**TEAM SA FIGHTS HARD IN TIGHT ROTAX FINALS**

*Team SA marches on in Bahrain’s closest Grand Finals ye*

Thursday is always D-day at the Rotax Max ‘Olympics of Karting’ Grand Finals and today was no different as crunch time appeared in an evening of reckoning at the 2023 edition at the Bahrain International Kart Circuit. It was also a day of mixed fortunes for Team South Africa.

“Bahrain is an amazing host and this event truly is next level, but the 2023 Grand Finals are proving tighter than ever,” Rotax South Africa boss and team leader Ed Murray reported. “The racing is super close and has made this without doubt the most even Grand Finals playing field yet, so there’s absolutely no room for error if we want more success this year.”

After finishing 11th in his DD2 heat on Wednesday, Sebastian Boyd started Thursday well with fifth in his opening race, before ending in his third qualifying heat seventh, to qualify a fine fifth for his Pre Final. 28th in his first heat, Jamie Smith went 29th in heat 2 and then 30th in his final race and will start his Friday Pre Final from 33rd. Kian Grottis’ weekend went from bad to worse when he added a 34th to his Wednesday 36th on Thursday afternoon. Kian however improved to 25th in evening race the and will set off 36th in his Friday Pre Final.

In Senior Max, KC Ensor-Smith bounced back to 17th on Thursday afternoon and 26th in his night race, following his Wednesday retirement. It went the other way for Erich Heystek who ended 16th Wednesday as he retired from his first Thursday race, before coming home a troubled 24th in the evening heat. KC starts his Pre Final in 29th, alongside Erich in 30th. Thursday was also a disaster for DD2 Master Kyle Lawrence, who was disqualified on Thursday, although his Wednesday 20th carried him to 31st overall, from where he will start Friday’s Pre Final.

South Africa’s Junior Max duo however impressed on Thursday. 24th in his Wednesday heat, Kent Swartz marched seven places up to 12th in his first Thursday race, one position up on

28th on Wednesday, Wian Boshoff, who stormed from 26th to 13th in his firsthigh school race of the day. Swartz then went 17th in the afternoon race to, while Boshoff was 23rd in his third race to see Kent starting his Friday Pre Final in sixteenth and Wian 27th.

The day did not start well for South Africa’s under-13 Mini Max duo. Reagile Mailula was 19th in his Wednesday heat but plummeted to 32nd in his first Thursday race. 21st on Wednesday, Caleb Odendaal slumped to 34th. Mailula fought back to 18th in his third race, but Odendaal closed off his heats in 33rd. Reagile starts his Pre Final 20th, and Caleb 32nd. But like all their teammates, they must end 18th or better on Friday to qualify for Saturday’s Grand Final.

Rafael da Silva fell back early in his second under 11 Micro Max heat to end up 33rd on top of his 19th on Wednesday and will start his Friday Pre Final in 24th. Where Rafael finishes there, is the position he will start Saturday’s Grand Final.

The Rotax Max Grand Finals are now set for Friday’s Pre Finals, before the top 36 in each class go through to Saturday’s Grand Finals to crown the various 2023 Rotax Max world champions.