

Saturday,
January 25, 2014



Rene Allard, Two Others
Denied Membership in
USTA...see page 3

Doug Ackerman: A Harness Racing Treasure By Dean A. Hoffman

There is no one in harness racing more respected and admired than Hall of Famer Doug Ackerman. No one. Just ask those who know him best. Ask his fellow Hall of Famers, guys like John Campbell, Ray Remmen and others.

Ackerman is admired not only for his horsemanship, but also for his character, intelligence, and sense of humor.

Today at age 86 he lives in North Carolina, near where his



Doug Ackerman (right) with fellow harness treats Delvin Miller (left) and Howard Beissinger (center) at Moscow's Red Square in 1989

stable is based at Pinehurst. He laments the fact that he cannot take an active role in the training chores because he's been fighting illness for over a year. Some people his age would be happy just to see another sunrise, but horses have been Doug Ackerman's whole life and he'd much prefer to be sitting in a jog cart than in a rocking chair.

People constantly refer to Ackerman as a "natural horseman" and that makes sense because he's worked with horses from the time of his youth. He's seen the sport of harness evolve from its

county fair roots prior to World War II to its post-war boom and he has lamented its recent rapid decline. "I've seen it all twice," Ackerman once told me in reflecting on his life. He's seen the great horses and the great horsemen. He can speak with authority about seeing the legendary Greyhound and Rosalind in their historic team-to-pole effort at Indianapolis in the 1930s. He can quote Clarence Cole, the famed farrier who nailed half-rounds and swedges on thousands of horses in the first half of the last century at the Indiana State Fairgrounds.

In 1989, Ackerman, along with his friends Delvin Miller and Howard Beissinger, went to Moscow to represent the United States in a driving challenge against Russian and German drivers. I went along on that trip and was struck that less than a half-century earlier that Germany, Russia, and the America fought the most horrible war in history. The shooting war was followed by the Cold War between the Communist Soviet Union and America.

The first morning we were in Moscow, Doug and I took a

walk from our hotel to see if we could find the racetrack. We knew it was near, but we weren't exactly sure where. As we walked along a side street, we heard the familiar clip-clop of hooves. We could hear horses, but they came from behind a fence overgrown with weeds and foliage. Doug started peering through the shrubs.

"There's a hole in the fence at every fairgrounds I've ever been to," Doug told me.

I reminded him that we were in Moscow, not at the Michigan fairs, and that there just might be a guy on the other side pointing an AK-47 at us.

Ackerman won the opening race in the international series, becoming the first American to win a race at the storied Central Moscow Hippodrome since before the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Communism still had a stranglehold on the Russian economy in that era and the facilities were primitive. We watched with appreciation as Sorrento, a grandson of Noble Victory, won the Russian Derby. He was a standout against other Russian-bred horses, but that was faint praise.

A proud Russian asked the American drivers if Sorrento could compete with the best at the Meadowlands.

(continued on next page)

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The ever-gracious Delvin Miller said yes and Beissinger agreed. But Ackerman knew there was a big difference between a good horse in Moscow and a good horse at the Meadowlands, and he demurred and said softly, "I'm not so sure."



Doug Ackerman, a harness racing treasure

Ackerman left his native Midwest as a young man and went to California to find fame in the golden west. He trained his stable at the beautiful Del Mar Fairgrounds near San Diego. He shipped east in the summer and competed on the Grand Circuit from a base in Michigan. When Del Mar was closed for training, he relocated his operation to Pinehurst.

Ackerman admits that he enjoyed every moment of his years in Southern California. When I asked him the difference between winter training in sunny southern California and at

Pinehurst, he quipped "Oh, about 50 degrees."

Ackerman is revered by those who know him best for his ability to crystallize truths into pithy and memorable sayings. When someone once sympathized because an Ackerman horse drew a bad post in a big race, Doug said, "Post position draw is the fairest thing at a racetrack."

When asked if size is important in horses, Ackerman once quoted the old shoer Clarence Cole by saying, "It's a lot of fun to race a good little horse. Until that good little horse has to race a good big horse."

Judy Davis-Wilson, head of the Delaware Standardbred Breeders Fund, is so fond of Doug's insights that she thinks a book of "Ackermanisms" could be written.

"It's often just the way Doug phrases things and the tone of his voice," says Judy.

We've all heard people talk the "little guy" in harness racing, but Judy tosses out a quote from Ackerman: "The little guy is the one without the big horse, and that's all of us unless we get lucky."

Ackerman is dismayed about changes in Michigan that might well mean the death of racing there because he has such deep roots there. He grew close over the years with Chris Boring, a stellar Michigan horseman respected by all who know him. But Ackerman never forgot the great

(continued on next page)

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talents he encountered that are virtually forgotten today.

"Don Hall was a Michigan driver who was as good as any driver who ever lived," Ackerman says. "There might be drivers as good as Don, but there were none better. He didn't have a great personality, but Don Hall could really make a horse go."

Ackerman's best trotter was Chocolatier ("prettiest horse you ever saw") who was the 2-year-old champion of 2005 and a winner of more than \$1.3 million. The son of Credit Winner is now one of the most popular stallions in Sweden.

Back in the 1980s, Ackerman developed a robust colt



Ackerman winning at his home track, Hazel Park

named **Crowning Point** that could trot a hole in the wind but wasn't always reliable. **Crowning Point** jumped in the 1984 Hambletonian and jumped in a time trial at Du Quoin in 1985 when he was almost surely going to beat the world record. The record then was 1:53.4 and Ackerman told me before the time trial that he was aiming **Crowning Point** at 1:52. Before the break,

I'd have bet a lot of money that **Crowning Point** would meet Doug's expectations. He was literally flying down the backstretch at Du Quoin before he took an errant step and took off running.

Ackerman says that the best pacer he ever trained was **Albaquel**, who happened to be foaled the same year (1979) as **Three Diamonds**. **Albaquel** was fast and tough, and certainly no kid's horse.

"You had to watch out around her," says Ackerman. "She didn't have many friends."

Albaquel later became a gold-plated broodmare for owner **Richard Staley** and trainer Ackerman. Her first two colts by **Justin Passin** earned more than \$1 million combined. Ultimately **Albaquel** produced a half-dozen foals that earned more than \$250,000.

"Her foals weren't as tough to be around as she was," he says, "but they were good horses."

Ackerman also points to **Denali** as one of his best pacers. **Denali** was a Grand Circuit star in the same class as **Niatross** and Ackerman and **Denali** even beat **Niatross** away from the gate in a heat of the Jug and made the great colt work for the trophy.

Ackerman is always quick to give credit to his late patron **Richard Staley**.

"Dick Staley was the best owner ever," says Ackerman. "Ever."

Many people feel that **Doug Ackerman** is one of the best horsemen ever in harness racing. Certainly there is no doubt that he's truly among the sport's greatest treasures.

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Rene Allard, Douglas Berkeley Denied USTA Membership

By Bill Finley

Trainer Rene Allard has been denied a USTA membership. Posting the notice on its website yesterday, the USTA cited a section in its bylaws that reads as follows: "The President of the Association may reject the application of any applicant who fails to comply with the requirements for membership herein specified; or whose experience, character or general fitness are such that the participation of such person in harness racing will not be consistent with the best interest of the sport or whose membership would be detrimental to or reflect adversely or unfavorably on harness racing or upon the Association."

When reached by HRU yesterday Allard said he had no

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idea why the USTA took the action that it did.

Allard was banned last year from the three tracks owned by Jeff Gural, but no explanation was given for that decision.



Rene Allard

Trainers, owners and drivers do not need to be USTA members to participate in most states, but racing commissions will sometimes weigh USTA actions when making their own licensing decisions. A spokesperson for the New York Gaming

Commission told HRU

that Allard had been "A listed" because of the USTA action. That means that a commission investigator must be consulted before the person in question is allowed to race. Because they were entered prior to the ruling, Allard's horses in last night at Yonkers were not scratched.

The USTA declined to comment on the actions taken against Allard and the others.

The USTA also denied the memberships of trainer Douglas Berkeley and Gilbert Garcia-Owens, the son of trainer Gilbert Garcia-Herrera. Garcia-Owens is a groom for his father.

Berkeley was given a 10-year suspension in 2001 after the Ontario Racing Commission ruled that he was racing horses under another trainer's name. At the time, Berkeley was serving another suspension for illegal drug use in New Jersey. After a 12-year absence, Berkeley began training again in 2012. He has made 10 starts this year, all of them at Yonkers.

Reached by HRU, Garcia-Herrera said that he had no idea why his son was denied USTA membership.

Former Hoosier park racing secretary Kevin Mack was also featured on the USTA's weekly rulings list. The report said, "Mr. Mack has surrendered his Hoosier Park Racing Secretary License. Racing Secretary Kevin Mack on numerous occasions during the course of the 2013 Standardbred race meet, changed race condition eligibilities later than allowed by commission rule 71 IAC 7-1-5(a).

Lawyer for Three Drivers Initiates Legal Action Against Freehold

Attorney Howard Taylor has filed a claim against Freehold Raceway on behalf of three drivers involved in the Jan. 10 spill there that began when the starting gate car spun out of control and crashed into the field of horses. Taylor said he is representing Debra Rucker, Chris Scicluna and Jim Pantaleano. Taylor said he has also consulted with Cat Manzi and believes he will also be representing him in the near future.

Taylor explained that a claim is a preliminary step before a lawsuit is filed.

"What you do is gather all information and then put someone on notice with a claim," he said. "You settle the

case if you can and if you can't you file a lawsuit. There's not much I can do right now to settle a case, not until I know the extent of the injuries and the extent of the recovery and that's a long way off."

Freehold barred the media from a meeting between concerned horsemen and track management to discuss starting gate-gate.



Taylor said that the injuries suffered by the drivers were substantial.

"All of them were severely injured," he said. "With Manzi there is a question as to

whether this was career-ending. Mrs. Rucker wasn't going to be the next John Campbell, but with the others they make their living driving horses and they have all been out of work. This was not routine stuff. You have a fractured pelvis, fractured ribs, punctured lungs. Chris Scicluna has a real bad gouge of his eye and there may be some eye damage. Mr Pantaleano has a broken heel and a separated shoulder. And they all have bad concussions.

"It was not an act of God and I don't think Freehold will say that. In the meeting they had the other day they opened up by saying, 'We don't know what happened but we do acknowledge that it was our fault, our responsibility.' I don't believe they are going to fight on the liability. A lot of it will be up to the insurance company anyway."

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Rick Pantano is the only driver involved in the spill to return. In his first drive back he won Thursday's seventh race at the Central New Jersey track.

Hanover Giving Unraced Horse A Shot as Stallion

Russell Hanover had the pedigree and the looks to become a top race horse. It just never worked out that way. Injured as a yearling he never made it to the racetrack, but



breeder Hanover Shoe Farms thought so much of his potential that they are standing him at stud.

Russell Hanover is by Somebeachsomewhere out of Rich N Elegant and is a half-brother to Hall of Famer Rocknroll Hanover

"It was determined by our farm vet and an outside vet that he was unsaleable," explained Hanover CEO and President Jim Simpson. "So we decided to just keep him and see if he would get better and sounder. He did, but not to the point where we could train him. He had a hock injury and we're still not sure why or what happened. With his breeding, we decided to just breed a few mares to him, which we did last year and then a few more this year."

Hanover has largely kept the breeding of Russell Hanover in-house and has closed his book for 2014. Simpson said that, by design, his books have been limited to around 25 mares. His first crop will be sold at public auction in 2015 when they are yearlings. Simpson said that in the many years he has been involved with Hanover this is the first time they have stood an unraced horse as a stallion.

Will Russell Hanover work out as a stallion? Simpson agrees that, at this point, it is a guessing game.

"We are in the business of relying on genetics and I can't think of a better bred prospect for a sire than he is," Simpson said. "I understand that it doesn't always work out. We were devastated when he was untrainable and unsaleable. Being a Beach and a good looking individual, which he is, he would have been close to the top of our sale."

Northfield Park Announces 30 Percent Purse Increase

by Ayers Ratliff, Northfield Park Publicity Department

Northfield Park is pleased to announce a 30 percent

overall purse increase beginning with the Thursday (Jan. 30) race program. This is the second increase since the opening of the \$265 million Hard Rock Rocksino five weeks ago.

"This is really the fourth time we have upped the purses in the last 12 months," said Dave Bianconi, Executive Vice President of Racing and



Simulcasting. "We have implemented gradual increases to maximize the benefit to our local horsemen who supported our racing program throughout the pre-VLT era."

The new purse structure allows for increased claiming and condition events, as well as \$9,000 and \$10,000 Opens.

"Northfield's race program is on the right track and we expect to execute a specific game plan over the next 18 months to ensure we make the most of the opportunity the state of Ohio has afforded us," explained Brent Reitz, Northfield Park's General Manager. "It is gratifying to see the positive changes taking place in Ohio, especially at our facility where we continue to offer year-round racing four and five nights a week."

Northfield Park will race 214 nights in 2014. A weather make-up date, Saturday, February 1, has been added to the current live racing schedule of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Each night has a 6 p.m. post time.

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It Takes a Village to Disseminate Information

It's probably safe to say that Harness Racing Update is an insider magazine. It's distributed to thousands of people who buy, sell, train and drive horses, as well as to numerous executives and everyone else who runs racing.

But it sure seems to be more than that.

Scanning the letters to the editor and comments on social media of late, I have noticed a lot of customers are weighing in on topics relating to betting and handicapping in general. Last Sunday was no exception.

Dan Burke, who made sure to let us know he is not related in any way to Ron, Mickey or anyone else Burke in harness racing, wrote a letter about the lack of uniformity of reporting and explaining equipment changes. He has noticed that some tracks publish some equipment changes and not others, some post them on track feeds or maybe not at all. He praised Woodbine for noting shoeing changes and wonders why other tracks don't do it, as it's an important part of his handicapping. Even the Meadowlands, who is quite pro-customer, was in his sights:

"The other horse breed that outhandles us by about 30 to 1, lists all equipment changes, shoes, mud caulks, bends, as well as nasal strips..... maybe Jeff Gural, who cares so much for the integrity of the game, and has hired Mr. Cote as investigator, can get involved to make sure all equipment changes are listed at all his tracks," he wrote.

A lot of what Mr. Burke wrote about was correct. Equipment changes are rarely issued uniformly, or in one place for bettors to access in simulcast land.

This letter did strike home with me, because coincidentally, on Friday evening I noticed a horse that may be a potential play. An Andrew Harris trainee in a non-winners of two at the Big M was coming off a bad line, but was right back in the box on a seven day rotation. I like to see this as a handicapper because if the horse was lame or bled, he would not be jammed right back in. Perhaps the problems stemmed from him needing an equipment change.

I missed the early changes, so I went to my advance deposit wagering site to see if there was one for this colt. The changes, despite it being post time for the first, were nowhere to be found. I went to Zocalli's race reviews on the Big M website, because I thought they were usually published there but could not find them. Then I went back to the track feed and waited for the scroll. Sure enough, there were two equipment changes. I might've found my pick 4 key.

Perhaps there was an easier way to find the changes.

Maybe I just missed them somewhere, but that's not really the point. The point is, I had to search for them, and I've been playing this game for what feels like a hundred years. It probably doesn't have to be this way.

About five years ago, Thoroughbred changes were a scattered mess. Some track websites would have them, some not. If you were a computer player who downloads all tracks (like I am), sometimes the changes would populate so you could run your program, sometimes they would not. That's when Jeff Platt of the Horseplayers Association of North America called Hank Zeitlin, the head of Equibase.

Jeff asked, "is there any way we can get scratches and changes in a central spot so players can see them on mobile phones, their laptops, or be able to download them easily?"

Several months later, the scratches and changes page was born.

"During the Keeneland spring meet, Equibase and members of HANA met for a productive meeting at their office," said HANA President Jeff Platt. "We are very pleased that as a result of that beginning and subsequent discussions, horseplayers will now have access to a centralized, accurate resource for reporting of late-breaking changes."

"Making it easier for horseplayers to acquire pertinent information such as scratches and program changes is simply good business and the tracks are happy to participate in this new arrangement," said Chris Scherf, executive vice president of the Thoroughbred Racing

(continued on next page)

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The page could be downloaded to an xml file, be read in text, be subscribed to via an RSS feed and it was all neat and tidy, with times supplied when the last information was given out.

To make this page work, tracks had to participate and buy into the concept. Over time they did. I, and anyone else who wants a scratch, or an off the turf change, or what have you, can get them, quickly, and easily. Later on, weather and conditions were added, giving customers even more data to use when handicapping.

Horse racing is not a sports league. If it were we'd see a commissioner say that all teams must supply an injury report at 9:30 on Wednesday, disseminate it to the league office and all media. Or we'd see uniform reporting of statistics, all in one spot, for everyone to use to play this weekend's fantasy games.

What horse racing needs is direction and cooperation. In the Equibase example, horseplayers alerted the industry to a need. A leader in information (Equibase) responded to that need and got all racetracks on board to fix a problem. It took a racetrack village to get the job done. But the most important thing: The village, over time, did respond. Customers are better off for it, and so is the industry.

Oh, my horse did win and paid \$14.70 but I missed the exotics. It would apparently take more than a village to help me construct a proper ticket.

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By Brett Sturman

Race 8, N/W \$6,500 L5 Pace

STONEBRIDGE ON ICE is yet to do anything since returning from the July layoff but at least now finally drops a notch for team McNair. This one showed speed into impossible fractions two back and then had no shot in his most recent following the scratch; I think he'll have a say in this. JJ SHARK has been well traveled since the fall and now makes his second start over the track. He shows some very good rivals on view from the PA tracks a few races back; seems logical on paper. KINDLY POET drops but hasn't been inspiring of late but now drops; 11-year-old war horse has loads of class he can flaunt at this level. PEENIE lands a more improved post for Corey Johnson; MONTE CRISTO hasn't been sharp.

Race 9, N/W \$6,000 L5 Trot

WINE PHOTO makes his second start back while dropping and picks up Scott Zeron with the Meadowlands on a temporary Super Bowl hiatus. This one has beaten far

better over the course of last year; I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving off the ticket. DELCREST JULIAN was well bet last out coming from the same race as the top choice; at least the post tonight will help for apparent one-run type. STRIKING LINDSEY is one I've always liked and he now drops while finding himself the rail; doesn't look terribly outclassed. R RAISED EMOTIONS was actually favored at this level last out when he broke; bound to offer a much higher price now.

Race 10, N/W \$28,000 L5 Pace

GRANDE SEELSTER has been sharp for some time now and lands a post edge tonight on a number of his main rivals. He's beaten these types in the not to distant past and can do it again if he trips out; possible at a price. MYSTICIAN took a good first over run last out in a race won by Apprentice Hanover; he's no cinch but he does deserve favoritism. ALSACE HANOVER and FRANKIES DRAGON land the outside two posts as a pair of entrants by O'Sullivan; both warrant respect despite exiting poor efforts. MCKINNEY tackles tougher following an upset win and closed in :26 and change two back; barn can't be disregarded.

Race 11, N/W 2 Pace

DERBY DYLAN just might be the fastest of these and he was loaded with late pace last out as a big longshot following a try two back when he stopped. Trainer Puddy has been good in spots like this and he picks up Filion; a main contender. Waples was listed on the top choice but opted to KEEPING OPTIMISTIC instead. This one is very intriguing as he was claimed last out for \$9,000 despite being in for just \$6,500 in his start prior. Johnson steps him way up now too! GOLDSTAR BADLANDS picked up pieces four back to nail second in a blazing mile by Flamboro standards; one of many coming in from the smaller tracks. WOODROCK NATION is compromised by the post but that was a useful acclimating mile over the track last week; maybe Henry will invent some early speed.

The Plays

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Track	Race	Purse	
Yonkers	6 th , Open	\$33,000	pps
Woodbine	10 th , Conditioned	\$28,000	pps

Woodbine Report

5, WDB, \$15,000, P, BLIZZARD - 2ND LEG - 3 & 4 YEAR OLD FILLIES & MARES. NW 2 RACES OR \$20,000 LIFETIME AS OF NOVEMBER 30, 2013. 28.1, 58, 1:26.3, 1:56.2

1-Rock N Roll Xample (b,f,3 - Rocknroll Hanover-R Xample - Camluck) O/B-Robert Hamather T-Shawn Robinson D-Randall Waples \$7,500 Lifetime Record: 9-3-0-1 \$16,340

To view the replay click [here](#)

7, WDB, \$28,000, P, FILLIES & MARES, NW \$28,000 LAST 5 STARTS. 28, 57.2, 1:26, 1:56.1

1-Addison Bay (b,m,7 - Camluck-Mattersalls-Matts Scooter) O-Julie Ferguson B-Larry Polland T-David Menary D-Scott Zeron \$14,000 Lifetime Record: 120-34-14-12 \$321,840

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9, WDB, \$15,000, P, BLIZZARD - 2ND LEG - 3 & 4 YEAR OLD FILLIES & MARES. NW 2 RACES OR \$20,000 LIFETIME AS OF NOVEMBER 30, 2013. 28.4, 57.4, 1:26.2, 1:55.1

1-Murrayfield (br,f,3 - Jeremes Jet-Keystone Liana-The Panderosa) O/B-Dr Huw Llewellyn T-Murray Brethour D-Keith Oliver \$7,500 Lifetime Record: 8-5-2-0 \$50,850

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Yonkers Report

5, YR, \$20,000, T, NON-WINNERS OF \$25,000 IN LAST 6 STARTS, 7, 28.2, 58.0, 1:28.0, 2:05.4, FT

1-Facing Justice (g, 5, Justice Hall--Mika's Mazurka, by SJ's Caviar) O-C Kevin Thomas & Mary C Katz. B-Mary C Katz & C K Thomas & Berto Stable, CA & Jean E Cloutier. T-Larry Remmen. D-Brian Sears, \$10,000, Lifetime Record: 25-9-3-4, \$101,588

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6, YR, \$33,000, P, F&M OPEN, 28.0, 57.2, 1:26.1, 1:55.3, FT 1-Carols Desire (m, 4, Real Desire--Carolache, by Kiev Hanover), \$25,000 2011 LEX-SEL O-M T Wallet Enterprises & Richard J Banca. B-D'Elegance Stable Ix & Sampson Street Stables & Carmen Iannacone. T-Richard Banca. D-Jason Bartlett, \$16,500, Lifetime Record: 40-12-3-9, \$399,368

2-Stage It Right (m, 5, Artiscap--Whenuwishuponastar, by Camluck) O-Howard A Taylor & Richard M Lombardo. B-Robert McIntosh Stables Inc, CA & Clifford N Grundy & Leo F Beaudoin, CA & David C Kryway, CA. T-Tracy Brainard. D-Mark Macdonald, \$8,250

3-Keepers Destiny (m, 8, Intrepid Seelster--Keeper Flying, by Nuclear Flash) O-Merlin Howse, CA. B-Merlin Howse, CA & Casie Coleman, CA. T-Andrew Harris. D-Brian Sears, \$3,960

Calls: 4H, 7, H, 1, NS - Finish Order: Ideal In Vegas, Mandy's Mattjesty, Little Santamonica, Lorrie Please, Simple Saver N

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8, YR, \$33,000, T, OPEN HANDICAP POST POSITIONS 1-5 DRAWN POST POSITIONS 6-8 DRAWN, 28.4, 59.1, 1:28.2, 1:56.4, FT

1-Cowgirl Hall (m, 5, Cash Hall--Centerfold Hall, by Garland Lobell), \$23,000 2010 SHS-HBG O-Burke Racing Stable LLC & Weaver Brusceci LLC & Jack B Piatt III & Michael H Rosenthal. B-Walnut Hall Limited & Lucky Shamrock Stable. T-Ron Burke. D-George Brennan, \$16,500, Lifetime Record: 52-21-6-10, \$498,358

2-Zooming (g, 6, Classic Photo--Merit Lane, by Lindy Lane), \$15,000 2009 LEX-SEL O-Stephen E Oldford & Oldford Farms LLC & Tyler L Buter. B-Brittany Farms. T-Amber Buter. D-Tyler Buter, \$8,250

3-Lorenzo Dream (g, 7, Taurus Dream--Langala Dream, by Credit Winner) O-Vincent J Lorenzo. B-Reve Avec Moi Dreamwithme, CA. T-Julie Miller. D-Eric Goodell, \$3,960
Calls: 6H, 6Q, H, NS, NK - Finish Order: War Cry Hall, Likeabatoutahell, Melady's Monet, Bob N Tony, Hesgotlegs

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