

Cobras win May Day Classic



Baseball champions: The 10-and-under NFWB Cobras defeated the Michigan Indians in the championship game of the USSSA May Day Classic May 3-5 at the Canton Softball Center, 7-6. Six Cobras were named to the all-tournament team - Andy Hoffenbacher, Jordan Lieberman, Brett Lubanski, Andrew Middlebrooks, Aaron Roberts and Mark Stanko. Lubanski earned the tournament MVP award. The team members are (kneeling, left to right) Todd Szlamkowicz, Hoffenbacher, Mark Feldman, Lieberman, Stanko, Jake Moss; (middle row) Derek Thiel, Peter Hartfelder, Eric Glanz, Lubanski, Roberts, Middlebrooks; (back row) Harry Glanz, Paul Thiel, Tim Roberts, Terry Lieberman and manager Paul Lubanski.

Area company powers Penske to Indy victory

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Before Roger Penske's team returned to the Indianapolis 500 last year, Penske's teams had won 10 titles. But Penske's 10 previous champions never matched what this year's champ did.

On Sunday, Helio Castroneves became the first back-to-back winner at Indy since Al Unser Sr. in 1970-71 when he was driving for Parnelli Jones. Ironically, Unser later drove for Penske; so did his brother, Bobby, and his son, Al Jr. Castroneves' two titles give Penske's teams 12 victories at Indy in 27 appearances.

These last two wins came with engines designed by Ilmor Engineering Inc., which is located in Plymouth. Penske owns 25 percent of Ilmor.

Castroneves' win last year took the racing world by surprise. This year's win was surrounded by controversy.

Castroneves won on Sunday under a caution after Paul Tracy's attempt to pass him was ruled to have occurred after the caution had been issued.

Tracy and his Team Green protested the ruling, both after the race and again on Monday, but to no avail.

Although the end result was pleasing to both Penske Racing Team president Tim Cindric and those at Ilmor, it wasn't the power of the engine that proved decisive. Indeed, Castroneves was only 13th in qualifying.

"We had six cars there," said Ilmor representative Ian Hawkins, "but the cold weather affected them during qualifying."

What the Penske team, with its Ilmor engine, did better than its competitors was gauge its fuel. Cindric opted not to refuel after lap 168, gambling there would be another caution in that time. Gas mileage for these cars doubles when running under a caution.

Cindric's decision paid off; Castroneves finished the race with less than a gallon left in his tank.

Castroneves' ability to conserve fuel and the engine itself

were also factors in the outcome. "It really came down to fuel economy," said Hawkins.

Castroneves averaged 166.6799 mph. His victory gave him the overall lead in the IRL driver's standings; Penske teammates Gil de Ferran and Felipe Giaffone are second and fourth, respectively.

Last year, Castroneves drove an Ilmor-designed Oldsmobile engine. Hawkins called this year's engine, a Chevrolet, "basically the same power plant." Both are loosely based on the Aurora V8.

"We've been working on this for the last year," said Hawkins. "It's been under constant development, for both mileage and power."

Penske's, and Ilmor's, racing interests go well beyond the IRL. They also sponsor the Mercedes/McLaren team in Formula One, which finished first at the Monaco Grand Prix Sunday.

"It was quite a weekend," Hawkins said, laughing. "We're still high on Indy. We've got a lot of races left, but you've got to celebrate (the wins) when you get them, because you don't know when your next one will come."

Until last year, it wasn't certain if a Penske team would get another win at Indy, simply because it wasn't racing there. The Penske Racing Team was part of the CART (Championship Auto Racing Teams) circuit; from 1996 through 2000, it did not race at Indy.

Penske, and Ilmor — which relocated to Plymouth from offices at Detroit Diesel in Redford in 1998 — returned to Indy last year, still racing for CART.

Because of a court ruling that limits the advertising of tobacco companies in sports, Marlboro, Penske's top sponsor, could not have its name on his car at last year's Indy 500 because it was an IRL (Indy Racing League) race and Penske was associated with CART (tobacco companies can advertise/sponsor in a circuit or the other, but not both).

The Penske Racing Team circumvented that by leaving CART and joining the IRL this year. The move looks like a winner, for all those involved with Penske and Ilmor.

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