

## **\$200,000 ON THE LINE AT MAZDA MX-5 CUP SEASON FINALE**

### **BATTERY TENDER GLOBAL MAZDA MX-5 CUP PRESENTED BY BFGOODRICH TIRES SEASON FINALE AT ROAD ATLANTA THIS THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**

IRVINE, Calif. (September 27, 2016) – Nathaniel “Sparky” Sparks, a native of Spanish Fork, Alabama (No. 8 Sick Sideways), leads a pack of four in the hunt for the \$200,000 Mazda Road to 24 scholarship prize in the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires. A season filled with dramatic finishes and more than 35 lead changes, the 12-race North American-based professional series will culminate with a two-race finale this Thursday, September 29 during the Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta. This is the inaugural season of competition for the all-new fourth generation Mazda MX-5 Miata.

John Doonan, director of motorsports, Mazda North American Operations, said, “This season has been nothing short of exceptional and these Mazda racers have driven their hearts out. The series finale will be the culmination of the competition as well as the camaraderie these drivers have showcased throughout the season. At the beginning of this journey, Mazda set out to provide the best value in racing and we succeeded in a tremendous way. We can’t wait to congratulate these racers for the fantastic season and to award the Mazda Road to 24 scholarship prize to this year’s champion.”

The title is still up for grabs, however, with three racers trying to catch Sparks at Road Atlanta. Closest to Sparks is Ara Malkhassian from Houston, Texas (No.11 ALARA Racing), aka “Mr. MX-5 Cup”. Prior to this season Malkhassian completed a remarkable 98 of 100 races in the previous generation MX-5 Cup. Like Sparks, Ara has showcased consistency and despite only landing on the podium once this season, he is still within reach of Sparks. It will be an uphill battle for the veteran as he trails by 69 points. To win, Ara will need to have an exceptional day in Atlanta.

John Dean II (No. 16 Sick Sideways), the defending series champion, and the winningest driver in series history, has been fast but unlucky this year being involved in multiple on-track incidents. Dean has scored the most pole positions, but has yet to win a race this season. Dean will be fierce in Georgia as he has won at Road Atlanta in both 2013 and 2015.

Copeland Motorsports’ breakout star, Nikko Reger retains the Mazda never-give-up spirit and will take it to the final checkered flag. Reger joined the series after competing in the Skip Barber Racing School class last year where he secured a third place season finish. Despite scoring three wins this year, the season has been a true test for the young racer after a few unfortunate racing incidents and penalties dropped his place in the championship hunt to fourth.

Malkhassian, Dean II, and Reger have a tough road ahead but nothing is out of reach. In the last ten races, a staggering six victors have stood atop the podium this season. Sparks, who scored his first series win at VIRginia International Raceway, will continue his strategy of consistency to hold off his competitors. He will be entering Road Atlanta with huge momentum as he also secured the inaugural title of [Mazda MX-5 Cup Global Invitational Champion](#) earlier this month. Regardless of how the competition places, Sparks will likely still need a solid showing by finishing in the top 15 to grab the title and the \$200,000 scholarship.

#### **Weekend storylines:**

This Thursday will be an intense day of competition with both races taking place on the same day. Teams will have minimal time to make repairs if there are any on-track incidents in the morning race.

Three drivers will be making their MX-5 Cup series debut at Road Atlanta; Danny Steyn (No. 6 MEATHEAD Racing), Cameron Cassels (No. 46 Bodymotion Racing), and Skip Brock (No. 75 MEATHEAD Racing).

Ashton Harrison from Villa Rica, GA (No. 03 GB Racing) will be wrapping up her first season in professional motorsports at her home track. She will be racing in honor of her cousin, Amber Harrison, who recently passed.

Both John Dean II (No. 16 Sick Sideways) and Ara Malkhassian have won twice at Road Atlanta. No other current MX-5 Cup racer has won at this track.

Nikko Reger (No. 01 Copeland Motorsports), fourth in points, has three wins this season, the most of any

driver.

Drivers who have led races this year, but have not yet secured a race win, include John Dean II, Nick Bruni (No.76 MEATHEAD Racing), Drake Kemper (No.99 Sick Sideways), Ara Malkhassian, Chris Stone (No. 12 ALARA Racing), and Glenn McGee (No. 23 Sick Sideways).

Mark Drennan (No. 50 WindingRoad.com/TFB Performance) leads the Rookie-Of-The-Year chase with 353 points, over Chris Stone with 320 and Glenn McGee (No. 23 Sick Sideways) with 315. A race win is worth 61 points.

The cumulative hard charger of the season has been Justin Raphael (No. 29. McCumbee McAleer Racing), who has gained a total of 62 places during the eight races where he has competed.

Both races will be lived streamed on <http://www.ustream.tv/MazdaLIVE>

8:00 a.m. (Eastern) Thursday, September 29, 2016 – Race #1

5:45 p.m. (Eastern) Thursday, September 29, 2016 – Race #2

## ROAD ATLANTA MX-5 CUP RACE RECORDS:

Year	Winner
2007	Ara Malkhassian
2008	Eric Foss
2009	Marc Miller
2010	Lyonel Kent
2011	Ara Malkhassian (Race 1)
	Jason Saini (Race 2)
2012	Dean Copeland (Race 1)
	Stevan McAleer (Race 2)
2013	John Dean II (Race 1)
	Elliott Skeer (Race 2)
2014	Sebastian Landy (Race 1)
	Sebastian Landy (Race 2)
2015	John Dean II (Race 1)
	Patrick Gallagher (Race 2)

MX-5 Cup Fastest Qualifying Lap: 1:39.550 (91.853 mph), John Dean, 2013  
MX-5 Cup Fastest Race Lap: 1:39.654 (91.757 mph), Ara Malkhassian, 2012  
MX-5 Cup Smallest Margin of Victory: 0.197-second, Ara Malkhassian over Jason Saini, 2011

### About MX-5 Cup

The MX-5 Cup race cars start as complete MX-5 road cars from the Mazda Hiroshima, Japan factory before being transported to engineering development partner Long Road Racing in Statesville, North Carolina where they are produced into a race car. The process includes disassembly of the production car, welding and paint of a full roll cage and interior, and assembly of the race car, adding more than 250 motorsports-specific parts. Other components of the car, including the Mazda SKYACTIV 2.0 liter engine are sealed to ensure even competition and a cost-effective platform.

The Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires is the signature spec series for the Mazda Road to 24 (#MRT24), the sports car counterpart to the Mazda Road to Indy (#MRTI). On both paths, Mazda-powered champions earn a Mazda scholarship to advance their career. The MX-5 Cup champion earns a \$200,000 scholarship.

Information on the car is online at [www.mazdamotorsports.com](http://www.mazdamotorsports.com).

### 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](http://MazdaMotorsports.com), @MazdaRacing on Twitter, and MazdaMotorsports on Instagram and Facebook.

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Additional assets available online:

 **PHOTOS** ([1](#))

<https://news.mazdausa.com/2016-09-27-200-000-On-The-Line-At-Mazda-MX-5-Cup-Season-Finale>