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### Baltimore Pushes for Indy Racing

Baltimore is not a city known for its professional auto racing, but a group of investors and professionals is looking to change that. Despite the limited geography of the city, Baltimore Racing Development LLC (BRD) is pushing ahead with plans to bring a street race sanctioned by the Indy Racing League to Charm City. Late summer or early fall of 2011 is the targeted range of dates for the inaugural “Baltimore Grand Prix.” The voice of the effort is BRD’s spokesman, Al Unser, Jr., a two-time Indianapolis 500 winner. Unser also helped designed the proposed 2.4-mile track, which will run through downtown Baltimore, going along Pratt Street, Russell Street, Camden Street, Conway Street, and Light Street, passing the Inner Harbor, Camden Yards, and M & T Stadium along the way.

The Indy Racing League is the main American sanctioning body for open-wheel, aka formula car, racing, in which the cars have wheels outside the car’s main body and, in most cases, one seat. The IRL’s centerpiece event is the Indianapolis 500. BRD expects the Baltimore Grand Prix to become the second biggest event on the IRL calendar.

There appears to be a great deal of excitement on the part of all Baltimore parties involved. The Baltimore City Council passed a measure August 10 giving BRD exclusive rights to negotiate with the Indy Racing League to make the grand prix event a reality. BRD CEO Jay Davidson has noted the “good support” he has received from Mayor Sheila Dixon. Unser believes that Baltimore is a good location

for an Indy racing event, considering its place on the eastern seaboard, its proximity to other areas such as New York City, Washington, D.C., and Virginia, and the fact that professional racing has yet to make a foothold in Baltimore.

If the plans pan out as proposed, the event will be more than a race, but instead a three-day series of activities. Chuck Kosich, the general manager of MJ Promotions, has said that it will be branded as a “festival of speed that’s family-affordable,” featuring concerts in addition to the race. He notes that only half the fans who attend Indy car events are race fans, implying that Baltimore could expect a similar number of casual fans in addition to the hardcore racing fans. The three days could bring as many as 150,000 people to the city, creating an expected economic impact of \$60-\$100 million.

BRD does, however, face a number of obstacles, before it gets the final go-ahead with its plans. The Baltimore Business Journal reported on August 14 that BRD is looking for more than \$1.4 million from investors, having so far raised \$550,000 from eight undisclosed investors. There is also the issue of much-needed road improvements, which may require \$1-\$4 million on the part of the city. There is competition on the part of other cities also bidding for a grand prix event, notably Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and Houston, but Unser believes that Baltimore is much further along in its plans than the competing cities.

The city will decide whether to give its final approval for the event on April 1, 2010, and in July, the IRL will make its final decision of which city will host the 2011 Grand Prix. Developments in the process can be followed on BRD’s website, [baltimoreracingdevelopment.com](http://baltimoreracingdevelopment.com).