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## RULE: Sato Wins Indy 500, Gives Andretti a Little Redemption



By [Heather Rule](#) - May 30, 2017

For the first time, a Japanese driver won the Indianapolis 500. Takuma Sato, a former Formula 1 driver, earned the honors. His reward was a jug of milk, kissing the yard of bricks and solidifying his place in racing history.

Sato, 40, held off Helio Castroneves near the end. Castroneves was once again denied his fourth Indy 500. The [victory for Sato](#) was his second overall as an IndyCar driver. He's also with a new team this year: Andretti Autosport. Sato spent the last four seasons racing for the legendary A.J. Foyt's

team. Sato qualified well, starting on the inside of row two in the fourth spot. Historically, winners have come from up front (42 from row one, 18 from row two).

It was a jubilant celebration for the Andretti team. Sato took the traditional swig of milk (2%, since each driver selects his or her choice before the race. Milk is delivered to the speedway in an armored car.) before he started pouring it over his face and splashing around. He's now an Indianapolis 500 legend.

Team owner Michael Andretti was there to celebrate with him. Unfortunately, Andretti never got to experience an Indy 500 victory as a driver. Instead, he knows all about heartbreak in the Indianapolis 500. Andretti started that race 16 times and never won, despite being one of the most competitive and dominant drivers in the sport. Chalk it up to the Andretti Curse at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. His father, Mario, won in 1969 and had his share of tough luck. Michael Andretti's son, Marco, has finished strong but never won in 12 tries.

One of Michael Andretti's best shots at [the 500 came in 1992](#). He built a huge lead until he started to slow with 11 laps to go. According to the television broadcast, Michael radioed in to his team: "I can't believe it, the engine quit."

Specifically, it was the fuel pump that let go and ended Michael's day.

Twenty-five years later, it seemed like a bit of twisted déjà vu during the race. Two of his six drivers had blown engines in the second half of the race. First, it was 2014 Indy 500 champ Ryan Hunter-Reay, whose engine quit without warning. Hunter-Reay led 28 laps looking for his second Indy 500 win.

Then with 20 laps to go, the most talked-about driver in the field – Formula 1 driver Fernando Alonso – had his engine let go on the front stretch. He led 27 laps of the race as an Indy 500 rookie.

"I'm so sorry, man," Michael Andretti said to Alonso via the team radio.

That left four Andretti cars, all with Honda engines. During the month of May, the Hondas proved to be a bit faster than the Chevrolets, but it came at a price. The Hondas seemed like a ticking time bomb in regard to reliability. Driver James Hinchcliffe's engine went on Friday during the last day of practice.

The biggest crash of the race in terms of the amount of cars involved resulted in the final restart with 11 laps to go and Max Chilton in the lead.

Shuffled back with a caution-filled race, Sato worked his way to the front again for the final restart. It turned into a battle for the lead between Sato, Chilton and Castroneves. The last 10 laps turned into a typical shootout at the front. The late restart bunched up the field, giving multiple drivers a chance.

Castroneves, a 20-year IndyCar veteran driving for Team Penske, even passed for the lead, but Sato grabbed it back again and crossed the yard of bricks first.

*He's now an Indianapolis 500 legend.*

Sato's other real chance at winning this historic race came in 2012. He raced up front, battling with Dario Franchitti for the lead on the final lap. They were wheel-to-wheel headed into turn one. They touched, and Sato went into the wall while Franchitti took the checkered flags under yellow to win his third Indy 500. Sunday, the now-retired Franchitti was there in victory lane to congratulate Sato.

The Andretti Curse when it comes to drivers is still alive and well. But Sunday marked another victory for Michael Andretti as a team owner. Andretti Autosport has won three of the last four Indy 500s, including 2014 with Hunter-Reay and last year's 100th running with rookie Alexander Rossi. Michael Andretti has been to victory lane five times overall, the first in 2005 with the late Dan Wheldon.

Even though Michael Andretti's gotten a taste of the victory milk few times as an owner, I'm sure he'd like to have his face on the Borg Warner trophy as a winning driver even more.

### **Dixon's crash**

The other big story of the day was [a crash between Jay Howard and polesitter Scott Dixon](#) early on in the race for the first caution. It was a scary looking incident that both drivers walked away from, despite the race being red flagged (stopped) to clean up all the debris and replace some fencing.

Howard, driving in an IndyCar race for the first time since 2011, got high on the track heading into a turn, sort of a point of no return, and collided with the wall. Many times, cars will stay along the wall after a crash, but his car started to slide down the track, leaving a passing Dixon with nowhere to go. Dixon's car went airborne and flipped before making an impact with the inside catch fence and guardrail.

*Dixon is one of the most talented and prominent drivers in the IndyCar series.*

It looked like a very scary crash, and it was. Seeing a car get so high off the track is tough to watch. (One thing to note though, it was not a fiery crash, as some headlines seem to indicate. I've seen fiery crashes before, and this does not qualify.)

Anyway, the safety of IndyCars was evident in this case. The entire back half of Dixon's car was detached and destroyed. But the tub where the driver sits remained intact. As they say in racing, in a crash like that the driver is "just a passenger." It's all about the impact. If the car hit the fence or wall at the right angle, a different angle, it could be a very different outcome.

As someone who has watched a lot of open-wheel racing and seen a lot of accidents, I can say that sometimes it's those crashes that look absolutely horrible that a driver will walk away from a majority of the time. Then there's a crash like the one that killed Dale Earnhardt in NASCAR that didn't look bad at all on first glance.

Dixon left the track medical center with a walking boot for a seemingly minor injury to his left ankle. Known as the "Iceman," he was even pretty calm and collected during his on-camera interview, calling his crash a "wild ride."

Dixon is one of the most talented and prominent drivers in the IndyCar series. He still just has the one Indy 500 win. Like Michael Andretti, who was just too good not to get one, Dixon seems too good to not get two. I'm sure he's already turned the page and is preparing for the next IndyCar race in Detroit.

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## HEATHER RULE



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