

Airton Dare Defends Brazilian Reputation at Indy

Contributed by Phillip Wagner
Monday, 29 May 2006

The news for fans of Brazil from the 90th running of the Indianapolis 500, like the day for several Brazilian drivers, is not what we might have hoped for. The Brazilian dominance we had seen since 2001 was not evident. But to be fair, Tony Kanaan, Vitor Meira, Felipe Giaffone and Airton Dare all posted good performances.

Kanaan solidified the perception that he may be one of the best Formula Indy drivers ever to not yet win "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing," and Meira further solidified his own standing, as a Brazilian who has already 'arrived.'

Fan favorite Hélio 'Spiderman' Castroneves was one of three former Indianapolis 500 champions taken out of the race as the result of an accident. That happened when Buddy Rice, another former Indy 500 champ, made contact with him. Rice, by his own admission, didn't see Hélio coming up alongside.

Hélio led after the first lap - as he did in 2003 when his teammate, Brazilian Gil de Ferran, won. Ironically, Helio's teammate this year, Sam Hornish from Ohio, also won. The fact that Kanaan led at one point is likewise noteworthy. Tony has had a lead in all five of the Indy 500s he has competed in.

We really shouldn't be feeling too disappointed with the lack of Brazilian dominance in 2006. Hélio, whom we all thought would compete for the win, did have an untimely exit. But the Brazilians - in reality - pretty much ended up where they started.

Meira started 6th and finished 10th, and a top-10 finish is always good. Kanaan and Giaffone ended up exactly as they started, in 5th and 21st place respectively. Medeiros started 33rd and finished 31st, mechanical problems sidelined him early.

Hélio started 2nd and finished 25th, but Airton Dare started 29th and finished 18th. For Airton that's hardly the whole story. In his only four appearances since 2001 Dare has now averaged a starting position at Indianapolis of 30.5, but finished on average at a remarkable 15.75. When will the sponsors catch on? This guy deserves a better ride!

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