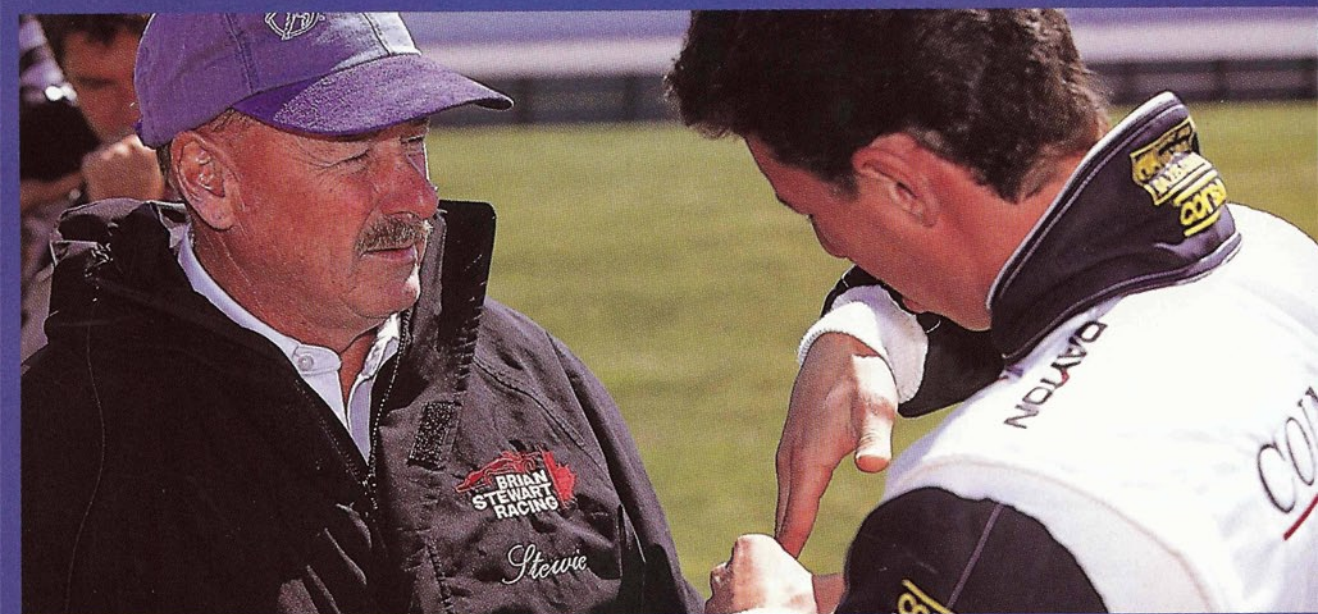


By Rick Matsumoto

PPG-Dayton



Indy Lights

WHEN Cristiano da Matta won his third Indy Lights race last season at

Laguna Seca Speedway, Brian Stewart stood at the back of the crowd surveying the celebrations on the victory podium like a proud papa. A small maple leaf flag fluttering from a stick stuck in the back of his baseball cap expressed his pride at having brought a measure of success to Canada in a sport dominated by American teams.

This year, with Player's/Forsythe having dropped its team and Andrew Bordin gone to the Atlantic series, Brian Stewart Racing has become the only Canadian garage in Indy Lights. And the Canadian aspect of his team stretches well beyond Stewart himself; his entire crew of engineers and mechanics are from this country.

Oddly enough, the Canadiana stops short of the driver's cockpit. His two drivers for Sunday's Indy Lights race will be Sergio Paese and Luiz Garcia Jr. Like da Matta and Stewart's other driver last season, Airton Dare, Paese and Garcia are both from Brazil.

In fact, six of his last nine drivers have been Brazilians.

It's not that Stewart has gone out of his way to hire drivers from the South American country. They have come seeking him. Take, for example, Stewart's first young Brazilian, Alfonso Giaffone, who followed drivers such as Bryan Herta, P.J. Jones, and Toronto native Paul Tracy, with Stewart's team.

"He phoned me and sent me a resume," Stewart explained. "In that resume he had a photo of himself on the podium after winning a Brazilian Formula 3000 race. The other two people in the photo were Rubens Barrachello and Christian Fittipaldi. He was the one that won, so I thought he must not be too bad a driver.

Brian Stewart hears out Sergio Paese, another in a long line of Brazilian drivers, explaining his car's cornering characteristics.