

# Joe Scalzo's

## City of Speed and elsewhere

### Old Men

Many decades ago, Wally Dallenbach tried bailing out of his thankless gig as chief steward of the Championship Auto Racing Teams. But CART's replacement steward broke down and suffered a heart attack from stress at his very first Indy car race so poor Wally had to come back. "I have a thick skin," he explained.



And he needed one. Wally, after all, was supposed to be the big gendarme – CART's all-powerful racing constable with the power to punish. Somebody to respect but mostly to fear, and it wasn't nice to get in the face of CART's top cop. CART, however, was a forward-thinking outfit which believed in democracy for everybody, including all its scofflaw superstars, who got away with taking shots at Wally every time he busted them. Question: was this free speech in action, or was it a case

of criminals running the clink? Your choice.

- Embattled Paul Tracy – in this century one of TV's big racing voices – has Wally put him CART furlough; whines that Wally is picking on him and turning him into a scapegoat; and then, really going on the offensive, argues that Wally is blind and that he, Paul Tracy, will be exonerated by telemetry.
- Alex Zanardi, frequently placed on probation by Wally for drilling people, achieves the honor/dishonor on being the most unpopular and heavily fined driver in the history of CART; never repents; and returns to Italy parroting the favorite fascist sound bite of his martyred, blowhard, countryman, Mussolini: "Many enemies. Much honor." Meanwhile Chip Ganassi, Zanardi's CART car owner, says that he applauds Zanardi's driving skills and rebukes Wally's penalties as "inconsistent."
- Michael Andretti, today one of the IRL's major players, is convicted of running over people by his own in-car camera; gets censured by Wally; and made to pay a

**fine. Whereupon Michael cuts loose on national TV saying none of it happened; it's all bogus; and Wally can't make him tone down his licks.**

**CART's defiant headliners Tracy, Ganassi, and Andretti were indeed fortunate that Wally had his thick skin and that they weren't racing in NASCAR. If they'd let fly at NASCAR that way, they and their cars never would have gotten out of the tech station. They were equally fortunate not to have been in Formula 1, where the umpires of Max Mosley would have dragged them before a kangaroo court. But they were most fortunate of all not to be racing under the thumbs of the despotic and rule enforcers of Indy car racing's deep past, who might well have reacted to such sass and jive by meting out floggings.**

**Half a century or more back, getting pounded black and blue by the bricks of the Brickyard, or bouncing around Langhorne's savage lip, were minor dangers compared to the frightening experience of a racing driver having a pack of angry old dictator stewards falling on him.**

**Some racing drivers got fined. Some racing drivers got suspended. Some racing drivers got beaten up. The choice wasn't always the racing drivers'.**

**Arthur C. Pillsbury, the timber-track-tycoon-turned-tyrant, was the hanging judge of racing magistrates, but there was another – apparently honorable – tradition which turned retired racing drivers with evil dispositions into strong-arm officials. And when the crankiness of old age combined with the infirmities of ancient racing wounds, combustion occurred. The geezer potentates achieved a state of permanent ill temper and became as mean as scorpions.**

**These angry old bullies with their cruel rule books enjoyed using the privilege to punish. Never mind the offense. For not having a valid highway operator's license, a lap speed record holder in the Indy 500 was threatened with expulsion from all racing. For going to a race and griping about not being allotted enough infield pit passes, a star racing driver was condemned not to race at all. Geezer enforcers found catching a racing driver using foul language in public delightful, because they could hammer him with a fine. Overhearing a racing driver "Impugning the integrity of the sanctioning body" more delightful still because that carried a still stiffer fine.**

**Almost in a class by himself as the most seasoned, surly, tyrant in the business was one Harlan Fengler, provost marshal of the Indy 500. He was erratic, arbitrary, and infamous for changing a rule and then denying he had. Sometimes he even overruled his own tribe of aged and snarling deputies who, just like Harlan, seemed to remain in harness forever; every year racing drivers in the Indy 500 moaned, "Are these old S.O.B.s eternal?" Finally, after a dreadful series of disasters in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Indy's Speedway panicked at last and attempted to remove Harlan. But he persevered anyhow, and had to get the chop.**

**Rule by terror! Paper tigers these coot referees were not. Rank or position meant nothing to them. Or, possibly, everything. The larger and more influential the target, the more inflamed they became and the more they hungered to give the culprit both barrels.**



**the steward isn't a geezer but a tough guy Elmer's own age, and just as hot tempered as Elmer. So the two of them agree to adjudicate matters by murdering each other down in Langhorne's dank catacombs.**

**Take the case of Elmer George, Okie racing driver in Indy and sprint cars as well as the hot-tempered son-in-law or Anton Hulman, owner of the Indy Brickyard, and racing's most powerful man. Elmer getting zapped was the outstanding example of damn-the-torpedoes senior citizen punishment.**

**The well-known scenario: Elmer is leading a race at lethal Langhorne and gets flagged off the track, perhaps unfairly. Heavily provoked, he punches out the lights of the steward who'd black-flagged him. Only this time,**

**What a shame matters were not settled so simply. Instead, gerontocracy kicked in as usual, and a tribe of the old guys took matters into their own hands: it was agreed that even if he was all-powerful Hulman's son-in-law. Elmer was a rockhead deserving severe disciplining. So they brought old Arthur C. Pillsbury out of retirement to chair a geezer star chamber which threw the boot at Elmer, who afterward temporarily vanished.**



**battle before he got the opportunity.**

**Years later, when he was back in his father-in-law's good graces, Elmer continued thirsting for revenge. He was on record as saying that come the day his father-in-law accorded him the keys to run the Brickyard (fat chance!) there would be not one but two Memorial Day races – the first would be the 500 itself and the second would be when he chased all the old tyrants out of there. But Elmer, ever hot-tempered, fought and lost a gun**