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Season finale bittersweet for Cory Witherill at California Speedway

For Cory Witherill, the final race in the Indy Lights season on Nov. 4 at the California Speedway in Fontana California was a bittersweet experience. Witherill's Casino Morongo/ Motors TV/ Indy Regency Racing/ Lola car screamed in the qualifying heats and on Sunday morning's warm-up sessions, giving him a season-best fourth place qualifying position for Sunday's race. Spirits and hopes were high going into Sunday's race, when, after twenty laps, the valve train system in the Buick V-6 engine failed, sending Witherill from mid pack to a tenth place finish in the race.

"The qualifying session went really well," Witherill said. "I knew we had a good car. We did a lot of things to it on Friday to get more speed, and it obviously showed in the qualifying run. I had good speed even without draft. But on Sunday, when I lost draft, I realized that there was nothing there."

"The engine problem was internal, said Sal Incandela, team manager and owner of Indy Regency Racing. "In a spec series like Indy Lights, we aren't allowed inside the engine, so a problem like this one is just something that can happen. The engine looked great in the Sunday morning practice session—Cory was second quickest out there. When the engine failed during the race, Cory lost about 30% of the power, and there was just no way he could keep up with the pack."

"Fontana has always been a good track for me," said a disappointed Witherill in a phone interview from his home in Santa Monica, California. "It's my home track. I led there in my rookie season, and have had two fourth place finishes. I was hoping to make it up to the podium for my new sponsor, Casino Morongo, on this one. But, that's racing. Sometimes it's just out of your control. My team did a great job getting the car ready for this race. It was a big disappoint for all of us."

"I was really impressed with Cory's positive attitude after the race," said filmmaker Natalie Noel after she filmed an extensive post-race interview with Witherill. "He just got up and got down to business. What a pro!"

Natalie was one of a host of friends, family and Cory Witherill fans that were on hand at the track for the race.

Now that the Indy Lights season is over, Witherill will be concentrating on finding sponsors to carry him to the Indy Racing League for the 2002 season. In addition, during the off season, Witherill will be visiting schools as part of his own role model program, as well as for the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona's Tobacco Education and Prevention Program.

For more information on Cory Witherill, visit his web site at www.corywitherill.com.