



Bits & Pieces From the Rolex 24

A.J. Foyt to miss 50th Anniversary of the Rolex 24 At Daytona

Daytona International Speedway officials today announced that 50th Anniversary of the Rolex 24 At Daytona Grand Marshal A.J. Foyt has been forced to cancel his trip due to illness. Foyt sustained some complications from his recent knee surgery but he is expected to make a full recovery.

Foyt issued the following statement: "I am really sorry that I can't be there this weekend for the Rolex 24. I was really looking forward to it because I thought it was a great honor to be asked to be the Grand Marshal of the 50th Anniversary of that race and considered it to be one of the great highlights of my career. I feel so bad that I let everyone down. I was also looking forward to seeing some of my old friends and the race cars that I drove in that race. It was going to be a really fun weekend for me but I guess I'll be watching the race from my hospital room—yep the doctors pulled rank on me. And I hate to admit, but I think they're right—this time. I'd like to wish everyone a safe race and I'll be with you in spirit."

Daytona International Speedway President Joie Chitwood III said, "We wish A.J. a speedy recovery and hope he's back on his feet soon."

Dempsey Racing Ramps Up Race Preparation

Dempsey Racing has shifted its focus to pre-race preparation and planning following Thursday's Rolex 24 At Daytona qualifying session at Daytona International Speedway (DIS) where both the No. 40 VISIT FLORIDA/Share a Little Sunshine Mazda RX-8 GT and No. 41 FishingCapital.com/Bass2Billfish with Team Seattle Mazda RX-8 GT both secured spots in Golden Anniversary event. The 50th Anniversary Rolex 24 At Daytona begins this Saturday, January 28, at 3:30 p.m. ET. Live coverage on SPEED starts at 2:30 p.m. ET/11:30 a.m. PT.

Charles Espenlaub qualified the No. 40 VISIT FLORIDA/Share a Little Sunshine Mazda RX-8 GT in the 27th position with a top time of 1:51.416 (115.028 mph). Espenlaub shares driving duties this weekend with Patrick Dempsey, Joe Foster and Tom Long. The same four drivers finished a team-best third in the No. 40 in last year's Rolex 24 and return this year along with new team driver Charlie Putman.

"We're getting better and better with every lap, and everybody on the team is getting better," Espenlaub said. "I'm excited and I think we have a lot to look forward to in this race. I have no doubt that that at 3:30 on Sunday afternoon we're going to be right there with them. This is a work in progress and everybody is working as hard as they can."

Foster is looking forward to the remaining track time scheduled for Friday. He sees a unique dynamic in the No. 40 team and will look to re-create that element in this year's race.

"In the evening session, we started rotating through the guys," Foster said. "A key element to working well as a driving team is to have a good routine going into the race. That's exactly what happened last year when we had a good rhythm going with all the drivers. If we keep that rhythm going, we'll be able to keep the VISIT FLORIDA cars up as far as we can."

Andrew Davis Captures GT Pole

Andrew Davis, defending Rolex Grand-Am champion driver with Brumos Porsche teammate Leh Keen, put the Jacksonville, Fla.-based 2012 Porsche 911 GT3 Cup race car on the GT class pole for Saturday Rolex 24 Hours a Daytona.

Davis, from Bogart, Georgia, though he had a jump on the crowded 46-car field as his Brumos crew worked hard to get him out first in the qualifying line, but he was disappointed with his opening lap effort.

"The guys did a great job getting me out onto pit lane in front, as we thought it would be important to get a clean lap with all the traffic, but my first lap wasn't so great. The first time I was fastest in the session, I was surprised as I was not successful in finding someone to draft, but the car felt great and I figured we'd at least make the top ten. Then Patrick (Long in the Flying Lizard Porsche), and the Risi Ferrari went faster, but I found a drafting partner and squeezed out the best time in the end. With only a 15-minute session, we were fortunate to get in seven laps, and the new 2012 Brumos Porsche was perfect. I am humbled to be fastest in a field which includes Porsche, Ferrari, Corvette/Camaro, and BMW factory drivers. But I better enjoy it tonight, because it really means nothing once the race begins." said Davis.

SIZZLING STARWORKS GRAB DP POLE FOR DAYTONA 24

Ryan Dalziel threw down the gauntlet to the Grand-Am big guns by powering the new Starworks Motorsport Ford-Riley to a sensational pole position for Saturday's 50th running of the Grand-Am Rolex Daytona 24.

Orlando-based Dalziel, originally from Lanarkshire in Scotland, clocked a stunning 1min 41.119 to take top spot at the Florida track.

He will share the #8 car with regular Starworks drivers Enzo Potolicchio and Alex Popow, from Venezuela, double Le Mans 24-hour winner Allan McNish, from Dumfries, Scotland, and current FIA GT1 world champ Lucas Luhr, from Germany.

The result for the Fort Lauderdale-based team was even more amazing given that they missed the whole of the first practice session with an engine problem, but were soon on the pace.

RYAN DALZIEL: "It wasn't unexpected that we would be good, we just didn't think we would be on pole. We had some issues in the first practice session – we missed all of that with a motor change, but we were really strong in the second practice.

"Then I just threw one down for qualifying. I am absolutely delighted with it and really happy for the team. They have worked very hard for this. We came here with a good idea of what to expect but for everything to come together so perfectly was definitely a surprise, but still I would say it was well-deserved.

"We spent a lot of time building the car so we are pretty confident that it will be reliable. For us, it is an added bonus to know that the car is fast. If it gets to a dog-fight at the end, then we should have a car that can win."

Wet to start but heat and sun make an appearance – as do the fans

Friday morning at Daytona started out with wet rain and a very brisk wind followed by a period of clearing soon followed by another period of misting rain. After all the gloom above, the skies have cleared now but not until after the Continental Tire Sports Car Challenge BMW Performance 200 began with a very wet surface beneath the Conti tires. All the water led to a number of cars spinning out in the pre race warm up. Once the race got started, the track appeared to be drying up quickly aided by and the clearing clouds that allowed the sun to come out and finish returning traction to those previously spinning tires.

Forecasts call for 49 degrees and clear overnight with a sunny day and 75 degree temperatures expected for the start of the 50th Anniversary Rolex 24 at Daytona. The finish should come in 69 degree weather with just a 10% chance of precipitation.

Despite the wet start to the weekend, the grounds are packed with race fans. We have never seen this many people at the track on the day before the main event. Midway vendors appear to be doing a brisk business. Grand-Am souvenirs are moving off the shelves and already pins and patches commemorating the 50th Rolex 24 have been sold out at at least one official Grand-Am vendor.