

MAZDA MOTORSPORTS HIGHLIGHTS FROM VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY

NATHANIEL SPARKS EXTENDS BATTERY TENDER GLOBAL MAZDA MX-5 CUP PRESENTED BY BFGOODRICH TIRES POINTS LEAD IN PURSUIT OF \$200,000 MAZDA ROAD TO 24 SCHOLARSHIP. CHAD MCCUMBEE AND STEVAN MCALEER TOP MAZDA FINISHERS IN CONTINENTAL TIRE SPORTSCAR CHALLENGE AT VIR.

IRVINE, Calif. (August 29, 2016) – After a month off, the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires jumped back into the season on a freshly paved track at VIRginia International Raceway. Competitors had a lot on the line entering the home stretch of the season. Points from the weekend would be vital for those in the hunt for the \$200,000 Mazda Road to 24 scholarship entering the finale at Road Atlanta next month.

After the dust settled, Nathaniel Sparks, from Spanish Fort, Alabama, (No. 8 Sick Sideways) scored his first career MX-5 Cup win to extend his championship points lead. The margin of victory was 0.017 seconds while the margin from first to fifth was just 0.15 seconds.

Sparks summed up the race; “In the last lap, we all got bunched up under yellow and my team at Sick Sideways were one-two-three. When you have your teammates in that position, it’s always a difficult chess game to keep all three of us up there while defending your position. Coming into the last corner, we got a couple of bad runs and everyone was trying to make a mess out of it. I’m glad we made it through safely but that was one heck of a race. Going into Road Atlanta, being the points leader was not something I expected. I think working on my car keeps my head in the game, but by doing what I’ve been doing, I’ll be in good shape for the point standings.”

The Saturday race was held in the early evening with a 6:15 p.m. start time. The newly paved track proved to be a double edged sword for competitors. The grip was fantastic, but an earlier storm in the day caused slippery conditions on the track and on the grass when wheels were dropped. John Dean II (No. 16 Sick Sideways) began the race on pole, but on-track contact resulted in a drive-thru penalty before returning to the race deep in the pack. This allowed teammate Nathaniel Sparks to jump into the lead but his lead would be short lived as Dean Copeland (No. 7 Copeland Motorsports) would retake the top spot before the race was slowed by a full course caution. Dean Copeland’s clean racing allowed him to move from 16th position to grab the top spot on the podium alongside his teammate Nikko Reger (No. 01 Copeland Motorsports) who took home third. Points leader Nathaniel Sparks took home second and stretched out his points lead at the end of Saturday’s race. For Copeland Motorsports, it was its fourth win of the season, three for Nikko Reger, and one for Dean Copeland.

Just 14 hours after the checkered flag dropped on Saturday night, the green flag dropped on Sunday morning. The first half of the race saw a close battle between John Dean II, Nathaniel Sparks, Ara Malkhassian (No. 11 ALARA Racing), Mark Drennan (No. 50 Winding Road Team TFB), Drake Kemper (No. 99 Sick Sideways), Dean Copeland, and Chris Stone (No. 12 ALARA Racing). Contact between Copeland and Stone resulted in Copeland spinning into the tire barrier and a full-course caution. Action resumed, but was again slowed for a final caution resulting in a two-lap sprint to the finish. Despite leading from the start, John Dean II saw a flurry of competition challenging that lead. The final dash to the finish line saw five cars covered by 0.15 seconds, the closest “pack-finish” in MX-5 Cup history. Sparks only led once, but did so when it mattered – the finish line. It was the perfect anniversary as Sparks had joined the Sick Sideways team four years ago at this race. He has scored multiple podium finishes, and thanks to consistency, entered the weekend as the MX-5 Cup points chase.

What’s next for the MX-5 Cup?

The first ever Global Mazda MX-5 Cup Invitational will be held at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on September 9-11, 2016. This non-points race will include ten Americans and nine racers from Europe, Australia, and Japan.

The final two rounds of the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires will be held at Road Atlanta, on September 29, 2016.

Chad McCumbee and Stevan McAleer Top Mazda Finishers in Continental Tire SportsCar Challenge at VIR

The Oak Tree Grand Prix for the IMSA Continental Tire SportsCar Challenge at VIR Saturday afternoon was slated for two-hours and 30 minutes of racing action, but Mother Nature had other plans. Twenty minutes after the race begun, rain began to fall, then increased to a shredding intensity causing the race to be stopped with one hour, 55 minutes remaining. The green flag to resume racing came with only 45 minutes remaining, rendering usual strategies moot.

The top finishing Mazda was the No. 25 ModSpace Mazda MX-5 for Freedom Autosport with co-drivers Chad McCumbee and Stevan McAleer who finished eighth. It wasn't the position they had hoped for, but the defending series champions pulled to within six points of the championship lead with two races remaining this season.

Freedom Autosport's Danny Bender and Britt Casey Jr. (No. 27 TRUMPF Mazda MX-5) survived the deluge to finish ninth, while the Alara Racing No. 34 Mazda returned from a heavy crash Friday to finish 11th with co-drivers Ethan Low and Christian Szymczak.

Coming home 17th was the No. 43 Alara Racing duo of former series champs Mike LaMarra and Terry Borcheller, just ahead of the Freedom Autosport SemperFiFund No. 26 Mazda with Liam Dwyer and Andrew Carbonell.

What's next for the Continental Tire SportsCar Challenge?

The next race for the series is September 15 at Circuit of the Americas outside of Austin, Texas.

About Mazda Motorsports

Mazda Motorsports boasts the most comprehensive auto racing development ladder system of any auto manufacturer in the world. The Mazda Road to 24 program offers a number of scholarships to advance drivers up the sports car racing ladder, beginning with the Global MX-5 Cup series and culminating with the Mazda Prototype team. The Mazda Road to Indy is a similar program that includes Mazda-powered categories of USF2000, Pro Mazda and Indy Lights. In grassroots road racing, more Mazdas race on any given weekend in North America than any other manufacturer. Mazda is also the title sponsor of the renowned Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif. Follow all of the latest news at MazdaMotorsports.com, @MazdaRacing on Twitter, and MazdaMotorsports on Instagram and Facebook.

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Contact:

Dean Case, Mazda Motorsports - (310) 318-4582
mazdaspeed@MazdaUSA.com

Jade Gurss, Mazda Motorsports - (317) 517-4121
MazdaMotorsports@icloud.com

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