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SunTrust RACING

EMCO Gears Classic Preview

LEXINGTON, Ohio (June 15, 2010) – Beneath the roar of racecar engines, much like the perpetual din of those South African *vuvuzela* horns that have become the signature soundtrack for the 2010 World Cup tournament that just got underway, the World Cup Fever epidemic makes its way to the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington this weekend as the GRAND-AM Rolex Sports Car Series kicks off the second half of its season with Saturday afternoon's EMCO Gears Classic.

Among the drivers, team owners, crewmembers and others in the Rolex Series paddock who hail from other countries and have a close eye on the goings-on in South Africa these days are Max Angelelli and Ricky Taylor, co-drivers of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara, as well as team owner and three-time sports car racing champion Wayne Taylor, who also happens to be Ricky's father.

Angelelli hails from Italy, which is defending its 2006 World Cup title. His 20-year-old co-driver Ricky Taylor was born in England but moved with his family to the Orlando area when he was just an infant and has lived there ever since. An avid soccer player during his days as a midfielder at Orlando's Lake Highland Prep, with whom he advanced to the 2008 Florida high school state tournament, Taylor makes it clear he was rooting for Team USA when it played to a 1-1 draw against England in its World Cup opener.

Wayne Taylor, meanwhile, stands to be the proudest of the bunch as the eyes of the sporting universe are focused on his native South Africa. Even though he's completely embraced the United States and became a citizen not long after he began racing sports cars full-time here in 1989, Taylor surprised even himself when he was riveted to the television screen during South Africa's opening World Cup match against Mexico. After all, for the man voted the 1996 Sportsman of the Year by the South African Guild of Journalists, and prior to that received South Africa's prestigious Springbok Colors – putting him alongside former Formula 1 champion Jody Scheckter as two of the only racecar drivers ever to receive the country's most coveted athletic honor – it's about time his homeland has a chance to finally take such a highly visible position on the world stage.

Of course, Angelelli, Taylor and Taylor head to Mid-Ohio with goals of the non-soccer variety in mind as they look to extend the SunTrust team's streak of three podium finishes in a row that has solidified its second-place position in the standings at the season's midpoint, a healthy 13 points ahead of third but a hefty 24 points behind the championship-leading No. 01 Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates BMW Riley team featuring drivers Scott Pruett and Memo Rojas.

Practice for Saturday's EMCO Gears Classic begins Friday morning with qualifying set for 5 p.m. EDT. SPEEDTV.com will stream live video coverage of qualifying beginning at 4:55 p.m. Race time Saturday is 5 p.m., with live television on SPEED. The Motor Racing Network's (MRN) live radio coverage begins at 4:45 p.m. Saturday, while Sirius NASCAR Radio Channel 128's delayed broadcast begins at 7:45 p.m. Live timing and scoring during all on-track sessions can be found at www.grand-am.com.

Max Angelelli, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara:

Things have been going well for the SunTrust team with a win and three podium finishes in the last three races. How do you feel as you head to Mid-Ohio this weekend?

“We've had a series of very positive finishes and we need to maintain this trend. We knew sooner or later this was about to happen. We knew we had the speed, we knew we had everything in place, but circumstances always denied a good result. Now we have it all together, and I'm extremely happy with everything we have, from Ricky, to the team, to the car, to the engine, the sponsors and all of our supporters – they make me very proud to be representing them. We have to maintain this trend, and I'm going to fight to get us the championship. I'm not going to give up, even though we are looking at quite a large deficit to the Ganassi team. It's a little bit like fighting against a big giant. At the end, David won (vs. Goliath) but, in this case, it looks like it's going to be difficult. But it is possible. Until the checkered flag at the last race, there is nothing to be gained by giving up.”

You had a great car and a huge lead at Mid-Ohio last year before an ill-timed yellow ruined your shot at the season's first victory. Do you feel the racetrack owes you one?

“What happened to us last year at Mid-Ohio was just bad luck. We were in the wrong place at the wrong time. We did a spectacular job of putting ourselves in position to win the race before that, and we will have to do it again this year. Otherwise, it's one of those racetracks where it is nearly impossible to overtake. It is a track where you need track position, so we really need to have a good qualifying effort, a good strategy, good pit stops, a good driver change, and a little bit of luck. Last year, we could have won the race, easily. At least we know that we do have a good car there.”

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Max Angelelli, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara (continued):

Being an Italian, the country which is defending its World Cup championship this month, are you caught up in all the frenzy surrounding this year's event?

“Obviously, I look after Italy. It's a big deal in Italy. Everything stops. The Parliament stops, politicians stop, government offices and business stops. For the next several weeks, nothing will be done. But I'm not like 99.9 percent of the Italians who completely leave reality for all of that. I'm not a fanatic. I do like watching it, and I like to be informed. I read the magazines and the newspapers and I watch what they say on TV. But I have enough stress being a racecar driver. I don't need the stress that is caused by the World Cup.”

What do you get excited about, if not something as huge as the World Cup?

“Here is what I like more than the World Cup: Every Sunday, after church, I take my sons (Samuele, 7, and Emanuele, 3) and my nephew (Nicolo, 5) out in my two-seater Porsche on the streets of Bologna. I find a good spot, and then, with one of them in the car at a time, I do burnouts. They love it. I love watching them loving it. When I pick them up, I say that we are going out for donuts. All week long, they bother me from Monday to Saturday about doing this on Sunday. Thanks to Pirelli for offering me tires to do such a thing on a regular basis. The kids love it, and that makes me more happy than anything else. That is my World Cup.”

Ricky Taylor, co-driver of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara:

Most everyone who's driven at Mid-Ohio has fallen in love with the place. Do you feel the same way?

“It's a great place to drive a racecar. It really keeps you busy and it's really physical and technical, but it's a lot of fun to drive. When it comes to racing, there's really only one good passing spot – heading onto the backstraight into a hard braking zone – turn three, I guess. Other than that, it's all about traffic because it's so difficult to pass the other DPs there. The first year I raced there (2008) was a good race for me. It was pouring down rain at the beginning and I was able to pass a lot of cars. That was cool.”

You've settled into a groove as a driver, as has the team. What has happened to make this possible?

“We've had several solid finishes in a row. I think we've always been capable of getting these kinds of results, but the whole team is working well together, now, and putting it all together. The true speed of the car is definitely showing. And it's definitely not luck, what we've been able to do the last few races. It's just hard work on the team's part, and not making any mistakes.”

Wayne Taylor, owner of the No. 10 SunTrust Racing Ford Dallara team:

Your overall thoughts headed to Mid-Ohio this weekend with the SunTrust team on quite a roll?

“I love Mid-Ohio. It's one of the nicest road racing facilities in America. Max and Ricky both love to race there. We had a great race car there last year and it looked like we were on our way to our first win of the year before we got robbed. We were so far ahead but got caught out by a yellow. Wrong place, wrong time. But it's all good for us right now. Max and Ricky are driving very well. Ricky's got his first pole and race win under his belt. The guys on the team are doing a great job. Everything is jelling. Now, I feel we're in a position where we can go to any track and be competitive. We've been developing the Dallara for a few years, now, and our Dallara-Ford package is solid. I'm not sure how to beat Ganassi at this point because they're so fast. It was clear at Watkins Glen, where they drove by us twice in a straight line. But it is what it is, and you can't take anything away from the Ganassi team. They're a good team and they do everything right. They have a really good package this year. We'll just have to stay the course that we're on, of late, and see where that leaves us at the end of the season.”

You've considered yourself an American since you moved to the United States permanently in 1989. But with the World Cup in full swing, do you find yourself feeling a bit nostalgic for your native South Africa?

“You can't take away your roots, that's for certain. I was even surprised a little bit by how much I've gotten into it. For me, it's even bigger than soccer. It's amazing that it takes something as enormous as the World Cup for people to be able to really understand what South Africa's all about. I'm totally American since I set foot here, but it is very special what is going on down in my homeland, right now. I'll be a little torn if the U.S. ends up playing South Africa, but I know who I'll root for, for sure, if either team ends up playing Italy, Max's team. They'll thrash the Italians!”

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