

= 2011 IZOD IndyCar World Championship =

The 2011 IZOD IndyCar World Championship was the final race of the 2011 IZOD IndyCar series schedule . The event took place at Las Vegas Motor Speedway in Clark County , Nevada on October 16 , 2011 . The race was stopped following a major accident triggered by drivers trying to avoid light contact between Wade Cunningham and James Hinchcliffe . 15 cars were involved in the wreck , which resulted in the death of two @-@ time Indianapolis 500 winner and 2005 series champion Dan Wheldon . After a several hour delay , IndyCar decided to abandon the remaining 188 laps after word of Wheldon 's death was relayed to the drivers .

= = Report = =

= = = Background = = =

The Las Vegas race was added to the schedule for the 2011 season and replaced the event at Homestead @-@ Miami Speedway as the final race of the IndyCar season . The races at Homestead and the International Speedway Corporation tracks were removed from the schedule following the previous year 's season . Las Vegas Motor Speedway was returning to the IndyCar schedule for the first time since 2000 ? and the first open @-@ wheel race at the circuit since the Hurricane Relief 400 Champ Car event in 2005 ? and none of the drivers in the race had raced at the circuit since it was reconfigured in 2006 , which saw a greater degree of banking added to the circuit to encourage side @-@ by @-@ side racing . The race was scheduled for 200 laps around the 1 @. @ 544 mi ( 2 @. @ 485 km ) oval , totaling 308 @. @ 800 mi ( 496 @. @ 965 km ) .

= = = The \$ 5 Million Challenge = = =

On May 3 , 2011 , IndyCar CEO Randy Bernard announced that a \$ 5 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 ( USD ) purse would be awarded to any driver who was not a regular on the IndyCar circuit to enter the race at Las Vegas and win while starting from the tail end of the field , hoping to attract interest from Formula 1 or NASCAR . The challenge was accepted by 2011 Indianapolis 500 winner Dan Wheldon , who had run only one additional race that season ; he agreed to split the purse with a fan if he went on to win .

= = = Championship battle = = =

Entering the race there was a two @-@ way battle for the IndyCar Championship between Chip Ganassi Racing 's Dario Franchitti and Team Penske 's Will Power . Franchitti was 18 points ahead of Power , retaking the championship points lead from him with a second @-@ place finish at the 2011 Kentucky Indy 300 two weeks prior . Power was still mathematically in the points race despite an awful finish at Kentucky , but needed to finish far ahead of Franchitti in order to win the championship title .

The race 's honorary grand marshal was skateboarder Tony Hawk , who gave the command to start the engines .

= = = Qualifying = = =

A total of thirty @-@ four cars qualified for the race . Tony Kanaan , driving the No. 82 Dallara for KV Racing Technology , qualified on the pole for the race and shared the front row with Oriol Servià , driving the No. 2 Dallara for Newman / Haas Racing . Danica Patrick , driving the No. 7 Dallara for Andretti Autosport , started 9th in what was her final IndyCar start before joining NASCAR . The two remaining championship contenders qualified on row 9 , with Power 17th in the No. 12 Dallara and Franchitti 18th in the No. 10 Dallara . In addition to Wheldon 's No. 77 Dallara , which he piloted for

Sam Schmidt Motorsports , Buddy Rice was forced to start from the rear of the field when he received a penalty in qualifying for driving the No. 44 Dallara below the track 's white line .

= = = Lap 11 crash = = =

The accident began on the front straightaway as the field headed into turn one . Wade Cunningham , Wheldon 's teammate in the No. 17 Dallara , clipped James Hinchcliffe , driving the No. 06 Dallara , and then made contact with J. R. Hildebrand in the No. 4 Dallara . Then Cunningham swerved and Hildebrand drove over the rear of his car , causing his to go airborne . Cunningham collected Jay Howard in the No. 15 Service Central Dallara on the inside and then Townsend Bell in the No. 22 Dallara on the outside before colliding with the retaining wall . Attempting to avoid the crash ahead , Vitor Meira lost control of his No. 14 Dallara and spun inward , collecting both Charlie Kimball 's No. 83 Dallara and E. J. Viso 's No. 59 Dallara . Tomas Scheckter , in the No. 57 Dallara , was also attempting to avoid the crash by rapidly slowing down on the outside . Following that , Paul Tracy ran into the back of his car with his No. 9 Motegi Wheels Dallara and Pippa Mann , rapidly approaching in the No. 30 Dallara , went over the top of him after jerking to the outside to avoid crashing into Alex Lloyd in the No. 19 Dallara .

As cars continued to drive through the accident scene , the No. 77 car driven by Wheldon and the No. 12 driven by Power left the racing surface . Wheldon was racing at 220 miles per hour ( 350 km / h ) when he came upon the scene , frantically trying to avoid the collision . Although he was able to considerably slow it down , Wheldon 's car went airborne about 325 feet ( 99 m ) after running into the back of Kimball 's and went barrel @-@ rolling into the catch fence cockpit @-@ first , causing his head to hit one of the poles . The No. 77 landed back on the racing surface having been sliced apart by the fence and slid to a stop next to the S.A.F.E.R. barrier . Power , meanwhile , went airborne when he ran over the back of Lloyd 's car and struck the S.A.F.E.R. barrier . The car landed sideways on the track and rolled over , which caused the front wheel assembly to break ; one of the front tires flew over Power 's head and barely missed hitting him .

A total of 15 cars were involved , with the most severe injuries suffered by Wheldon , Power , Hildebrand , and Mann . Wheldon was extricated from his car and was airlifted to the University Medical Center of Southern Nevada . He was officially pronounced dead on arrival two hours later at 1 : 54 PM Pacific Daylight Time . The official cause of Wheldon 's death was given by the Clark County Coroner as blunt force trauma to his head due to the incident . Mann and Hildebrand were later taken to the hospital for overnight observation , while Power was evaluated and released that day .

After one additional lap had been run , IndyCar officials red @-@ flagged the race as the track was not suitable for racing . In addition to the debris left by the fifteen cars involved in the wreck , the asphalt surface was damaged and the catch fencing needed repair . As the teams waited to see if they would resume racing , they also were waiting for word on Wheldon 's condition as word had not been relayed to the track .

Sometime around 3 : 00 PM local time , an emergency drivers ' meeting was called by series director Brian Barnhart . After the meeting ended , Randy Bernard met with the media . In his brief statement , Bernard told reporters about Wheldon 's death and that , out of respect , the drivers and teams agreed not to continue the race and instead decided to pay tribute to their fallen colleague with a five @-@ lap salute .

The 19 drivers who survived the crash scene returned to their cars , and every crew member stood silently in their pit boxes . The scoring pylon was blanked except for the top position , where the No. 77 was displayed . The remaining cars lined up three abreast on pit road , as in the Indy 500 starting formation , with Kanaan , Ed Carpenter in the No. 67 Dallara , and Ryan Briscoe in the Dallara leading . Only eighteen of the drivers participated . Out of respect for Wheldon 's death , the No. 98 Dallara fielded by Bryan Herta Autosport was parked . The car was driven to victory in Indianapolis by Wheldon and its driver on this day , Alex Tagliani , normally drove the No. 77 car that Wheldon had taken over

The pace car then led the cars back onto the track while every crew member and person behind the

wall moved to the grass separating pit road from the track to watch . The track loudspeakers blared renditions of " Danny Boy " and " Amazing Grace " played on bagpipes while the cars went around the track at pace lap speed , and each time the cars passed the start / finish line the fans remaining in the front @-@ stretch grandstand offered applause . At the end of the five tribute laps , the starter waved two checkered flags to signify the end while the cars proceeded around the track one more time before exiting for the pits in turn four .

Wheldon 's death was the first suffered by an IndyCar driver since Paul Dana was killed in a race @-@ morning practice crash at Homestead @-@ Miami in 2006 .

= = Championship resolution = =

Since the race was abandoned after twelve total laps , it did not reach official status ; IndyCar does not consider a race official unless it reaches the halfway mark . As such , no points were awarded and the series championship went to Dario Franchitti by default . If the race had continued and reached official status , Franchitti would have been the series champion anyway ; due to his involvement in the crash that resulted in the race being stopped , Will Power 's car was destroyed and he would not have been able to continue racing .

This was Franchitti 's third consecutive and fourth overall championship . Indy Racing League , LLC delayed all official prizegiving , choosing instead to conduct it during the annual State of INDYCAR speech in February 2012 ; Franchitti also delayed his own celebration of his championship victory .

= = Reactions = =

At the time of his death , Wheldon had been working with IndyCar officials to develop the ICONIC chassis with the intention of improving safety in the sport . Planned changes to the chassis include larger cockpits for driver protection and bodywork over the rear wheels to prevent cars from launching off one another in the event of a collision , long a problem in open @-@ wheel racing , regardless of oval or road course , but troublesome on high @-@ speed ovals and tight street circuits with a long straight and a tight turn , similar to the style of many modern road courses .

Prominent figures within the IndyCar fraternity and the wider international motorsport community expressed their condolences to Wheldon and his family . Wheldon had been scheduled to take part in the Gold Coast 600 , a round of the V8 Supercars championship , on October 22 , racing alongside his friend James Courtney . Upon hearing of Wheldon 's death , Courtney described the accident as a sobering reminder of the dangers faced by racing drivers . As the first major international motorsport event after Wheldon 's death , organizers of the V8 Supercars series planned a series of tributes to him at the Gold Coast 600 . Wheldon 's place was taken by another British driver , Darren Turner , an FIA GT1 World Championship competitor . Wheldon 's name was left on the car as a mark of respect , while British drivers at the event paid tribute to him with helmet decals , and several other drivers planned individual tributes to Wheldon . Kanaan , who had also been scheduled to race in Australia , announced his withdrawal from the event out of respect for Wheldon . However , Briscoe , Tagliani , and Hélio Castroneves , all of whom raced at Las Vegas , along with other part @-@ time IndyCar drivers Sébastien Bourdais and Simon Pagenaud , who were not at Las Vegas , did race . Bourdais , the best performing " International " driver , received the Dan Wheldon Memorial Trophy . Sam Schmidt , for whom Wheldon had been racing at the time of his accident , admitted that the events at Las Vegas Motor Speedway had prompted him to re @-@ evaluate his involvement in motorsports . Similarly , veteran drivers Davey Hamilton and Paul Tracy said they were considering retiring from racing on the back of the accident .

In the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series , several drivers at the 2011 Good Sam Club 500 at Talladega on the weekend after Wheldon 's death put special tributes on their cars , like NASCAR issuing the " Lionheart Knight " decal Wheldon wore on his helmet , which were placed on the cars ' b @-@ pillars , along with T. J. Bell putting Wheldon 's name on the namerail .

Driver Marco Andretti withdrew from The Celebrity Apprentice , which started taping days after the incident , and was replaced by his father Michael , team principal of Andretti Autosport .

On December 9 , 2011 , IndyCar decided that they were not going to return to Las Vegas for the 2012 season . Randy Bernard expressed reluctance to return to the speedway following Wheldon 's death , despite the insistence of Speedway Motorsports , Inc. president Bruton Smith ( who owns the track in Las Vegas as well as three other tracks used by the IndyCar series ) for the series to honor its three @-@ year contract with the track . As of that date , the investigation into the accident was still ongoing . IndyCar was holding back on the release of its 2012 schedule until the investigation concluded . The IndyCar series also conducted an investigation into whether or not the series should continue racing on high @-@ banked ovals such as Las Vegas and Texas Motor Speedway in Denton , Texas . Texas had been one of the staples of the IndyCar series since 1997 and had yet to be confirmed for 2012 prior to the Las Vegas race in 2011 . Indycar 's future at high @-@ banked ovals was in jeopardy pending the results of the investigation . Texas was eventually placed on the 2012 schedule .

The series went to new restrictions on restarts . IndyCar announced that restarts would only be single @-@ file in 2012 , rather than double @-@ file as they had been the previous season .

= = = Criticism = = =

In the build @-@ up to the race , several drivers expressed unease at the race ? with Franchitti , Oriol Servià and Alex Lloyd the most vocal opponents ? particularly given the high degree of banking around the circuit , with between 18 and 20 degrees of banking in the corners . Franchitti was quoted as saying that the track was " not suitable " for IndyCar racing , while championship rival Will Power ? himself a staunch critic of short @-@ track oval racing ? described the race as " an accident waiting to happen " .

The field of 34 drivers was the biggest in an IndyCar series race in 14 years . A typical oval track race has six to eight fewer drivers , except for the Indianapolis 500 , which normally has a 33 @-@ car field . ESPN.com senior motorsports writer Terry Blount wrote : " Obviously more cars presents more danger . They wanted a whole lot of cars cause obviously this is their season finale and they wanted it to be a big deal . Some of the people that were driving in this event yesterday had no business being in it . Some of them had never driven on a track like this . That was a mistake " . Chris Powell , president of Las Vegas Motor Speedway , defended the race , saying that the circuit had passed all of the IndyCar Series ' accreditation procedures and was deemed suitable for racing . He also went on the record to say that despite the media reporting the concerns of several drivers over the safety of the event , none of those concerns had been raised with him .

1979 Formula One World Champion Jody Scheckter , whose son Tomas was involved in the accident , was highly critical of the series organizers , stating that a serious accident was " inevitable " as " they were basically touching wheels at 220 mph ( 350 km / h ) . They all bunch up together so there are thirty @-@ four cars in a small space of track . One person makes a mistake and this happens . You [ shouldn 't ] have to get killed if you make a mistake . It was madness . " Former Formula One and IndyCar driver Mark Blundell agreed , claiming that the Las Vegas circuit was unsuitable for IndyCar racing ? this was the last race for the Dallara IR05 ? while NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion Jimmie Johnson called for the series to leave oval racing altogether , though he clarified his statement by saying that the open @-@ wheel type cars on a resurfaced 1 @-@ 5 mi ( 2 @-@ 4 km ) track built for the heavier Sprint Cup and Nationwide Series cars was a bad idea . However , former champion Mario Andretti said that the accident was a " freakish " one @-@ off incident and that facilities at the circuit were adequate for racing . While he admitted surprise that more drivers were not seriously injured , he also cautioned against what he called " knee @-@ jerk reactions " to the accident , calling for any changes to the sport to be carefully considered before being introduced , rather than being rushed into action . Former FIA President Max Mosley , a long @-@ time advocate of increased safety in motorsport , agreed with Andretti , urging a " calm and scientific " approach to any proposed changes , particularly when asked about the proposed introduction of closed canopies for open @-@ wheel racing cars .

The five million dollar prize was also the subject of criticism in that a driver inexperienced in driving IndyCars would have a higher risk of causing a crash , though Formula One driver Anthony

Davidson downplayed the influence of the prize in causing the accident , stating that racing drivers by their nature try to win every race , whether they start from first or last . Many short track races in the United States offer a cash or points bonus where a driver who wins the pole and starts last can collect a cash bonus for winning ; this was used at Lucas Oil Raceway at Indianapolis in the " Night Before F1 " midget car race where the winner of the first feature race started last for the second in a reverse @-@ grid race , and a driver who starts last by winning the first feature , starting last , and winning the second feature wins a cash bonus . Some series offer a point bonus for the driver who makes up the most positions in a race .

In the days following the incident , it was learned that two additional drivers had been approached to try for the \$ 5 million challenge prize . One was Scott Speed , who previously ran open @-@ wheel Formula One cars for Scuderia Toro Rosso and who had raced on the reconfigured LVMS track in the Craftsman Truck Series for Morgan @-@ Dollar Motorsports in 2008 and for Team Red Bull in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series in 2009 and 2010 . Speed , in an interview he gave to Inside Edition on October 18 , 2011 , said that he declined to take the offer saying that the track conditions were too dangerous for Indy @-@ type cars . Finnish media reported that 2007 Formula One World Champion Kimi Räikkönen , who was splitting time between the World Rally Championship and NASCAR in 2011 , had also been approached to take part in the race , but Räikkönen rejected the offer as he was not confident of having a competitive car , rather than having concerns over safety .

= = = Investigation = = =

Three days after the accident , series organizers announced that the race would be the subject of a full investigation . The other members of the Automobile Competition Committee for the United States ( ACCUS ) , the national governing body of automobile racing in the United States , and a member of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile ( FIA ) made their resources available for the investigation , which IndyCar officials expected to take several weeks . As all ACCUS / FIA members participated in the investigation , IndyCar would have full use of the NASCAR R & D Center in Concord , North Carolina . In the meantime , all testing at Las Vegas Motor Speedway was cancelled indefinitely ; Franchitti and Chip Ganassi Racing had been planning to test the 2012 @-@ spec Dallara chassis at the circuit in the week following the race .

= = = = Results = = = =

The results of the investigation into Wheldon 's death were released on December 15 , 2011 . In a report prepared by crash investigators , it was found that Wheldon 's death was caused by an impact with the catch fencing around the circuit . Brian Barnhart further rejected claims that the banking had also contributed to the accident , stating that it created two ideal racing lines , and that these lines made the location of cars more predictable for other drivers ; at the time of the accident , all 34 cars had been behaving as expected . The report also revealed that the right front pull rod of the suspension assembly penetrated Wheldon 's survival cell , though it did not cause him any injury . The report recommended further investigation of this phenomenon , as it was the first recorded incident of its kind in nine years of the use of the IR03 and later IR05 model chassis , which was being retired at the end of the race . The pull @-@ rod suspension chassis is not being utilised in the DW12 .

= = Classification = =

= = = Qualifying = = =

Notes :

^ ? Rice was moved to the back of the grid after receiving a penalty for running below the white line .

^ ? Wheldon agreed to start the race from thirty @-@ fourth and last place on the grid as part of the organizers ' five million dollar challenge .

= = = Scoring when abandoned = = =

= = Standings after the race = =

Note : Only the Top 5 positions are included .