

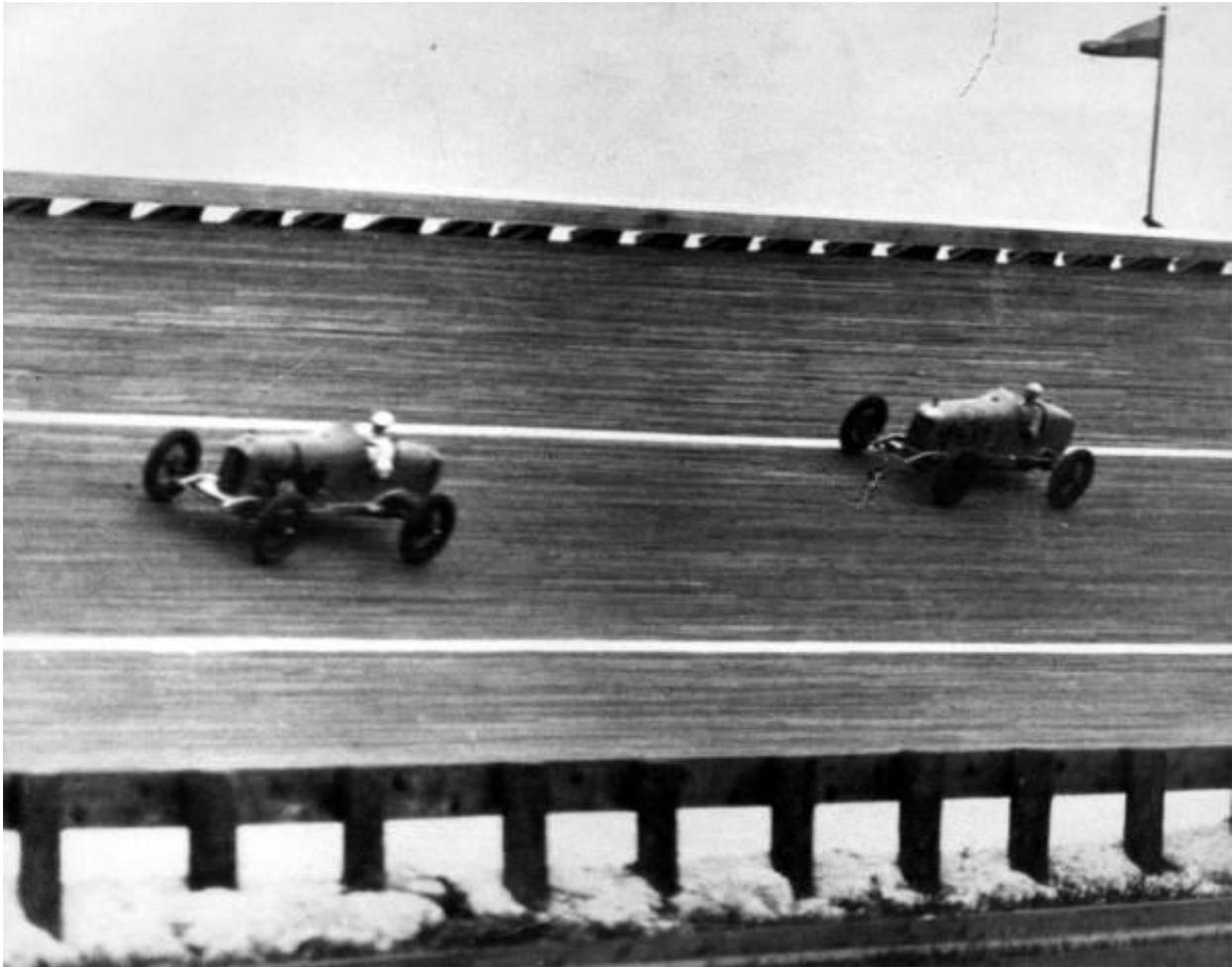
# **Joe Scalzo's**

## **City of Speed and elsewhere**

### **Sanctioning Bodies**

**Tyrants used to love American automobile racing and so did demagogues, idealists, fat cats, laissez-faire capitalists, doomsayers, and saviors. Making matters worse, back in the 20<sup>th</sup> century such dangerous creatures were famous for banding together for mass hallucinations and the free exchange of fancy. Terrible things happened to racing whenever they did.**

**They had it pretty good, did those racers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who were free to race as they wished, without sanctioning bodies ordering them around. But by the 1920s racing was in crisis. The contest board of the powerful American Automobile Association, most feared and probably worst of all sanctioning bodies, had steered racing to the brink of a precipice. Its over-developed Millers and Duesenbergs tended to run flawlessly or blow up from the stress, and, in either case, were traveling much too fast for sanity and safety on the bricked surface of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, to say nothing of the AAA's tournament of even faster board tracks.**



**Operating costs were out of control, and a clique egotistical fat cat racing car owners had matters firmly under their thumb. And although the stated purpose of the Indy 500 was to further development the automobile, the only piece of advanced technology to spew forth from the Hoosier laboratory of speed had been the rear-view mirror.**

**The Great Depression of the 1930 ameliorated a lot of this, cutting the speeds and putting an end to the supercharged Millers and Duesenbergs, wiping out the fat cats, bankrupting all the looming lumber bowls, and almost doing the same thing to the Indy 500. Racing plunged from its earlier status as a high-toned endeavor down to perhaps its proper one as blue collar.**

**Meanwhile, the AAA Contest Board, after appointing itself to further racing, instead seemed determined to destroy racing. By 1933 it had reduced the number of National Championship meets to three, including the Indy 500; and by 1938 the Contest Board's dedicated, patient. stewardship had succeeded in reducing the schedule to a bare two. Making an ambitious bid to tempt America's car manufacturers into racing, the contest board tried replacing the 500's missing, glitzy, Millers and Duesenbergs with passenger car-based eyesores; heavy, cumbersome, iron junks with too little rubber on the ground. It also brought back into fashion a species that had gone out with flag pole-sitting: riding mechanics. The**

**Contest Board's new, brontosaurus, formula unnecessarily shortened the lives of at least nine of them, plus taking a similar toll on the 500's drivers.**



**Racing's weakness for dictatorial leaders was marked by the reign of Arthur C. Pillsbury, tyrant. Ruling by terror, he and his lieutenants acted less as racing handmaidens and more like its Praetorian guards. "Conduct detrimental to racing" was a rubric covering everything with showing up with an unwashed racing car to speaking unflatteringly of the AAA's contest board, and either offense would get you hauled before the Pillsbury star chamber and lashed with a suspension from racing of up to two seasons.**

**Kept in harness seemingly forever, Pillsbury and the contest board's other senile seniors didn't mellow with age but got meaner, and by the 1950s had grown into surly old crocks. Thus the AAA's often asinine rules frequently were open to ad hoc interpretation, as happened in 1953, at a notorious 100-mile race on the fairgrounds at Detroit.**

**First Detroit's dirt surface exploded, making all of the 18 starters agoraphobic because they were jumping, dancing, and leapfrogging over each other. And then, humanely, the horror show was interrupted at 51 miles so that efforts could be made to civilize the ruined track with water. The efforts failed. But then, inhumanely, the pulverized drivers were sent back to their pulverized cars and ordered to continue racing.**

The drivers, quite naturally, refused to obey, even with the grandstands packed with 30,000 impatient fans preparing to riot if they didn't. But just as the inflamed geriatrics of the contest board were preparing to level brutal punishments – the swine drivers were disobeying their orders! – an emergency compromise was reached: the standings at 51 miles would count so long as everybody promised to complete the remaining 49 miles at parade lap speeds. This backfired. Even parade-lap speeds were sufficient for one of Detroit's craters to rip a wheel off the leading car and impale it on the fence. The sham parading continued until the 76th mile when another driver ended on his head, red-flagging matters for good. Afterward, rather than explaining how a racing car left hanging on the fence for ten miles still had managed to win, the contest board zippered everything up and filed away Detroit as just another of its embarrassing secrets.

**August 3, 1955:** Among other disasters, it was the bad ink summer of Billy "the Crazy Russian" Vukovich's fatal wreck in the Indy 500, and the 300 SLR Mercedes massacre at Le Mans. And the contest board of the AAA, after five terrible decades at the wheel, reacted by professing itself utterly shaken at discovering that automobile racing was, well, dangerous. So it fled the scene, leaving racing to face the music alone.

Racing wasn't left without the benefit of leadership for long. A body called the Cowboy Riders and Ropers Association made an unsuccessful grab for its remains, leaving the pillars of racing to cogitate and brainstorm about the future. This unwieldy body included racing car owners; drivers and mechanics; racing track owners and promoters; and members of the Hulman family, all-powerful rulers of the critical Brickyard in Indianapolis. "Down with tyrants!" was the group's repudiation of the old AAA terror.

The newly-born United States Auto Club, soon universally called USAC, was going to be a fraternity of racers, administrated by a board of directors who themselves were knowledgeable racers. Duane Carter, USAC's first director of competition, ex-champion of the sprint car death traps of Salem, Winchester and Dayton seemed determined to make USAC fulfill its destiny as Maximum Leader of All Known Racing. So Carter set his sights on Europe, and got the Indy cars invited to Italy and Monza's Race of Two Worlds; made a tire supplier commit to building the proper rubber so that



the Brickyard might one day host a 500-mile stock car extravaganza; traveled to Bonneville to see how USAC could muscle in on the Salt Flats' speed nationals; ventured to Pikes Peak to create a USAC hill-climbing division to augment its sprint, midget and championship categories; even tried forcing the amateurs of la-de-dah sports car racing to turn professional by joining USAC. Carter got fired in 1959. USAC's nervous board of directors concluded that he'd never really grasped democracy's egalitarian concepts.

Tempting fate, USAC's board of directors next selected Henry Banks, another race-driving hero and former National Champion, to fill Carter's vacant position. And if Carter had seemed like a lightning rod for action, Banks seemed sure to behave as a weather vane. He was soft-spoken, even soft-hearted. In fact, the most telling anecdote about Banks was this: seasons before at a crash-ravaged dirt track race similar to Detroit's, but in New York, at Syracuse, one of several injured drivers – Andy Linden -- was lying out on the track, too numb or scared to move. But racing was continuing anyway, because AAA wouldn't throw a yellow caution flag. Of all the drivers, only soft-hearted Banks had stopped to tell the AAA that something should be done about poor Andy, prostrate on the track. And something had been done. AAA dispatched an ambulance traveling in the wrong direction, and four more drivers cracked up trying to miss it.

But once he was installed as USAC's official shill, an unpredicted metamorphosis occurred. USAC's sash of authority turned Banks into a railing and capricious zealot who

quickly made life under Arthur C. Pillsbury and his cronies from the AAA seem like the good old days. Corporal punishments bloomed in the 1960s, and attempting to give a turn in the stocks to USAC's brightest stars, including A.J. Foyt, caused Banks no anxiety or remorse.

Which was understandable. Very early in its life - in 1959 - Banks and USAC had played Russian Roulette with a bullet in every chamber and gotten away with it. Elmer George, years afterward shot dead by the lover of his divorced wife, Mary Hulman George, had been a racing driver of middling ability and a terrible temper. He'd lost it again in Pennsylvania, during a 100-mile race at circular Langhorne, when he Sunday-punched a USAC referee. Refusing to live in fear of Elmer's patriarch and powerful father-in-law, Anton Hulman, owner of the Brickyard, USAC conducted a full dress hearing - it even called out of retirement old Arthur C. Pillsbury to act as the hearing's hanging judge - to determine how Elmer might be punished. And Pillsbury's ruling was to throw the book at Elmer: a year's suspension plus a sizable cash fine.



In the immediate aftermath, USAC sat back and awaited the angry reaction of Elmer's father-in-law; and even speculated about which sanctioning body Hulman might choose to run future Indy 500s. But when Hulman offered no objections to Elmer's punishment, USAC breathed easier and again started feeling confident, even cocky, and this -- not just for USAC but for all racing - was extremely dangerous.

No longer content with patrolling its own empire, or picking fights with its own vassals like Elmer and A.J., USAC, in the bellicose manner of its old, fired, director of competition Carter, began moving like a conquering civilization. Banks went marching on Daytona Beach and NASCAR but, much to his frustration, was met at the gates by Big Bill France, NASCAR's founder and dictator, who rebuffed him, strongly suggesting that Banks and USAC mind their own affairs. Not discouraged, Banks hit the heartland, traveling to Des Moines to visit the International Motor Contest Association, the IMCA, whose pious slogan was "Safety First," and whose fixed races were conducted on unfenced dirt tracks edged by everything from toxic garbage pits to open gravel dumps to polluted lakes. Once again Banks was rebuffed. The potentates of IMCA thought his vision of an "interchange" sounded more like voluntary enslavement than inter-sanctioning body trade.



Learning of his emissary's continuing frustrations, Thomas Binford, USAC's president, became a little out of

control himself. Upon catching Paul Goldsmith - a licensed USAC driver, who was its stock car division champion - competing in southern California at a NASCAR race in Riverside, Binford ordered Banks to suspend Goldsmith, which Banks did with gusto. But the difficulty was that, although Riverside was a NASCAR race, it had the blessing of the FIA, sanctioning body for racing world-wide, making it fair game to any American driver from NASCAR, the Sports Car Club of America, and, of course, USAC. Defying the FIA, Binford, Banks, and USAC black-balled Goldsmith anyway. But Goldsmith, a hardened former flat-track motorbike racer, threatened to take USAC to federal court, making USAC aware for the first time of such painful realities as the Sherman Anti-Trust Law and assorted right-to-work statutes. When USAC still refused to back off and return Goldsmith from exile, he switched sanction bodies and joined NASCAR, and USAC had succeeded in losing another of its top stars.

Yet another strategy which backfired was USAC's re-invention of the unproven bromide that racing's noble purpose was to serve the automobile as a hot-house test laboratory. In a letter printed in Life magazine, Binford, attempting to rebut a negative story, named racing as the source of every gizmo from the shock absorber to the balloon tire {he never mentioned racing's balloon foot).

Encouraged, various automotive companies and corporations next tried to privately license the star drivers of USAC to mouth endorsements for their wares at USAC races. The sanctioning body attempted to prevent it, but this brought an inquiring Federal Trade Commission to USAC's front door.

It got worse. "Official policy," a 1960s USAC position paper declared, "is to encourage innovations from wherever they may come." This attracted, among many, Colin Chapman and Jimmy Clark and their English Lotus-powered-by-Fords, and the All-American Eagles of Dan Gurney, who promptly put out of business a million dollars' worth of home-grown, front-engine, Meyer-Drake roadsters. Then when another innovation, the STP Turbocar, arrived and threatened to put out to pasture all of USAC's piston-engine machinery, the sanctioning body dropped its pro-innovation stance and filed more lawsuits. But the owner of the Turbocar, controversial Andy Granatelli, made a monkey out of USAC by bringing to bear lawsuits of his own.



**Its dumb image steadily growing dumber, and desperate to set up damage control, USAC hastily reversed course, and, renouncing Thomas Binford's letter in Life, drafted a lecturing press release. "Too often," moaned the release, "the public has been led to believe that the primary function of an automobile race is to aid in the development of automotive products. This is not true. The primary objective of a USAC race; is to provide entertainment for the fans through close, thrilling, competition."**

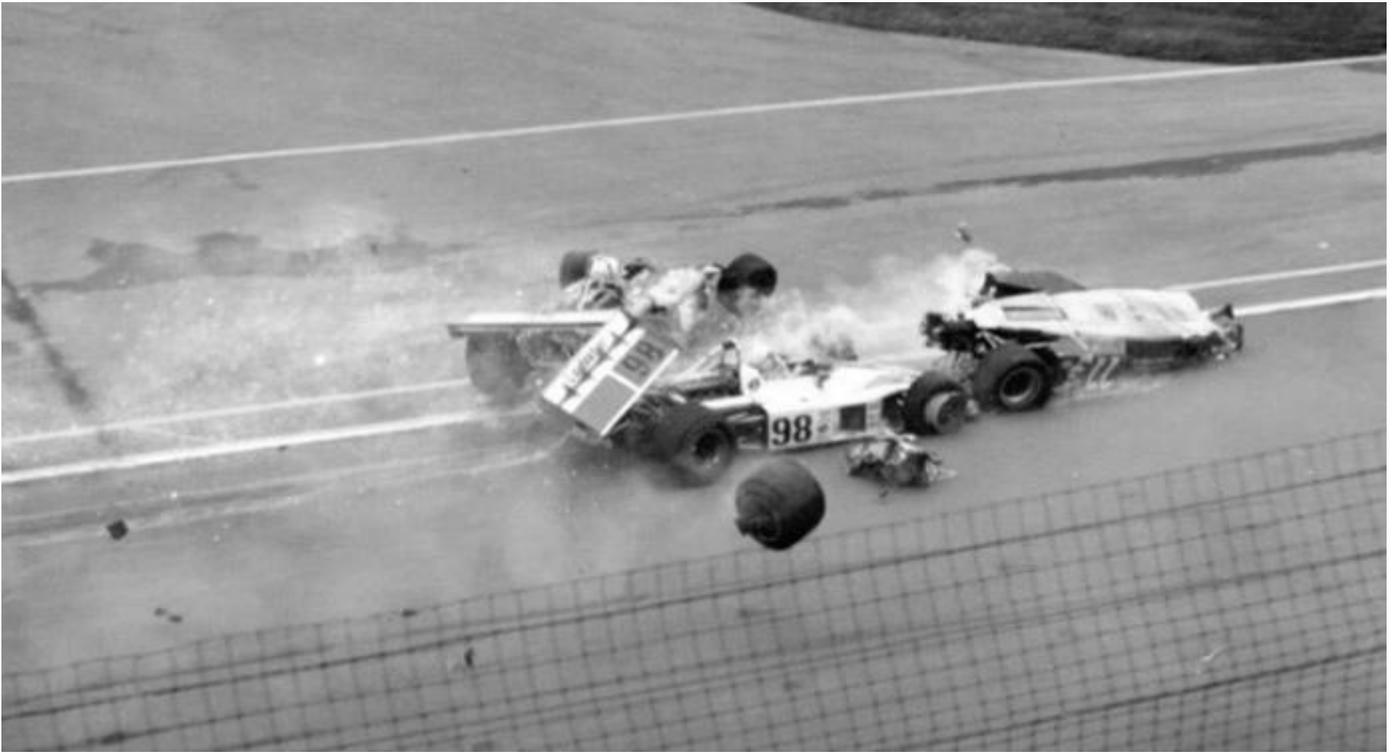
**Of course the racing, by now, wasn't half as thrilling as USAC itself. All the opponent sanctioning bodies regarded the body as a rogue enterprise and sought its ostracism. Yet even when left on its own, USAC succeeded in attracting powerful new enemies, namely the entire female sex which it battled to keep out of Gasoline Alley's garages.**

**Attempts at conciliation failed. Henry Banks, introducing a new and patronizing hospitality to NASCAR, found more suspicion than gratitude. Thomas Binford, making a similarly ill-fated entreaty to the FIA, complained "We came bearing the olive branch of peace, and our reward was brick bats." Brick bats wasn't the half of it. As a result of Binford's "overtures," USAC lost all its internationally-approved races other than the Indy 500, and the city of Indianapolis lost its right to host the U.S. Grand Prix.**

**Came the 1970s, USAC discovered -- too late -- that its democratic institution had turned into an authoritarian monster and something had to be done, and was. Henry Banks got kicked upstairs into administration, and Thomas Binford departed to become the chief steward of the Indy 500. And then, with a dozen long years abounding in mistakes and**

**misfortune to account for, USAC bored deep into the discomforts of truly rancorous democracy.**

**It enlarged itself into an unwieldy chamber of 21 directors, each one having veto power over the others. Possessing nothing but a single vote, the bloc of Indy car owners clearly were not in the majority, but behaved as though they were. Gorging on the new treat of vast sponsorship dollars, they over-heated their tall-winged, unrestricted automobiles into ballistic billboards for the rubber and tire industries.**



**False prophets, they also began believing their own PR blather about racing's new and mighty role as "the Sport of the Seventies," or at least they did until the calamitous, mayhem-filled, 1973 Indy 500, offered a different perspective. With some newspapers in full cry for the prohibition of racing in a way that hadn't been heard since 1911, USAC was forced to run down the curtain on its latest version of Indy car racing. And the resulting rules changes proved so emasculating that Indy racing's backbone of Meyer-Drake Offys and emerging Cosworths couldn't begin growing back their fangs until the 1980s.**

**Indy's fat cat car owners of the 1970s resented this – resented it deeply. Something new was happening. Previously ridiculed as wealthy parasites who owned the racing equipment but lacked the guts to race it themselves, this new breed of fat cats were suddenly a force mightier than the drivers themselves. And they assumed that belonging to USAC gave them the right to spend as much of their sponsors dollars as they pleased, and to make their racing cars run as fast as they wanted.**

An “Our toys, our rules,” syndrome evolved, leading to a head-on collision between the fat cats and USAC. Yet another source of car-owner rage was prize money, of which the owners didn’t believe that the Brickyard or USAC was paying enough.

The car owner who most counted was Roger Penske -- college boy, trickster, former sports car racer and billionaire fat cat -- who earlier had caused a stink by faking out USAC into believing that his F1 Cooper single-seater was a sports car . His time was coming. By the 21st century, Penske would be the most powerful and frightening figure racing has ever seen: czar and owner of his own Indy car and NASCAR teams; owner and leader of his new Indy Racing League; and new owner of the Brickyard itself.



Arguably the second most powerful fat cat was a Chicago businessman named Carl Haas, who never was seen without an unlit six-inch cigar in his mouth, and who had a suspicious streak which compelled him, just before a race’s start, to squat down, gasp his car’s nose, and voice some sort of mysterious mumbo-jumbo. Nobody knew what this meant.

Ultimately, after a decade’s impatience, a delegation led by Penske, Haas, and Dan Gurney seceded from USAC and dreamed up Indy car racing’s third acronym in seven decades, CART, Championship Auto Racing Teams. And barely two years afterward, USAC had become a make-believe power and CART was firmly in the driver’s seat. But confronting the USAC-affiliated Brickyard didn’t turn out to be the cakewalk that Penske, Haas, and Gurney expected. The last time the Brickyard had been confronted by such an angry coalition had been in the 1940s, when a rump body of car owners and drivers called the American Society of Professional Automobile Racing, called ASPAR (yet another racing acronym!), threatened to strike unless the Indy raised its purse to 40 percent of its gate receipts. ASPAR was even dumber than USAC. Indy had easily routed the strikers by ceasing to announce the size of a 500’s attendance.

Routing Penske, Haas, Gurney, and Indy’s other unhappy car owners of the 1970s was more difficult. CART needed the 500 so it could please its exposure-hungry sponsors, and in 1979, after the Hulman dynasty’s lawyers had refused to accept their entries in the 500, CART had its own well-paid shysters haul the Hulman Dynasty into federal court and CART carried the day. But the fight wasn’t finished. The feds ruled that the Indy 500 had to accept CART teams but didn’t have to accept CART as its sanctioning body. Thus, beginning in 1979, there existed the anomaly of the Indy 500 being the only Indy car meet still sanctioned by USAC.



**With USAC gone. CART's leaders vowed to run racing the right way: no more democracy, and certainly no more demented nonsense like putting old warhorse racing drivers behind the wheel and minding the store. Quoting the wisdom of one of its most respected and admired founders, CART was going to run the Indy car show "like a business."**

**The individual preaching this wisdom was Dan Gurney who --before Goodyear Tire & Rubber set him up with a car-building enterprise, All-American Racers -- had never operated a business, so had never properly grasped the difference between business in the cockpit and business in the board room. Another Gurney flaw was pointed out by pundit Ken W. Purdy, who wrote, "What Gurney believes in - are the pioneer virtues, patriotism, clean living honesty"**

**But his fellow board members in CART, led by fat cats Penske and Haas, who refused to be constrained by such sporting considerations, ate Gurney alive. Rather than purchase an All-American Eagle from Gurney, Penske, Haas and rest of CART's fat cats were shipping their sponsorship dollars to England, benefiting from a friendly exchange rate and the gross overcapacity of the UK's ever-growing construction shops. And after an under-financed, made-in-America, Eagle almost defeated all of the March, Lola, and Penske imports CART declared the vehicle illegal. Which wasn't quite what Gurney had meant by "Running racing like a business."**

**Later the fat cats of CART - without telling him first - voted him out of office, and in time Gurney's name disappeared from the group's official biography. "Running racing like a business," it turned out, meant laissez faire non-interference with the ego-tripping of a select few fat cats who were zonked out on the abject worship of high-technology solution and had enough big-money sponsors to foot the bills. More cold-cash was needed than ever because, under CART's leadership, high-tech proliferated, and costs sky-rocketed: over five brief seasons, the expense of a competitive Indy car effort for a season rose more than 300 percent,**

from \$165,00 to almost a quarter of a million. A tolerant board of directors observed the spectacle of cannibalism, as the fat cat teams devoured the little owners then often fought over the spoils by bringing lawsuits against one another.

Back-biting and duplicity raged, and the atmosphere at a CART board meeting became so poisonous that every team guarded against its neighbors. On rare occasions the owners of the small teams would attempt a putsch against the fat cats, only to crash and burn. Desperate for some relief from Penske, Haas, and the other all-conquering fat cats, one owner of a small team cried, “We need a collapse!” and collapse his small team did.

Meantime, Penske and Haas, or Haas and Penske, continued growing more powerful, and continued winning almost all the races: CART was said to stand for “Carl’s and Rodger’s Teams.” But one tiny and scrappy outfit that kept on going was run by the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace workers. Its boss and spokesman was a gadfly named Andrew Kenopensky, whom the fat cats ridiculed as a doomsayer Jeremiah. Kenopensky’s attack message was that CART’s board of directors was run by dangerously self-absorbed individuals like Penske and Haas, fat cats fixated solely on their personal goals. “The board of directors better come down from the clouds!” he often railed. “We all don’t have multi-million dollar sponsors! We can’t continue this madness!”



**Kenopensky was much like the absent Dan Gurney. He, too, believed in “the pioneer virtues, clean living, honesty.” But Kenopensky was tougher than Gurney – tougher than anybody else in CART. His face scarred from a broken whiskey bottle, and his body a survivor of the dreaded Legionnaires disease, he was a seasoned agitator with a demagogue’s nose for trouble end, especially, unfair practices; not for nothing was his CART team sponsored by a labor union. He considered the like of Penske and Haas spiritual descendents from the Robber Barons, while they tried writing him off as some labor goon.**

**Bowing to Kenopensky’s unrelenting pressure, Cart added him to its board of directors. Unique among his brother regents. Kenopensky spent 18 months on the board rocketing the CART administration with eloquently hostile epistles as well as uncounted memos of accusation, plus he pounded everybody silly with his frequent, roaring tirades:**

**“I sleep very well at night, clear conscience. How about you guys?”**

**“What’re you doing, holding a closed door meeting? You think this is the Ku Klux Klan?”**

**“I haven’t seen a Statue of Liberty Play pulled off like you guys just did since high school, with Mario Andretti as the quarterback!” (Andretti, a board member himself, was a special focus of Kenopensky ill will).**

**“A typical CART deal! No communication, the self-interest-oriented decisions of a few, and the hell with the rest!”**

**But Kenopensky, annoyingly, proved more effective at agitating from the outside than he was at improving things from within. Upon resigning he wrote up a blistering and inflammatory paper that provoked a CART car owners revolt. A chaotic, confused, meeting was hastily convoked and it proved disastrous: Carl Haas and Andrew Kenopensky invited each other to step outside with both declining**

**Afterward, all the brilliant minds got together to create a huge and unworkable democratic body of 25 voting members – which toppled over dead in yet another chaotic revolt the following summer. Andrew Kenopensky, terminally exhausted, did the same: though a survivor on Legionnaires, the stress of battling CART may have helped bring on cancer.**

**Now the 1990s blasted off, and the remaining rulers of CART did something new over the 1991. They tidied up their franchises, rearranged their prize money structure, and committed organizational suicide: “CART” was dead; long live IndyCar.**

**But CART's owners were unlucky in that their name change didn't fool someone with the horsepower to disrupt their agenda. Charging the fat cats with being "blinded by power and greed," Tony George, scion of his assassinated father Elmer, started his own sanctioning body but was too late. Came 2020, Roger Penske, the last active member of CART's old clique, and the richest, most frightening, fat cat of them all, threw Tony out of there by buying the Indianapolis Motor Speedway something nobody had believed possible. And for good measure he also purchased the IRL, what which surely will be racing's last-ever sanctioning body.**

**Roger Penske controlling all racing?! Let us pray.**

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