

Drivers, mayor see Baltimore's first IndyCar race as success

By Gary Graves, USA TODAY



By Michael Madrid, USA TODAY

Will Powers celebrates after his Baltimore Grand Prix victory on Sunday.

BALTIMORE – More impressive than [Will Power's](#) mastery of yet another street-road course was the crowd that gathered to watch him win Sunday's inaugural Baltimore Grand Prix.

“That’s the best podium ceremony I've ever had in my career. Massive!” the Australian said of the rock-concert feel at the trophy presentation. “So many people. On my cool-down lap, I looked at every (grand)stand, absolutely full. They put on the best race we have had all year.”

Race organizers estimated that 150,000 attended the three-day event, which ended with Power's Izod IndyCar Series-best sixth victory this season. Oriol Servia was second and [Tony Kanaan](#) third. The 2.4-mile, 13-turn layout — built for \$6.5 million, largely from federal funds mandated for street improvements — wound through downtown streets past venues such as the [Inner Harbor](#) and [Oriole Park](#) at [Camden Yards](#).

The event began, literally, with bumps, as construction of a section of catch fence resulted in a six-hour delay Friday.

Things smoothed out by Saturday, with Sunday's hitches mostly confined to on-track activities. Graced with sunny weather, many of the grandstands were filled, and thousands more milled around tents and the convention center that doubled as an inside paddock.

Encouraging as that was, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake spent [Labor Day](#) reflecting on the lessons learned and what can be improved.

“For next year, we'll definitely have more entrances as well as a sense of traffic monitoring and having contingency plans,” Rawlings-Blake said. “But we go on to Year 2 in the enviable position of exceeding everyone's expectations. This was a real city race, and we realized there was a demographic around Baltimore to draw from. It was truly a Baltimore event.”

Rawlings-Blake said she and city officials quickly began research on what makes a temporary street-course race work after the race was announced last year with a five-year commitment.

Despite Baltimore's outlay, which included cutting down trees to improve sight lines and fencing off neighborhood streets, Rawlings-Blake said the event preparations came in under budget.

IndyCar Series President Randy Bernard came away impressed. "This is what the sport needed," Bernard said.

Though Power made the course look easy, leading 70 of 75 laps, turns 1 and 3 — where 11 cars stacked up in a midrace incident — proved tight and tough for passing, and the Pratt Street straightaway included chicanes and bumps. But drivers raved about the challenges, and Servia was among many lobbying for more events like it.

"What a surprise it was to have an event like this," Servia said. "It was important for IndyCar. We don't have many events here at all on the [East Coast](#), so it's important to choose the right market, and this was a right choice, and the promoter did a great job."