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Krohn Finishes Fifth In FIL Season Opener

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., March 28—Anders Krohn got the 2011 Firestone Indy Lights season off to a solid start by finishing fifth in the season opener Sunday. The 45-lap race was part of the Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, which is run on a street course near that Florida city's harbor.

Krohn, a native of Stavanger, Norway who now lives in Houston, drives the Belardi Auto Racing No. 9 sponsored by Liberty Engineering, Logi Trans Offshore Express, Trallfa, PM International Suppliers, Allied Interior Products, ZAT Graphics, Eagles Canyon Raceway, OMP and Bell Helmets.

Krohn served notice that both he and his Brownsburg, Ind.-based team had done their homework in the off-season when he topped both official practice sessions on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. His fastest lap in practice took just 1:09.1135 (95.135 miles per hour) for the 1.8-mile, 14-turn street course.

He was just 0.2753 seconds off that pace in Sunoco Pole Qualifying Saturday afternoon to earn the eighth starting spot for Sunday's race. The initial start of the race was wild. There was contact between the driver who started fourth, Stefan Wilson, and the driver who started right beside Krohn, Victor Garcia. Krohn took evasive action and somehow missed becoming involved. There was no caution flag but Krohn did drop one spot, to ninth place, when he was forced to play defense.

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After things settled down a bit Krohn zeroed in on the driver ahead of him in eighth, James Winslow, and passed him with a nifty move with four laps down to get his original starting spot back. That put him right behind Joel Miller, whom he followed for the next eight laps. That was difficult because Miller's car was leaking oil, which made the track slippery and Krohn's visibility low due to oil on his visor.

Krohn got around Miller for seventh in Turn 4 with 13 laps down and then set his sights on David Ostella in sixth, but by that time there was already an 8-second margin between fourth and fifth place, as the field was getting strung out.

For the majority of the race Krohn was engaged in the best battle of the event. It waged between the drivers who were running fifth through eighth: Gustavo Yacaman, Ostella, Krohn and Miller. Krohn was 0.7124 of a second behind Ostella with 37 laps down when Yacaman plowed into the tire barriers off the exit of Turn 2, pausing the action for the first time since the race started some 43 minutes earlier. Krohn escaped another bullet when he wasn't involved in that incident either.

Yacaman's misfortune put Krohn into sixth place, and the assignment was to try to pass Ostella while holding off Miller on the restart on lap 41. That restart was even wilder than the initial start, as Miller hit a wall to bring out another full-course caution almost immediately.

The green waved again with only two laps remaining with Krohn still in sixth place. The polesitter, Esteban Guerrieri, who had been in second place, missed a braking point a bit on the restart and dropped to sixth, which vaulted Krohn to fifth when the checkered waved on lap 45. Krohn crossed the finish line just 0.5670 of a second behind fourth place.

Krohn was tenth in his first Firestone Indy Lights race, which occurred last July at Watkins Glen, N.Y., and he was fifth in his second event ever in the series on Sunday. Sunday's top five were Josef Newgarden, Conor Daly, Peter Dempsey, Ostella and Krohn.

Krohn set the ninth-fastest lap of the race with a 1:09.6340 (93.058 mph) on lap seven.

The next race is only 13 days away when the series appears at Barber Motorsports Park in Leeds, Ala., near Birmingham, on Sunday, April 10. That race will be televised live on VERSUS at noon Eastern time. Live coverage is also scheduled for indycar.com. Krohn had an excellent test at that track during the off-season.

Krohn's Web site is located at AndersKrohn.com, while his team's Web site is at BelardiAutoRacing.com.

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Krohn's post-race quote follows:

"I think we surprised a lot of people when we rolled it off the trailer and we were P1 in both practice sessions, but that was just a testament to all the work the Belardi Auto Racing guys did.

"We had a couple of minor issues with the car in qualifying and we ended up in the eighth starting position. We were disappointed with that considering our pace in practice. The bad news was that we lost the pole, but the good news is that we learned something.

"At the start of the race there was a big scramble, and a lot of cars made contact in turns one, two and three. I think I lost one position there, but then after that we just tried to work our way up. Joel Miller's car was leaking oil so it was very hard for me when I was behind him, both because of low grip and low visibility. Eventually I got by him going into Turn 4.

"I had a very close call when Yacaman crashed. He and Ostella were battling it out right in front of me. We were lucky that we weren't involved too.

"I managed to gain a couple more spots due to attrition, so all in all I think we have to be really happy with fifth.

"We had some issues with the car during the race too; we didn't have traction to come off the corners as well as we would have liked, but again, we learned valuable lessons for the next race and the rest of the season.

"It wasn't a bad result for us; we have to remember that this was Belardi Auto Racing's first Firestone Indy Lights weekend ever, and only my second Firestone Indy Lights race ever. It showed that there's a lot of potential for us to go forward, and hopefully we can do even better the next time out."