

THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026

Beau Jangles recalls memories of Niatross



(ABOVE) NEW IMAGE MEDIA / (RIGHT) USTA PHOTO

Beau Jangles (above) will start Saturday in the seventh race at Woodbine Mohawk Park while Niatross was a star in 1979 and 1980.



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [✕ BergmanJay](#)

It was in May of 1980 as best as I can recall that an undefeated pacer would make his stakes debut at Vernon Downs in upstate New York. Niatross had captured the sport's attention through a brilliant freshman campaign and there was a need to see this horse in person, no matter what. A five-hour drive with relatively cheap gas and tolls made for an adventure with much to discuss on the way and even more coming home. Niatross and Clint Galbraith lived up to their billing on that day and days to follow. Watching

greatness in those days was only possible if you made the road trip, otherwise the details would come from second- and third-hand sources that I found over time came with wide exaggerations of the truth.

Some 46 years later Beau Jangles made his second start as a sophomore at Woodbine Mohawk Park. Also undefeated, Beau Jangles never made it to the United States as a freshman and other than training in Florida, has yet to go a mile at a pari-mutuel track in this country in 2026. Thankfully, I've been able to watch all of Beau Jangles' races to date and at any point can go back to watch them again should I care to put the microscope to every nuance of the son of Cattlewash. While I haven't seen Beau Jangles in person, I know a lot

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more about him from witnessing his races than I did about Niatross at the same point in their careers.

Beau Jangles is a storyline for the sport and thankfully those doing the telling at Woodbine Mohawk Park, where Beau Jangles made a mockery of the competition in the SBOA final this past Saturday (May 16), recognize the value of his presence and hope to expand the sport's popularity through the messaging. Through the in-house broadcast and the announcer notifying fans in attendance that Beau Jangles was going his final trip before the race, it was apparent every base was trying to be covered to help share and grow the horse and hopefully the sport he competes in.

Storylines are vital in a world where the competition for eyeballs is fierce. Niatross had established himself and his story circulated in major newspapers throughout the country promoting his unique story in 1979. Today, those newspapers have largely disappeared yet the medium for reaching the public has been amplified ten-fold by the presence of cell-phones and expanded social media.

Different as well in 2026 is the need and capacity to see a horse in person or for that matter go anywhere of relatively long distance to see an event when you can save travel and expense by tuning in at home. Let's not forget that to wager on horse racing you had to be in attendance in 1980. I didn't go to Vernon to bet on or against Niatross in 1980, but track handle was the only handle of the day.

While Beau Jangles romped at Woodbine Mohawk Park on Saturday evening, a different story was being told in the afternoon at Oak Grove with the inaugural edition of the Oak Grove Trotting Derby and its filly companion race the Oak Grove Trotting Oaks. With purses of \$500,000 and \$300,000 respectively, there was enough money on the line to lure a solid influx of horses and horsemen to the event despite it coming roughly three months before the Hambletonian. Just as the pacing map has changed for sophomore colts and fillies over time, so have the dates shifted. The \$1 million G1 Hambletonian placed in the first days of August on the schedule had become the focal point of all trainers with top contenders as they carefully mapped out plans to minimize prep races. Key races that in the past had come prior to the Hambletonian lost any



TONY CENTONZE PHOTO

Spencer Hannover (1) and Endurance both put in strong efforts in the Oak Grove Trotting Derby on May 16.

star power and over time became less meaningful to the tracks or the public. The so-called "Road to the Hambletonian" had fewer stops and quite often meant contenders were represented more heavily in qualifying or regional events, as opposed to meeting other top horses.

There's always a risk in trying to change the status quo and critics are always quick to judge success or failure from limited sample size. Placing the two Oak Grove Stakes events in May and at the same time offering byes to horses that were elite in 2025 proved to be an incredibly smart calculation that revealed itself when elimination races brought to the fore last year's Breeders Crown champion as well as a host of Top 10 Hambletonian contenders. While the purse structure alone should have been enough to see horses nominate, sustain and declare to these races, it was vital to seek out and attract the best quality to make the race worth the risk.

Two brilliant performances came out of the Oak Grove Derby, with race

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



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winner Spencer Hanover and runner-up Endurance putting on a great show racing at the top of their game for the second straight week. Jason Bartlett, the 2025 Driver of the Year, again managed to find a winning trip, putting the Chapter Seven-sired Spencer Hanover in position to ride Endurance's cover into the stretch and wear that rival down. Endurance left well enough to overcome an outside draw and driver Andrew McCarthy took a tuck before the quarter but found himself having to move to the outside shortly thereafter otherwise getting locked inside. That left Endurance covering a lot of extra ground and perhaps was the difference in the outcome.

Jailbird Jog was brilliantly driven by Anthony MacDonald, who let a host of fillies' battle through the first quarter and then pulled to the outside at the quarter pole, locking in favored Naked And Famous and getting into position to make her signature brush at the right time. Jailbird Jog's quick speed was the difference as she shifted gears at the right time and lost the field in the process.

The broadcast of the Oak Grove races was again exceptional as Ray Coto and Pete Kleinhans prove time and time again. Both are incredibly well-versed in not just the handicapping side of the sport but in pedigrees and history. It's often a difficult combination to pull off being entertaining and informative at the same time but Coto and Kleinhans have managed to do just that. Our own Derick Giwner added extra color to the production on track with interviews throughout the day.

A lot has changed since 1980 for the sport and many people struggle with that as opposed to adapting to it. There were virtually no owners in the winner's circle for either Oak Grove Derby and considering Jailbird Jog is owned by a lengthy group that may have come as a surprise or shock to some. Conversely, the same people trying to weigh the cost of horse ownership to the degree they could accept small fractions, are likely to celebrate some victories in the comfort of their own homes. It's a luxury for horse owners and fans alike.

For those hoping to build a more provocative narrative leading to the \$1 million Hambletonian, it's vital to see rivalries develop and horses get name recognition months not weeks before the big event. Here's hoping that the 2026 Oak Grove Derbies prove the foundation for that future.



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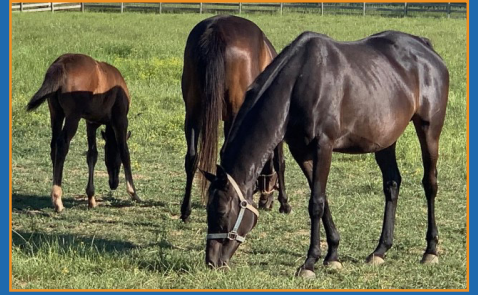


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Antognoni headlines Gingras' lineup for Super Sunday at Philly

By Derick Giwner

The second-richest day of 2026 racing at Harrah's Philadelphia will take place this Sunday as the track presents a trio of \$100,000 Invitationals for older campaigners as well as multiple divisions of the Pennsylvania Sire Stakes and Stallion Stakes for 3-year-old pacers. Yannick Gingras, who co-owns the track record with 10 winners on a single card, will have multiple opportunities to shine, including with the likely heavy favorite in the Maxie Lee Invitational Trot.

Swedish import Antognoni, who Gingras co-owns with Burke Racing Stable, Weaver Bruscelli and FAC Racing, drew post four in the Maxie Lee and is riding a five-race winning streak dating back to 2025. Along the way he has beaten many of Sunday's rivals and even took down Trotter of the Year Lexus Kody in his last start on May 2.

"I still think Lexus Kody is the best trotter in the country," said Gingras when asked if Antognoni had taken over as the top dog in the division. "[Lexus Kody is] just not fully healthy right now. And, you know, he's a big horse. I don't think one or two starts defines them and if you remember last year, you didn't really get good till July or so."

While Gingras was quick to shower praise on Lexus Kody, he fully recognizes the spot that Antognoni is in on Sunday and his place as the horse to beat against seven rivals in that 11th race field.

"On a smaller track, I definitely wouldn't trade Antognoni for anybody," said Gingras. "I'm going to race him like he's the best."

"He's so handy this year. Last year, sometimes he could be a little bit aggressive and we raced him from behind more often than not, by design, just because of that. So far this year he's been beautiful to handle."

The main competition in the field for Antognoni is fellow Swedish-bred Aetos Kronos S, who captured this race in 2025 from an inside post. Tonight he'll have to overcome post eight after a gutsy second-place finish behind Periculum in the Cutler Memorial at The Meadowlands on May 16.

Antognoni wasn't eligible to the Cutler because the connections were hoping to make the trek to Sweden for the May 31 Elitlopp at Solvalla Racecourse, but financially the trip became unreasonable since the connections would've needed to foot the entire bill to make the trip and local officials weren't able to shoulder some of the load.

While he won't be favored, Gingras has a very live drive in the 12th race, the Betsy Ross Invitational for fillies and mares. He picked up Rodeo Drive Deo when David Miller made the decision to return to Ohio and thus far things have gone well, with a neck victory in 1:49 4/5 at Pocono Downs to open her season.

"She looks like a tank. She's big and strong," said Gingras. "She won easily the other day. It may show a neck victory but she did it well in hand."

As good as she is right now, the career winner of just over \$1 million has a tall task ahead with Dan Patch-winning 3-year-old, now 4, Miki And Minnie just to her inside in post six with Dexter Dunn at the lines. She has blown out consecutive qualifying wins with the latest a 1:52 1/5 score at The Meadowlands on May 15.

"Obviously, she's got a tough post now and there are some nice mares in there, so we'll see what happens," said Gingras, who admitted he's not expecting to take an overly aggressive approach but left open a small window to change his mind. "You know how I am. If nobody leaves, then we'll go, but I think I see some speed in this race, so maybe we'll come from the back. We'll decide behind the gate."

While some may think that Rodeo Drive Deo has a conditioning edge because she has a pari-mutuel start under her belt, Gingras doesn't see it that way.

"Trainers like Chris Ryder, Ron Burke and a lot of them, they know what they're doing. These horses show up ready. Chris wouldn't put her in for \$100,000 if he thought that she wasn't ready," said Gingras.

Perhaps Gingras' weakest hand in the trio of \$100,000 Invitationals is with Bythemissal in the Joseph Auger Memorial (Race 13). That said, the now 7-year-old did win this race last year and he is drawn nicely in post three for trainer Ron Burke, who sends out all three of the Gingras-driven horses.

Bythemissal was a closing second at The Meadows in an Open Handicap to start his year and never got into the race from the far outside in the Pacey Mindlin Memorial at Miami Valley last time on May 2. Gingras



DERICK GIOWNER

Antognoni has won five straight starts going back to 2025.

will sit behind him for the first time since October.

"I'm not too sure what to expect," said Gingras about the career winner of over \$2.5 million. "Last year he was inconsistent. He went in 1:46 4/5 [Canadian Pacing Derby elimination] and he did it really easy that day. He just didn't bounce back. And after that, he wasn't quite as good. I do believe he still has it. It's just a matter of if we can find some consistency in him and get him healthy enough for him to be consistent for an extended period of time. I guess we'll see how he is on Sunday."

"I think we'll be looking to race him on the back end of the race and hopefully he puts up a good performance."

While lacking a couple of the potential top players, the Auger drew a strong field that includes \$1.6 million winner Coaches Corner (post one), FanDuel and Canadian Pacing Derby winner Maximus Miki (post four) and \$1.2 million earner Ken Hanover (post eight).

One top open pacer who isn't in the Auger field is Captain Optimistic. The Nancy Takter trainee has been servicing mares this year while preparing to race and looked no worse for the task blowing out a powerful 1:48 1/5 win over the Harrah's Philadelphia surface on Sunday.

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Takter said she declined the invite – citing his age (4) and the fact that his regular drivers Scott Zeron and Jason Bartlett already had assignments in the race – to instead race in the fifth race \$50,000 #SendItIn versus a somewhat softer group.

For Gingras, his day won't be confined to just the Invitationals as he'll be picking up a catch-drive on Another C Note in the second of three \$37,335 Pennsylvania Sire Stakes slated as race 10, which also kicks off the \$10,000 guaranteed Pick 4. Another C Note is perfect in six starts this year, including wins in the first two legs of the Sire Stakes series.

"I raced him last year. I liked him actually, but he definitely surprised everybody coming back this year. Nobody expected him to win six straight. He was good in the stallion series but not quite good enough for the Sire Stakes last year," said Gingras. "Right now he looks like he's one of the better ones that Ronnie [Burke] has in the Sire Stakes whereas earlier I thought he had four or five better ones than him.

"I think on Sunday he's in a great spot. Obviously for him, it's all systems go," continued Gingras. "For sure it's exciting to pick up a horse that hasn't been beaten yet this year. We'll look to keep it that way."

Gingras also has Al Papi in the final Sire Stakes split in race 14.

"He qualified so good his first time. He was actually super and I couldn't not have been happier. The second time he wasn't quite as good. And then when I raced him at the Meadows, it was a good mile, but I thought he'd have more. He felt really, really good coming up the last turn and he kind of flattened out a little bit late, and he did the same thing on Timmy [Tetrick] the other day. I know they weren't really happy with how he was



CHRIS GOODEN PHOTO

Al Papi made over \$400,000 as a 2-year-old but has yet to get on track in 2026.

health-wise and stuff, but I think he'll be better Sunday.

"I hope they're able to turn him around quite soon because the big races are coming. The goal is obviously not this Sunday. We're going to try to race him and try to get a good start in him, but be mindful that there's big races down the road too. I definitely think he's one of the contenders this year, so it's just a matter of getting him to turn the corner in a positive direction."

Post time for the 15-race mostly stakes card at Harrah's Philadelphia Sunday is 12:40 P.M. (EDT).

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Dream ride: Caretaker Oliver Lemus gets his first driving win



HARNESS FOCUS

By Jessica Hallett [X @JHallettPhoto](#)

From the time he arrived in the United States from Guatemala at 21 years old, Oliver “Ollie” Lemus lived the life that so many backstretch workers know so well.

Lemus entered the world of harness racing 15 years ago when his parents started working as caretakers in Middletown, New York. For 15 years he has worked through early mornings and late nights, cold winters and hot summers. For 15 years he has had the dream to one day go behind the gate and make it to the winner’s circle.

On Saturday (May 16), at 36 years old, the dream that he had as a 21-year-old came true. Lemus picked up his first pari-mutuel driving win.

For 10 years Lemus worked for Jimmy and Heidi Rohr Nickerson. Four years ago, he switched to trainer Andy Gardner and his large-scale 20-head operation at the Saratoga Harness Track in Saratoga Springs, NY.

The stable operates as a “team effort” where Gardner and his three grooms work together to get the horses ready in the morning, jogged and trained, and put away in the afternoons. They work together on paddocks, with sometimes upwards of eight horses entered in one card at Saratoga, and all enjoy in the winner’s circle photos at every opportunity together.

Before Saturday, Lemus had 51 trips to the track. His first winning mile was on July 3, 2023 aboard Andy Gardner’s Kims Choice in a \$3,800 New York Fair Stake for 2-year-old fillies. Upon returning to the paddock for that milestone, Lemus was met with a traditional shower from paddock buckets by the horsemen at Goshen.

“I went to the Meadowlands and said one day I want to drive. Andy [Gardner] gave me the opportunities to do that,” Lemus said.

Three years later, on May 16, Lemus got the call to drive Shreddar in the 11th race after the Saratoga card ran later than expected, forcing listed driver Leon Bailey to leave and run to his scheduled drives at Vernon Downs.

“God took care of me,” Lemus said.

Shreddar is a 6-year-old Betterthancheddar gelding who went winless in 2025 in 11 starts, last scoring in October 2024 at Rideau Carleton Raceway. In 2026, Shreddar made two starts in February before his third appearance at the end of April. Two weeks later, he drew post two in the \$7,500 claiming pace worth \$5,950 with Lemus now holding the lines. Off at 41-1, it was clear that he was written off the ticket and out of the minds of many.

In the race Whats Your Limits and Aaron Byron went to the front and controlled the tempo through splits in 28 1/5, 58 1/5, and 1:27. Lemus and Shreddar got away fourth, 5-3/4 lengths off the pacesetter. Lemus kept Shreddar along the pylons as the outer flow was led by heavy favorite Sylvester and Jim Devaux after the first-quarter marker.

Lemus appeared locked in on the pylons all the way to the three quarters. Just past that pole and into the turn, he found room to edge out and started to pounce on the leader.

The paddock erupted. The same people that had horses in that race, the same people contesting for that same win and same purse money, cheered for Lemus. That should be enough to describe the kind of person Lemus is and his character.

Three-wide around that final turn and down the stretch, Shreddar sprinted home and nabbed the win by a half-length in 1:57 over Whats Your Limits. Aaron Byron was beaten at the wire but could be seen cheering for Lemus in the finish line photo.

As Lemus made his way back to the winner’s circle for the first time in a pari-mutuel race, pumping his fist in celebration, horsemen piled onto the golfcart to celebrate with him. After the high fives and hugs, cheers and tears, Lemus was greeted by the remaining horsemen in the paddock with a several-bucket shower in celebration. And despite hitting the milestone of his career – of his life – and despite being soaked from head-to-toe with his celebratory shower and with tears in his eyes, Lemus went right back to work to finish the paddock on the winning horse, Shreddar.

“It meant a lot,” Lemus said, still holding back the tears even days later while thinking about the big win. “It was something very special to me. All the people that were there and congratulated me. I have to thank Andy for the opportunity given to me, for helping me get my license and giving me the opportunity to drive. He’s always there for me.”



JESSICA HALLETT

Oliver Lemus picking up his first career win behind Shreddar at Saratoga Raceway on May 16.

Horsemen have congratulated Lemus throughout the week and he could be seen in the paddock and on the track with a big smile.

“I’ve known Ollie ever since I started working in this business,” said Katie King, caretaker and co-worker at the Gardner Stable. “He is just always nice and always puts everyone in a good mood with his positivity. He’s so much fun to work with. We all get along. We laugh everyday till we cry. He’s definitely one of the best coworkers I’ve had!”

“If you’re feeling down, Ollie will throw out some jokes and will turn anyone’s frown upside down! He’s good with all the horses, loves them like his own. I have to say when he won, we were all crying happy tears. The best part was it was Andy’s own horse he won on; definitely no other win can compare to that one.

“Ollie told us when we started back racing that his goal was to win a race this year and seeing him tear up and say, ‘I’ve waited 15 years for this’ was a tearjerker. He works so hard and he deserved every bit of that win,” King added.

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Not only was the win Lemus' first and a horse owned by trainer Andy Gardner, but it was also Gardner's 900th training win milestone.

"I really wouldn't classify Ollie as just a groom but more as a second trainer. He's a very hard worker and has a very good connection with a horse," Gardner said. "The win really means a lot. All of the hard work that the team put in has really paid off. He's almost like a son to me and I couldn't be prouder and happier for him. He'll remember that win for the rest of his life. Oliver's first win was also my 900th training win, so it was a nice milestone for both of us to share."

In his day-to-day schedule Lemus gets to Gardner's barn by around 7 a.m. and stays until the work is done. On Saratoga's current racing schedule, most days stretch from the early morning until 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. In the summer, the races move to the evening schedule, meaning the early mornings span into the late nights, sometimes past midnight.

Gardner's team splits the work of the 25 horses currently in the barn. From cleaning stalls to jogging and training to harnessing and putting away, Lemus is an all-around caretaker working around the clock to get the daily chores done and horses raced. Alongside Lemus is Katie King, caretaker Adam Germain, and of course, trainer Andy Gardner.

"He works so hard. He's a pleasure to be around always and he is always in a good mood. I am so happy for him," Germain said. "That was our best win of the year. Maybe the best win since I've worked for Andy. I'm so happy for Ollie. Well deserved."

Walking around the paddock getting videos of horsemen congratulating Lemus on his first win, it was clear that he has a lot of fans and there wasn't one negative word said about him nor his work ethic.

"Oliver or 'Oscar' as I sometimes call him -- he has a few nicknames -- is just a great all-around person with a kind soul. Any time we've been out in public together we always end up running into someone who knows him, which speaks volumes of his character. An extremely outgoing person who loves people, horses, and the industry," trainer Wil Dubois said.

And the list goes on. Whether complimenting his immaculate and



JESSICA HALLETT

Oliver Lemus is congratulated by trainer Andy Gardner.

precise stall cleaning, his cheerful demeanor and outgoing behavior, his willingness to jump in and help at any time, or his character overall, Oliver Lemus is truly proven to be the definition of someone you would want in the barn taking care of your horses and sets the standard for what a good caretaker should be.

One line in the program, two minutes on the track and a lifetime of emotions. For most people, it was just another race. For Lemus, it was the realization of a dream a decade and a half in the making.

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Beaton, Ryder send out favorites in NJSS Finals at Meadowlands

By Jay Bergman

There's an undefeated 3-year-old based in Ontario and then there's another unbeaten that hasn't received such headlines. While Beau Jangles has made the news, trainer Anthony Beaton's undefeated pacing filly Be Perfect BG has won all seven of her career starts and hopes to make it eight straight on Saturday night in the \$180,000 final of the New Jersey Sire Stakes (Platinum division) at The Meadowlands. The daughter of Perfect Sting landed the pole position with only six other fillies facing her in the 13th race on the program.

"She's really developed nicely," said Beaton when asked about Be Perfect BG compared with last year. "She's gotten taller and has more length."

Staked only in New Jersey as a freshman, Be Perfect BG wrapped up her first year of racing on August 1 with a dominating victory in the same class she'll race with on Saturday. Despite the long absence Be Perfect BG showed no rust at all as she returned to The Meadowlands with a powerhouse 1:50 victory in her stakes debut on May 2. Raced off the pace in her second leg on May 9, the results were the same with Be Perfect BG pacing home in 26 1/5 and rolling past runner-up She Stings in the late going.

"I don't think we've seen the bottom of her as yet," said Beaton. "Dexter (Dunn) always seems to give her a great trip."

Be Perfect BG must navigate a short field but there are a few fillies that have the potential to rise to the occasion with big money on the line. Perfect Thought earned \$197K as a freshman and is off to a slow start this year for trainer Megan Scran, but she showed improvement in each start and is likely trending in the right direction. Scott Zeron drives the filly from post two.

She Stings got the pace to her liking in the second Sire Stakes leg and was a solid second behind the favorite, as she was in the first round where she tailed Be Perfect BG to the wire. Joe Bongiorno trains and drives She Stings, who starts from post four.

Be Perfect BG will get a chance to prove herself on the big stage later this year as Beaton has charted a course to see her against open company moving through the campaign.

"We've got her in one open race every month," said Beaton, who hopes Be Perfect BG not only remains perfect but is able to tackle open company with the same ability she's shown within the Garden State.

"After this race, we'll bring her home and get her ready for the Fan Hanover (eliminations June 6). After that she's eligible to the Jerry Silverman at The Meadowlands in July and the Lynch at Pocono in August," said Beaton.

Be Perfect BG has the New Jersey Classic back at The Meadowlands as well as the Breeders Crown and Matron Stakes on her potential schedule.

Bookie J is another undefeated horse of sorts (3 for 3 in 2026) looking for the top prize in the \$225,000 New Jersey Sire Stakes for sophomore pacing colts and geldings carded as race six on the Meadowlands stacked stakes Saturday card.

"I'm happy with the way the horse has come back," said Chris Ryder, who conditions the altered son of Perfect Sting.

Bookie J was a 1:50 winner in the only preliminary leg he competed in, with Ryder choosing to qualify him in preparation for the final.

"Scott Zeron hopped on and he qualified well," said Ryder of Bookie J, who landed in a qualifier with stablemate Twin B Joe Fresh driven by Dexter Dunn. Bookie J will get Dunn back in the bike for the rich final and starts from post five in the field of nine.

"It's a much tougher group," said Ryder of the final field Bookie J will face on Saturday. "Sonofanutcracker went a pretty big mile last time."

Ryder and many others noticed how effortlessly Sonofanutcracker (post 2) blew away rivals, pacing to a 1:50 mark on May 9 with Dunn in the bike despite a sloppy track. Tim Tetrick picks up the drive for trainer Tom Cancelliere on Saturday behind the homebred son of Nutcracker Sweet, one of only two in the field not sired by Perfect Sting.

Azrael Blue Chip (post 9) didn't get the best of the draw, but the Besim Odza-trained colt has finished strongly in both Sire Stakes events, just a nose behind Bookie J in the opening round and second behind Sonofanutcracker on May 9. A seven-time career winner, Azrael Blue Chip will be driven by Andrew McCarthy.



DERICK GWINNER

Be Perfect BG is perfect in seven career starts.

A Perfect Moment has only two career starts for trainer Tony Alagna but has shown speed in both outings. A solid fourth in his maiden voyage coming from ninth at the three-quarter pole, A Perfect Moment leveled out in the second round after sprinting away in a 26 3/5 opening quarter. A Perfect Moment drew the pole position.

Rocknacious (post 3) enters the final in improving form for trainer Linda Toscano, with the addition of Lasix prior to the Sire Stakes perhaps one of the main reasons. The first foal from the \$1.1 million winner Rocknificent, Rocknacious will have Jason Bartlett in the bike.

Ooglesaurus (post 6) has three wins in seven starts this year for the Bongiorno stable but will need to lift his game with two even efforts in the preliminary legs.

The 15-race Meadowlands card starts at 6:35 PM (EDT) and also features the first leg of the Miss Versatility for mare trotters as well as the initial round of the NJ Sire Stakes for 3-year-old trotters.

Ryder said that Twin B Joe Fresh will qualify again this weekend at The Meadowlands while stablemate Miki And Minnie will race in Sunday's Betsy Ross at Harrah's Philadelphia. "They will both go to Woodbine Mohawk Park for the Roses Are Red," said Ryder of the June 6 date for elimination races. "Jason Bartlett will drive Miki And Minnie."

Dexter Dunn owns a piece of Twin B Joe Fresh and must remain her pilot in any race the two mares meet.

Stoebe hopes for more big things from Mega Shark in NJSS

By Ken Weingartner

Annie Stoebe came into this year enthusiastically looking forward to racing an established star among older trotters, the 5-year-old mare Elista Hanover, and a highly regarded Hambletonian Stakes contender, 3-year-old colt trotter Diabolic Hill.

Both of those horses will be in action on Saturday (May 23) at the Meadowslands, but since last week the trainer has found another reason for excitement this season.

Three-year-old colt trotter Mega Shark, who like stablemate Diabolic Hill is Hambletonian eligible, got his first career win on May 15 at the Big M, stopping the timer in 1:51 3/5. The clocking is tied for the fastest of the season by a 3-year-old male trotter.

The other sophomore male trotters to win in 1:51 3/5 this year? Spencer Hanover and Endurance, who finished 1-2 in last week's \$500,000 Oak Grove Trotting Derby and are ranked second and third, respectively, on Meadowlands announcer/analyst Ken Warkentin's Road to the Winning Key Farm Hambletonian.

"Last week made it a little more exciting now knowing we have two Hambo horses in the barn," Stoebe said. "(Mega Shark) definitely got the gold star of the week."

Mega Shark was winless in seven races last year before being turned out in September to be given time to mature. Purchased for \$185,000 at the 2024 Lexington Selected Yearling Sale, the son of Tactical Landing-Megadolce comes from a family of late developers. His mother and half-brother Grande Via both were winless as 2-year-olds but were stakes winners at 3 and earned more than \$100,000 lifetime. His family also includes Bella Bellini, who was winless at 2 but won the Hambletonian Oaks the following year and received the Dan Patch Award for best sophomore female trotter.

"With his pedigree, we didn't expect a lot of him at 2, but he went a mile in (1):54-and-a-piece and showed us some talent," Stoebe said. "He was big – long and gangly at 2 – but he showed us he could do it, so we gave him time to grow into himself. He came back big and beautiful; he really grew into his Mega Shark name. And then he went that insane mile last week. I didn't expect to see (1):51 yet, maybe in a week or two, not his second start. But we knew that horse was in there.

"He's a gorgeous horse, and so easy to do everything with. He's a happy horse to be around. He's just a dude."

Mega Shark, who was second in his seasonal debut at Harrah's Philadelphia on April 24 when a breaking horse caused interference exiting the final turn, returns to the Meadowslands on Saturday to compete in the first of two \$25,000 opening-round divisions of the New Jersey Sire Stakes Platinum series for 3-year-old male trotters. Tim Tetrick will be in the sulky behind Mega Shark, leaving from post 1 in a field of six for owner Mazza Racing Stables.

Four other horses in the race are Hambletonian eligible: Practical Man (trained by Tom Fanning), Nix Nacken (Marcus Melander), Gabes Luck (Nancy Takter) and Nordic Dancer S (Ake Svanstedt). Nix Nacken is No. 7 in the Road to the Hambletonian rankings. The Grade 1 Hambletonian, America's Trotting Classic, is Aug. 8 at the Big M.

Diabolic Hill, who is No. 4 in the Road to the Hambletonian rankings, will make his seasonal debut in the second Platinum division. He will leave from post 1 with driver Todd McCarthy. Last year, the son of Muscle Hill-Crysti Dream battled immaturity issues but won five of 10 races, including the Valley Victory Stakes (G1) at the Big M, and was second in the Breeders Crown (G1) for freshman male trotters on his way to \$505,636 in earnings.

"This year, his whole attitude is different," said Stoebe, who owns

Diabolic Hill with Mario Mazza and AC Crawford Racing Stable. "He matured so much mentally over the (winter) and grew up into a gentleman. All the naughty stuff is gone and he's just 100 percent business. He's very focused. He didn't have that attribute last year. That's what has me so excited about him."

Diabolic Hill will face four other Hambletonian-eligible foes in his six-horse field: American Power (Melander), Gustav (Takter), Kingmen (Per Engblom) and Ardonne (Megan Scran). American Power is No. 9 and Ardonne, last year's William Wellwood Memorial (G1) winner, is No. 10 in the Road to the Hambletonian rankings.

Stoebe also will send out Classic Pickle in a \$10,000 division of the NJSS Silver series for sophomore male trotters. Stoebe owns the son of Tactical Landing-Classic Martine, who won in 1:55 1/5 on May 8 at the Meadowslands, giving Stoebe's partner, Jeremy Morrison, his first-ever driving victory at the Big M.

"He's the happiest horse I've ever met in my life," Stoebe said. "He's our baby. When Jeremy got his first Meadowlands win on Pickle, it made it 10 million times more special."

Earlier in the card, Elista Hanover will compete in the first of two \$30,000 opening-round divisions of the Miss Versatility Series for older female trotters. Last year, the daughter of International Moni-Evermore counted the Hambletonian Maturity (G1) among her three wins and finished second in the Breeders Crown Mare Trot (G1) and Graduate Series (G2) final. She earned \$532,951 for owners Lynn Curry, Philomena Curry and Stoebe, pushing her career total to \$1.01 million.

In the sulky will be Andy McCarthy, who took over the driving of Elista Hanover following David Miller's return to Ohio this past winter. McCarthy and Elista Hanover finished fourth in their seasonal debut on May 15 at the Meadowslands. They will leave from post 5 on Saturday in a six-horse field that includes returning Dan Patch Award-winner Warrawee Michelle.

"Every horse has their quirks, and I wouldn't say (Elista Hanover) is a super-easy horse to drive in a race," Stoebe said. "So, Andy is getting to know her. That's the biggest transition, in my mind, this year. I can tell that he already loves her. David loved her too. It's so nice to have someone else behind her that appreciates and loves her just as much as everyone else. He's so excited about driving her this year and I think it will show in these next couple starts."

Stoebe, who went on her own in 2021 with a stable of three horses, now has 22 in training. Ten are 2-year-olds.

"It's surreal for me," the 38-year-old Montana native said. "Being someone that wasn't born and raised in this business, I've had to find my way to where I am on my own. Now, I have some amazing horses and amazing people surrounding me. I wouldn't have ever imagined that I would have the caliber of horses that I have in my barn. I take so much pride showing them off on social media. Yeah, I love to race, but we put so much work into them, I love showing them off because they're so special."

Saturday's stakes-laden 15-race card at the Meadowslands also features NJSS Platinum and Silver divisions for 3-year-old female trotters plus NJSS Platinum and Silver finals for 3-year-old male and female pacers.

Racing begins at 6:35 p.m. (EDT) at the Meadowslands.



LISA PHOTO

Trainer Annie Stoebe.

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Beckwith to join Big M TV crew

Fans of Brett Beckwith have missed watching – and betting – on the 23-year-old pilot for the last month or so, as the defending Meadowlands leading driver from 2025 has been on the mend since going down in a spill at Saratoga Raceway last month.

Beckwith's followers won't be able to place a wager on their favorite driver, but they will be able to see another side of the 2024 Dan Patch Rising Star Award winner when he joins The Big M's TV team on Friday (May 22) night.

During the course of the evening, Beckwith will be interviewed by regular host Dave Little, and will be seen on the Sam McKee Broadcast Set sporadically throughout the night with both Little and John Rallis providing the unique insights only a driver can, as well as touting selections on selected races and giving out tickets for both 50-cent Pick-4s.

"Doing the show, it's more of just something that would be a fun hobby or something. It's something different," said Beckwith. "I think it's good for the fans and the sport to see different opinions."

What about a future in TV?

"I don't ever see myself retiring (from driving)," said Beckwith. "But let's say, if I did, I wouldn't be against it. You know, like how (Hall of Fame driver) Randy Waples does at Mohawk. That probably still gives him that thrill of being surrounded by horses and horse people, but without actually driving."

The winner of more than 1,200 races during 2024-25 is predictably champing at the bit to get back in the bike.

"I got hurt 5½ weeks ago," said Beckwith. "I had a broken jaw, a broken wrist and some head trauma. I actually just had my final brain scan, and I got an all clear on that. And now it's physical therapy on my wrist. I have to have it where I can get locked in a hole and have the confidence that I can hold a horse."

"All of us at The Meadowlands look forward to having Brett do the show on Friday," said Big M Chief Operating Officer and General Manager Jason Settlemoir. "Brett and I have spoken in the past about him appearing on the broadcast, and with him currently on the sidelines, it's the perfect time for him to show us what he can do. Our show provides viewers with opinions from handicappers, announcers, trainers and other people from the racing industry. To add a driver to that list is something we are happy to do for our viewers."

Beckwith is hoping to return to action sometime in June. Until then, his fans will have to settle for Brett the Broadcaster instead of Brett the Driver.

ONE THOUSAND REASONS TO PLAY: For the fifth time this year, patrons who love a good challenge will go at it for \$1,000 in cash prizes on Saturday (May 23) night, when Leg 5 of the popular Meadowlands Monthly Handicapping Contest takes place.

It's important to finish at or near the top of the leaderboard, as the four players with the highest bankrolls at the end of the night will win some cash (on a \$500-\$250-\$150-\$100 basis), but only the top two finishers will earn spots in the \$10,000 invitation-only contest final, which takes place on Saturday, Dec. 12.

2026 contest schedule:

- Leg 6 – Friday, June 12
- Leg 7 – Friday, July 24
- Leg 8 – Saturday, Aug. 22
- Leg 9 – Saturday, Sept. 5
- Leg 10 – Friday, Oct. 23
- Leg 11 – Saturday, Nov. 14
- Invitation-only \$10,000 contest final: Saturday, Dec. 12

Each monthly contest will follow the same format:

- Contestants must bet a minimum of five Meadowlands races.
- No minimum or maximum bet per race.
- All wagers offered on The Meadowlands program are eligible.
- Contestants keep all pari-mutuel winnings.
- Unlimited entries per person.

There is no entry fee, but a \$100 live-money bankroll is required for players, and the prize pool is guaranteed at \$1,000, funded by The Meadowlands.

On the night of the contest, players must register/check-in at the Clubhouse Lobby by 6:35 p.m. A \$100 betting card must be purchased to participate, as this is a live-money/wagering contest.

The top two finishers from each \$1,000 contest earn spots in the \$10,000 tournament final on December 12 (22 total players).

To register for the competition, go [here](#).

-edited release (Meadowlands)

DRF HANDICAPPER'S CORNER

At DRF Harness we strive to provide the best handicapping information in the sport. Each week we'll use this space to bring you some of our handicappers' best bets and value plays. Use this information as one of your tools when wagering or head to your nearest ADW and simply make a win bet.

THURSDAY, MAY 21

RACE 1

(3) MC ANGEL took on \$25,000 claimers in her last two starts and now drops back down to the level where she won handily on 4-22.

-Greg Reinhart



FRIDAY, MAY 22

RACE 9

(5) PLANKTON HANOVER gets a telling nod from Louis Roy after last week's sharp win. Both starts this season have been strong.

-Kevin Plowcha



RACE 9

(3) REMI LOU A has become an unstoppable force since entering the Bongiorno barn and I see no reason to stop riding the wave.

-Derick Giwner



SATURDAY, MAY 23

RACE 12

(5) MIRACLE MAVEN put in a strong effort to be second in her 2026 debut and she seems highly likely to control the pace in this abbreviated field.

-Giwner



SUNDAY, MAY 24

RACE 11

(4) ANTOGNONI S has been super in two starts this year and I see no reason to abandon ship.

-Giwner



FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Harrah's Philadelphia Analysis	Sunday
Mohawk Park Analysis	Friday Saturday
Meadowlands Analysis	Friday Saturday
Yonkers Analysis	Thursday Friday Saturday

DHP PPS

HARNESS EYE PPS

TRACKMASTER PPS

FREE PPS

NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

DAY OF CHAMPIONS CARD SET FOR SATURDAY AT SHENANDOAH DOWNS

After two weeks of elimination races, fields for the Virginia Breeders Fund 3-Year-Old Championships are set and will take place this Saturday May 23 at Shenandoah Downs. The four title bouts feature a full field of eight with combined purse money of \$439,900. They are scheduled as races 1, 3, 5 and 7 on the 14-race card which gets underway at 1:05 PM.

Headliner in the \$107,800 filly pace is Frank Chick's Caviart Daisy who was simply stellar in her eliminations. The daughter of Sweet Lou covered the two miles in 1:53 1/5 and 1:53 2/5, respectively, in wire-to-wire fashion. The Jamie Sullivan trainee, who was driven by Tony Morgan in both outings, established a new divisional track mark in the first. Caviart Daisy enters the final with \$227,360 in purse earnings. She won the Breeders Championship as a 2-year-old in 1:53 3/5.

[READ MORE](#)

SCIOTO'S THURSDAY HI-5 CARRYOVER SITS AT \$41,530

Scioto Downs is building serious momentum with its Super High 5 wagering, as bettors are eyeing a lucrative opportunity following a rare double carryover. With no winning tickets in consecutive sequences, the carryover has swelled to \$41,530 heading into Thursday's 4th race. The race draws a competitive field of 10 filly and mare pacers.

[READ MORE](#)

BREAKFAST WITH THE BABIES BEGINS SATURDAY, JUNE 6

The most wonderful time of the year is upon us as the long wait for the next crop of freshmen pacers and trotters to perform is at an end, with baby races getting underway across the continent.

At 9:00 am on Saturday, June 6th, The Meadowlands will premiere the 2026 edition of Breakfast With The Babies, featuring 2-year-olds, generously sponsored this year by our friends of the Tactical Landing Syndicate, Ecurie D Syndicate, and Karl Syndicate, standing at Southwind Farms of New Jersey.

The dates for the Baby races will be the following, but are subject to change due to conflicts at MetLife Stadium with the World Cup:

-Saturday, June 6th at 9:00 am. -Friday, June 12th at 9:00 am.
-Saturday, June 20th at 9:00 am. -Friday, June 26th at 9:00 am.

There will be a breakfast bounty of pastries and beverages, along with programs for the day available in Trotters. It's all free and fun, and everyone is invited to attend.

As always, the races will be live-streamed on The Meadowlands website, and an announcer will be on hand to call the action.

[-release \(Meadowlands\)](#)

DERBY DAY PICK 4 CARRYOVER SETS OAK GROVE BETTING RECORD

As the 2026 season of harness racing at Oak Grove continues to show strengthened growth in handle, the Monday (May 18) card saw a record amount bet in a single pool at Oak Grove when a \$17,000 Pick 4 carryover from the Oak Grove Trotting Derby card attracted gamblers in droves.

The Pick 4 at Oak Grove has already provided positive returns to gamblers in 2026 as a result of its dollar minimum and lowered takeout of 15 percent. But the carryover, the largest ever at Oak Grove, created a betting opportunity that attracted a total pool of \$83,060.36 and a negative takeout, meaning more money was paid to bettors on the winning combo. Monday's sequence handily offered around 2-1/2 times the dollar parlay when winners at odds of 1-1, 8-5, 7-2 and 18-1 returned \$1,202.91 for a buck to winning Pick-4 ticket holders.

Even without the record pool in the Pick 4 on Monday, Oak Grove has held strong wagering momentum on the winds of the inaugural Oak Grove Trotting Derby Day card. Handle year-over-year on the Monday card was up 42.1 percent and up nearly 30 percent on the Tuesday (May 19) card. Through the 2026 meet, handle remains up at Oak Grove over 20 percent and up 15 percent excluding the Oak Grove Trotting Derby card, demonstrating continued growth in the overall Oak Grove product.

While favorites have found a short run of success of late at Oak Grove, Tuesday's card generated robust payoffs with only five chalks reaching

the winner's circle on the 14-race card. A 5-1 winner in the second race and a 7-1 winner in the fifth race were the only straws needed to spur a carryover in the Early Pick 5, which otherwise proved to be a logical sequence with three winners paying under a \$6 win mutuel. Chaos later ensued in the Late Pick 5 when a 10-1 winner and 27-1 winner squashed any live tickets, resulting in a pair of carryovers to Monday's (May 25) 20-cent Late Pick 5, which has a takeout of 15 percent, totaling \$1,225.24. With several longshots and many middle-priced horses finding the winner's circle Tuesday, the average win payoff through the 14 races came out to a healthy \$14.57 — roughly an average of 6-1.

And without a carryover in the \$1 Pick 4 on Tuesday, gamblers who connected on the winning combination were paid handsomely. A slight surprise opened the sequence with a 5-1 winner foiling the 3-2 favorite followed by a 1-9 shot in the next leg that functioned as a popular free square for many mapping tickets. A 6-1 winner then nipped the 8-5 favorite in the closing strides of the third leg before the 9-5 second choice scored in the last leg. With no horse paying higher than \$15 in a sequence that could basically be bet as a Pick 3, the \$1 Pick 4 paid \$605.22 — nearly four times better than the dollar parlay.

Live racing resumes at Oak Grove on Monday (May 25) with a 14-race card including the first preliminary of the next Kentucky Sire Stakes series for 4-year-olds as well as with wiener dog races on the day. First-race post time is 1:10 p.m. (CDT). For more information, visit oakgrovegaming.com.

[-edited release \(Oak Grove Media\)](#)

PHILLY SOPHOMORES CONTINUE TO PREP FOR 2026

Pretty soon the new crop of 2-year-olds will become the focus of the preparatory session throughout North America, but Tuesday morning's qualifiers at Harrah's Philadelphia showcased returning horses getting ready to make their mark in 2026.

The American Ideal sophomore pacing filly Liberty Bell Style, winner of the New York Sire Stakes final as a baby, looked strong in a 1:53 qualifying victory for driver-trainer Andrew Stafford, co-owner with Bonnie Benson. Liberty Style moved down the back to command and came home in 55-27 1/5 in winning by over 10 lengths.

The amount of improvement in potential a horse can show from 2 to 3 was exemplified by the Bettor's Wish pacing colt Bettor Behold, on the engine despite post eight and home in 55 1/5-27 2/5 to post a 1:54 1/5 win, also winning by 10+ lengths. If this one can put occasional behavior problems behind him, he could be a nice one for driver-trainer Cote Keim, co-owner with Michelle Rickey.

On the trot, the dual-eligible Pennsylvania-Maryland Captain Corey 3-year-old filly Show Pony now has two winning qualifiers on her card, trotting her back numbers in 58 3/5-28 4/5 for a 1:59 3/5 success for driver Corey Callahan and trainer-owner Richard Hans.

Callahan was also behind the Sweet Lou ridgling Go Go Grasshopper, a PA Sire Stakes winner at 2 and 3 and 2-4 in his Championship races, who turned in a sparkling 1:52 victory for the red-hot Joe Bongiorno barn. Go Go Grasshopper must have been thinking of his dam, Faster Faster (good name for a musical group in this city, the Eagles), as he streaked home in 54 3/5-27.

Callahan's double was matched by the team of driver Tim Tetric and trainer Enrico Robinson, who combined for the fastest trotting victory, a 1:55 3/5 win with the Resolve gelding Resolve To Win, who has earned \$407,296.

The Philly backstretch will also be abuzz Wednesday morning, when the draw for the annual Super Sunday card, featuring three \$100,000 Invitationals and Pennsylvania Sire Stakes action for sophomore pacing colts, will be put together.

Free Philly program pages for the pari-mutuel races, plus replays of the qualifiers, are or will be available at www.phha.org.

[-edited release \(PHHA/Harrah's Philadelphia\)](#)

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