

## **RAHAL BECOMES YOUNGEST POLE WINNER IN INDYCAR SERIES HISTORY**

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., (Saturday, April 4, 2009) – If Graham Rahal could race on the streets of St. Petersburg, Fla., every weekend, who knows how many records he could set. Last year, he became the youngest race winner in major open-wheel history when he took the checkered flag in the Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Saturday he became the youngest pole winner in series history when he survived the IndyCar Series' three-round, knockout qualification format to win his first career pole in his return to the circuit.

He lapped the 14-turn, 1.8-mile course in 1 minute, 2.4110 seconds, 103.828 mph

At 20 years, 90 days, Rahal took the record from Marco Andretti, who won the pole last June at Milwaukee at the age of 21 years, 79 days.

Rahal survived the first two knockout rounds of PEAK Performance Pole Qualifying to advance to the Firestone Fast Six. The Newman/Haas/Lanigan Racing driver entered the session with the third-quickest time and came out of the 10-minute shootout on top.

The qualifying session marked the first time that IndyCar Series teams have used Firestone's new alternate tires. Known as "reds" because of their red sidewall, the tires have been introduced for the seven road/street course races on the 2009 schedule to offer improved grip at the expense of some durability. Teams have three sets to use at their discretion during practice, qualifying and the race with the stipulation that one unused set be used for at least two laps during the race. Rahal used alternates early during qualifying and then hung on as others used them late in the session.

"We didn't really know what to expect because we had the primary tires on there while a couple of guys had the alternates (in the Firestone Fast Six)," Rahal said. "The alternates were consistently faster today. I didn't really know what to think.

"It's an exciting day for me and a great day for the whole McDonald's team. It's exciting to be here. I obviously love St. Pete. It was good to me last year, and it's great to be on the pole this year."

Justin Wilson will start second next to Rahal on the front row. The Dale Coyne Racing driver turned in that team's best ever qualifying effort.

Tony Kanaan and Ryan Briscoe will start in Row 2. Dario Franchitti, competing in his first IndyCar Series points event since winning the championship in 2007, qualified fifth. He will share Row 3 with Will Power.

Also on Saturday, rookie Junior Strous became the seventh driver to win his first Firestone Indy Lights race, taking the checkered flag in the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg Race 1 by .7205 of a second ahead of rookie Jonathan Summerton.

Strous started second and passed pole sitter J.R. Hildebrand on Lap 23 following a restart. Strous led the final 18 laps to take the win.

Hildebrand finished third, and Ana Beatriz finished fourth.

The 27 Firestone Indy Lights drivers also qualified for the second race of the weekend doubleheader. Strous will start second in that race. Sebastian Saavedra won the pole.