

Power shot: Make it 2-for-2 on streets of St. Petersburg

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. – Sunshine broke through the clouds just as Grammy-award winner Jon Secada hit the final notes of the national anthem, eliciting cheers from spectators and a quiet “thank you” from event promoters and Mayor Bill Foster.

The sixth Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg was postponed 18 hours because of more than 4 inches of rain that overwhelmed the temporary street circuit and, in conjunction with lightning, created unsafe conditions for race participants and ticket holders.

But with the racing surface quickly drying in the mid-morning sun, 24 cars took the green flag without rain tires attached. Ticket holders who returned and weekday downtown workers who filled in the grandstands (gates were opened for free admission for the “Businessman’s Special”) were treated to a quite a show – 10 lead changes among eight drivers, dramatic runs in the corners, crashes and Will Power holding off Justin Wilson by 0.8244 of a second to take the checkered flag in the 100-lap event.

“There were so many things going on, I lost track,” said Wilson, who gave Dreyer & Reinbold Racing its best finish since team co-owner/driver Robbie Buhl won at Walt Disney World Speedway in the team’s IZOD IndyCar Series debut in 2000.

Team Penske’s Ryan Briscoe and Helio Castroneves filled out the top four – Briscoe, last year’s race winner, gaining 16 positions to finish third (most in race history) with team manager Tom Wurtz subbing for owner Roger Penske as race strategist and Castroneves moving up a modest one spot.

“It was an awesome day for Team Penske,” Castroneves said. “Fortunately, the team looks strong and we are on the right track. With Will winning two in row, it shows how talented he is. It was a great effort for the whole entire team. Hopefully, in Barber, we will have a similar effort and result.”

It was the second consecutive victory for Power this season in the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske car (the last to win two in a row to start a season was Sam Hornish Jr. in ’01 – Phoenix and Homestead) and the third of his IZOD IndyCar Series career.

“It’s just great,” he said. “It’s Verizon’s first year, and we’re out to win the championship. Perfect pit stop, good race. Perfect weekend – pole and a win. Can’t get much better than that.”

Power started from the pole but didn’t gain the lead for good overtaking the slowing car of E.J. Viso (shift mechanism issue) on Lap 73. Power was ahead of a Turn 1 mid-pack pileup that created a full-course yellow on Lap 74, which al-



lowed him to conserve fuel for four laps.

“I knew (Viso) had to save fuel, but he had a problem,” Wilson said. “That was close. I didn’t want to nail him from behind because I knew Wilson was coming. I picked a side and went for it.”

Wilson closed to 0.7822 of a second with his fastest lap of the race (1 minute, 3.9659 seconds) on Lap 83, but Power answered on the next trip around the 1.8-mile, 14-turn course with his fastest (1:03.9078).

“In that last stint, we were flat out,” Wilson said. “We were pushing hard. Everyone on the Dreyer & Reinbold team did a great job on that last pit stop. From that point on, I was trying to put will under some kind of pressure. I saw him get sideways a bit, but it wasn’t enough.”

Power led a field-high 50 laps to pick up the three bonus points (one for the pole, two for most laps led) and takes a 44-point advantage over Wilson, Ryan Hunter-Reay (finished 11th in the No. 37 IZOD car for Andretti Autosport) and Dario Franchitti heading to two more road/street course events before the first oval race.

Franchitti, the reigning IZOD IndyCar Series champion, jumped from 11th in the final 11 laps to finish fifth, while Alex Tagliani gave start-up team FAZZT Race team its best finish of sixth and his personal best in the series. He went the final 51 laps on a set of Firestone Firehawks in an effort to make up positions.

“Credit to Team Target today,” said Franchitti, who started 13th. “I had a great car and it was fast all day. I made a mistake and touched (Takuma) Sato early and that cost us. It was a lot of fun

out there. Great weekend and glad so many fans came back today. Tough luck and we’ll be back at Barber.”

Danica Patrick scored her best road/street course finish of seventh since Long Beach (fourth) in ’09. Raphael Matos, the third-place finisher in Brazil on March 14, checked in at eighth (advancing a career-high 15 positions) and Graham Rahal moved from the 16th starting spot to ninth in the No. 67 Dollar General car for Sarah Fisher Racing (the team’s first top 10).

“What a great finish for the GoDaddy car this weekend,” said Patrick, who started 21st. “It was a challenging race but we held on to the very end. The guys did a great job in the pits and they made all the right calls. We will definitely use this momentum heading into Barber in a couple of weeks.”

Tony Kanaan’s string of five top-five St. Pete finishes ended, but he was 10th in the No. 11 Team 7-Eleven car. Marco Andretti led early but faded to 12th and rookie Mario Romancini finished 13th in his second race in the No. 34 Conquest Racing car.

City crews, in conjunction with the operations team of the event promoter, attacked the asphalt and concrete course at 6 a.m. under a light rain in an effort to clear debris from trees and sweep away water. Everything was ready.

“Yesterday threw us a curveball, but the fans got to see four races on Sunday, and I’m so happy they came out again today,” said Kevin Savoree, co-owner and managing partner of Green Savoree Promotions. “They saw a great race.”



Barber Motorsports Park welcomes the Indy Racing League and the Grand AM Rolex Series back to The Park April 9-11, 2010! Come see all your favorite open wheel racing superstars: Danica Patrick, Helio Castroneves, Scott Dixon, Dario Franchitti, and Dan Wheldon!! Other Attractions Include: Fan Zone, Car Corral, Jumbo-Trons, Autograph Sessions, Team Merchandise, & League Merchandise.



Go to www.FreeMSA.com to the Barber Motorsports Park link to order tickets.