

SPORTS



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A3

INDIANAPOLIS 500 | POLE QUALIFYING

CASTRONEVES CLIMBS BACK ON TOP

LOOKING GOOD: Helio Castroneves flashes a fist pump after clinching his third Indianapolis 500 pole. He has won the race twice.



TOM STRATTMAN/AP

■ Helio Castroneves' late gamble paid dividends as he won the Indianapolis 500 pole for the third time, less than a month after being acquitted of charges of tax evasion in Miami.

From Miami Herald Wire Services

INDIANAPOLIS — A gleeful Helio Castroneves was back on top of the racing world Saturday, winning the pole for the Indianapolis 500.

On a cool, windy Saturday full of strategic guesses on when to qualify and when to stay off the track, Castroneves — back in racing less than a month after being acquitted of charges of tax evasion in Miami — took a big gamble, voiding a fast qualifying effort from earlier in the day and knocking Penske Racing teammate Ryan Briscoe off the pole.

His four-lap average of 224.864 mph on the 2.5-mile oval came with less than two hours remaining in the six-hour opening round of time trials for the May 24 race.

Briscoe and several other challengers, including former Indy winner Scott Dixon, Key Biscayne resident Tony Kanaan, Marco Andretti and Graham Rahal, then took shots at knocking Castroneves off the top spot without success.

"This place is magic," said Castroneves, a two-time Indy 500

•TURN TO INDY 500, 8D

INDY 500 QUALIFYING MPH

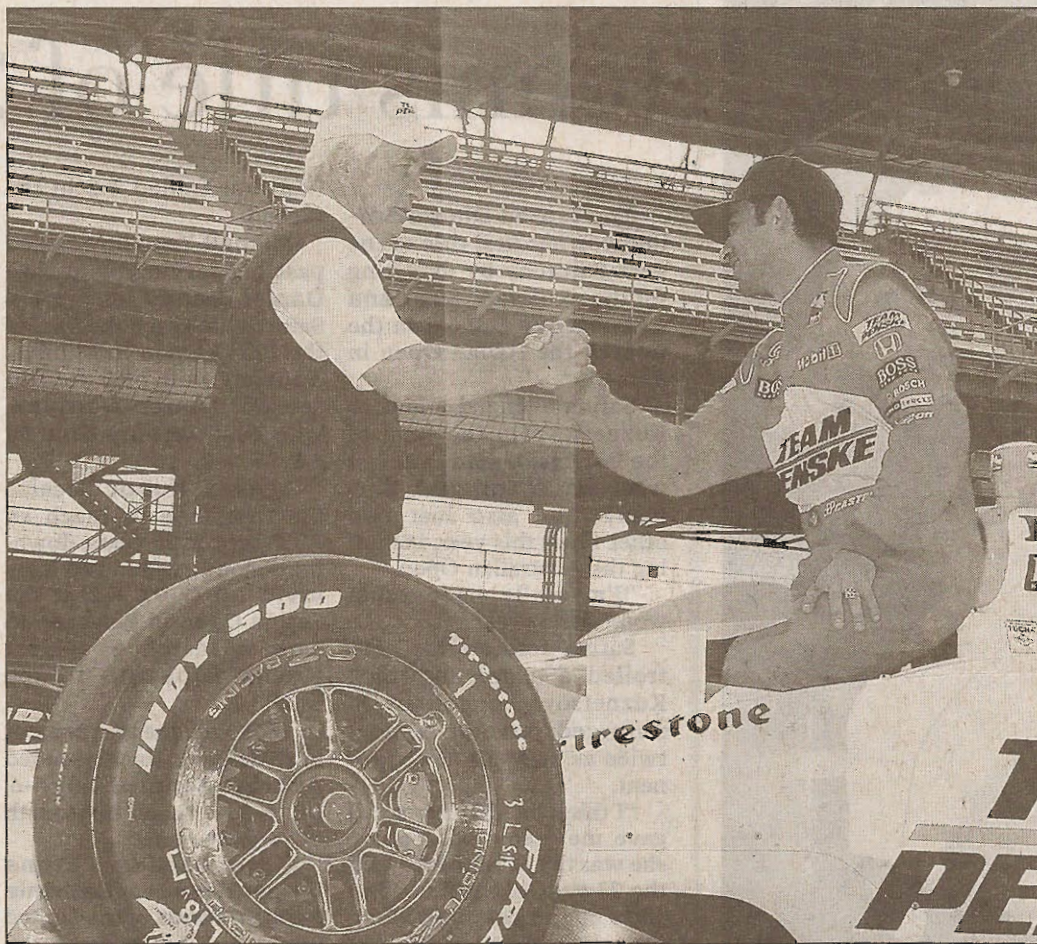
1. Helio Castroneves	224.864
2. Ryan Briscoe	224.083
3. Dario Franchitti	224.010
4. Graham Rahal	223.954
5. Scott Dixon	223.867

FIRST-DAY POLE QUALIFYING RESULTS, 8D

■ SUNDAY'S QUALIFYING: SECOND-DAY (POSITIONS 12-22), NOON, VERSUS
 ■ 8D: MARTIN WINS AT DARLINGTON; MAYFIELD FIRST TO FAIL DRUG TEST

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JONATHAN FERREY/GETTY IMAGES

NICE WORK: Roger Penske, left, congratulates Miami resident Helio Castroneves, who gave Penske his 15th Indianapolis 500 pole as a car owner.

Windy day wreaks havoc on the track

•INDY 500, FROM 1D

champion and Miami resident. "It's just amazing. . . . We just had to keep working through the weather, working through the day. Ryan and I were really strong. When he went out there at the end, I was thinking I didn't really want to have to go out [again]. [Saturday] was about finding the edge. The first attempt was a little easy. That means you're not going fast enough. We worked a little bit and made it a little bit tougher."

Castroneves was asked if this was even more special because of the uncertainty he faced at the trial in Miami.

"Being here is already being special," Castroneves said. "Many times during the trial I was thinking about it. I was just wishing I would be here."

Castroneves, who won poles here in 2003 and 2007, gave boss Roger Penske a record 15th Indy pole. But Penske was just happy for the driver, who he strongly supported throughout his six-month legal ordeal.

"There's no question the emotion around him," Penske said. "He's one of the most electric guys in racing and everybody likes him. And the good news is he puts the numbers on the board. He doesn't say it, he does it

with his foot."

Penske also was proud of Briscoe, who made the decision to withdraw a 224.131 run from earlier in the day and try to take the pole from Castroneves in the final 10 minutes of the session.

"That was a call that Ryan made," Penske said. "He wanted to go for it. I've got enough confidence in him that he isn't going to make a mistake out there."

Briscoe, who qualified a little slower on the second attempt at 224.083, said he might have had a better chance to knock his teammate off the pole if the decision had been made sooner.

"When you get down to it, it's all about timing," the Australian driver said. "We really wanted to do another practice run and then everybody got in (the qualifying) line and we had to get in line. We ran out of time. From that standpoint, it's unfortunate, knowing you've got the equipment to get the pole."

It was a big day for Penske, who also placed Will Power, his third driver, ninth among the 11 drivers who locked up starting spots in the 33-car race field.

"Three in nine is pretty good," said Penske, who also has a record 14 Indy wins. "We've just got to be sure we've got one of those in the Winner's Circle on race day."

With wind gusts up to 25 mph making the famed Brickyard oval more treacherous than usual and each entry allowed up to three qualifying attempts, many of the teams were trying to out-guess the gusts.

Dario Franchitti, the 2007 Indy winner, waited until after an early flurry of qualifiers in the windiest part of the day and posted a speed of 224.010 that was good enough for third on the grid.

"That wind is horrible," said the Scot, who chose to sit on that speed and not make another try. "It was very, very challenging conditions."

Rahal, a son of 1986 Indy winner Bobby Rahal, flirted with the front row, but ended up fourth at 223.954.

Rahal was followed by Dixon at 223.867, Kanaan at 223.612, Mario Moraes at 223.331, Andretti at 223.114, Power at 223.028, Danica Patrick at 222.882 and Alex Lloyd, who barely made it into the first-day lineup in the last five minutes at 222.622, bumping Hideki Mutoh's 222.470.

The next 11 spots in the lineup will be filled during qualifying Sunday. The final 11 positions will be filled next Saturday, with next Sunday reserved for drivers attempting to bump the slowest qualifiers out of the field.