

IndyCar racing to copy silly follies of baseball?

STRANGE is the only way to describe the situation at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

On one side, you have drivers Arie Luyendyk and Scott Brayton driving safely at breakneck speeds and a flock of talented rookies performing brilliantly. It's just what Indy in May is supposed to be all about.

On the other, you have speedway president Tony George detracting from his own event by calling a press conference to reaffirm that there will be two series for Indy cars next year and noting there has been no significant dialogue between him and CART president Andrew Craig in recent months.

So one wonders about May in 1996. If George and Craig aren't talking, and Craig represents a majority of the Indy car teams, just who is going to race where next year?

John Menard, who owns the cars driven by Luyendyk and Brayton, has aligned himself with the Indy Racing League. He has stickers indicating such on his hot cars.

But can a 500-Mile Race be run with two cars? If the IndyCar owners decide to boycott, where will the additional competitors come from? What are their names?

Thus far, the IRL has announced four races and a commissioner who has no authority. Two of the tracks haven't been built, but George assures that they will be ready at Disney World next January and Las Vegas next September.

At the same time, are the IndyCar owners ready to commit themselves to passing on the Indy 500 next year in their own show of strength?

Once not too long ago, I would have said no. But the baseball strike convinced me the 1990s are a different time and place. The players and owners, caring little for history, stubbornly stared each other into a corner and abandoned the World Series.

I cherished the "World Serious" as much as I do the legends of the speedway.

Now, baseball is desperately trying to regain its lost fans. Many will never return. I may be one of them.

Hockey came close to doing the same. The result of the fall lockout was the demise of a franchise like Winnipeg in the absolute heart of hockey country.

Two IndyCar series would confuse and distract auto racing fans. Right now it is difficult enough for one IndyCar series to compete for fan attention with the ever-growing popularity of NASCAR stock car racing.

One of George's goals is to bring the American driver. But there some damn fine American



AUTO RACING

Dick Mittman

drivers competing this weekend in qualifications at his race track.

Robby Gordon didn't do 230 by magic. Jimmy Vasser and Bryan Herta are fine young chargers. Scott Sharp and Jeff Ward have potential. And Unser Jr. and Michael Andretti aren't exactly aging slouches.

Jeff Gordon got away. So what? Who's to say he would have done as well in an Indy car? He went to a driving school in Charlotte and found that stock car racing appealed to him most. That's any driver's choice.

Check the young foreigners in this year's group of rookies. Andre Ribeiro, Alessandro Zampedri, Gil de Ferran, Christian Fittipaldi and the older Eliseo Salazar and Carlos Guerrero are skilled both in driving a race car and communicating with the media.

No racing series could ask for a better group.

My major gripe against the IndyCar side is that it has let too many drivers who built names for themselves among the fans slip away. Why are drivers like Luyen-

dyk, 1990 Indy champion, Roberto Guerrero, the current track record-holder, and Brayton forced to become one-race wonders?

They shouldn't? Some owners just have done a terrible job marketing what they had.

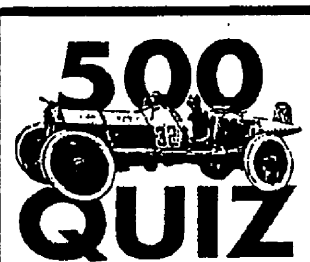
I have ambivalent feelings about two leagues. I like oval racing, enjoy the speeds and the competition. But I also have witnessed some wonderful competitions on the road and street courses.

Personally, I do know one thing. Two leagues are one too many.

All drivers questioned about this situation said they hoped the two sides get together.

Put my voice, for what value it's worth, in there with them.

Dick Mittman covers auto racing for *The News*.



1. In 1929, which driver carried No. 53, first number over 50 in the race? a. Jimmy Gleason. b. Dick Vitale. c. Buddy Joshua.

2. Who was the last American to win the Bank One Rookie-of-the-Year Award? a. Lyn St. James. b. Jeff Andretti. c. Bob Bernath.

3. What was driver Travis Webb's nickname? a. Spider. b. Spinning. c. Jack.

ANSWERS

1. — 1. (a) 2. (b) 3. (c)

Answers to the 500 quiz can be found in the 1995 edition of *The News 500-Mile Race Record Book*.

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