

STAR BEACON

ASHTABULA, OH
THURSDAY 23,000
JUN 22 2000



BURRELLE'S

12 .xxed. 13 XX... ZW

Castroneves loved racing from start

Driver grew up wanting to drive

By HARRY ATKINS

Associated Press 3039 M1
When he was 5, Helio Castroneves would go to the race track hidden in the trunk of his father's car.

That's where it all began.

Where it will end is anybody's guess. But the future is promising for the Brazilian, forming with Gil de Ferran the new tandem of drivers for Roger Penske's rejuvenated CART team.

"I see a lot in him," said three-time series champion Rick Mears, the driving coach for Team Penske. "He kind of proved himself last year. I knew he had the ability, and I knew it was a matter of time before he got his first win."

Castroneves, a winner at every level of racing, got his first CART victory Sunday in Detroit.

"Now they know who Helio Castroneves is," he said.

But it didn't take a victory by Castroneves in the Tenneco Automotive Grand Prix of Detroit to make Indianapolis 500 champion Juan Montoya realize the talents of the 25-year-old Brazilian.

"Helio runs hard," said Montoya, the Colombian sensation who won the title last year as a rookie. "I never like to see him behind me."

Castroneves learned racing from his father — also named Helio — who owned a small stock car team.

"I was not allowed in the pits because you had to be 18 or 21 years old," Castroneves recalled. "He couldn't leave me in the stands because I was 5.

"So he put me in the trunk of the car and we'd pass through security and then I was there in the pits. The engine noise, the smell of oil and just the excitement. I was liking it."

Like many little boys, he wanted to be a grown-up. In his case, Castroneves wanted to be a driver.

"So I asked my father for a go-kart," Castroneves said.

By the time he was 12, Castroneves was a contender on the Brazilian go-kart circuit. He won the national championship two years later. In 1991, when he was 16, he was racing on the World Cup go-kart circuit in Europe.

His career has been on a steady rise since. He drove F3 cars in Brazil and Britain, then landed in America, beginning in 1996 a two-year run on the Indy Lights circuit. Four wins earned

2080718762