

Tuesday, October 5, 2004

Olympic Gold Medalist Dana Vollmer to be Grand Marshal for Chevy 500k

by Sarona Winfrey

FORT WORTH-DALLAS, Texas -- Granbury, Texas teenager Dana Vollmer is used to seeing quick starts. The 16-year-old swimming sensation helped the United States to a world record and gold medal performance at the Olympic Games in Athens, Greece this summer.

On Sunday, Oct. 17, Dana will see another fast start as she serves as Grand Marshal and gives the command to start the Indy Racing League IndyCar Series Chevy 500k at Texas Motor Speedway.

"We are delighted Dana and her family will be a part of our race day activities," speedway president Eddie Gossage said. "Her performance at the Olympics was truly remarkable, and we are proud to have a champion like Dana be a part of our IndyCar Series championship celebration weekend."

In addition to her duties as Grand Marshal for the Chevy 500k, Dana and her family will get to meet A.J. Foyt and A.J. Foyt IV prior to the race.

Vollmer swam the third leg of a world record performance by the Americans in the 800m freestyle relay. The United States foursome of Natalie Coughlin, Carly Piper, Vollmer, and Kaitlin Sandeno won the gold medal in Athens in the 800m freestyle relay with a world best time of 7:53.42.

Dana and her family are no strangers to motorsports. Her dad, Les, is a lifelong racing fan who rarely, if ever, misses the opportunity to host an Indianapolis 500 watching party. He grew up in California going to see dirt track racing in Napa Valley. Dana's mother, Cathy, was raised on the east coast, and her father took her to dirt tracks in Connecticut. It only seemed natural to have that love of racing passed on to Dana and her brother Nick.

"We followed the Unser family taking their nine wins from generation to generation at the Brickyard," Les remembers. "And, A.J. made his own mark there too for sure along with Rick Mears and a host of other drivers that made that race spectacular for our family. When we moved once in 1985, boxes from the move hadn't even been unpacked when the Indianapolis 500 came on. Everything was put aside for the race as the family and all the friends helping us move watched the race. After all, what's really more important? Unpacking boxes or watching the Indy 500!"

"Nick and Dana have always worked with me on the cars we have owned, and we approached the work with what we felt was the precision of a pit crew, but we could never match the sub-minute performance tough of a trained crew. But in our minds, we were there!"

Since returning from Athens, Dana has been busy trying to catch up on school, making special appearances, and continuing to train for the upcoming World Championships. But, she is looking forward to race day at The Great American Speedway*, and Les admits the race day participation will leave a lasting impression with the whole family.

"Texas Motor Speedway honoring Dana with a tour of the track, starting the race, and meeting A.J. Foyt and A.J. IV will be added to the best moments of our lives."

Tickets for the Chevy 500k and the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series Silverado 350k (Oct. 16) can be purchased by calling the speedway ticket hotline at (817) 215-8500, online at www.texasmotorspeedway.com, or through participating Ticketmaster outlets.