



ROTAX MAX CHALLENGE GRAND FINALS 2007 Monday, November 26 2007

STORY

There's just something about a racetrack in the morning. It's calm, relatively quiet. People are milling about, talking with friends, making plans for the day. Here and there the clinking of wrenches is heard as well as the occasional short burst of exhaust as an engine is fired up. This relative calm is not as it would seem, however. It's more like water at 99 degrees, just about to boil. For under the surface, there's an excitement running through the pits. An anticipation for an event many have been waiting and preparing for a full year. But this is not just any event; this is the ROTAX MAX Grand Finals, an invitation-only event that brings together over 200 of the top kart racers from around the world.

To get invited to the Grand Finals, a driver must be a top-finisher in his or her's national championship or qualify through a series like the ROTAX MAX Euro Challenge. As such, the level of competition is extremely high and it is not unusual to see some very talented drivers not make it through to the finals. This year is no exception and at the end of the Second Chance races on Thursday there were a lot of dejected faces throughout the paddock as crews were tearing down their karts so they could be returned to the Intrepid and CRG tents.

At the other end of the emotion spectrum were the drivers who had safely made it to the finals through their performances in the heat races. Sitting atop their respective classes were Takamoto Katsuta from Japan (Junior MAX), Mike Simpson from the UK (MAX) and Pier-Luc Ouellette of Canada (DD2).

By many accounts, Pier-Luc's performance this year has been astonishing. Not only was he the fastest qualifier in DD2, he has won all three of his heats by a big margin against a field that includes former ROTAX MAX Grand Finals Champions Ben George (DD2 2006) and Kenneth Hildebrand (Junior MAX 2005). Sharing the front row with Ouellette in the pre-final will be South Africa's Kyle Lawrence. Kyle has also looked very impressive this week and is looking to put South Africa back atop the winner's rostrum.

Leading the charge in turn on in the MAX pre-final is Michael Simpson from the UK. To his right will be fellow countryman Ben Cooper. Could this be the year that Great

Britain wins their first Grand Final championship? Or will the defending champion, Ricardo Romkema of Holland, repeat his success from Portugal?

Junior MAX sees Takamoto Katsuta from Japan on pole for the pre-final. Takamoto has been looking strong all week as well and has impressed many with his fluid driving style. Sharing the front row with Katsuta is another talented driver from the Netherlands, Mats Van Den Brand. Starting seventeenth in Junior MAX is Austria's Daniel Schellnegger. Daniel has been on the podium the last two years in the Junior category. If he is to make it back "on the box" this year, he will certainly have to work for it in this tight field.

As Friday comes to a close, there's no way we can be sure what the final results will be come Saturday evening. The only thing that is for sure is that the racing will be extremely close and very fun to watch.