

An interview with:

CRISTIANO DA MATTA

T.E. McHALE: Good afternoon to everyone. Welcome to the CART media teleconference. Thanks to those of you who took the time to join us today. Our guest this afternoon is driver Cristiano Da Matta of *Newman/Haas Racing* who capped an extremely successful first season with the team by claiming a \$1 million victory in Sunday's *Marlboro 500* presented by *Toyota* at *California Speedway*.

Good afternoon, *Cristiano*, congratulations. Thanks for being with us today.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Thanks for the opportunity. Hello to everybody.

T.E. McHALE: *Cristiano*, the driver of the No. 6 *Texaco/Havoline Kmart Toyota Lola* drove to his fourth career *FedEx Championship Series* victory Sunday and his second in a row. He became the second consecutive *Newman/Haas* driver to claim the \$1 million season-ending prize by winning the season finale, following teammate *Christian Fittipaldi's* 2000 triumph in the same event.

Cristiano's other victories came in the season opener at *Monterrey, Mexico* and last week at *Surfers Paradise, Australia*. He also added podium finishes of second at *Long Beach* and third at *Rockingham, England*, and scored championship points in 13 of 20 starts with ten top seven finishes.

Cristiano finished fifth in the *FedEx Championship Series* championship with 140 points and will be honored along with all of the Top 10 finishers, topped by champion *Gil de Ferran* of *Marlboro Team Penske*, during this evenings *FedEx Championship Series* awards ceremonies at the *Venetian Hotel* in *Las Vegas*.

With that, we will open it up to questions for *Cristiano*.

Q. I know it was kind of hectic with the race being cut down twice. What was your reaction to that?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Well, I wasn't very surprised first because we had a lot of rain in the morning. When we started the race, we knew it was getting dark very early in *California*. We

thought, Well, we have this delay now, and it's very likely we might have some part of the race cut. You never know how much, you know.

I wasn't very surprised. It didn't upset us at all. Some people complain about it, which is always the way it goes. Sometimes you play one strategy, it's going to upset you a little bit. Sometimes it's not going to affect you at all.

My car was good, no matter what, with a short race or long race. I ran up front the whole day. I think me and *Papis*, we were the two guys that led more laps. We were the only guys that I can say right now that led the race. We were on the top five, top six all the time, all day long.

You can see that shortening the race didn't change the results a lot.

Q. How sure were you that you at the last caution had beat *Max* across the line?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: I knew I had beat *Max* across the line. There's another thing on *CART*. We don't race to the line, right? The result comes when the yellow comes out. I was ahead of *Max* when the yellow comes out because the yellow came before the line. In the line, I was still ahead. But we weren't racing to the line.

Q. In your wildest dreams, did you think you'd have this good of a season with a brand-new team this year?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Yeah, I was expecting a very good season. I was expecting a little bit more consistent than we were. I think three wins in a season is very good. That's the kind of wins we need to get to fight for the championship.

But we didn't get as good a results like on the middle of the season. Especially the month of July and August we were very weak. I was expecting to be a little bit more consistent. I was expecting to be fighting for the championship all the way to the end.

I'm very happy with my season. I'm very happy with my team. I'm very happy with my engine, with my chassis, with everything.

But now for a second year together, the good thing is we know our weak points and we're going to work on them a lot on the off-season. So that helps a lot.

Q. Is that an admission that you're going

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to be back with *Newman/Haas* next year?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Yeah, yeah. We were all set for the next two years. I had the contract since the beginning of last year. Everything is all set.

Q. You've won a road course, street course and an oval. That's pretty championship running.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Yeah, it's something that I can't say if it's coincidence or not, but it's something that makes you feel very good. There's some tracks that you just feel happier driving around. For example, I usually prefer road courses and street courses. But my first win ever came on an short oval. So sometimes you're confused in what you drive better, what you do better, if it's oval, if it's road course, if it's super speedway.

It's good to know that I can do well and I can win in all of them. Even though I have four wins in *CART* right now, each win I got in a different kind of track.

That's how you have to be if you want to fight for the championship. This is good. It makes me very happy about my driving, about my team, my setup, that we can perform on any kind of track. It's something that for many people doesn't mean a lot. For the drivers and the teams, it means a lot.

Q. The new wing package that they ran on Sunday at *Fontana* really got the whole field competitive. That must have been an amazing amount of energy to expend to keep the competition up for that long?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: It's something considering the speeds we were running and how close we were running, it's very tiring. You can't lose attention for not even a hundredth of a second because something very bad can happen because of the speeds and everything.

Most of the drivers don't like this kind of competition because it kind of put all the bad cars and the good cars about in the same level because the drafts helps so much.

As drivers, I think everybody would like to see something like a wing package that if you have a good car in your hands, you can pull away. If you have a bad car in your hands, you're going to drop back. That's not what happens today. Like today, whatever car you have, because the drafting is so big, you can still be there for the end of the race and maybe get a good result.

Is very good I think for the race. I mean, the race was a spectacular race. It's just I think

we're running a little too close for the speeds we were running. That's it.

Q. This bicycle business with you and *Tony*, it's getting humorous. Have you decided what to get him? Maybe you should buy him a Schwinn.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Yesterday I talked to *Tony* first time after the race. First thing I had to ask him, "What are you saying to other people in the press that I owe you \$100,000?" I never said that (laughter).

It was good because *Sergio* was there, and *Mears*, and they both said *Tony* had this bet with them, not with me. I said *Tony* is trying to get money out of whoever wins.

Q. Go buy him a Timex watch.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Exactly (laughter). Now I owe him like two bicycles. Because of the *Australia* win, I haven't had time to buy him a bicycle. And now *Fontana*.

He said, I don't need two bicycles. I buy a scooter, which is for me cheaper than the bicycle he chose last time. I don't know why he chooses some very expensive bicycles. I said, "Okay, it's going to be a scooter and bicycle." I'll be very happy to pay for that for him.

Q. What are you looking at in changes for next year with the car or any new setups? Are you making any changes with your team personnel at all?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: I think the whole team personnel is going to stay pretty much the same. In my car at least everybody is pretty happy. Everybody was quite glad on working together. We really had quite a team this year.

Package-wise, chassis and engine, everything is going to stay the same. We're going to keep the *Lola* and the *Toyota*. The team, I think everything is going to stay pretty much the same, too, which is one of the points I feel very good about next season. There's nothing like continuity in any kind of work, I think. You're working together with people for longer, you know them better, you know what they're good at, you know what they're not good at, where you have to practice more, to improve. They know you better, too, as a driver. They also know your weak points and your strengths.

That's very important. I'm very happy to have such a relationship with everybody at *Newman/Haas*. We help each other a lot. I grew a lot as a driver this season. I feel, because you

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work with good people, with good mechanics, with good engineers, you grow as a driver. I feel a lot better this year. I feel like I still have a lot to give for next season.

Q. What are you going to do in the off-season? Are you going to do the two events down in *Brazil*?

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: No, I'm not going to do the 500-mile race, which is this coming weekend. It's just too close to now. I'm only going to arrive in *Brazil* on Thursday or Friday. I'm still not sure. The race is already Saturday. That didn't give me time to arrange teams and everything else. It was a little bit too close to the time for me.

I'm going to be -- I think November and December I'm going to be not so busy, I say, because the new car only is going to arrive I think beginning of December and is going to be ready just by Christmastime or so. We only going to be testing January.

I'm going to fly back to *Brazil*, start working on my fitness again. I'm going to take probably a week or ten days' break before I start working out again. I'm going to probably be getting into some mountain bike races and maybe some triathalons, just relax, have some fun, just chill out.

T.E. McHALE: *Cristiano*, before we wrap it up for the day, can you tell us about when you know the off-season testing program will begin and where.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: We still don't know exactly. Maybe we're going to do a test like the end of November in *Phoenix*. I think we going to cancel that. We have so few days, there's no point in testing with the old car. We're going to wait a little more and go into other tests we can do which is ten days per car. We're going to do all the ten days with the new car because is going to help us more.

So far we don't have a program still. Is going to depend a lot on how fast we going to put this new car together and have other package ready, new engine and everything.

T.E. McHALE: Very good. With that, we will wrap it up for the day and for the season. This is the final scheduled media teleconference of the 2001 *FedEx Championship Series* season. I want to thank all of you who took time of us to join us.

Thanks, *Cristiano*, enjoy your time at the awards ceremony this evening. We hope to talk to you soon.

CRISTIANO DA MATTA: Thanks, T.E. we'll talk to you soon.

T.E. McHALE: Please join us as we have announcements scheduled throughout the season, we'll be sending you alerts.

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