Porsche Coanda works driver Joshua Rogers wins final race in Daytona

11/11/2023 Porsche Coanda Esports wrapped up the fall series of the ESL R1 sim racing championship second in the team standings. In the season's final round on the Daytona International Speedway, works drivers Joshua Rogers and Mitchell deJong contributed the decisive points. While Rogers won the final race in the digital Porsche 911 GT3 R, deJong finished sixth. Alongside Dayne Warren, both have qualified for the major event in Jönköping, Sweden.

The organisers had a surprise in store for the final round of the ESL R1 autumn series: The Daytona International Speedway, a new track on new sim-racing platform "Rennsport", served as the series' venue for the first time. The circuit consists of an infield section with two right-hand turns and the steeply banked corners of the tri-oval, with a gradient of up to 31 degrees. The IMSA SportsCar Championship opens its season every year in January with the legendary 24-hour race on the 5.730-kilometre circuit. For the first time, the ESL R1 also adopted the "rolling" start from the endurance classic instead of the usual start procedure.

In the knockout round on Thursday, two of the four Porsche Coanda Esports works drivers quickly learned that the track requires a specific vehicle setup and can be extremely tricky to navigate: Australian Dayne Warren finished tenth in his race, while Mack Bakkum from the Netherlands came seventh in his qualifying heat. This meant that both missed out on a spot in the semi-finals. Joshua Rogers and Mitchell deJong, on the other hand, made the cut in fourth and fifth place.

DeJong flew the Porsche Coanda colours in the first semi-final. The American tackled the race from fifth on the grid. On the fourth of nine laps, he benefited from a skirmish in front of him and squeezed past the Redline BMW of Dutchman Jeffrey Rietveld. However, he had to fight hard to defend his fourth position initially. The door for DeJong opened when his pursuers became entangled in a jostle for positions. This allowed the Porsche driver to turn his attention to the leading trio again. When the duel between British BMW driver Luke Bennett and the Williams Esports Mercedes of Poland's Jakub Brzezinski escalated in front of him, the American driver grabbed his chance to move into third place. The top four then sprinted towards the chequered flag in bumper-to-bumper slipstream formation, but the order remained unchanged. Ultimately, they were separated by less than a mere hundredth of a second, with DeJong advancing to the final for the first time in the ESL R1 autumn series.

In qualifying for the second semi-final, Rogers had put himself in a strong position with third place on the grid. He returned from the first lap in second place and launched an attack to catch Dutchman Bono Huis. On lap three, the Australian snatched the lead in the "International Horseshoe" turn and eked out a slight advantage. Huis, however, closed the gap in the final phase and overtook from the slipstream. Rogers countered on the final lap in the approach to the "Le Mans" chicane, only to be forced to let the Mercedes driver pass him again in the final two corners before the chequered flag. Second place, however, handed him a starting spot in the finale.

With that, the cards for the decisive race were shuffled. Rogers started from second place, deJong from tenth. The Australian took the lead in the "Le Mans" chicane on the opening lap, while his teammate advanced to P7. Rogers then managed to keep his pursuers at bay, but the question remained: who would catch the leader from the slipstream on the final lap? An intense duel unfolded between Brzezinski and British Mercedes driver Kevin Ellis Jr (Apex Racing Team) for the decisive grid spots shortly before the end, with Bennett also getting involved. Luckily for Rogers, while the three were busy fighting among themselves for positions, he was able to pull clear at the front of the pack and take home his maiden final victory of the ESL R1 autumn series.

With this result and sixth place for deJong, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing has secured second place in the team standings. Additionally, the American racer moved up to 21st place in the drivers' standings, securing his ticket to the Major final alongside Rogers and Dayne Warren. The final will take place in a fortnight in Jönköping, Sweden. Prize money of 40,000 US dollars awaits the winner there.

Impressions after the race

Jörn Jens (D, Team Manager Porsche Coanda Esports Racing):"We took second place in the team classification. Overall, it was very close. We lacked a bit of speed on the straights at Daytona. We still have potential for the coming season. Joshua's victory has put him in an even better starting position for the Major final. As seventh in the drivers' standings, Dayne Warren is also in a position to deliver a good result in Jönköping. It's fantastic that Mitchell deJong also managed to qualify for the final for the first time this season. Overall, I'm confident about Sweden: When it comes down to it, our boys always bring home the results."

Joshua Rogers (AUS, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing):"An unbelievable day and a fantastic end to the online season for me. First place in Daytona is a great result on this difficult track, which also demands a lot in terms of strategy. I was able to take the lead early on and control the race from there. Because my pursuers didn't see eye-to-eye, I managed to take the win – unlike in the semi-final. Now, I'm taking this momentum into the Major event, which is coming up in two weeks' time. Of course, we want to win that too."

Mitchell deJong (USA, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing):"I thoroughly enjoyed today! My semi-final went really well, despite it being pretty wild. But I came third and scored a lot of points, which is paramount for my entry into the Major event. In the final, I came sixth after a lot of battles for position. I haven't even thought about Jönköping yet, but I'm going to enjoy it now and see how far I can get."

Daytona (USA), result of the final

1. Joshua Rogers, Porsche 911 GT3 R (AUS, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing)
2. Jakub Brzezninski, Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo (PL, Williams Esports)
3. Luke Bennett, BMW M4 GT3 (UK, Team Redline)
4. Kevin Ellis Jr., Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo (UK, Apex Racing Team)
5. Daire McCormack, Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo (IRL, Williams Esports)
6. Mitchell deJong, Porsche 911 GT3 R (USA, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing)

Drivers' standings after 8 of 8 rounds

1. Sebastian Job (UK, G2 Esports), 454 points
2. Joshua Rogers (AUS, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing), 409 points
3. Daire McCormack (IRL, Williams Esports), 375 points
4. Jiri Toman (CZ, R8G Esport), 370 points
5. Martin Csincsik (CZ, R8G Esports), 328 points
6. Luke Bennett, (UK, Team Redline), 287 points
7. Dayne Warren (AUS, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing), 263 points

21. Mitchell deJong (USA, Porsche Coanda Esports Racing), 128 points

Team standings after 8 of 8 rounds
1. R8G Esports, 1,021 points
2. Porsche Coanda Esports Racing, 861 points
3. Williams Esports, 806 points
4. Team Redline, 788 points
5. Apex Racing Team, 778 points
6. G2 Racing Team, 692 points

Vollständige Ergebnisse und alle Tabellenstände:
https://eslr1.com/fall23-2/

Calendar ESL R1 autumn 2023

31.8 Monza (I)
7/8.9 Spa-Francorchamps (B)
21/22.9 Hockenheim (D)
28/29.9 Nürburgring (D)
5/6.10 Monza (I)
28/27.10 Spa-Francorchamps (B)
2/3.11 Road Atlanta (USA)
9/10.11 Daytona (USA)
24.11 Major-Finale Jönköping (S)

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