



AP Photo/Nick Vespe, File

In this Feb. 16, 2019, file photo, provided by Cage Fury Fighting Championships, Kyle Daukaus, top, battles Jonavin Webb during a mixed martial arts bout in Atlantic City, N.J.

Philly fighter Daukaus looks to impress UFC in title fight

By DAN GELSTON
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kyle Daukaus won a convincing fight on a MMA reality show that looks for the next big UFC star. So he waited for Dana White to offer him a contract.

For a Philly kid who grew up rooting for Georges St-Pierre and Chael Sonnen, this was the career moment of a lifetime.

"I was excited about the contract," Daukaus said. "I believe I had the best performance that night."

But when White offered the first two fighters UFC contracts on his "Contender Series," Daukaus sat there with one thought: Uh oh. White probably wasn't going to make it 3 for 3 for the prospects. Daukaus' hunch was correct.

"There are parts of his game that aren't really there yet and he would have trouble in the UFC with some of the guys that we have," the UFC President said on the show. "I think he's got a ton of talent, I think he's got a lot of promise. I just don't think he's ready right now."

In reality show terms, Daukaus was voted off the island.

"It's heartbreaking but I need to move on," he said. "I have to be very dominant in my performance Saturday,

and I have to be very dominant in all my performances until they give me the call."

Daukaus (7-0) gets his next shot Saturday when he defends his Cage Fury Fighting Championships middleweight belt against Stephen Regman (9-4) at Parx Casino. The regional MMA promotion will have CFFC 78 air live on UFC Fight Pass. Former WWE star and UFC fighter CM Punk joins Mike Gill and UFC strawweight Jessica Penne on the broadcast team.

The 26-year-old Daukaus ran into White after the show aired in June and was told he just needed more experience to get the call to UFC.

"One fight isn't experience, but you never know," Daukaus said. "I could have a very dominant performance and they could say, you know what, we made a mistake and we want this guy."

Daukaus was raised in Northeast Philly in the Tacony neighborhood and still lives and trains in the city. He watched UFC fights with his older brother and they'd "roll around in the basement" before they entered a grappling tournament about eight years ago. Both finished second despite minimal training. They soon decided to take up MMA and both are fighters. Daukaus' brother is also

a Philly police officer.

Daukaus needed time to find his niche in MMA.

"I was a fat kid out of high school," he said. "I was walking around at 260, 265 pounds. So when I first started training, my coach told me I needed to take heavyweight fights. It wasn't smart of me. I lost a lot."

Daukaus lost a handful of amateur fights — including one on a 2016 CFFC card — and hardly looked like a prized prospect. He eventually took a step back and decided to fight at a lower weight. He followed a plan set by noted MMA fitness expert Mike Dolce and soon dropped to 205 pounds. He fought at 185 pounds "and I just found my calling."

He found success at his proper weight as a pro, ripping off an unbeaten streak that included a CFFC middleweight title victory in February over Jonavin Webb. His win caught the attention of UFC and earned him the "Contender" invitation.

The Daukaus fight is one of four pro title fights on the Fight Pass card. The welterweight title is up for grabs after Philadelphia's Sean Brady vacated the belt when he signed with UFC.

"They treat you like a UFC fighter," Daukaus said. "It's like you're in the big show."

IndyCar touts positive gains as season heads to climax

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

MONTEREY, Calif. — When a 19-year-old rookie paces the field at an unfamiliar and technical race track, it catches the attention of veterans who wonder if the kid is fearless or foolish whipping around historic Laguna Seca Raceway.

Will Power went with "definitely brave" in describing Colton Herta's successful first day hurtling through 11 fast corners of the 2.258-mile road course.

Then came Day 2. Herta again paced the field in Friday's first practice session, but that bravery so heralded a day earlier caught up with him. Herta went off the track three times, including a session-ending spin.

"I was definitely pushing to the limit of what I had yesterday, and that's what I was doing all three times, and the third time kind of ended the session for me and everyone else," Herta said.

Either way, Herta and fellow rookie of the year contenders Felix Rosenqvist and Santino Ferrucci were the top three on the speed chart during the first practice session for Sunday's season-ending and championship-deciding race. The practice was problematic for Alexander Rossi, second in the points standings behind Josef Newgarden, because his car had a "hardware problem."

It required Rossi to get out of his car so his Andretti Autosport team could access

the issue. Rossi wound up with just four laps completed in the session and sported his "Angry Alex" scowl as he climbed atop the timing stand to debrief. He is 41 points behind leader Newgarden headed into a race worth double points as IndyCar decides its champion in the finale for the 14th consecutive year.

It didn't get much better for Rossi in the second session, as he was 23rd of 24 cars with the caveat that he didn't turn any laps on the faster set of tires. Andretti Autosport teammate Ryan Hunter-Reay was fastest of the session, and followed by the rookie contenders. Rosenqvist was second, Herta third without incident and Ferrucci fifth.

Newgarden was sixth fastest and needs only to finish fourth Sunday to win his second title in three years.

A tight championship battle, an impressive rookie class, improved television ratings and major advancements in safety and technology on the horizon were among the highlights touted Friday by IndyCar leadership.

"We believe IndyCar is the most compelling form of motorsport on the planet, and I think that's more true, more defensible every year," series CEO Mark Miles said. "We just keep getting better, the racing improves, it's more competitive, and it's all done while being very attentive to managing costs for the teams. I'm also delighted to say that in almost every metric, our marketing and pro-

motional and commercial initiatives are growing the sport and ultimately attracting more fans."

IndyCar this year had just one broadcast partner, the NBC Sports Group, which helped its continued renaissance. While nowhere near its heyday of the 1980s and early 1990s, the series has gained stability that is being openly celebrated this weekend in the long-awaited return to Laguna Seca. The track was one of the most popular on the circuit until it was dropped after the 2004 race.

But there's a boost in energy over what is still to come for the series, and that includes McLaren's participation next season, a windscreen that will protect the cockpit beginning next year and a hybrid system that will be implemented when the new engine formula is introduced in 2022. IndyCar wants less downforce by 2022 and is aiming for over 900 horsepower.

"It's very important that we remain true to our DNA, and our DNA is fast, loud, authentic and unapologetic," said Jay Frye, president of IndyCar.

The "Aeroscreen" project currently underway to protect the drivers' heads in the open cockpits is receiving the most attention as IndyCar aims for improved safety. The push has been on for years but has been slow in development, even after Justin Wilson's death in 2015 when he was hit in the head by a piece of debris.



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