front straight ended with a broken front wing. Ghirelli thus held on for fourth ahead of Razia, Piedrahita and Juan Pablo Garcia in another Schmidt Peterson entry.

Contingency Awards included the Replay XD Move of the Race which was awarded to Harvey for a Turn 13 pass on Lap 25. The winning team of Andretti Autosport was presented with a customized Race Energy BCM21 charger - the official battery of the ladder series.

Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires will return to action, again in support of the Verizon IndyCar Series, with a double-header on the Barber Motorsports Park road course on April 26/27.