

= 2007 Indy Japan 300 =

The 2007 Indy Japan 300 was an IndyCar Series motor race held on April 21 , 2007 , at the Twin Ring Motegi in Motegi , Tochigi , Japan . It was the third race of the 2007 IndyCar Series season , the fifth annual edition of the Indy Japan 300 in the IndyCar Series , and the tenth anniversary running of the race (including its five years on the Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) schedule) . Andretti Green Racing driver Tony Kanaan won the race with a 0 @. @ 4828 second margin of victory over Chip Ganassi Racing 's Dan Wheldon . Dario Franchitti , Scott Dixon , and Sam Hornish , Jr. rounded out the top five .

Hélio Castroneves , the defending champion of the Indy Japan 300 , won the pole position by posting the fastest lap in qualifying . In the race , Wheldon gained the lead from Castroneves on lap 44 and led for more than half of the 200 laps , but a pit stop with 14 laps remaining forced him to relinquish the top position . Kanaan took the lead because of a late pit stop by Dixon , and held off a late challenge by Wheldon to secure first place .

There were four cautions and nine lead changes among five different drivers during the race . It was Kanaan 's first win of the season , and the eighth of his career . The result moved Wheldon into the lead of the Drivers ' Championship , three points ahead of Kanaan . Dixon , who led the championship before the race , dropped to third .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

The Indy Japan 300 was confirmed as a part of the Indy Racing League 's (IRL) 2007 schedule for the IndyCar Series in September 2006 . It was to be the fifth consecutive year the race was held in the series , and the tenth Indy Japan 300 , counting the period from 1998 to 2002 when it was a CART event . Uniquely in the 2007 season , the race took place at a non @- @ American location . The Indy Japan 300 was the third race scheduled for 2007 by the IRL , out of 17 . At this early stage in the season , Dixon held the lead in the point standings with 80 points . Castroneves and Wheldon were tied for second with 75 points , and Kanaan and Hornish , Jr. were fourth and fifth on 65 and 61 points , respectively .

= = = Practice = = =

Two days before the race , on April 19 , a pair of two @- @ hour practice sessions were held at the Twin Ring Motegi . The racers were split into two groups , which were each allowed to run laps for one hour per session . The first practice session began at 10 : 30 a.m. Japan Standard Time (JST) ; five minutes later a yellow caution flag came out due to a crash by Vitor Meira , who was forced into a backup car when he returned later in the day . A second caution flag was shown at noon local time to allow for an inspection of the track ; 30 minutes later the session came to an end . From 1 : 30 to 3 : 30 p.m JST , the second practice session of the day took place . Danica Patrick posted the fastest lap of the day , going around the circuit in 26 @. @ 9585 seconds in an average speed of 202 @. @ 979 miles per hour (326 @. @ 663 km / h) . Japanese driver Kosuke Matsuura , who called the Indy Japan 300 his " most important " race of the season , had the second @- @ fastest lap time of the day , followed by Castroneves , Kanaan , and Wheldon .

Before qualifying took place on April 20 , there was a third round of practice from 10 : 30 a.m. to 12 : 05 p.m JST ; the drivers were each allowed 45 minutes of track time . Two caution flags came out ; the first came half an hour into the session when Jeff Simmons spun out coming off the track 's fourth turn . The other caution was a track inspection , which came 18 minutes into the second group 's allotted time . Kanaan had the best lap of the session ; his average speed of 204 @. @ 465 miles per hour (329 @. @ 055 km / h) topped Patrick 's leading mark from the previous day .

== Qualifying ==

An hour and 25 minutes after the last practice session ended , the 18 drivers determined the starting grid through qualifying . Each driver ran two laps , with the starting order determined by the competitors ' fastest times . Castroneves , the winner of the 2006 Indy Japan 300 , gained pole position with a lap time of 26 @. @ 6416 seconds ; it was the second consecutive year he qualified first . Two @- @ time race winner Wheldon earned the other front @- @ row starting position ; his lap was .0328 seconds slower than Castroneves ' . Kanaan and Patrick qualified third and fourth , respectively ; they were followed by Hornish , Jr. and Dixon , who would start in the third row . Dario Franchitti and Tomas Scheckter qualified in the fourth row , while Matsuura and Marco Andretti rounded out the top 10 . The difference between the first and tenth @- @ best lap times was less than three @- @ tenths of a second .

== Race ==

The conditions on the grid were dry but cloudy before the event with an air temperature between 70 ? 74 ° F (21 ? 23 ° C) and a track temperature of 80 ° F (27 ° C) . Bridgestone CEO Soshi Arakawa commanded the drivers to start their engines . The race began at 1 : 00 p.m. JST , as Tomikazu Fukuda , governor of Tochigi Prefecture (location of the Twin Ring Motegi track) , waved the opening green flag to signify the start . Shortly afterward , however , Matsuura suffered an accident ; he crashed into the turn two wall during the first lap after he spun , and did not return to the race . A caution flag came out as a result of the incident ; several drivers made pit stops for new tires , fuel and car adjustments during the caution , and Meira made two stops . On lap 9 , the field returned to green flag racing , and Castroneves maintained his lead , which reached nearly three seconds by lap 25 . The second caution flag of the race was flown on lap 31 , to allow for the removal of debris on the track in the fourth turn . A round of pit stops occurred during the caution ; Castroneves held on to the lead , with Wheldon and Kanaan in second and third . The green flag came back out on lap 39 , and Hornish , Jr. immediately took third place from Kanaan . Lap 44 saw a lead change as Wheldon passed Castroneves ; he would go on to lead 126 of the race 's 200 laps . Wheldon gradually increased the lead to almost two seconds by lap 80 . Kanaan had risen to second by this point , ahead of Franchitti and Castroneves .

From laps 81 to 90 , pit stops were made by all the drivers . After Ed Carpenter 's stop , one of his wheels came off while he attempted to return to the track ; he would ultimately finish 15th , eight laps behind . At the end of this series of pit stops under the green flag , Wheldon remained out in front , ahead of Kanaan . By the halfway point of the race , Kanaan had begun to narrow his deficit , which by lap 115 was less than a second . Wheldon , meanwhile , was faced with a mechanical problem ? his radio was malfunctioning , preventing him from talking to his pit crew ; he later said that he and his team " lost radio contact early on " . On lap 122 , Kanaan made a pass while coming out of turn two , taking the lead from Wheldon . Soon after , the drivers began their third round of pit stops , and Wheldon took back the lead before Andretti was afflicted with oversteer and crashed into the turn four inside wall on lap 135 , bringing out a caution flag . The yellow flag period saw pit stops continue . Castroneves stopped twice on pit lane on top of a prior stop just before the caution ; during the second yellow flag stop , he overshot his designated area on pit road , and his car needed to be pushed into position by crew members . With 51 laps left , the caution period ended , and Wheldon slowly built a gap over Kanaan of 1 @. @ 8834 seconds entering the final 20 laps .

Wheldon made a pit stop on lap 186 , giving Kanaan , who had been conserving fuel since early in the race , the lead . Four laps later , Kanaan stopped , and the lead briefly went to Hornish , Jr . , before he too pitted and Dixon assumed the top spot . On lap 196 , however , Dixon was also forced into the pits . Kanaan had come off pit road ahead of Wheldon after his stop , and therefore was in position to assume the lead . Wheldon closed in on Kanaan , and by the final lap was less than four @- @ tenths of a second behind . Kanaan , though , held off Wheldon to win the race with a .4828 of a second margin of victory . Third place went to Franchitti , who was over 11 seconds off the pace . Dixon was fourth , followed by Hornish , Jr . , who finished one lap behind the leaders , having

stalled his engine on pit road in the closing laps . Scott Sharp was the sixth @-@ place finisher , and early leader Castroneves wound up seventh . Simmons , Scheckter , and Buddy Rice finished eighth through tenth ; all other drivers ended the race two or more laps behind .

There were nine lead changes in the race ; five drivers reached the front of the field . Wheldon 's total of 126 laps led was the highest of any competitor . Kanaan led four different times , for a total of 26 laps . The victory was the eighth of Kanaan 's IRL career and the first of a series @-@ high five wins he posted in the 2007 season .

= = = Post @-@ race = = =

In interviews after the race , Kanaan credited his team 's fuel strategy for being the main factor in his victory . During many of the laps that Wheldon led , Kanaan drafted behind him to use less gasoline than normal , and he was able to stay on the track longer than other drivers as a result . He said of the strategy , " that 's what probably gave me the win . " On the other hand , Wheldon later said that his radio problem forced more " conservative " pit stop planning by himself and his team . Third @-@ place finisher Franchitti said : " We had to take the gamble to try to get the win . I thought we had as good a car as TK (Tony Kanaan) and Dan (Wheldon) . I think I could have hung with them , but I don 't think I could have caught up with them . " Matsuura admitted his first @-@ lap accident was his fault and apologized to his Japanese fans . After his accident on the 135th lap , Andretti was taken to the track 's infield care center for a precautionary X @-@ ray scan of his right shoulder which showed a negative result . He said that he struggled with controlling his car but was happy . With his second @-@ place finish , Wheldon gained the season points lead with 188 , three ahead of Kanaan and 17 in front of Dixon . The standings were closely contested , with the top six drivers separated by 27 points .

= = Classification = =

= = = Qualifying = = =

= = = Race = = =

= = Standings after the race = =

Note : Only the top five positions are included for the drivers ' standings .