The wait is officially over! Some of the best 2-year-olds from 2023 have been qualifying and we'll get to see our first true look at how they've developed and matured over the winter. Will they thrive as sophomores or has the rest of the pack caught up in terms of speed and stamina?

Five tracks will offer events this weekend for 3-year-olds of both gaits and while we'll get into them shortly, we can't start a conversation about second-year Standardbreds without first mentioning the winter book Hambletonian favorite Karl, who recorded his first charted line of the year on April 27 at The Meadowlands and was nothing short of spectacular.

Trained by Nancy Takter and driven by Yannick Gingras, Karl trotted to an easy half in 58 seconds before sprinting 27 3/5 and 26 3/5 quarters to close out a 1:52 1/5 mile. To put the time into perspective, Breeders Crown 2-year-old Colt Pace winner Gem Quality won his qualifier in the exact clocking (btw, he was extremely impressive as well with a 25 1/5 final quarter – more on that later). To further show how fast the mile truly was, no trotter on the card went better than 1:54 2/5.

If we are seeing 1:52 1/5 from Karl in April, you have to wonder where the bottom may be for the son of Tactical Landing.

"Honestly, I have no idea," said Takter with a chuckle when asked about how fast Karl may be able to trot. "I trained him in [1:]55 1/5 the week before with a back half in 55 and a piece. That was the fastest I've trained him before in a race bike. He just glides over the track. It is amazing how quickly and effortlessly he switches gears. You don't even notice it. You can be going a quarter in 30 seconds and the next thing you know he's going in 27 and a piece without feeling any difference."
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“We were looking to go high [1:53 or 1:54], but Yannick never even asked him to go down the stretch. There was a little tailwind. I had five horses on the day that came home better than 26 [seconds]. Obviously the track was setting up for fast last quarters.”

For the record, seven trotters have gone sub-1:50 miles as 3-year-olds, with Six Pack (2018, Red Mile) holding the North American record at 1:49 1/5, and Jujube (2021, Meadowlands 1:49 4/5 & Red Mile 1:49 3/5) and Plunge Blue Chip (2018, Meadowlands 1:49 4/5 & Red Mile 1:49 4/5) the only horses to accomplish the feat twice in the same year.

When pressed further about the possibility of Karl trotting in 1:49, Takter was reluctant to predict it but left open the possibility.

“I don’t want to jinx him but I think he has the ability to do it. I don’t want to necessarily do it, at least not now. Maybe on a nice day in Lexington if things set up right for him. If he could win every race in 2:00 this year nobody would be happier than me,” concluded Takter.

Karl is expected to make his 2024 debut in a division of the New Jersey Sire Stakes on May 11 at The Meadowlands. That series offer a second leg on May 18 and a Final on May 31. After that, Karl will be forced to take a little break.

“He has no races in the month of June and he’s not in a position where it is easy to find an overnight race for him,” said Takter, who said she would likely put him in a qualifier in late June or early July. “After that he has the Stanley Dancer or the Zweig, then it is Hambo time.

“Horses get sick, things happen, so I don’t want to get too far ahead of myself.”

For those of us brave enough to look ahead and dream of a future where Karl becomes a star, then the thoughts switch to 2025 and beyond. While it is premature to even consider it, Takter admitted that she has previous racing Karl as an older horse.

“Obviously he has to get through this year, but the idea of racing him as a 4-year-old has been talked about within the ownership group, so we’ll try to manage him well enough this year,” said Takter. “Obviously it will come down to money because I know there is a lot of interest in him as a stallion. Maybe you make a little less racing him but at the same time… I own a piece of him and I’m the youngest one in the ownership group and definitely the one that needs the money the most, but you’re a fan of the sport too and you want to do what’s right. Black Horse Racing raced Manchego as an older horse, the Benders would like to see the horse race in the future, and even the Crawford’s, they raced Atlanta and have raced aged horses in the past too. For them, they would probably benefit the most from having him stand stud because they have a breeding farm, but at the same time they’re big fans of the sport and obviously fans of racing.”

While Karl’s debut is still about a week away, there are plenty of 3-year-olds preparing to make their 2024 pari-mutuel debuts this weekend and our journey starts in New Jersey where The Meadowlands hosts three divisions of the New Jersey Sire stakes for pacers and Freehold offers the Dexter Cup and Lady Suffolk for trotters of both sexes on Saturday.

We now head west to The Meadows to check out the three $51,257 divisions of Pennsylvania Sire Stakes for 3-year-old colt and gelding pacers that takes place Saturday with first-race post set at 11:30 AM (EDT). Things kick off in the fourth race with the undefeated-in-2024 Timeisomnesty for The Stable putting his streak on the line versus a good field that includes Governor’s Cup runner-up Its Saturday Night. Two races later we get to see the 2024 debuts of a pair of sub-1:51 winners last year in Arson and Booming Economy. The final division is scheduled as the eighth race.

Blackhawk Zette

Flawless won the Commonwealth final at The Red Mile in 2023 and makes her seasonal debut Sunday at Pocono for Nancy Takter.

More and more Ohio bred are bursting on the Grand Circuit scene and we’ll get our first look at 43 hopefuls in five Ohio Sire Stakes splits at Miami Valley in the afternoon on Saturday.

Some of the interesting contestants include Jurassic Hattie, a recent winner of the Hackett Trot over the track who has never been worse than second in nine career starts, in the opener. Winning a pacing split of the Hackett was Seaside Diva and she’ll put her perfect record in two starts on the line in the $100,000 filly pace carded as the second race. The colt pacers go in races three and eight worth $65,000 each, with Janelle Granny looking to rebound in the former while his conqueror in the Hackett – Rose Run Zane – seeks to run his winning streak to five

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4
in the eighth race. Perhaps the featured horse goes in the $100,000 ninth race for colt trotters when Spaaaanzano makes his 2024 debut. The Chris Beaver trainee won his first five starts last year before a second in the Ohio Sire Stakes championship and a fifth versus Grand Circuit foes in the Peter Haughton.

Our final stop is Pocono Downs Mohegan Pennsylvania as the track starts off its PA All Stars series with 3-year-old filly pacers on Sunday evening. Three events are scheduled with races seven and 10 offering the best returning prospects. Takter is represented with Kentucky Commonwealth final winner Flawless in race seven, who has been just that in two qualifying wins with Lasix added to the equation.

“She’s like a new horse this year. She was just so angry and difficult to deal with last year,” said Takter. “When she came back from turnout she was just way easier to get along with and wanted to do her work. I always thought she had enough speed but she wasn’t giving us all her effort.”

Race 10 and post seven is the starting point for Liberty Bell and Kindergarten leg winner Pressure Cooker. The Linda Toscano trainee showed plenty of promise as a 1:51 4/5 winner last year and can’t be faulted for finishing second behind the promising Caviart Bell in her latest qualifier.

Five tracks and three states worth of racing for 3-year-olds and we are literally just raising the curtain on the 2024 stakes season for that age group. There are still seven more months of Sire Stakes and Grand Circuit events ahead. If you’re like me, the excitement is hard to contain.

News and Notes

It was an inauspicious start to the year for top 3-year-old pacing prospect Captains Quarters as he locked wheels with the leader as he was making a move on the outside and finished well back (timed in 2:02 2/5) in his first qualifier of the year at Woodbine Mohawk Park. The 2023 Metro Pacer winner has hopefully gotten all the bad luck he’ll experience this year out of the way.

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Ready To Shine preparing for late-season spotlight

A 3-year-old pacer made his 2024 pari-mutuel debut on Tuesday (April 30) at Pocono and had the look and feel of a potential star. Upon first glance it appeared as though Ready To Shine, a Huntsville-sired gelding with limited racing experience, could be destined to race in this year’s Meadowlands Pace, but in the end his road won’t lead to New Jersey.

Raced just one time for money as a 2-year-old in a non-winners event at The Red Mile, Ready To Shine was a runaway winner from off the pace in a 1:52 1/5 clocking. That mile was followed by a long period of time away from the races and trainer Julie Miller explained what had happened to the promising freshman she was preparing.

“He was coming along late and The Meadowlands was closing,” Miller said. “So we brought him down to Lexington. He’s a New York-bred but he was very big and I didn’t want to put him over the half-mile tracks in the Sire Stakes, so the idea was to bring him to The Red Mile and try to get him ready for some later races on the stakes schedule.”

Following the victory Miller discovered that Ready To Shine had incurred a soft tissue injury that derailed plans for his freshman season but had a positive prognosis.

“We gave him time and took him to Rood and Riddle and they cleared him to go back into training,” said Miller.

Given the extreme talent Ready To Shine had already displayed, albeit briefly during his freshman campaign, Miller and the co-owners staked Ready To Shine early this year like a horse that had done enough as a freshman to anticipate competing at the highest level. Along the list of races Ready To Shine was paid into prior to April was The Meadowlands Pace, but in the end his road won’t lead to New Jersey.

“To Shine was a runaway winner from off the pace and Little Brown Jug and they cleared him to go back into training,” said Miller.

On Tuesday, Ready To Shine gave a glimpse of his talent with an effortless wire-to-wire victory in 1:51 3/5 at Pocono with Julie’s husband Andy quite still in the bike through a 27 3/5 final quarter. Though the last quarter was quick, it wasn’t the fastest of the mile, with Ready To Shine sprinting a 27 1/5 third quarter unchallenged.

“I don’t look at the times much,” said Miller of the fractions or final time, “But I want to know how they felt finishing the mile. Andy said that he was strong through the wire and finished with the earplugs in.”

So next step, Meadowlands Pace?

Not exactly, said Miller.

“We didn’t make the payments for him, so we’ll miss the Meadowlands Pace and Little Brown Jug and point him for the later races in the year.”

As to why the change of heart after making other sustaining payments, Miller was forthright.

“We qualified him a couple of times and I saw how some of the others looked. He’s a big horse that lacks experience,” said Miller.

Perhaps even more important was doing right by the horse, something the Millers have done for decades when making racing considerations. Ready To Shine, a $185,000 yearling purchase at the 2022 Lexington Selected Sale, clearly has talent, but without experience it’s asking a lot of a young horse to race at the highest level and not hit a serious bump in the road.

“It’s about building up his confidence,” said Miller, who recognized the challenges of educating a young horse while also trying to win some of its biggest races.

“Ideally I would have liked to see Andy race him from off the pace in his first start,” said Miller. “But that’s not the way horses win at Pocono, and you have to race them the best way that fits the track.”

While a pair of major races have been taken off Ready To Shine’s potential dance list, Miller happily informed that she is no longer as concerned about stepping into the half-mile-track dominated New York Sire Stakes this year with Ready To Shine.

“Ready To Shine blazed to a 1:51 3/5 win in his 2024 debut at Pocono Downs.

“He was a big horse last year and he hasn’t gotten much bigger, but he’s filled out some,” said Miller. “He’ll be fine in New York.”

The New York Sire Stakes for 3-year-old colts and geldings commences on May 26 at Saratoga Harness and that could be a destination for Ready To Shine.

“What I’m hoping for is that we can have him at his best late in the year and then be able to go up against the best in races like the Breeders Crown,” said Miller with an understanding of what’s best for her horse and what could be the most economically savvy move she didn’t make before the April payments. “Hopefully we can keep him fresh and maybe some of the others are a bit tired.”

On the other end of the stable and currently in Kentucky is last year’s top sophomore French Wine, now racing at Oak Grove where he’s eligible for the lucrative Kentucky Sire program for 4-year-olds.

“He’s got a little bit better every year,” said Miller of the Bar Hopping-sired French Wine, a millionaire with plenty to race for this season. “We’ve got him eligible to all of the big races but there are some conflicts.”

Miller noted that French Wine will likely skip the Maxie Lee at Harrah’s Philadelphia on May 26 and race the next afternoon at Oak Grove in Kentucky Sire Stakes action.

Currently Miller has 55 horses in training with a majority based at Gateway Farms. With 2-year-olds making their final preparations for the coming season, Miller has 30 babies that collectively are doing well and was reluctant to go too far making predictions.

“At this point they are doing what we expect of them,” said Miller. “But that’s not the way horses win at Pocono, and you have to race them the best way that fits the track.”

While a pair of major races are scheduled for Ready To Shine this year and then be able to go up against the best in races like the Breeders Crown, Miller suggested the stable would be spending plenty of time in Kentucky this year. “About 75 percent of our horses are dual eligible,” said Miller, with hopes of seeing many of her young horses earn and learn while racing in the Bluegrass state.

One of Miller’s finest fillies, the now racing-retired Max Contract has begun her second career in style.

“I spoke to Steve Stewart and he told me that she’s in-foal to Confederate. I’m not sure we’re going to have enough money to bid on that foal,” said Miller.

The Millers’ raced Max Contract, also by Huntsville, to a Breeders Crown victory last fall at Hoosier Park and then sold her to Stewart and partners at the conclusion of her racing career.
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Nearing round two of Tall Dark Stranger vs. Papi Rob Hanover

 regard less of his current physical condition, the rivalry between Papi Rob Hanover and Tall Dark Stranger will continue into the stallion ranks as both will send full first crops to the races in a few short weeks.

According to my sources, at present, Papi Rob Hanover is suffering from a heart condition and is reportedly able to breed one mare per collection. However, that will have no impact on this year’s 2-year-old crop. Nor will it impact his second-crop yearlings or his third crop arriving as this is written. Thus he and rival Tall Dark Stranger will each offer three distinct crops for comparison purposes. For the time being at least, that rivalry continues.

How each will do in stud remains to be seen. Thus far there are glowing reports about the initial offerings of both stallions, and the numbers are quite similar for the first three crops. Last year, Papi Rob Hanover’s crop of foals numbered 105 of which 76 were sold at auction for an individual average of $76,131. His highest priced yearling brought $350,000. Conversely, Tall Dark Stranger’s initial crop numbered 108 of which 85 went through the yearling sales for an individual average of $80,062. Tall Dark Stranger’s highest priced yearling also brought $350,000. Consequently, both first crops are very similar in not only numbers, but yearling prices.

As is well known, they raced each other several times at age 2, with Tall Dark Stranger having a slight edge in overall victories. However, one was the result of a contested disqualification in the Breeders Crown final in which the victorious Papi Rob Hanover was disqualified and placed second following an objection on the part of Tall Dark Stranger’s driver Yannick Gingras. That year, Tall Dark Stranger won eight of nine starts earning $717,514. Meanwhile Papi Rob Hanover won six of 12 starts for earnings of $754,774. Tall Dark Stranger earned Dan Patch 2-year-old honors over his rival.

At age 3, Tall Dark Stranger won the Meadowlands Pace over a parked-mile Papi Rob Hanover.

Thereafter, the rivalry ceased as Papi Rob Hanover came up lame after setting the 1:47 1/5f world record in the Adios elimination at The Meadows. Tall Dark Stranger then went on to totally dominate his division earning accolades of Horse Of The Year for 2020. Thereafter, both were syndicated and sent to stud at Hanover Shoe Farm, with “Stranger’s” fee set at $20,000 while “Papi Rob” stood for $10,000.

Hopefully the rivalry will continue, although history indicates that happenings on the racetrack can vastly differentiate when carried over to the stud barn. Certainly there can be no greater example than the rivalry between Thoroughbreds Affirmed and Alydar. While Affirmed won the big races, especially those Triple Crown events, it was Alydar that became a world-class stallion until that unfortunate leg incident at Calumet. Affirmed meanwhile was a marginal stallion at best.

As for Standardbreds, the great Overtrick had an edge on his chief rival Meadow Skipper on the racetrack. But in the stud barn Overtrick was just adequate while Meadow Skipper virtually recreated the pacing breed in his own image.

Thereafter, Meadow Skipper son Most Happy Fella had a slight edge over Columbia George on the racetrack. But again, there was no comparison as sires since “Happy” advanced Meadow Skipper’s legacy while “George” was just another decent but not exceptional Good Time stallion.

At times, Nansemond seemed a racetrack rival for Albatross, but in the stud barn Albatross totally outdistanced his Tar Heel rival.

Artsplace and Die Laughing were 2-year-old rivals. Die Laughing with Richie Silverman from an outside post actually was favored over inside-posted Artsplace and John Campbell in the Breeders Crown at Pompano Park. That night Artsplace decimated Die Laughing and in the stud barn was equally dominant, as the No Nukes son Die Laughing was a total flop.

Real Desire and Bettor’s Delight were racetrack rivals. Bettor’s Delight is probably the most fertile stallion of any breed in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres. In addition, he ranks among the all-time great pacing stallions. Unfortunately at age 26, this will probably be his final year as he’s slated for retirement in New Zealand this fall. Still he’s impregnated 60 mares thus far this season. Real Desire proved a marginal stallion at best.

I didn’t see them but read reports about the racetrack rivalry between Adios and King’s Counsel. Of those Adios proved a legendary stallion and in the opinion of many possibly the greatest stallion ever. King’s Counsel had a modest career and might be better known for his broodmare credits, some of which excelled with Adios, especially an all-time great filly named Countess Adios.

With Papi Rob Hanover and Tall Dark Stranger having distinctly different pedigrees, daughters of each will undoubtedly be sent to the other sometime down the road. In fact, there are no pedigree conflicts within the first three generations, although Cam Fella will show up as a very acceptable 3x4 being the great grandsire of Tall Dark Stranger and sire of Camluck, who appears on the maternal side of Papi Rob Hanover. Of course that will depend upon Papi Rob Hanover’s overall health, as he may or may not still be in service by the time Tall Dark Stranger fillies reach broodmare age. That said, some of the “Papi Rob” daughters from the first three crops will likely be serviced by Tall Dark Stranger, so we can still get an inkling of what might have occurred.

Fortunately we will see enough in these next three seasons to judge just how the rivalry between Tall Dark Stranger and Papi Rob Hanover plays out in the stud barn!

Stay tuned.
The first round of the New Jersey Sire Stakes for 3-year-old pacers kicks off at The Meadowlands on Saturday night with a pair of $30,000 divisions for colts and geldings and a single $30,000 leg for pacing fillies.

Driver Jason Bartlett has been a regular at The Meadowlands on Saturday night since the season began and he has a likely outsider in the seventh race first division for colts and geldings. While the nine-horse field includes the $510K winner Better Is Nice (post 8) Bartlett finds himself with a first-time starter in Jersey Beach (post 6), a son of Lazarus N that has just qualified twice this year after going unraced as a 2-year-old.

“He’s a nice big-gaited horse,” said Bartlett of Jersey Beach, who he drove to victory in a 1:53 clocking at Pocono during a qualifier on April 24.

Deborah Daguet trains the gelding that also flashed high speed in an April 17 qualifier at Pocono. “He came a last quarter in 27 in that first qualifier,” said Bartlett. “I couldn’t make it for that race, but I did train him for Deborah before his first qualifier.”

Bartlett has sat behind many a quality horse in his career and wouldn’t speculate on how well Jersey Beach might fit in making his career debut in a stakes race.

“I think with his gait he may be better suited for the big track,” said Bartlett.

Just how well Jersey Beach stacks up against the competition remains to be seen but his first trip in a pari-mutuel race will certainly be a good place to find out since he’ll face Better Is Nice, a seven-time winner as a freshman racing both in New Jersey, Kentucky and the Grand Circuit, and a horse with a ton of experience and talent to back it up. Trained by Tony Alagna, Better Is Nice has had two qualifiers over The Meadowlands surface to prepare for his sophomore debut, with driver Andrew McCarthy keeping him covered up and pacing 26-second final quarters.

Alritealritealrite earned $83K last year while going winless in six trips for trainer Paula Wellwood. He returned this year with a sharp effort in his season’s debut at Woodbine Mohawk Park on April 25 with a 1:53 4/5 effort coming from off the pace. Alritealritealrite drew post four in this division.

Trainer Nancy Takter’s Caviart Justice was on the board in eight of his 11 starts as a freshman and makes his debut on Saturday from post two. The homebred son of Lazarus N took a 1:52 1/5 mark last year.

2023 NJ Sire Stakes champion Better Is Nice is the one to beat heading into round one of the series this year at The Meadowlands.

The second New Jersey Sire Stakes division (race 9) finds another of last year’s better 2-year-olds facing a field looking for stakes identity. Wish You Well, 10 times first or second in 14 starts in 2023, makes his season’s debut for trainer Nifty Norman. Wish You Well finished sixth behind Captain Luke in his final start last year in the Governor’s Cup and was fifth chasing the same horse in his most recent qualifier at The Meadowlands on April 20. Wish You Well landed post seven.

While many of last year’s top performers are making their first start of the year in the New Jersey Sire Stakes, the same can’t be said for Ain’t Nostopn Time. The half-brother to Always B Miki has won half of his 10 starts this year and should be fit from the pole position for trainer Per Engblom.

Bonaparte (post 5) has turned things around this year. Following a winless campaign in seven starts as a 2-year-old, Bonaparte has won three of six races this year, all coming at Pocono. The Bettor’s Wish-sired gelding was a solid second behind the highly regarded McCrunch at The Meadowlands on March 30.

The fourth race on Saturday’s card is the $30,000 NJSS for sophomore pacing fillies, with a pair of last year’s standouts hoping to make winning debuts. Odds On Steno (post 5) was nine times first or second in 11 starts as a freshman for trainer Tony Alagna. She will debut following a pair of qualifiers at The Meadowlands. Pulp Fiction (post 8) had some vintage performances last year in New Jersey Sire Stakes action for trainer Michael Hall that led to six wins and $189K banked in 2023. Pulp Fiction tuned up for the Sire Stakes with a third-place finish at Rosecroft on April 16.

Bartlett has a busy schedule these days, clocking a ton of miles with plenty of days with doubleheaders scheduled.

“I’ll be at Plainridge tomorrow [May 2],” Bartlett said following Wednesday morning qualifiers at Pocono.

“I drove a colt I like that I raced last year for Deborah Daguet in the Excelsior series,” said Bartlett of Escape To America, a 1:55 winner in the qualifier with a 27-second final quarter. “I also drove that nice mare that Shane Tritton brought over August Moon A. He’s still trying to get the kinks out with her.”

Bartlett has been a regular at Pocono on Mondays and Tuesdays, doing double duty at Yonkers in the evenings. He also plans on being active in the New York Sire Stakes with those races kicking off this month.

Jersey Beach seeks Sire Stakes success in career debut mile

By Jay Bergman
Moore and ‘Stockade’ set to begin again in Wizard Memorial

By Ken Weingartner

After being named Canada’s Trainer of the Year in February and a member of the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame Class of 2024 a week ago, Dr. Ian Moore is set to kick off a new season this weekend with a slate of races that include millionaire Stockade Seelster visiting Miami Valley Raceway for Saturday’s $100,000 Pacey “The Wizard” Mindlin Memorial.

Stockade Seelster, a two-time O’Brien Award winner, will face seven rivals in the Mindlin Memorial as he makes his 4-year-old debut. Moore changed some of the stallion’s equipment in preparation for this season and has been pleased with the results so far. Stockade Seelster qualified twice at Southern Oaks Training Center in Florida, scoring in 1:50 1/5 with 27 3/5 last quarter in the most recent on April 19.

“He’s been real good,” Moore said. “We’ve got him rigged up a little differently this year. I’m actually using a riding horse bit on him and no head check, and he seems to like that. So far, we’ve been able to sit him in during training. He hasn’t been pulling or fighting us. I’m interested to see how he’s going to fare in the race, but so far so good.

“If he works with us instead of going against us like he has the last couple years, he’s going to be a better horse, that’s for sure. Sometimes, you just couldn’t do with him what you wanted to do. I think we’re in good shape now and looking forward to it.”

Stockade Seelster won seven of 19 races last year and hit the board an additional eight times. The son of State Treasurer-Sooire Seelster earned $767,688 in Canadian dollars ($673,220 U.S.) for owners Sally MacDonald and Paul MacDonald. His victories included a division of the Somebeachsomewhere Stakes, the consolation division of the North America Cup, and three preliminary divisions of the Ontario Sire Stakes. He finished second to Confederate in the Breeders Crown and Max C. Hempt Memorial.

“It was up and down a little bit, but for the most part it wasn’t too bad at all,” Moore said about Stockade Seelster’s season. “He finished strong.”

For his career, Stockade Seelster has hit the board in 25 of 38 races, winning 15 and earning C$1.59 million. In addition to his O’Brien honors, he received a Dan Patch Award as a 2-year-old.

Stockade Seelster was one of two O’Brien Award winners for Moore in 2023, along with older male pacer Tattoo Artist. Moore also conditioned Ontario Sire Stakes 2-year-old pacing colt champion Storm Shadow and Ohio Sire Stakes 2-year-old pacing colt champion Clever Cody as his stable surpassed C$3 million in purses for the first time. Storm Shadow and Clever Cody also make their seasonal debuts Saturday, in an SBOA elimination at Woodbine Mohawk Park and a division of the OSS at Miami Valley, respectively.

For his career, Moore has won more than 700 races and C$23 million in purses while averaging a stable size of only 10 to 15 horses. He has received 15 O’Brien Awards, including two for Horsemanship, and trained seven millionaires. In addition to Tattoo Artist and Stockade Seelster, his stars have included 2022 Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame Inductee Shadow Play, 2015 Canadian Horse of the Year State Treasurer, Century Farroh, and Percy Bluechip.

“It’s hard to believe really,” Moore said about his Hall of Fame recognition. “I’ve only been a small-time guy, never had large numbers. There are a lot of people better than me, that’s for sure, that might be more deserving as well. I’m very humbled and honored.”

In the Mindlin Memorial, Stockade Seelster will start from post two with Aaron Merriman in the sulky. He is 5-1 on the morning line.

Hellabalou, who won the MGM Borgata Pacing Series final on April 22 at MGM Yonkers Raceway, is the 5-2 favorite. Little Rocket Man, who won last year’s inaugural Mindlin Memorial, is the 7-2 second choice followed by Taurasi, who brings a nine-race win streak to the event at 9-2.

Chris Page will drive Hellabalou for trainer Ron Burke and leave from post three. Little Rocket Man will leave from post five with driver John DeLong while Taurasi starts from post six with Trace Tetrick.

Pacey Mindlin passed away in March 2023 at the age of 81. He was a mainstay for several decades at Lebanon Raceway and later Miami Valley, where he was the on-air handicapper. He also was a prominent owner and pedigree expert.

In addition to the Mindlin Memorial, Miami Valley on Saturday hosts five divisions of Ohio Sire Stakes action for 3-year-olds. Clever Cody is one of two returning champs competing, along with filly pacer Daisy’s Star.

Crone hands out top marks to Canadian Graduate Series hopefuls at Mohawk

Trainer Meg Crone has two chances at making the grade when the Canadian Graduate Series finals take center stage at Woodbine Mohawk Park on Saturday.

Off to a stellar start in 2024, Crane is hoping to keep her stable’s winning ways going this weekend at the Milton oval.

The lifetime winner of 433 races will be represented by Passarino in the Canadian Graduate Series Trot Final. A son of Lookslikeachpndale-Perfect Prelude, the bay gelding is set to square off against five rivals in the race for Canadian-sired 4-year-olds.

“He appears to be getting a little stronger and a little sharper each week,” said Crone. “His biggest thing is that he is always able to leave the gate and put himself into a good position. He is tough down the lane too.”

Owned by Seawind Amgs Stbs 2005 Inc (New Brunswick) and T M Racing (Alberta), Passarino arrives at the final off a gutsy second in the third leg of the Graduate on April 26.

Sent off at 14-1, Passarino held a nose advantage at the stretch call and dug in gamely to secure the runner-up spot, trotting the final quarter in a lively 26 3/5.

In nine starts this year, he is 2-3-1, along with $46,110 in purse earnings.

Road to the Meadowlands Pace (Week 1)

Below is the Top 4 from Dave Little’s Road to the Meadowlands Pace:

1-CAPTAIN ALBANO ($445,680 – 1:49 2/5): LAST YEAR, FINISHED SECOND TO GEM QUALITY IN THE BREEDERS CROWN AS THE 2-5 FAVORITE; TOOK HIS MARK OF 1:49.2 IN THE BLUEGRASS AT THE RED MILE. WILL MAKE HIS FIRST APPEARANCE OF 2023 FRIDAY IN A BIG M QUALIFIER. DAILY: “WE’RE JUST GOING TO FOLLOW ALONG THERE. LOOKING TO QUALIFY FROM OFF THE PACE. JUST LET HIM RUN HOME, THEN, NEXT WEEK, BE A LITTLE BIT MORE AGGRESSIVE.”


4-CAPTAIN LUKE ($332,109 – 1:51): RECORDED HIS TWO WINS OF 2023 IN HIS LAST TWO STARTS AFTER LASIX WAS ADDED; WON THE GOVERNOR’S CUP ELIM, AND THEN THE GOVERNOR’S CUP FINAL. ALAGNA: “HE WAS LIGHTS OUT IN HIS FIRST QUALIFIER. WE’LL PLAY THINGS BY EAR AFTER [FRIDAY’S] QUALIFIER. GENERALLY, WITH A CAPTAIN TREACHEROUS, YOU GET A GOOD 3-YEAR-OLD.”

-edited release (Dave Little for Meadowlands)
Sir Pinocchio ready to put nose on the gate in Dexter Cup

By Ken Weingartner

Stakes success at Freehold Raceway is a bit of a tradition for the family of Sir Pinocchio, who will look to leave his own mark at the central New Jersey half-mile oval when he competes in Saturday’s (May 4) $134,900 Dexter Cup for 3-year-old male trotters.

Sir Pinocchio’s second dam, Oh Oh Its Magic, won a division of the Lady Suffolk at Freehold in 2007. Ten years later, Oh Oh Its Magic’s fourth foal, Lord Cromwell, captured the Dexter Cup in a still standing stakes-record 1:55 and gave driver John Campbell the final Grand Circuit victory of his Hall of Fame career.

Those two horses, who combined to earn more than $932,000 in their careers, were bred and owned by Carolyn Atherton and her husband, Irv, as is Sir Pinocchio.

Sir Pinocchio, a son of Met’s Hall-Lady Cromwell, was a New York Sire Stakes Excelsior Series champion last year. He has hit the board in six of eight lifetime starts, winning three and earning $56,427. He will start Saturday’s Dexter Cup, the first Grand Circuit event of the season for sophomore male trotters, from post six with Jason Bartlett driving for trainer Ed Hart. He is the co-second choice on the morning line at 4-1.

In his only start this year, Sir Pinocchio won a conditioned race from post seven at MGM Yonkers Raceway on April 17. The gelding was victorious by 1-1/2 lengths in 1:57 4/5.

“It’s going to be exciting,” said Irv Atherton. “We have high hopes for the young man. He won handily at Yonkers, so we’ll see what happens. Carolyn is very excited; she can’t wait to see him race. We can only hope for the best.”

Sir Pinocchio went off stride in three races last year, but also displayed talent, such as when he won the Excelsior final from post eight at Batavia Downs in 1:59 at odds of 9-1.

“He was good as gold that night,” said trainer Hart. “He showed flashes of being a very nice horse last year. He made a couple odd breaks last year; it’s just a matter of attention with him. Basically, he just had to mature.

“He’s a big, good-looking, nice horse to be around. I thought he was very good at Yonkers (on April 17). He left and got a little roughed up in the first turn, Jason had to steady him, and then he came back and had good trot. It was a good mile for him. We’ll start from there and see what happens.”

Sir Pinocchio’s mother is a full sister to Lord Cromwell, who also was trained by Hart. The conditioner said Sir Pinocchio and Lord Cromwell share little in common, at least physically.

“They are opposites,” Hart said. “Lord Cromwell was a poor standing, small horse that just had a ton of heart. (Sir Pinocchio) is a big good-looking horse. But he seems to also have a lot of heart.”

Sir Pinocchio is not eligible to August’s Hambletonian but is staked to several other major Grand Circuit races for 3-year-old male trotters, including the Yonkers Trot, Canadian Trotting Classic, and Matron.

“We can only keep our fingers crossed that he stays healthy,” Atherton said. “We’ve got the right trainer and the right driver, so everything is good.”

The Athertons, who have been involved in harness racing for four decades, have cut back on breeding, which makes watching Sir Pinocchio all the more meaningful.

“We’re just getting a little too old for this,” Atherton said with a laugh. “We’ve had a few horses that have done well. We have no complaints. It’s special.”

Sir Pinocchio’s seven rivals in the Dexter Cup include Blackhawk Zette, who is 5-for-5 this year for trainer Robert Baggitt Jr. and owner J L Sadowsky after winning the Bobby Weiss Series final on Monday at Mohegan Pennsylvania’s Pocono Downs. The colt is this season’s richest 3-year-old trotter, with $62,000. He will start from post seven with Matt Kakaley in the sulky and is the 9-5 favorite.

Last year’s New York Sire Stakes champion, Chaplind, will start from post two with Yannick Gingras driving for trainer Trond Smedshammer and owner Purple Haze Stables. The colt is 4-1.

Chaplind is one of four horses that will be making his sophomore debut in the Dexter, along with Stockholm Hanover, Inflation, and Thinker Monkey. Thinker Monkey, a full brother to 2020 Trotter of the Year Gimpanzee, is the lone Dexter participant eligible to the $1 million Hambletonian.

Completing the field are Jakey Jumpup and Casanova Hall.

Saturday’s card at Freehold also includes two divisions of the Lady Suffolk for 3-year-old female trotters. Racing begins at 12:30 p.m. (EDT).

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SBOA elims at Mohawk Park

The stakes season for Ontario sired 3-year-olds launches this weekend with the SBOA Stakes eliminations at Woodbine Mohawk Park.

The SBOA Stakes will see eliminations contested in three of the four divisions over Friday (May 3) and Saturday (May 4). The SBOA for 3-year-old trotting colts and geldings did not require eliminations (nine entered). The top five finishers in all this weekend’s eliminations will advance to the finals on Saturday, May 11.

Last season’s top performers Pass Line and Its A Love Thing have drawn away from each other as part of 19 entered 3-year-old pacing fillies.

Pass Line will headline Friday’s first pacing filly elimination, starting from post three with driver James MacDonald. The daughter of All Bets Off captured last year’s OSS Super Final before finishing runner-up in the Breeders Crown. Friday will be her season debut after racking up over $600,000 in earnings as a rookie.

Dave Menary once again will train Pass Line north of the border for Ron Burke.

The Menary stable will then send out their star Its A Love Thing from post five in the C$25,000 second elimination. The daughter of Bettor’s Delight will make her season debut after winning six of 12 and earning over $560,000 last year. She notably won last season’s Shes A Great Lady with driver James MacDonald, who again will do the driving.

A filly that will have close eyes on her in the second elimination is Coco Jo Jo. The Anthony Beaton trainee rallied from last with a blazing 25 1/5 final-quarter to win a Non-Winners of two event last Friday at Mohawk Park. Tyler Borth will drive the Betterbunched har filly from post three.

The SBOA Filly Pace eliminations go as races six and eight on Friday. The SBOA Filly Trot will also have two eliminations on Friday (races one and three), as 15 sophomores were entered in the event.

O’Brien Award winner Willys Home Run makes her season debut in the first division, leaving from post two with James MacDonald. The Kyle Fellows trainee won six of 10 and never finished outside the top-three last season, earning over $500,000. The Archangel filly won the OSS Super Final in dominant fashion to complete her 2-year-old season.

Champlain division winner Valuable Miss is the slight morning-line favorite in the second elimination. The Kyle Bossence trainee was second in last year’s Super Final to finish off a two-win and near $200,000 earned season. Sylvain Filion will drive the My Mvp filly for the first time, leaving from post three.

Saturday night will see the SBOA Colt Pace eliminations contested. A total of 12 sophomore pacing colts and geldings were entered to set up two six-horse eliminations (races one and three). Despite the short fields, the eliminations should provide a pair of entertaining clashes.

Multiple OSS Gold winner and Nassagaweya division winner Funtime Bayama is the 8/5 morning-line favorite from post two in the first split. The Richard Moreau trainee and driver Sylvain Filion teamed to win four of seven starts last year, earning nearly $250,000.

Storm Shadow, who captured last year’s OSS Super Final, will also compete in the first elimination for trainer Dr. Ian Moore and driver Bob McClure. The Bettor’s Delight colt leaves from post five in his season and notably was third in last year’s Breeders Crown after winning an elimination.

Battle of Waterloo winner Do Better will go from post six with driver James MacDonald. The Bob McIntosh trainee won his season debut last Saturday in 1:51 3/5 after winning five of 11 and earning over $220,000 last season.

The $25,000 second elimination is led by two-time OSS Gold winner Chain Gang. The Nick Gallucci trainee won three of eight starts and earned over $150,000 last season. James MacDonald will steer the Bettor’s Delight colt from post five.

The 9/5 morning line favorite in the second split is Bob McIntosh trainee Always A Thrill. The Bettor’s Delight gelding is two-for-two to start the season, which includes a sharp 1:50 2/5 victory on April 20 at Mohawk Park. Bob McClure will drive the sophomore from post two.

The SBOA Colt Trot did not require eliminations. Below is the field of nine for the final on May 11: Convoy Hall, Elegant Resolve, Griffin, Mastercraft, Mrstery Deal, Salem Seelster, Soar Higher, What About Elmo, Willowtime.

The purses for the SBOA Finals (in Canadian dollars) on May 11 are as follows: SBOA Filly Pace - C$141,500; SBOA Filly Trot - C$137,500; SBOA Colt Pace - C$127,000; SBOA Colt Trot - C$124,000.

Saturday’s card, which has a special 7:15 PM post, will also feature three Canadian Graduate Series Finals as part of a 12-race program.

-edited release (Woodbine)
Diamond Creek Farm will hold its 7th Annual Open House on June 1. This is a great day for anyone, in or outside of harness racing, to come out and enjoy a day at the farm. There will be 2 stallion collection demos, chances to meet some of the new foals, hayrides and many more fun activities.

This year the popular “Stallion Showcase” returns, where our PA stallions, including Confederate and Tactical Approach, will be paraded for visitors. The day is very hands on and staff is on hand to answer any questions.

Charity organizations such as Pacing For The Cure and Harness Horse Youth Foundation will be in attendance as well. There will be food trucks and the fan favorite Bootleg Creamery is returning.

The Open House will be held June 1st, 2024 (rain or shine) from 12-4 pm. Address is 151 Warrington Street, Wellsville, PA 17365. There is no cost to attend, please no pets.

More information can be found on the Diamond Creek Facebook page. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for the day or an event vendor, please contact caroline@diamondcreekfarm.com for more information.

Buffalo Raceway is midway through their 2024 season with live harness racing three days a week, Wednesdays and Fridays at 2:30 p.m. first post and Saturdays at 6:00 p.m. first post. Effective immediately, the Race Office will now conduct draws for both Friday and Saturday on Mondays. The first draw for the weekend cards will be Monday, May 6th. The entry box will close at 9:00 a.m. For any questions, call the race office at 716-649-1280 ext. 6234.

The Ohio Harness Horsemen’s Association will feature Tim Lane and his Ohio 2-year-olds in training in this week’s edition of Freshman Focus. Freshman Focus with host Roger Huston will air Thursday evening on the OHHA Facebook page and the Ohio Harness Horsemen’s Association YouTube channel. Air time is 7 PM.

Favorites reigned supreme in the Buckeye Stallion Series opening leg for three-year-old filly trotters and pacers at Miami Valley Gaming on Wednesday, May 1. All four divisions of trotters were won by the favorites, while three of the five pacing divisions saw the favorites win.

In the opening BSS race of the year, Esteo with Chris Lems grabbed the lead heading to three-quarters and cruised to an easy win in 1:56. It was the second win in three starts for the Dalton Walls trainee.

In the second division, Trevor Smith swung Maxine’s Hill three-wide at the top of the stretch and grabbed the lead mid-stretch on the way to a two-length win in 1:57. Trained by Chris Beaver, the daughter of What The Hill won for the first time in four starts.

2023 Ohio Filly Trotter of the Year Sugar Instead with Brett Miller was an easy winner in the third division. The Volstead filly sat mid-pack before making her move around the final turn, opening up to win by four lengths in 1:55 4/5, the fastest time of the trotting divisions.

In the final division for sophomore filly trotters, Tony Hall rallied Justasiam AS, the Buckeye Stallion Series 2023 2-year-old filly trotting champion, around the final turn, taking the lead late in the stretch winning in 1:53 1/5. It was the first race of the year for the daughter of Lionhunter.

In the first pacing division, Flying Bullets with Brett Miller went gate-to-wire to win by two lengths in the 1:52 1/5, the fastest of the five divisions. It was the first start of the year for the Downbytheseaside filly.

In the second division, Illegal with Kayne Kauffman sped off the gate and never looked back winning by two lengths in 1:52 4/5. The daughter of Western Vintage was making her season debut for trainer Mike Polhamus. The first non-favorite to win came in the second division when Lady Briderton with Jeremy Smith went three-wide coming off the last turn and turned on the jets to blow by the leaders to win by two lengths in 1:52 4/5. It was the first start of the year for the Brian Georges trainee.

Fearless Ginger with Tyler Smith went gate to wire to win the fourth division in 1:54. The daughter of Fear The Dragon fought off a late charge from Rock Ur Wings to win for the first time in three starts.

The final division of the card went to Muddinup and Jeremy Smith. Smith popped the pocket and went three-wide around the final turn rallying down the stretch to win by two lengths for trainer John Ackley in 1:53 2/5. It was the first win in three starts for the Bit Of A Legend filly.

Buckeye Stallion Series action continues Thursday.