

Friday, June 4, 2021

Busy stallion racehorse **Catch The Fire** takes aim at Battle of Lake Erie

The Ohio-based stud and racehorse will do battle Saturday in the \$200,000 free-for-all invitational pace at Northfield Park.

by Jay Wolf

Ohio



In January, owner Greg Luther expanded on his "million-dollar experiment" and purchased the majority share of the 4-year-old Captaintreacherous stallion, Catch The Fire who is pulling double duty as a racehorse and stud.

Despite a pair of impressive prep races, Catch The Fire has been tapped as a 10-1 shot in Saturday's \$200,000 Battle of Lake Erie free-for-all invitational pace at MGM Northfield Park.

Catch The Fire is owned by Luther's Black Magic Racing and Charles Taylor's CT Stables. Greg's brother, Todd Luther trains the stallion.

Catch The Fire won his seasonal debut on May 22 with a 2¾ length score in 1:50.2 at Eldorado Scioto Downs. A week later, he won in 1:51 with the same margin of victory.

"He's a really nice little horse. He doesn't do anything wrong," said 35-year-old Todd Luther. "He's push button. You can race him anywhere, any way you want."

Catch The Fire drew the trailing post-position #9 in the 35th edition of the Battle and will be driven by Brett Miller.

"Brett's great on a half-mile track and has won this race a couple of times (with Maltese Artist in 2005 and Clear Vision in 2014), so he'll know how to get him around there," Todd said.

"By looking at the program, we are either going to have a great trip or we are never going to get a chance to race. It looks like the #1 (Western Joe), #2 (Little Rocket Man) and #3 (This Is The Plan) are going to be leaving. I am sure Joe (Bongiorno) is going to be looking for a position out of the #4 (Stars Align A). Hopefully it will all work out and we get a good trip. We have

prepped him for this race. It has been on our radar as soon as we purchased him."

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Brad Conrad

Catch The Fire wins a conditioned event on May 22 at Eldorado Scioto Downs in 1:50.2

Catch The Fire was originally purchased for just \$15,000 at the 2018 Lexington Select Sale by Taylor.

As a 2-year-old, Catch The Fire won four of 12 seasonal starts including the \$250,000 Kentucky Sire Stakes Final in 1:49.4.

His connections – owner Taylor, trainer John Ackley and driver Mike Wilder – had high hopes for his sophomore season. Catch The Fire won the \$375,000 Adios Final and took a \$111,800 elimination of the Little Brown Jug.

A couple of days prior to Catch The Fire's final 3-year-old start, a third-place finish in the \$325,000 Progress Pace Final, Taylor announced that his colt would stand stud at Sugar Valley Farm for the 2021 breeding season, while continuing his racing career.

"Breeding and racing has been a great combo," said Joe McLead, co-owner of Sugar Valley Farm. "The McCowns (Cameron and Jessica) have been great to work with, they bring him here on time and take him back to the fairgrounds."

Todd Luther turned to the McCowns to help out since Todd's base of operation is at the Winner Circle Training Center in Ashville, OH – an hour away from Sugar Valley Farm.

"(The McCowns) are great friends of mine. They know my schedule pretty well and I don't have any worries," said Todd.

Catch The Fire performs his stallion duties on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and an occasional Saturday. On 'off' days he is at the Delaware County Fairgrounds, a five-mile drive from the farm, jogging and training.

Catch The Fire, who stood for an introductory fee of \$3,500, had an original book limit of 65 mares, but was increased to 85 due to Catch The Fire's fertility.

"He is very fertile and has great semen," said McLead. "We will stop collecting from our stallions on July 3rd and at that time Catch The Fire can leave the state."

"After this race, we'll probably give him a couple of weeks off.

He can't leave the state until after the breeding season," said Todd. "He's staked to absolutely everything after that."

On the Battle of Lake Erie undercard are the Ohio Sire Stake (OHSS) divisions of the sophomore colt trot and 3-year-old filly pace.

The undefeated Winning Ticket (Aaron Merriman) headlines the colt trot. The Chris Beaver trainee is a perfect four-for-four this season winning the opening OHSS leg. Stablemate Panzano (Aaron Merriman) are the favorites in the first \$50,000 division.

In the \$100,000 (div) filly pace, last year's OHSS champ, Summer Touch (Chris Page) is the 3-2 morning line favorite in the first division. Lady Arthur (Ronnie Wrenn, Jr.) is the favorite in the second division.

The post time for the 15-race card is 6:00 pm

RACE #10 – MGM NORTHFIELD PARK

\$200,000 Battle of Lake Erie

PP	Horse	Driver/Trainer	ML Odds
1	Western Joe	Aaron Merriman/Christopher Choate	7-2
2	Little Rocket Man	John De Long/Melissa Essig	8-1
3	This Is The Plan	Yannick Gingras/Ron Burke	2-1
4	Stars Align A	Joe Bongiorno/Jennifer Bongiorno	4-1
5	Hesa Kingslayer N	Peter Wrenn/Michael Deters	15-1
6	Gold Digger King	Tyler Smith/Scott Mogan	12-1
7	Century Farroh	Ronnie Wrenn Jr./Dr. Ian Moore	6-1
8	Southwind Amazon	Tony Hall/Paul Holzman	20-1
9	Catch The Fire	Brett Miller/Todd Luther	10-1

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Ohio



Little Rocket Man looks to fire in Battle of Lake Erie

by Ken Weingartner / USTA media relations manager

After watching Little Rocket Man recently take a test flight at Northfield Park, trainer Missy Essig hopes the 5-year-old is ready to soar in Saturday's \$200,000 Battle of Lake Erie invitational for older male pacers.

Little Rocket Man competed in the open handicap at Northfield on May 16, which marked his first-ever start on a half-mile oval. Little Rocket Man started from post six in a six-horse field, got away at the rear, overcame traffic at three-quarters with a three-wide move, and finished second by a neck to local stalwart Southwind Amazon.

"We took him up there to make sure everything was okay, that we had him shod right, and see if we needed to make any adjustments," Essig said. "We didn't want to go out there without knowing. He got a little steppy in the first turn, so we'll adjust his hobbles, and that's about it. We were very happy with him. It was a good test run."

Little Rocket Man, who has made 33 of his 37 lifetime starts at Harrah's Hoosier Park, heads to the Battle of Lake Erie with 23 career wins and \$352,055 in purses. This season, he has won six of eight races with one second and one third.

The gelding will start the Battle from post two with driver John DeLong and is 8-1 on the morning line. Only once in his past 31 starts has Little Rocket Man started inside post four.

"He won't know how to race coming out of the two hole," Essig said with a laugh. "We were very happy with the post position. There's not a bad horse in the field so it's all about the trip. Hopefully, we get a good trip. They're all great horses. It's just an honor to be invited to go up there for that race. We'll see how it all shakes out."

Essig trains Little Rocket Man for her father, Russ Beeman, and Jack Freeman. Little Rocket Man, by Rockin Image out of GT Miss Royal, was purchased under the name Just Like Pete for \$18,000 at the 2017 Hoosier Classic Yearling Sale. He was unraced at 2, blossomed at 3, and has a career mark of 1:47.2 established at 4.

"He loves to do his work," Essig said. "He's got a big heart. He'll give everything he's got every start. He's very special to us. He'll be here forever. He'll retire at our house, and he will live out the rest of his life with us."

This Is The Plan is the 2-1 morning-line favorite in the Battle.

CONGRATS SOUTHWIND GENDRY

p,3, 1:49.4f-'21 (\$672,758)

Always B Miki - Gambler's Passion

\$76,729 PASS division winner (3yopc) in 1:51f,
May 30 at Harrah's Philadelphia.

Owned by **Burke Racing Stable LLC,**
Phillip Collura, Knox Services Inc,
Jandt Silva Purnel & Libby

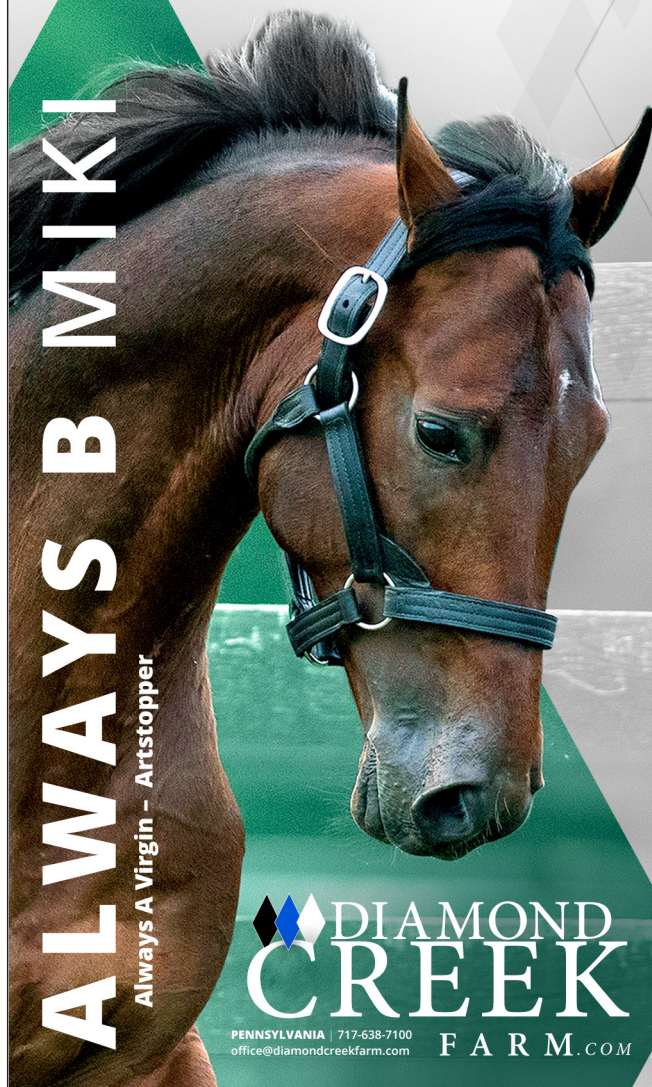
Trained by **Ron Burke**

Driven by **Yannick Gingras**

Bred by **Southwind Farms LLC**

ALWAYS B MIKI

Always A Virgin - Artstopper



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He heads to the race off a second-place finish behind Nicholas Beach in this past Sunday's Commodore Barry Invitational. Trained by Ron Burke and driven by Yannick Gingras, the 6-year-old gelding has won two of eight races this year and not been worse than second.

For his career, This Is The Plan has won 16 of 77 races and \$2.10 million. In his 10 most recent starts on a half-mile oval, dating back to 2019, he has four wins and five seconds. His victories include the MGM Borgata Series championship at Yonkers Raceway in April.

Southwind Amazon, an 11-year-old gelding, has started nine times this season at Northfield Park, winning eight. Lifetime, he has won 70 races at Northfield and his total of 108 victories is tied for ninth by a pacer over the past 45 years. His next triumph will put him in a tie with Hall of Famer Foiled Again, who was a three-time Battle of Lake Erie champ.

Racing begins at 6 p.m. (EDT) Saturday at Northfield Park. The Battle of Lake Erie is race 10 on the 15-race card. Complete entries can be found [here](#).

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EDITOR@HARNESSRACINGUPDATE.COM



HARNESS RACING UPDATE

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CONGRATS

DELAYED HANOVER

3, 1:53f-'21 (\$161,503)

Southwind Frank - Don't Wait Up

**\$50,170 PASS division winner (3yotc)
in a life best of 1:53f, May 31 at The Downs
At Mohegan Sun Pocono.**

**Owned by Mellby Gard Inc.,
Ake Svanstedt Inc**

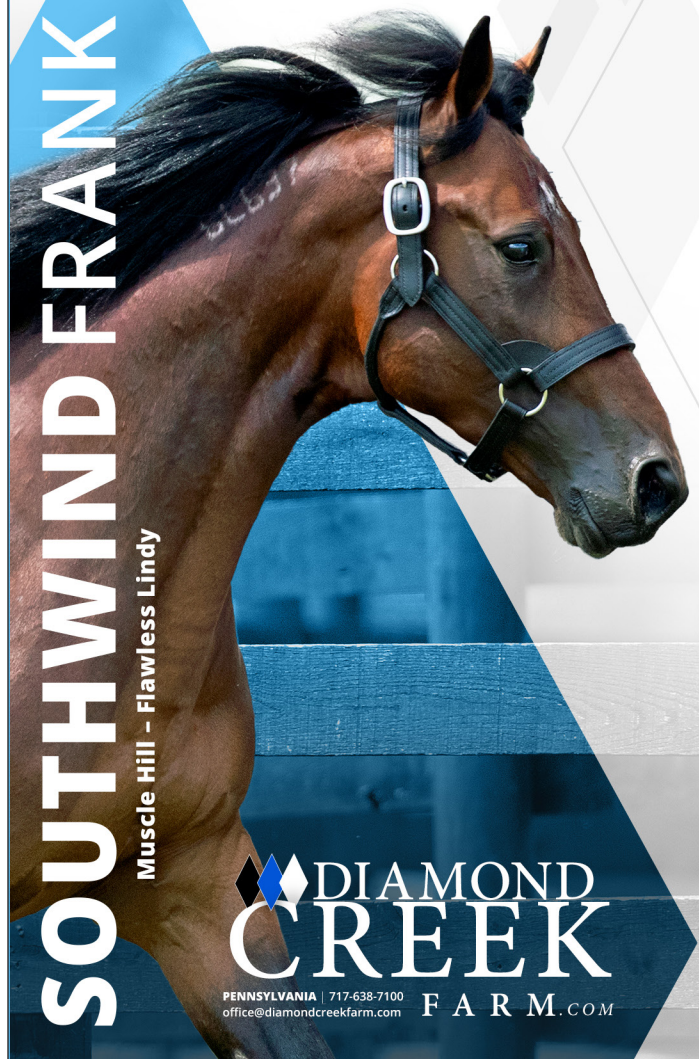
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BETWEEN THE LINES



with BRETT STURMAN

Yonkers to resume racing on Monday with new track surface

Dan and Greg Coon are in the midst of a 10-day reconstruction of the half-mile oval that includes adding 7,000 tons of new surface material.

by Brett Sturman

Racing has been dark at Yonkers this week, but that's not to say it's been quiet at the Hilltop Oval. Far from it. Since the conclusion of the race card on Thursday, May 27, there has been a massive reconstruction project underway on the track's race surface.

Like some other tracks, Yonkers was plagued through the winter months and even into March with repeated cancelations of live race cards. Some of which were strictly a circumstance of weather, but there were too many instances of less-than-excusable poor track conditions that caused repeated delays throughout race cards or cancelations altogether.

Now the track is getting a much-needed reconstruction in a massive effort spearheaded as consultants by expert track builders Dan Coon and his brother, Greg. It's a project that is ambitious in scope, particularly due to the short turnaround time required.

"It's a big project," Dan said. "It's no secret that Empire City Casino by MGM Resorts runs the show around here, and they want this to be equal to the very high standard that these horsemen demand, and that's exactly what we're doing."

New York



CONGRATS

JUJUBEE

3, 1:54.2f-'21 (\$81,018)

Creatine - La Cantera

\$49,770 PASS division winner (3yotc) in 1:54.4f, May 31 at The Downs At Mohegan Sun Pocono.

Owned by **Jon Erdner**

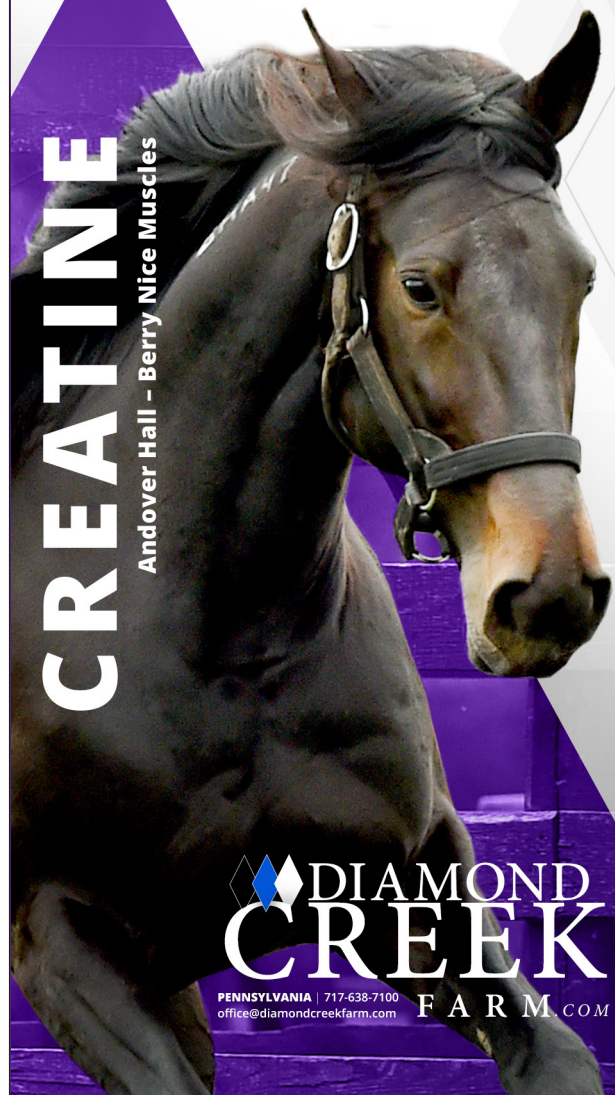
Trained by **Greg Wright Jr.**

Driven by **Tony Hall**

Bred by **Jon Erdner**

CREATINE

Andover Hall - Berry Nice Muscles



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The track has had some modifications to its surface through the years including an effort to increase the bank in its turns in 2019, though it's been far longer for maintenance of the scale being seen this week.

"It's a collaborative effort between the SOANY and Empire City Casino/MGM Resorts. They came to an agreement that they would use our service to bring this track back to the standard that it was in 2006, which is the last time we were here," Dan said. "Let's face it, it's no secret that we've haven't done this substantial of an upgrade since '06. So, there is some wear that comes from years of near year-around racing."

There wasn't one specific issue with the track that Dan pointed to, but rather the condition of the track is the result of time since the last major work was performed on it. Explaining it in layman's terms he said, "I liken it to your car. You don't have to change the oil or use quality oil, just keep driving. But at some point, there's excessive wear that comes from excessive use. And part of it is the weather, too – it's not perfect in New York in January and February and March. And here's the other thing, these are top-flight and highly-skilled drivers and trainers and owners, and they'll tell you what they think the track needs and it's important that it gets it."

Working within an already super tight timeline to complete the work, the weather hasn't been kind to Coon and the entire crew working on the project.

"I've been here since last Thursday night, which was the last race night on the 27th. And from Friday to Monday, which was Memorial Day, it rained four and a half inches. And we worked right through it and have been busting our ass to get this done. I got to tell you, I'd be a little farther along if not for all the rain, but I'm not here to make excuses; we're here to get this done."

"We're here with 7,000 tons of new surface, and our goal is to have this race ready on Monday. I expect the track to be good on Monday, better on Tuesday, and then razor sharp on Wednesday, that's how it works. And I'm just a consultant, but the track superintendent is Tim Masters and he's going to be the one who is going to maintain it and he's going to be exceptional."

Speaking to the importance of the ongoing maintenance even after his work is finished, Dan said, "I always tell anybody that will listen – and not just at Yonkers or Hawthorne or Spring Garden or Pompano – everywhere – this is about equal parts. Design and construction is what we're doing right now, and then the equal parts is the maintenance. It's how the track is maintained every day that's very important. And because they train horses here, too, it's not like the track isn't being used on non-race days. Which can be towards your advantage because you've got to get it right every day."

As Coon and team complete their work for Monday come hell or high (or rain) water, much credit should be given to all involved in making the surface reconstruction project happen. It should lead to safer, higher quality racing, and make the track more dependable in challenging weather.

ELSEWHERE...

Northfield Park is a track that Yonkers presumably tried to emulate a couple years ago when they modified their track's turns, and Saturday Northfield plays host to the annual Battle of Lake Erie.

It never feels fair when any horse draws post 8 on a half-mile track in a big race, but how unfortunate it is the locally-based wonder horse Southwind Amazon drew the 8-hole for this race? I guess it doesn't work in such a way that you could have said that the local horse has to draw somewhere between posts 1 through 4, but it would have been interesting to see how the 11-year-old matches up against the invading free-for-allers. It's one thing to repeatedly go in 1:49 on the Northfield half-mile and win by almost 10 lengths, but it's another to do it against the sport's best. Probably an opportunity missed there unless the race unfolds in a way completely unexpected.

As for the contenders, This Is The Plan finally draws well in a big race. He's been so good this year in these spots and was second last out to only the unbelievably sharp Nicholas Beach who owns the co-fastest mark this year in harness racing in 1:47.2. Gingras is in town to drive for Burke and I'd expect him to try to set up on the front end, though we'll see how hard Little Rocket Man to his inside tries to push early. Immediately to his outside is Stars Align, another Bongiorno nemesis. This one is tied for the fourth fastest mark this year at 1:48 flat and has been running like a machine since the change away from Takter following the Borgata series. For a potential longshot, Catch The Fire could work out a trip from the second tier with Brett Miller. The Adios winner from last at 3, he's two-for-two for trainer Todd Luther, jogging in both preps for this race over at Scioto.

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O Canada

Three top Canadian drivers assess the positives and negatives about their month racing in the States.

by Debbie Little

Ontario's not Kansas, but for three drivers there's no place like home.

"I kind of already knew, but it definitely solidified my opinion of just how good we have it in Ontario. These guys work way too hard," said Bob McClure with a laugh.

McClure, James MacDonald and Doug McNair arrived at The Meadowlands in late April and have appreciated their experiences while waiting for Mohawk to open back up.

"It was good to see how you stack up," said MacDonald. "If I'd come down and gotten run out of here in two weeks, it would have been pretty disappointing, but I was going to make it a good time no matter what happened on the track. I had some luck and it's a good measuring stick, I guess."

All three currently are in the Top 25 in The Meadowlands' driver standings, with MacDonald and McClure tied for 21st and McNair checking in at No. 14.

"I always wanted to try it down here and see how I'd make out and I was fortunate enough to get a lot of drives and it worked out," said McNair. "It's good for everybody. It's good for my confidence and it's good for the guys that put me up."

MacDonald and McNair both drive regularly for trainer Carmen Auciello back home and he was only too happy to have them do so at The Big M as well.

Auciello sent down 10 horses from his Canadian stable and thinks every one of them had a profitable month of May.

"That's why I'm pretty proud of myself and those guys as well," said Auciello. "We showed them that we can compete down here. I think Dougie had 30 wins in May and that's a big month for any driver. James won four or five races for other trainers as well and he won – I think – 11 for me. So, it just kind of shows we can do this. I think it's something to be proud of anyway."



Dave Landry

Canada's reigning Driver of the Year Bob McClure has done well during his month of racing in the United States.

In addition to his four Meadowlands wins, MacDonald also scored at Pocono and Yonkers, bringing his total to 17. MacDonald paired with Auciello for 13 of those victories and the duo hit the board 45 per cent of the time.

MacDonald has drives in 10 races at The Big M tonight (June 4), three of which are for Auciello. He also has one drive for Auciello on Saturday from seven on the card.

McClure had winning stops at Freehold, Harrah's Philadelphia, Pocono and Yonkers for a total of 15, including four at The Meadowlands. Luc Blais was the trainer for eight of those wins.

McClure will be lined up next to MacDonald in seven races tonight, none of which are for Blais.

McNair was the busiest of the bunch, racking up over 300 starts between Harrah's Philadelphia, Pocono, The Big M and Yonkers. He won 13 per cent of the time for a total of 40 with 11 at The Meadowlands. He teamed with his dad, Gregg, for eight and also had a one for Auciello.

McNair's talent on the track apparently made an impression

on others, including among them a Hall of Fame trainer.

"Nancy [Takter] said something to me," said McNair. "My dad's been watching you. He's been watching you pretty closely and he said you fit in pretty good here and he thinks you should stay. I'm glad to hear that from [Jimmy Takter]."

McNair is already making his way north and MacDonald hopes to be doing the same shortly.

"I've got a couple of days to decide what's going on but probably after this weekend I will not be back unless a good horse comes along," said MacDonald.

For McClure, it's a little more complicated.

"It's not set in stone, but I would like to be back for the 14th [Mohawk's opening day] to be able to race," he said. "To do that, I would have to leave the States on the 9th of June. But, obviously, I'll have to check the stakes schedule. If one of Luc's horses has a big stake that week, I might have to prolong going home temporarily. [Getting vaccinated] was one of the best parts about being down here. Down here, you wait four weeks, and at home, you wait four months to get your second shot."

Although the majority of their trip was positive, there is definitely something they will not miss.

"It's not the driving horses that makes you tired, it's the driving to and from every track," said McClure. "Me and Doug were laughing that we feel sorry for ourselves if we have to drive a half-hour or 40 minutes to Flamboro Downs or Grand River. It just ruins our whole month."

MacDonald said he'd always heard people talk about how far away from the track everyone is, but never believed it could be that bad. Having experienced it first hand, he has a greater appreciation for his commute back home.

"These guys spend a lot of their lives in the car driving from track to track," said MacDonald. "All the horsemen that race at Mohawk, we all live in the same city or we all live in the same town. We all live within 30 minutes of each other and I still don't want to go see them, but these guys live hours [from the track]."

Driving between New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania taught McNair something basic.

"I learned the roads are a lot bumpier here than they are in Canada," he said.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

For the first time since the pandemic started, Chef Dennis Sammarone will be back in the kitchen today (June 4) for the return of buffet dining to both Trotters and Pink Restaurant.

BREAKFAST WITH THE BABIES

Breakfast With The Babies starts at 9 a.m. on Saturday (June 5) with 11 races amidst three qualifiers. Edison Hatter, the 21-year-old voice of Freehold and Rosecroft Raceways, will be calling the action.

For more information, please check www.playmeadowlands.com.

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GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE



with CHRIS LOMON

Alexia Kehl maintains modest Midwestern approach to racing in Minnesota

by Chris Lomon

Alexia Kehl might not know the reasons for her standardbred success, but the Wisconsin-born trainer isn't exactly preoccupied with finding an answer.

Her personality, like her stable, is modest. Whether it's speaking about herself or her horses, Kehl doesn't talk a big game.

"I try to stay humble and take everything as it comes. I don't really talk my horses up. When they do well, I don't want to come off as though it's a surprise. It's nice that over the years I've had owners come to me and give me horses. They see something in me. I try to treat them all like good horses. I do what I can and at the end of the day, it's up to the horse to finish the race. If I have a bad night of racing, I'm sad for a couple of minutes and then I ask myself what I can do differently."

Whether it was fate, good fortune, or something else altogether, Kehl decided to give the racing world a shot just over 13 years go.

She's glad she did.

"I started out as a groom for Rick Magee. I just stumbled upon the job. I was working two jobs at the time and was in college, and Rick mentioned that there was a racetrack opening up in Minnesota and he needed help. Ever since I was little, I had horses. I never thought I'd grow up to be a horse trainer, but here we are."

After years working for Magee, and other trainers, including Erv Miller, and time spent at racetracks in Pennsylvania and Indiana, Kehl found herself back in the Midwest U.S., specifically, Iowa and Minnesota.

In 2011, her first year on her own, she won four races and had 21 top-three finishes from 39 starts. Her career-best season, win-wise, was 2015 when she recorded 21 victories. Two years ago, her horses earned \$138,560, a personal-best mark to date.

Win or lose, she finds herself in a good spot these days, heading a competitive stable and running the show on her own terms.



M. Therrian Photography

Alexia Kehl in the sulky.

"I remember an older gentleman, who had horses with Rick Magee, when I first got on the trailer to ride to Minnesota, he said, 'Once you get this sport in your blood, you'll never get rid of it.' I didn't really think too much about that at the moment, but he was right. I'm still here and I'm still enjoying it."

Horses such as Goody Two Socks are a big reason why Kehl remains a fixture in the industry.

The pacing son of Relentless Yankee delivered the conditioner several victories over his 111-race career, including his final trip to the winner's circle on September 28, 2018, at Cannon Falls, MN.

"I had him for about four years. He was one of my favorites. Unfortunately, due to health complications, he passed away. I really enjoyed working with him. He was one of those horses that always gave an honest effort."

Kehl has also developed a penchant for having a fair share of Minnesota-bred trotters in her barn each year.

The 32-year-old isn't quite sure how it came to be, but she gladly embraces the challenge.

"I don't know how it happened. My first Minnesota trotter, a 2-year-old filly, was a Minnesota champion. Ever since then, people continue to give me trotters. They joke that I'm a trotting barn. I actually have two pacers this year, but I have six trotters, a mix of 2- and 3-year-olds. I don't know if I'm a glutton for punishment. Trotters, they can make you want to rip your hair out at times, but with the program here at Running Aces, if you have a horse that can stay flat and be competitive, you can make some money. Being a smaller stable, it's nice to have that."

When she's not training her band of racehorses or watching them compete at Running Aces, Kehl takes advantage of any downtime to take her mind off racing for a little while.

How she achieves that goal, however, is somewhat ironic.

"I have a retired standardbred that I like to ride. The last two years we went down to the Ozark Mountains and rode there. That's been nice. It's sort of my vacation for about a week. If I'm not doing

that, I just enjoy hanging out with my friends or I try and get back to see my family in Wisconsin. You try and make the most of the time you do get away from the races and try not to think of the horses too much, but here I am, still hanging out with the horses.”

As for challenges she’s faced in her career, running a solo operation can be, at times, quite demanding both mentally and physically. So too can be the hurdles the horse racing industry constantly faces.

Still, it remains a labor of love for Kehl.

“I’m doing this by myself, so it can be tough. There are times where the uncertainty of the sport creeps into your mind too. I consider myself very lucky to be doing this job and to get to be around the horses. I guess if something ever happened with the sport, I’d be able to say I got to do something I love. I really don’t know what else I’d want to do. I think about that all the time.”

Optimism comes courtesy of the rookie class.

“I really like breaking babies, starting them out. That’s my favorite part of my job. You have to dedicate a lot of time to them and you also have

to patience, but it’s extremely rewarding. It’s exciting to see when they learn something and they begin to put all of those lessons together.”

While Kehl continues to educate herself on the art of conditioning horses, she won’t dedicate much thought as to why she remains a go-to for owners.

Whatever formula for success that she’s found, she’s happy to keep rolling with it.

“I had friends that would ask me to train their horses and I was glad to do it. But when other owners started asking me to take on one of their horses, I began to really have that faith I could do a good job. That’s kept happening year after year, so I’m very grateful. I don’t question why it’s worked out that way. I just think, ‘I’m doing it.’ I guess I must be doing something right.”

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Pennsylvania



Aaron Merriman notches career win 13,000 while racing at The Meadows

by Evan Pattak for The Meadows
Standardbred Owners Association

Aaron Merriman, who ranks sixth on North America’s all-time win list, collected career victory 13,000 Wednesday (June 2) at The Meadows. The milestone win came with Biggiessecondshot in race 8.

Milestones and awards have been coming fast and furious for Merriman, 42, a native of Cuyahoga Falls, OH and harness racing’s six-time reigning dash champion. Although he recorded his first win in 1998, more than half those victories have come since 2014, testament to Merriman’s talent and breakneck schedule as he drives at both The Meadows and Ohio tracks.

While Merriman intends to maintain that frantic pace, he says he’s been cutting back ever so subtly.

“You couldn’t see it last year because it was a COVID year,” he said, “but I tried to cut out some racing on Fridays. I’m trying to find maybe 10 per cent of my starts and cut them out to the point where I’m comfortable again. I’m taking days off here and there, and I’m cherishing them more.”



Chris Gooden

Aaron Merriman is congratulated in The Meadows’ winner’s circle after scoring his 13,000th career win.

But with his son Kristopher (he also has a daughter, Ava, 6) set to attend Bowling Green State University in the fall, Merriman says he may need to pick up all the race dates he eliminated to fill the void.

“He’ll only be two hours away, but I’ll miss him dearly. I don’t know if I’ll go stir crazy without him.”

Merriman, whose mounts have won more than \$88.5 million, indicates that if he is able to slow down, he may use the time to savor the significance of 13,000 victories.

“It’s a lot of wins, and I’m actually very proud to have reached 13,000,” he says. “One day I’ll start looking back and reflecting on this and the names around me on that list. I haven’t won a bunch of major stakes, but I’m just as happy winning a non-winners of \$750 in the last 4. Every win means something to the sport, and it means something to the owners.

“Every race is a milestone. I try to take it like that.”

Will Dave Palone's dash record ever be broken?

Two days after driver Aaron Merriman recorded his 13,000th career win, the author ponders whether Merriman – or anyone – will ever surpass all-time dash leader Dave Palone, who is closing in on 20,000 career wins.

by Jay Wolf



Claus Andersen

Driver Dave Palone is on course to win 20,000 career races. Will anyone ever break his record?

Sports have always been about statistics and records. Many think that there are records in sports that will never be broken; the Boston Celtic's eight straight NBA championships, Byron Nelson's 18 Professional Golf Association tour victories in 1945 – including 11 events in a row and pitcher's Walter Johnson's 110 career shutouts or Cy Young's 511 victories.

Among the harness racing records, many think Dave Palone's 19,580 (and counting) driving victories will never be broken.

"I don't know if it is as safe as Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game or his claim of 20,000 women," joked Palone.

Before we get into the examination, I should make a couple of notations. First and foremost, I am only looking at North American drivers. I am fully aware of Germany's Heinz Wewering's nearly 17,000 career wins and Finnish born Jorma Kontio, who has 11,000+ victories. At 69 and 67 years of age

respectively, father time is not on their side.

It should also be noted that all of the "lifetime" statistics are as of Jan. 1, 2021. The way these top drivers record victories, these numbers could change several times in an hour.

Let's start with those drivers who already have 10,000 or more victories. There are 18 reinsmen that have reached that milestone, of which 12 are still actively driving (See Chart #1). Palone's nearest challengers are 62 (Tony Morgan) and 56 (David Miller) years of age and the 58-year-old Palone has a sizable cushion on both.

Staying in the 10,000-win club it should also be noted that Palone has averaged 410 wins a year over the past four years, bettering everyone on the list except for Aaron Merriman (990 wins), George Napolitano, Jr. (610 wins) and Tim Tetrick (595 wins).

"There are so many things that come into play," said Palone. "Besides a few accidents I have been pretty fortunate as far as that goes. The other thing is that I am still getting opportunities that I cherish and I still have to go there and prove myself."

"Now I think when you first start driving, you have to prove yourself and that you have talent and can get the job done. As you get older and your career is winding down, you also have to prove you can still get the job done because there is so much talent out there. You can't blame people when they go to the young guns."

The names most often mentioned as a threat to Palone's eventual mark are Tim Tetrick and Aaron Merriman, both are ahead of Palone's pace during at this point of their career (See Chart #2).

Tetrick, who won his 12,000th career race on February 16th of this year, recently told HRU's Brent Sturman that he's "got at least another 10 years" in him.

Dubbed the "Bionic Man" thanks to a pair of hip replacements, Tetrick passed the 6,000-career win mark in year 13 of his career. It took another 10 years to add another 6,000 wins.

Thanks to an unbelievable work ethic, Merriman appears to have the best chance to topple the eventual record. Merriman has been pulling The Meadows/Northfield Park doubleheaders for a number of years.

Merriman's talent and willingness to spend hours on the road has garnered the deepest respect from Palone.

"I don't think I have seen anybody with Aaron's work ethic," said Palone. "I had the chance to race with Herve (Filion) and Cat (Manzi) and there has never been anyone in this game that has worked harder than Aaron. I have made that two-hour drive and to think he does it three or four times a week is a credit to his work ethic. He is a good guy and easy to root for. He deserves everything he's got."

The respect is mutual.

"He's still incredibly sharp," said Merriman. "It is amazing what he does. He still strives at such a high rate. He's relentless. I know that going to the Meadows has made me a better driver."

"His record? I don't see it being broken," said Merriman. "He would have to completely shut down. I would have to keep up this rampant pace."

"I love driving horses, but the car has taken its toll on me the last few years. I love The Meadows. I love being there, I love driving the horses there, the people I have met there, the owners and trainers I drive for are awesome. Sooner or later, it is going to come to a halt and it will be okay," said Merriman.

"I see what Aaron puts himself through every day. I think that Aaron and Timmy are capable of breaking it," said Palone. "It is very, very, very hard to stay nose to the grindstone. If there are two guys have a shot to do it, it is those two."

Another driver that Palone has gotten to know and compete with more regularly is Ronnie Wrenn, Jr.

Wrenn, 34, is currently ahead of Palone's pace through their first 13 years of racing (See Chart #3). Wrenn is 1,800 wins ahead of Palone during the same time period, but would have to keep this tempo for another 20+ years.

"Ronnie can be as successful as he wants to," said Palone. "I foresee Ronnie maybe taking the next step to the Grand Circuit. I just don't know if he loves to go up and down the highway that much either. It is a real grind, especially on those muddy, rainy, sloppy days."

Over the past few years, Palone has greatly reduced his travel and is applying his trade almost exclusively The Meadows, where he has been the leading driver every year since the Ronald Reagan administration.

"I have a farm that is about four miles from the track," said Palone. "The Meadows is a prefect set up for a guy like me. I go in at 12:30 or 1:00 and I am out the door at 5:00. I can turn the page and on to the next. I am not beating myself up."

During his 39-year career, Palone has made nearly 75,000 starts, another impressive start considering that distance would be three complete trips around the world's equator.

"I didn't know that," said Palone. "That may be the first stat that was not given to me by Roger Huston. That is a lot of going around in circles."

Does Palone expect to hang up the lines anytime soon?

"I don't have anything in mind," he said. "20,000 is a nice number. I still have a way to go to get to that. We don't have plans to shut it down. As long as I am not costing anyone money or getting in the way out there."

"Usually, your success will tell you one way or the other that you belong out there or not."

"They say records are meant to be broken and, in a way, I would love to see the record broken, because it would mean harness racing is still around and that would mean more to me than anything."

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Active Drivers with 10,000+ Career Wins	Career Wins	Ave. Wins Last 4 Years	Age
Palone, Dave	19,414	410.8	58
Morgan, Tony	16,765	274.0	62
Miller, David	13,149	280.3	56
Merriman, Aaron	12,692	990.8	42
Tetrick, Tim	11,944	595.8	39
Parker, Jr., William	11,313	6.3	67
Brennan, George	10,822	375.3	53
Hennessey, Wally	10,671	357.5	64
Napolitano, Jr., George	10,625	610.8	54
Wallis, Kevin	10,351	66.5	64
Wrenn, Peter	10,327	134.3	58
Sears, Brian	10,240	131.3	52



No check? No problem. They were still Horse of the Year

by Bob Heyden

The following stubbed their toe once or twice, but they still were voted Horse of the Year. Let's take a look at the rare down moments for these stars:

C R Kay Suzie in 1995 jumped it off finishing sixth at 10 cents on the dollar on Hambletonian Day. She still dominated from there and was an easy choice for HOY with a record of: 13 10-0-1, \$910,535.

Abercrombie answered the call an amazing 33 times in 1978, so he can certainly be excused for any minor mishap. He was seventh in the Gaines at Vernon Downs on July 28 and eighth in the Jug final on Sept 21, but finished the year 33 22-6-3, with then-record earnings of \$703,260.

Rainbow Blue was 20-for-21 in 2004 and edged out Triple Crown winner Windsongs Legacy for HOY honors. Her only blemish in a year in which she earned \$1,195,010 came with an untimely break in the Mistletoe Shalee on Hambletonian Day.

Niatross missed a single check in two years falling over the rail at Saratoga on July 5, 1980 in the Battle of Saratoga.

Rock N Roll Heaven did not finish in the Burlington (now called the Somebeachsomewhere) in 2010 during his spectacular HOY season of 21 16-2-1, \$2,156,192.

Gallo Blue Chip was last twice in 2000 – once via DQ – during his \$2,428,816 record-breaking season (29 19-5-1). He was also seventh in the second heat of the Jug.

Moni Maker had afib in 1999 during the Titan Cup eliminations and was eighth, but went on to be HOY for the second straight season. She was 21 14-43-2 and earned \$1,494,972 in her bruising 1999 campaign which saw her set an earnings mark that stood until Bee A Magician broke it 14 years later for a female trotter.

Beach Towel, in 1990, was the first \$2 million single season (23 18-4-0, \$2,091,860) but that lone blemish came in the North America Cup in which he finished last.

Shartin N missed the board from post 8 in a Matchmaker leg in 2019 during her HOY season.

Matts Scooter was 30 23-3-1, \$1,140,994 in 1989 the last time any horse was named HOY with at least 30 starts. He failed to get any money at Hazel Park on June 10.

Fancy Crown in 1984 was 21 13-4-2, \$701,189 and HOY. Her only blemish came in the Impish – her first start of the year for \$11,800.

Cam Fella had two sevenths in 1982 at age 3 – the Spring Championship Final at Los Alamitos and then again in the Meadowlands Pace elims; April 23 and July 9, respectively – and then did not miss the board ever again.

Staying Together was 26 21-2-0 as a 4 Year Old in 1993 for Bob McIntosh, a strong HOY season which featured a 1:48.2 win in the Haughton final. He was seventh in the Tricentennial, his only missed check.

Precious Bunny in 1991 reset the earnings mark from Beach Towel the year prior with a 25 20-3-1, \$2,217,222 year. He ALMOST missed a check in his last start, a fifth in the Provincial Cup final.

Mack Lobell was eighth in the 1987 World Trotting Derby during his HOY season. He started up late – on June 30 after a 20-start freshman season.

Real Desire was ninth early in the year of his 4-year-old, award-winning season of 2002 – his lone missed check. He finished 13 10-1-1, \$1,059,790.

HOYS THAT RACED IN ANOTHER BARN THE YEAR PRIOR

Albatross 1971-1972 – Harry Harvey to Stanley Dancer

Precious Bunny 1991 – Staffords to Bill Robinson

Artsplace 1992 – Gene Riegler to Bob McIntosh

Cams Card Shark 1994 – Mickey McGivern to Bill Robinson

Cam Fella 1982-1983 – from Doug Arthur to Pat Crowe

Abercrombie had a handful of trainers at 2 in 1977, then HOY in 1978 with Glen Garnsey

Keystone Ore only raced one year for Dancer and was HOY in 1976

Staying Together and **Moni Maker** both started elsewhere before landing with Hall Of Famers Bob McIntosh and Jimmy Takter, respectively.

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HRU Foal Spotlight

Archangel colt out of Amoureuse Hanover arrives at Peterson Farm in Ontario

photo courtesy Peterson Farm

This Archangel colt out of Amoureuse Hanover arrived on May 23 at the Peterson Farm in Port Hope, ON two weeks late and strong and ready to go. It is the second foal out of Amoureuse Hanover, a former Ontario Sires Stakes Gold Series winner that earned \$268,589 on the track and had a mark of 1:53.4. Her first foal, a Wheeling N Dealin colt, is scheduled to sell at this year's London Virtual Yearling Sale.

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New York



Iteration aims to repeat success in NY, and beyond

by Ken Weingartner / USTA media relations manager

Iteration, a full sister to multiple Dan Patch Award winner Gimpanzee, heads to Vernon Downs this week to begin her 2021 campaign in the opening round of the New York Sire Stakes (NYSS) for 3-year-old female trotters. The Marcus Melander-trained filly, who won the series championship at age 2, competes in the second of two divisions today (June 4).

"It's her first start but I'm very happy with how everything has been going," Melander said. "She's filled out very nicely and she feels like she's more mature. She had speed and she had ability last year, but she didn't really understand everything. The money she earned was almost like a bonus because she was a little bit immature mentally."

Iteration, by Chapter Seven out of Steamy Windows, won five of 10 races and \$315,009 last year for owner Courant Inc. In addition to winning the NYSS final, she was victorious twice on the Grand Circuit, capturing the Kentuckiana Stallion Management Stakes and a division of the International Stallion Stakes.

In the NYSS championship, Iteration went off stride before the start and trailed by more than a dozen lengths at the quarter-mile point before rallying with regular driver Brian Sears to win by a nose over Aela Jamieson at Yonkers Raceway.

"She could definitely go, but Brian had to work with her and teach her," Melander said. "When she had a closed bridle, sometimes she got a little too grabby. And sometimes when we opened her up, she got a little bit too lost. Otherwise, she was a real nice 2-year-old. She proved she could go on the Grand Circuit, and I'd be surprised if she wasn't that kind of horse this year as well."

Before tackling the Grand Circuit this season, Iteration will focus on New York, where she will try to follow in the footsteps of her brother Gimpanzee as a two-time NYSS champion. Melander also had a two-time filly champ in Hypnotic AM.

"We've been very fortunate in New York," Melander said. "Obviously, you have to find the right horses. We have a half-mile track that we train the horses down on, so when they start racing on those half-mile tracks in New York it feels like our horses have learned how to go around the half. I don't know if that has something to do with it. But we've been lucky, and it's a real good program."

Today, Iteration faces a field that includes Aela Jamieson as well as Kentuckiana runner-up Big City Pearl and Breeders



Mark Hall / USTA

Iteration (Brian Sears) winning in Lexington.

Crown third-place finisher Splash Blue Chip, who is a half-sister to world-record-setter Plunge Blue Chip.

"It will not be a walk in the park, there are some nice horses in that field, but it's perfect to start in the New York Sire Stakes, especially at Vernon on a big track," Melander said. "I really like Vernon. It's a nice track, a nice place to race."

Melander also sends out a filly in the NYSS first division. Debtors Adversary, by Chapter Seven out of Met's Rival, was unraced at 2 and enters her start today with three starts in maiden races this season. She has a second and two thirds.

"She's a little green," Melander said. "She felt good as a 2-year-old but got a little sore when we got down in times. I think she's a pretty nice horse, but she needs a little bit more experience. I think she will be a good horse for New York; maybe not a Grand Circuit-type horse. Hopefully if she's sound and fresh all year she can make some money in New York. It's always tough when they haven't raced as a 2-year-old, but we'll do our best."

In addition to the two NYSS divisions for fillies, Vernon hosts two splits for 3-year-old male trotters — headlined by returning series champ Steel and Dexter Cup winner Incommunicado — as well as multiple Excelsior A and Excelsior B divisions. Racing begins at 6:10 p.m. (EDT).

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Hambletonian Society Breeders Crown Poll

WEEK 2 - JUNE 1

Rank	Name (First Place Votes)	Age/Sex/Gait	Record	Earnings	Points	Previous Week
1	Manchego (31)	6tm	2 2-0-0	\$117,095	345	1
2	Abuckabett Hanover (1)	3cp	3 3-0-0	\$72,686	261	4
3	This Is The Plan	6gp	8 2-6-0	\$349,500	245	2
4	Nicholas Beach (3)	5gp	7 5-2-0	\$107,950	226	6
5	It's Academic	4ht	9 4-1-2	\$142,594	129	3
6	Sounthwind Gendry	3gp	3 2-1-0	\$89,689	98	Not Ranked
7	Machnhope	6mp	15 6-3-3	\$227,877	87	5
8	Alexa Skye	4mp	12 8-3-0	\$150,874	56	7
9	Keep Rockin A	5mp	8 2-1-3	\$83,112	37	Not Ranked
10	Whiskey Blu	3gt	13 10-2-0	\$91,046	36	8

Upcoming Stakes

Approx. Purse	Race	Track	Age, Sex, Gait	Race #(s)	1st Race Post
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SATURDAY, JUNE 5

\$20,000	Battle of Lake Erie	Northfield Park	OLDER FFA PACE INVIT.	10	6:00 p.m.
\$50,000	Ohio Sires Stakes	Northfield Park	3YOCT	2, 4	6:00 p.m.
\$50,000	Ohio Sires Stakes	Northfield Park	3YOFP	6, 9	6:00 p.m.
\$50,000	Graduate - 2nd Leg	The Meadowlands	4YO OPEN TROT	4, 6	6:20 p.m.
\$50,000	Graduate - 3rd Leg	The Meadowlands	4YO OPEN PACE	8, 10	6:20 p.m.
\$74,766	Pennsylvania Sires Stakes	The Meadows	3YOFP	9, 11	11:25 a.m.
\$20,000	Pennsylvania Stallion Series	The Meadows	3YOFP	2, 4, 6, 8, 10	11:25 a.m.
\$44,300	Violet	Hawthorne	3YOFP	7	7:10 p.m.

SUNDAY, JUNE 6

\$72,168	Pennsylvania Sires Stakes	The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono	3YOFT	10, 11	5:00 p.m.
\$20,000	Pennsylvania Stallion Series	The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono	3YOFT	7, 9, 12	5:00 p.m.
\$44,500	Violet	Hawthorne	3YOFT	3	6:30 p.m.
\$22,350	Cardinal	Hawthorne	3YOCT	5, 7	6:30 p.m.



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ISLAND FANTASY DEAD AT 25

Winbak Farm is sad to announce the passing of Island Fantasy, p, 2, 1:52; 3, 1:50.1 (\$1,371,525).

Island Fantasy passed away at the age of 25 on May 28. He succumbed to complications from colic. He had been standing at Winbak Farm of Maryland.

"Island Fantasy was a striking individual," said Garrett Bell, Winbak Farm general manager. "He had the looks, pedigree and racing career that made him the complete package as a sire."

Island Fantasy won 15 races. His awards included HTA Nova Award for Two-Year-Old Pacing Colts, O'Brien Award for Two-Year-Old Pacing Colts and USHWA Dan Patch Award for Two-Year-Old Pacing Colts. At 2 and 3, Island Fantasy traveled North America and won stakes across the continent. At 2, he won the Abe Lincoln Stakes, Arden Downs Stakes, Bluegrass Stakes, Breeders Crown elimination (second in Final), Champlain Stakes division, Governors Cup elimination and Final, International Stallion Stakes division and Nassagaweya Stakes division. He was second in American-National Stakes elimination. At 3, Island Fantasy won the Art Rooney Stakes elimination (second in Final), Meadowlands Pace consolation, Simcoe Stakes division, and Tattersalls Pace elimination. He was second in the Breeders Crown Final and Cane Pace elimination.

"Between his performance as a racehorse and his outstanding pedigree, Joe Thomson thought that he would make a great addition to our stallion roster when he retired from racing," said Bell. "We had stood Island Fantasy since 2000."

Island Fantasy was the son of 2 Hall of Fame Inductees. His dam, Three Mile Island, also produced Island Glow, p, 2, 1:53.2; 3, 1:50.4; 1:50 (\$608,074), Dragon Island, p, 2, 1:55.2f; 3, 1:50.3z; 1:48.2 (\$534,047), Pedro Island, p, 2, 1:56.4; 3, 1:51.2f; 1:50.2f (\$379,433), Wicked Island, p, 2, 1:54.2s; 1:52.2 (\$290,147), Two Times Three, p, 2, 1:56f; 3, 1:54.2f; 1:54f (\$235,487), Always A Threat, p, 2, Q1:59.2; 3, 1:53s; 1:49.2 (\$204,334), Artist Island, p, 3, 1:54.1f; 1:51.4f (\$193,234), and Midnight Island, p, 2, 1:54.3s; 3, 1:52.3f; 1:52.1 (\$179,139). The immediate maternal family includes several rich performers led by Scott Rocks, p, 3, 1:50.2f; 1:48f (\$1,136,325).

"Island Fantasy was an award-winning millionaire racehorse who had sired several successful offspring in Canada and

Indiana before moving to Maryland," said Bell.

As a sire, Island Fantasy has sired 318 race winners. He is the sire of six performers who won \$400,000+ including Whippet Good, p, 3, 1:58.1h; 1:50.1s (\$850,709), Secluded Island, p, 2, 1:53.3s; 3, 1:51.2f (\$660,670), Ambro Brando, p, 2, 1:56.4s; 3, 1:50.3s (\$561,846), Triple Bars, p, 2, 1:59.4f; 3, 1:54.2s; 1:50.1s (\$542,813), Camphor Hanover, p, 2, 2:01.1h; 3, 1:59.2f; 1:52f (\$480,250), and Jinnis Fantasy N, p, 1:51.4s (\$438,074).

Island Fantasy has also found success as a broodmare sire. Performers from Island Fantasy-sired dams include Casimir Jitterbug, p, 3, 1:56.2h; 1:49.3s (\$1,029,961), Neat, p, 2, 1:53.2f, 3, 1:53.2h; 1:50.3s (\$462,118), Ambro Courage N, p, 1:51.3f (\$402,543) and Island Jet, p, 2, 1:55.4h; 3, 1:52.2s; 1:51h (\$346,407).

Winbak Farm would like to thank the breeders, trainers, owners and other supporters who have helped Island Fantasy be a successful sire.

"We want to say thank you to everyone who has supported Island Fantasy during his breeding career," said Bell. "Island Fantasy was a very loved Winbak Farm resident and he will be missed."

If breeders have questions, they should call 410.885.3059 or email stallions@winbakfarm.com. The Winbak Farm stallion lineup can be found at www.winbakfarm.com.

Elizabeth Cheesman / Winbak Farm public relations and marketing

WOODBINE TO BEGIN ISSUING ACCESS CARDS AT MOHAWK PARK

Woodbine Entertainment would like to inform all members of the standardbred racing community that it began issuing Access Rights Cards to all participants starting Tuesday (June 1).

Woodbine will issue Access Rights Cards to all participants that will become the new form of identification for admittance to horse racing restricted areas (paddock, lasix barn, retention barn). Similar to the previously issued AGCO license cards, the Access Rights Card will contain a participant's photo, name, occupation, AGCO expiry date and barcode.

Woodbine will have pop-up locations set up in the Mohawk Park paddock over the next few weeks to issue Access Rights Cards during training and qualifiers. On live race nights, participants will be able to receive their Access Right Cards by visiting the race office.

Participants will need to complete an Access Rights Card form and present a valid AGCO license and form of ID to receive their Access Rights Card. No fee is required to receive an Access Rights Card. A \$5 replacement fee will be required to replace a lost or damaged card.

Woodbine communications

GRAND RIVER RACING TO RESUME SPECTATOR FREE IN STEP ONE

Grand River Raceway formally announces that it will resume racing in Step One of Ontario's re-opening plan. However, spectators will be watching online from the comfort and safety of their homes.

In light of the recent "Roadmap to Reopen" announcement by the Ontario government guiding the gradual opening of businesses and non-essential services, racetracks in Ontario will have the ability to reopen in Step One. Racing will resume without spectators and with physical distancing measures in place for everyone at the track.

"This is a very similar start to the 2020 season," said Jamie Martin, director of operations at Grand River Raceway. "Last year we worked hard to keep our team and race participants safe and this year we are prepared and committed to do the same".

Katie Giddy, director of hospitality, sales and marketing added: "We appreciate that the last year has been a challenging one for many, and we certainly look forward to welcoming people back to the track, but in the short term we have launched a new website (<https://grandriverraceway.com/>) to provide a way to access the highlights of a visit from their home."

Featured up front and center is access to racing schedules, watching livestream and replays, and the ability to download the latest programs. Online betting contests will be available every Monday, Wednesday and Friday race night, and younger fans can find activities to download in the NEIGHbourhood. For horsepeople racing at the track, there is a dedicated section with up-to-date protocols, as well as training and qualifying information.

All seasons the races will be broadcast live in both high and standard definition, and can be found on the Grand River Raceway website, Facebook, and YouTube channel. Qualifiers will also be live streamed to view from home.

The team at Grand River Raceway certainly hope this won't be the only option for long as, in alignment with the reopening plan, spectators will be welcomed back to the track in Step Two of the plan, noting this is expected at a reduced capacity.

Katie Giddy / Grand River Raceway

SVANSTADT STABLEMATES 1-2 TWICE IN POCONO PASS

Trainer/driver Åke Svanstedt had a "double double" during the second prelim of Pennsylvania Sire Stakes (PASS) action for 3-year-old trotting colts on Monday afternoon (May 31) at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono, sending out the 1-2 finishers in two of the three divisions while guiding both winners.

One of the divisions matched the three first-round PASS winners, but Svanstedt accounted for that with the 17-1 Southwind Frank colt Delayed Hanover in that one's first start of the year,

winning in 1:53 for a new mark. Svanstedt vacated the pocket with his charge turning for home, giving stablemate Johan Palema (Dexter Dunn), one of the first prelim winners, a shot in the Pocono Pike from third-in. The pair attacked pacesetter Type A in the stretch, with Johan Palema gaining a short lead before Åke coaxed more from Delayed Hanover to defeat his barnmate by a nose for Melby Gard Inc. and Åke Svanstedt Inc. Favored In Range made a break before the start and was always out of range.

In another grouping, Svanstedt brought out the Googoo Gaagaa colt Captain Corey for his 2021 bow, and the 2020 PASS champion made this event quite a contrast to its companion photo finish section: pacesetter Captain Corey came home in :27.4 and won by 10½ lengths over stablemate Lepanto (Yannick Gingras), who happened to be the 2020 Stallion Series champion. Captain Corey is owned by S R F Stable, Knutsson Trotting Inc., Midnight Sun Partners Inc., and Åke Svanstedt Inc.

The Creatine colt Jujubee stalked yet another Svanstedter, Capstone, from the pocket, then caught him in the stretch to post a length decision in 1:54.4. Jujubee trotted his own last quarter in :27.2 to win for driver Tony Hall, trainer Greg Wright Jr., and owner Jon Erdner while running his seasonal tally to 6-for-8.

Another stakes double was achieved by the team of driver Bob McClure, trainer Luc Blais, and owner Determination, with one of their winners the 2020 Breeders Crown champion On A Streak, as the Cantab Hall colt won for the first time this year in 1:56.2. Their other success story came from the Bar Hopping gelding Inaminute Hanover, who has now taken five of his last six starts, this one in a lifetime best 1:55.3.

The other Stallion Series winners have been triumphant in both their PA program starts this year. Cantab Hall got a sireng double credit when the gelding The Irishman equaled his mark of 1:55.3 for driver Tim Tetrick, trainer George Ducharme, and the ownership of W Donovan, Thomas Dillon, Purnel & Libby Inc., and Joe Sbrocco; the other section saw the Father Patrick colt Sunny Crockett improved his seasonal tally to 4-3-1-0 with a 1:54.4 triumph for driver Andy Miller and trainer Julie Miller, along with the ownership of Willow Oak Ranch and Andy Miller Stable Inc.

PHHA / Pocono

OHIO SIRES STAKES LEG 2 ACTION FOR SOPHOMORES SATURDAY AT NORTHFIELD

Four \$50,000 Ohio Sires Stakes (OHSS) divisions for 3-year-old pacing fillies and 3-year-old trotting colts are set for Saturday (June 5) at Northfield Park in round 2 action of the four-leg series for the Buckeye State's finest-bred youngsters. Post time is 6 pm at the Cleveland-area half-miler.

Winning Ticket will be the prohibitive favorite in the second

OHSS division (Race 4) for trotting colts. This son of Triumphant Caviar took his OHSS leg 1 division on May 3 at Miami Valley in 1:55.3 with Aaron Merriman driving for trainer Chris Beaver. He now has five wins in as many tries this year, with seasonal earnings of \$77,500 and career earnings of \$172,547. Bred by James Bender, Winning Ticket is owned by Beaver, Steve Zeeland, Tim Homan and Jim Burnett. Winning Ticket will start from post six with Merriman in the sulky, and this bay gelding typically uses front-end tactics to score his triumphs. He is the second foal out of his dam, the hardy Credit Winner race mare Lotto Winner, 7, 1:56.1H (\$166,461).

Another Beaver trainee, Panzano, heads up the first OHSS division (Race 2) with Merriman driving from post three. This son of Coraggioso—Grace N Charlie is owned by Spaaaartners, of Ballston Spa, NY and has lifetime earnings of \$114,724. He is the first foal out of his dam, who herself earned \$225,830 and took an 8-year-old record of 1:55.4f. Panzano finished fourth to the winning Spyder The Striker in his OHSS leg 1 before winning a Scioto overnight on May 21 in 1:55.1. To date he has three wins, three seconds and two thirds in 12 career starts.

Among the pacing fillies, Summer Touch (Race 6) and Lady Arthur (Race 9) are the clear standouts in their divisions, as both won their OHSS Leg 1 events on May 2 at Miami Valley.

Summer Touch stopped the timer in 1:53.1 in that first OHSS contest for driver Chris Page, who will be in the sulky from post three Saturday. This gregarious filly by Well Said—Real Touch captured last year's \$300,000 Championship on Super Night, and is owned by Burke Racing Stable, Knox Services, Slaughter Racing and Weaver Brussemi and trained by Ronnie Burke. The homebred lass has \$328,800 in her coffers to date from eight wins and two seconds in ten starts. Summer Touch is the fourth of six foals from her dam Real Touch p, 3, 1:51.1 (\$150,251), and is a half-sister to Real Fine (by Bettor's Delight) p, 3, 1:52.1f (\$145,118); Tru Lou (by Sweet Lou) p, 3, 1:49.1f (\$140,131); and Touch Of The West (Western Ideal) p, 4, 1:52.1f (\$82,432).

Lady Arthur captured her OHSS event at Miami Valley in 1:53.3 with Ronnie Wrenn, Jr. at the lines for trainer Dr. Ian Moore, who co-owns the filly in partnership with the RG McGroup and Serge Savard. The winner of \$111,031 lifetime has four wins, one second and a third in 13 career outings. Lady Arthur is by Arthur Blue Chip and is the eighth foal out of the Mach Three mare April Three p, 3, 1:53.1s (\$100,262). She has half siblings in Apollo Seelster (by Camluck) p, 5, 1:50.4f (\$187,729) and Azalea Seelster (by Big Jim) p, 5, 1:54.3f (\$27,929), among others.

Kimberly Rinker, OSDF administrator

MAY WAS MARVELOUS AT THE MEADOWLANDS

One year ago, with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing its grip on not only harness racing, but all aspects of life as we once knew it, it was scary to think what might happen to the game.

Remarkably, the sport has seen a resurgence as coronavirus

restrictions have slowly eased. In fact, last weekend (May 28-29) was the first since March 7 of last year to see The Meadowlands at full capacity.

"One year ago, there was no racing due to the pandemic," said track chief operating officer and general manager Jason Settlemyer. "Perhaps we will look back years from now and might say May of 2021 was the comeback from the pandemic. And a month for the record books."

The increases seen during the nine May programs over the comparable race cards from 2019 are startling.

The month started strong as Sat., May 1 saw the second-highest total handle of 2021 as \$4,451,363 was pushed through the windows, an incredible \$1.8 million more than was bet on the corresponding 2019 program. (Saturday's average per race of \$342,412 was a yearly high.)

All nine race cards during May saw wagering of over \$3 million and an increase of at least \$500,000 over the corresponding programs from two years ago. Five programs saw the increase exceed \$1 million.

"What can you say?" said Settlemyer. "Saturday handle in May averaged almost \$4 million a night (\$3.993 million). The 50-cent Pick-4 and 20-cent Pick-5 were over \$100,000. The 20-cent Pick-6 handled over \$31,000 on Saturday (May 29) without a carryover. The GSY Amateur Series races handled over \$293,000 on race one and \$286,000 on race five, respectively, on Friday (May 28). Our racing has been spectacular and everything we do right now is getting an enormous response from the horseplayers around the world."

Total handle during May was \$32.9 million, good for an average per card of \$3,664,022. The average per race was \$274,801. When compared to the same month in 2019, total wagering was up \$9.7 million, average handle increased \$1 million and the average per race was \$74,875 higher.

"Standardbred racing is rolling right now," said Settlemyer. "Handle at The Meadowlands is blowing up and Woodbine Mohawk Park is getting ready to resume and everyone is excited about that. On Sunday (May 30) night, Hawthorne, Northfield and Philadelphia all saw wagering of over \$1 million. It's an exciting time for the sport as we roll into the stakes season."

BELMONT STAKES SIMULCAST: The 153rd running of The Belmont Stakes is Saturday, and those who want to watch and wager on "The Test of the Champion" – named because of its grueling 1½-mile distance – can do so at The Meadowlands, home of one of the top simulcast facilities in the country.

The first of 13 races on the card kicks off at 11:35 a.m. The Belmont Stakes, where Essential Quality is the 2-1 morning-line favorite in the eight-horse field, is race 11 and has a post time of 6:49 p.m.

WALK-UP AND BET: For those who would like to bet The Belmont Stakes but are short on time, they can stop by and wager fast at The Big M's walk-up window on Saturday.

The walk-up window is located in Lot M off of Berry's Creek Road (follow the signs), and wagering will be available from 10:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. Past performances will be available.

CHECK OUT DAVE AND DAVE: Make that Brower and "The Mad Hatter".

While the Big M's usual TV duo of Dave Brower and Dave Little will be on hand to take racing fans through the Saturday program, Meadowlands regulars will get to see a new face on Friday.

Edison Hatter, the 21-year-old track announcer at Freehold and Rosecroft Raceways, who has been a staple of late doing Big M commentary on TVG's live telecasts, will be on set alongside Brower Friday night.

Big M TV's live "Racing from The Meadowlands" pre-game show, which provides news, notes, features, staff selections and a look at that evening's marquee races, gets underway at 5:47 p.m.

Live racing continues every Friday and Saturday with a first-race post time of 6:20 p.m.

GET YOUR FREE PROGRAMS, HERE! Need a program but don't want to spend any green?

The Big M has you covered, with free programs of every race of every race card. Just go to playmeadowlands.com to get your no-cost past performances.

A \$100,000 PROMISE: Every night, The Meadowlands promises big money on both editions of its signature wager, as each 50-cent Pick-4 – which begin in races 6 and 10, respectively – sports a guaranteed pool of \$50,000.

GET SOCIAL, NOT DISTANT: You can always check in with the team at The Meadowlands on Twitter.

For early changes, racing information and staff selections, go to @themeadowlands or #playbigm.

On race nights, stay in touch with the Big M's Dave Brower (@eedoogie), Dave Little (@DaveLittleBigM), Ken Warkentin (@kenvoiceover) and Jessica Otten (@JessicaOtten1).

WHO DOES BROWER LIKE? For those who like to get a leg up on the action, go to playmeadowlands.com to see track oddsmaker and analyst Brower's selections and commentary. Click on the "handicapping" tab and go to "race reviews".

Brower's input is generally available 48 hours before every card.

Meadowlands media relations

IRISH AMERICAN CELEBRATION WEEKEND KICKS OFF SATURDAY

The first running of the Irish American Celebration Weekend June 5-6 at Portmarnock Raceway in Dublin is part of the "Invest in Ourselves" breeding initiative announced earlier this year and further support for international recognition and support

for the growth of the sport of harness racing in Ireland. This weekend launched by the official body for the sport of harness racing in Ireland, the Irish Harness Racing Association (IHRA), is in recognition of the financial and organisational support that they have received from industry leaders and globally recognised farms in the United States of America (U.S.) Bill Donovan, Hanover Shoe Farms and Winbak Farms.

The weekend will feature 17 races including the inaugural 4-year-old graduate races and The Derby and The Oaks for 3-year-old horses. The inclusion of these races will see an increase in prize money. The weekend racing will culminate with Graded Handicap Trot & Pace Races and Grade One Pace Races seeking the top standardbred horses in both codes from across Ireland to compete. Plans already include top drivers, trainers and industry leaders from the US to attend the event next year once Covid restrictions have been lifted.

To promote and highlight the ties between the harness racing communities of Ireland and the US, as well as showcase the great racing that will be available this coming weekend at Portmarnock Raceway, a number of the top professionals from across both countries' industries have been interviewed. These will be released leading up to and during the weekend and will include, the main sponsors of the event Bill Donovan and representatives from Hanover Shoe Farms and Winbak Farms as well big names in U.S. harness racing like John Campbell, Casie Coleman and Yannick Gingras. Racing will commence both days at 2 p.m. Irish time. The whole weekend will be live streamed and available to watch in real time from across a number of media outlets including IHRA TV, which can be found on the IHRA website: <https://www.irishharnessracing.com/>.

The Irish American Celebration Weekend is set to become one of the most important dates annually in the Irish harness racing calendar and is a great example of the international interest and investment that is being given to help support, promote and grow the sport in Ireland.

Irish Harness Racing Association

PA-SIRED SOPHOMORE TROTTER FILLIES COMING TO POCONO SUNDAY

The Pennsylvania Sire Stakes (PASS) / Stallion Series for 3-year-old trotting fillies makes its stop at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono during Sunday's (June 6) twilight card, with this third preliminary leg consisting of two PASS divisions in races 10 and 11 and three Stallion Series cuts in races seven, nine, and 12.

The biggest question in race 10 is whether the Donato Hanover filly Anoka Hanover can regain her winning ways. Last year's Dan Patch award winner won her seasonal debut at Philly while tying the divisional track record in 1:52.3, but then on a sloppy track at The Meadows last Saturday she never got going into the race and finished back. Driver Todd McCarthy and trainer Noel Daley are hoping that day was an aberration as Anoka

Hanover starts from post one in a field of seven.

You Ato Dream, also a daughter of Donato Hanover, has won both of her Sire Stakes races so far, at odds of 12-1 and 23-1, but it's not likely that that kind of price will be available Sunday as the Jeff Gregory-trained and -driven filly begins from post four.

In race 11, there are all sorts of fillies who earned distinction at two – the PASS champion Flawless Country (by Southwind Frank, post two, trainer/driver Åke Svanstedt), Canadian star Donna Soprano (Donato Hanover, post six, driver Bob McClure, trainer Luc Blais), Breeders Crown winner Lady Chaos (Cantab Hall, the outside post eight, driver David Miller, trainer Linda Toscano), and Pennsylvania Stallion Series champion Love Muffin (Andover Hall, post six, driver Andy Miller, trainer Julie Miller).

If asked, just on those credentials, to pick the one out of the quartet who would win her first two Sire Stakes starts in 2021, one might not go for Love Muffin, but she's the filly from this division who will be going for her third straight. In fact, none of the others has a PASS triumph to her credit this year.

In the three Stallion Series divisions, only Piper Hanover in race nine has notched two 2021 victories against this type – the only two wins of her career to date – but six other single winners will be looking to raise their profiles with a repeat triumph.

Program pages will be available at <https://www.phha.org/downsmppps.html>.

PHHA / Pocono

2021 NEW YORK COUNTY FAIR SERIES SCHEDULE CONFIRMED

The Agriculture & New York State Horse Breeding Development Fund has released the approved schedule for the New York Sire Stakes (NYSS) County Fair Series. This year's season gets underway on July 8 at the Afton Fair in Chenango County. The County Fair Finals are scheduled for Sept. 5 at Goshen. The full schedule of race dates can be viewed [here](#). The series will consist of 21 non-pari-mutuel harness racing events open to eligible 2- and 3-year-old New York-bred standardbreds. The events provide young horses with the opportunity to earn as they learn while bringing harness racing to communities across the state.

"This schedule came together thanks to the work of many dedicated individuals in counties around the state," said executive director M. Kelly Young. "We appreciate the commitment of all our racing fairs and are excited for the outstanding season coming up."

The New York State County Fair Series has three new locations this year in Genesee County, Madison County and Ontario County. Genesee County racing will occur at Batavia Downs, while Madison County racing will be offsite at SUNY Morrisville. The Ontario County Fair is located in Canandaigua, which is hosting harness racing on its track for the first time in memory.

"The New York Sire Stakes is excited to welcome these three new locations to expand our racing offerings," said Young. "We hope this schedule encourages more individuals to participate in harness racing and attend these exciting grandstand events in New York State."

Additionally, the Lewis County Fair celebrates its 200th year this summer. Harness racing has long been an integral part of the Lowville, NY, event and the NYSS is excited to be part of this milestone celebration. You can learn more [here](#).

Lastly, all County Fair Finals entries, except those for Erie County, will go through the New York Fair Entry Hotline at 518.388.0964.

Visit the New York Sire Stakes website at www.nysirestakes.com for more information.

Eliza Bianco for NYSS

NJRC ALLOWS CASHING OF TICKETS THAT EXPIRED DURING PANDEMIC

Per the New Jersey Racing Commission, winning tickets and vouchers that expired during Meadowlands Racetrack and Winners Bayonne closures due to COVID-19 can now be cashed.

Bettors with Meadowlands and Winners expired winning tickets that expired in 2020 are encouraged come out to the track and cash-in at any mutuels window at the Meadowlands or Winners.

In addition, the mutuels department and NJRC must verify any tickets from Sept. 16th, 2019 – Nov. 1 2019 before they will be cashed.

Tickets and vouchers can also be cashed in via registered mail by sending in the tickets along with a self-addressed and stamped envelope to:

Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment

Attn: Mutuels Department

1 Racetrack Drive

East Rutherford, NJ 07073

Any questions can be sent to mutuels director Stu Berman at sberman@playmeadowlands.com

Rachel Ryan / Meadowlands media relations



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