

Via IndyCar.com

ST. PETERSBURG, FL, March 30, 2014 - Will Power made a statement in the Verizon IndyCar Series opening race that will resound throughout the season.

Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske car, won the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg for the second time since 2010. What's amplifies that result is that the North Carolina resident has won the past three races bridging the seasons, and has led at least 16 laps in the past six races. He has registered 22 victories now in 122 Indy car starts.

But he has yet to win a series championship, and three consecutive runner-up finishes were little consolation.

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"I'm stoked to get the first win for Verizon as a series sponsor," said Power, who started fourth after earning the pole the previous four years. "That's how you want to start the season. I worked so hard in the offseason. We came into the season wanting to win a championship for (team owner) Roger (Penske). The field is so tight that I'm just happy we had a good race car.

"That's how you want to start the season. Last year was horrible, and this year it's good to get a points lead."

Power held off Ryan Hunter-Reay, the 2012 driver champion, in a 22-lap sprint following a restart to prevail by 1.9475 seconds. Hunter-Reay overtook Power's teammate, Helio Castroneves, in Turn 1 on Lap 88 for second. Castroneves, a three-time winner on the 1.8-mile, 14-turn temporary street circuit and the runner-up in 2013, placed third.

Power prevails in opener; wins third race in a row

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"We definitely hung in there," said Hunter-Reay, who matched his best finish at St. Pete. "Things were a little strange at times, not really sure where we were position-wise. But we kept pushing 110 percent, had a good little fight with Helio, got by him. Will was really good; we were matching each other at the end, lap to lap, so I was pushing as hard as I possibly could. Good points for the No. 28 DHL Honda. We're happy to start the season out this way, so I'm ready to go to Long Beach."

Scott Dixon, the reigning series champion, finished fourth in the No. 9 Target Chip Ganassi Racing car and Simon Pagenaud garnered a top five in the No. 77 Schmidt Peterson Hamilton Motorsports car. Takuma Sato, the pole sitter who led the first 26 laps of the 110-lap race under a cloudless sky, finished one place behind sixth-place Tony Kanaan.

The race was caution-free under the yellow flag flew for the No. 83 Novo Nordisk Chip Ganassi Racing car driven by Charlie Kimball sliding off course in Turn 1. On the Lap 82 single-file restart, the cars of Marco Andretti and Jack Hawksworth made contact, bringing out a second full-course caution.

Power earned the two bonus points for leading the most laps.

"Will is great on this race course, but it's a credit to the whole team and the guys back at the shop, obviously for Verizon to see us get in the winner's circle when they come over to the series is just so good for us," said Penske, who is Castroneves' race strategist. "Congratulations to Will and the whole team."

Seven different teams were represented in the top 10. Justin Wilson placed eighth in the No. 19 Dale Coyne Racing entry, while Josef Newgarden, who started 22nd but was second quick in the morning warm-up, gained 13 positions. Ryan Briscoe, returning to Chip Ganassi Racing Teams, was 10th.

Mikail Aleshin led the five drivers who were making their Verizon IndyCar Series debuts on the St. Petersburg circuit with a 12th place in the No. 7 Schmidt Peterson Motorsports car. Juan Montoya, among those competitors, gained three positions to finish 15th.

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"I think it went pretty good," said Montoya, the 1999 CART champion and 2000 Indianapolis 500 winner who went on to win in Formula One and NASCAR before returning to Indy car racing for this season with Team Penske. "We were just burning up the rear tires with the setup that we decided to run. It was just a little too aggressive. There are a few things we have to do better but I didn't feel my pace was too bad there at the end.

"It's going to be a lot of work but I am very excited."