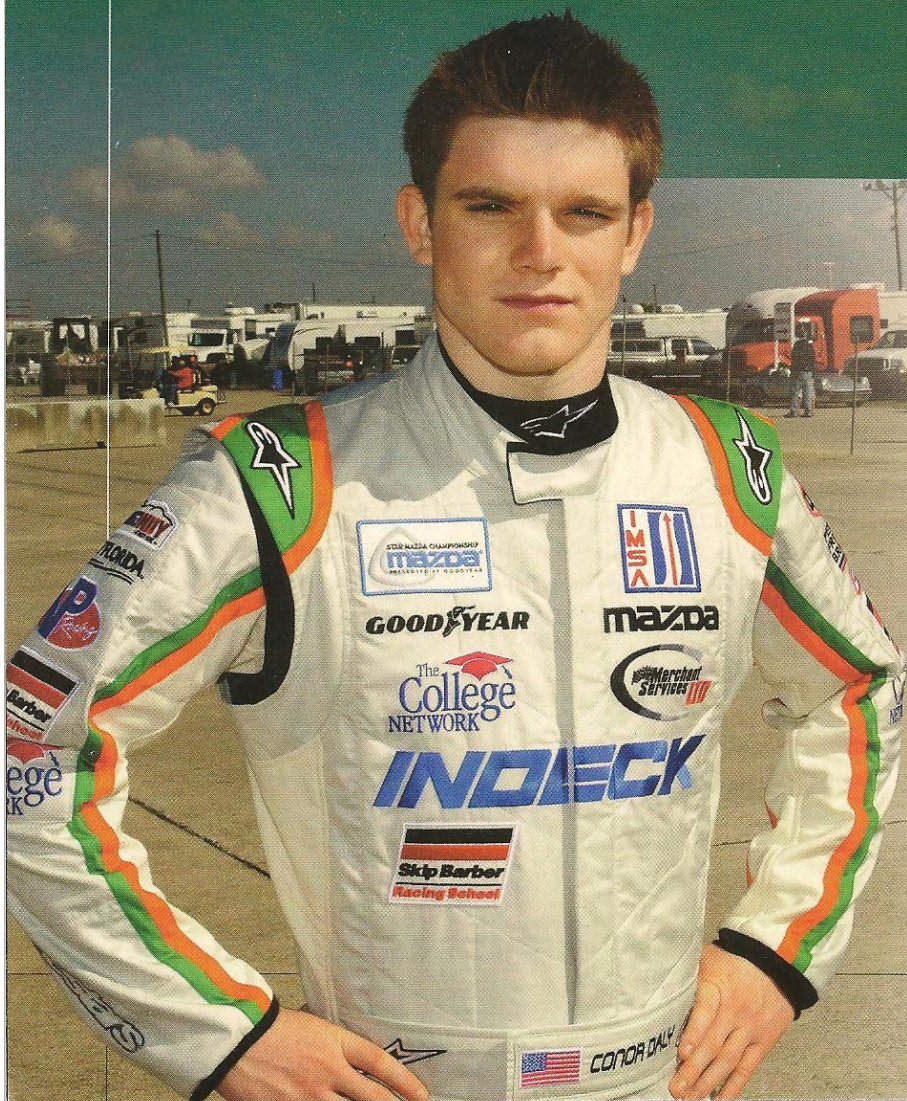


Trackside

The Son ALSO RACES

Conor Daly, Derek's son, is on a fast path to open-wheel success...at Indy or in F1

BY TIM TUTTLE » PHOTOS BY AL MERION PADRON



Conor Daly has emerged as a shining star among top driving prospects on North American and European stages in the past three seasons, highlighted by his championship in the 2010 Star Mazda series presented by Goodyear. It's supposed to get tougher climbing the development ladder, but the 18-year-old Daly has maintained a level of excellence at each rung .

By the end of August, Daly had racked up seven wins and 11 podium finishes in the 14-race Star Mazda series, while also capturing nine pole positions for his Florida-based Juncos Racing team, which he joined in January.

This is Daly's second season in the series. He had one victory and was third in the championship in 2009 with Anderson Racing.



"I had a good year [with Anderson] and learned a lot racing against a lot of good guys," Daly recalled. "It was the right move going to Juncos Racing. It all came together with my experience in the series and driving for Juncos. It's been a little surprising, there are still a lot of really good guys we're racing against. But I'm not really surprised after I look back at how hard we're working to win."

Daly's victories this season include flag-to-flag wins at O'Reilly Raceway Park at Indianapolis and Iowa Speedway, the two ovals on the Star Mazda schedule. He's also won at St. Petersburg, Florida; Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca; Autobahn Country Club in Joliet, Illinois; and Road America at Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin.

"The win that was the most satisfying of my career was at O'Reilly," Daly said. "It was the night before the [Indy] 500 and a ton of my friends and family were there."

The son of retired Formula 1, Indy car and sports car driver Derek Daly, Conor was born and still lives in Noblesville, just north of Indianapolis. His mom, Beth, is from and lives in Indiana. Conor doesn't have a trace of the brogue of his Irish father.

"I was born here," Daly said. "I never got the Irish accent."

Derek Daly stopped driving competitively about the time Conor was born and he never pushed his son toward racing.

"Not at all," Conor said. "I played every other sport and he supported me in everything I did. I played

soccer, basketball, football and lacrosse at different times. My last year was in the eighth grade, playing lacrosse. After that, it was full on toward racing."

Daly was 10 when he was invited by a cousin to go to a karting track.

"As soon as I saw it, I wanted to get into it," Daly said. "It was kind of love at first sight."

Daly embarked on a karting career, winning an Indiana state championship in 2004 at age 12 and then championships in World Karting Association and TaG Senior Stars of Karting. He moved into cars, taking the Bertil Ross School in late 2006.

Daly won a Skip Barber Series regional race in 2007 and captured the Mazda Skip Barber National Championship in 2008, earning a \$350,000

prize that put him into Star Mazda in 2009. Daly also won five straight races in Canadian Formula Ford 1600 in 2008.

Late in 2008, Daly was awarded the Walter Hayes Trophy at Silverstone, England, one of the most prestigious Formula Ford events in the world. Daly won his heat, started on the second row and drove to victory in extremely wet and cold conditions.

"Being able to go over to England and win the Hayes Trophy meant a lot to me and a lot to my supporters," Daly said. "It proved we could win and Americans could win in Europe."

Daly tested an Indy Lights car this summer and had a GP3 test scheduled for September at Silverstone. He'll leave Star Mazda, which awards

\$100,000 to its champion, following this year, but hasn't decided where he'll race next year. It will be a decision made by him and father Derek, who is Conor's manager.

"Obviously, I've been around the block and my role is simply to put him into an environment where he's surrounded by the right people," Derek said. "Then, I step back."

Eventually, Daly wants to drive in F1 and IndyCar.

"My goal is to make it as a professional driver," he said. "I just want to make money doing what I love. Growing up in Indy, I've never missed an Indy 500 in my life and it's a dream of mine to drive in it. But it's also a dream to represent America on the top step of the podium in Formula 1. I'd like to do both."