Ohio Tracks Set To Lead The Way In Reopening

Following the approval of safety protocols by the Ohio health department and the Ohio State Horse Racing Commission (OSRC), horse racing in Ohio is poised to resume on Friday, May 22, at Scioto Downs. Northfield Park is shooting for a possible opening on May 26.

On a conference call on Thursday morning, May 14, the OSRC voted unanimously to approve safety/health guidelines to be followed in conjunction with spectator-free racing.

"Thank you and let's show everyone why we deserve the privilege to race in Ohio," said commission chairman Scott Borgemenke in adjourning the meeting.

The Ohio racing commissioners first met via a conference call on Wednesday morning and gave track operators and horsemen's associations representatives the opportunity to comment or ask questions about the safety protocols. In that call Joe Morris, executive vice president of racing for Eldorado Resorts, owner of Scioto Downs, said his track was simply waiting for the state to give it the "green light."

In a later interview, Morris said that Ohio will allow horses based out of state to compete if those trainers have "been part of our racing program and regularly raced horses here" within the last year.

Morris, who has been involved in harness racing since he was a young boy growing up in Maine, said his knowledge of what is workable has driven some decisions he has made for Scioto.

"We'll assign stalls in the barn area, since we don't have a resident stable population, and we will group horses by stables," said Morris. "We will be placing horses from the same stable together. We will operate with a two-race paddock and horses will move in and out accordingly.

"I plan to be part of checking people in at the gate, and I will be wearing a mask," Morris added. "It will be a great way for meet the horsemen."

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“When we start qualifying Saturday, the horses that will be permitted to qualify are horses that will match or fit the conditions of the races we’re carding on May 22,” explained Morris. “We expect to have qualifiers for four or five straight days and all of them will match up to the condition sheets for racing.”

Dave Bianconi, race secretary at MGM’s Northfield Park, said he will also link horses eligible to qualify to those that fit the condition sheet, which he expects to post sometime Friday.

Northfield Park was the last Ohio track to race this year, continuing until it was shut down on March 18. It was conducting racing with social distancing at that time, with just two races in the paddock at a time.

“We actually raced with social distancing for a week, so we’re confident we can follow all the guidelines,” said Bianconi.

The safety protocols for ALL participants involved in conducting racing include those commonly cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for general business re-openings. Among them are the following:

- Wearing, at minimum, a suitable mask or face covering prior to entering and all times while on the grounds. A medical screening which will include a medical questionnaire related to Covid-19 symptoms, known contact with anyone confirmed to have Covid-19, travel to or from places that require quarantine per Ohio Department of Health orders related to Covid-19 and a temperature reading. Anyone who does not comply will be required to leave the grounds.

- No congregating in any areas. Only trainers and horsemen with horses stabled at the track or racing that day and others responsible for the care of the horses are allowed in the stable area.

- Social distancing must be followed.

- Hand sanitizing stations will be provided by the track at numerous locations in the barns and around the backside. Antibacterial liquid soap will be kept stocked in restrooms and bath houses. Personnel are urged to make frequent use of the sanitizers and soap. Sharing of barn/horse equipment shall be minimized.

- Grandstand and frontside access will be strictly limited to racing officials and required track staff. Until spectators are allowed, owners will be prohibited from the grounds. Paddock access will be limited to officials, the trainer, groom, warm up personnel and horse. Winner’s Circle pictures will be limited to horse and driver. Officials/charter/announcer/video/timer/photo finish must be conducted with safe distancing protocols or install barriers.

- The Race Office/Judge’s office/OSRC office must perform required functions with adequate room to comply with social distancing guidelines.—By Kathy Parker
YEARLING PAYMENTS DUE MAY 15*

One list and one check keeps your yearlings eligible to these top events.

*per USTA rule 12.02 all payments must be postmarked by midnight Monday, May 18

Don’t forget to stake your yearling!

TROTTERS
Arden Downs
Breeders Crown*
Currier & Ives
Dexter Cup
Hambletonian
Hoosier Stake No. 85
Horseman No. 113
Ralph Wilfong No. 84***
MGM Yonkers Trot
*** no separate filly division

PACERS
Adios
Arden Downs
Breeders Crown*
Cane Pace
Fox Stake No. 95***
Hoosier Stake No. 85
Horseman No. 113
MGM Grand Messenger
Progress Pace***
*** no separate filly division

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Mohawk To Resume Racing June 5; NA Cup May Be Held Late August

On Thursday, May 14, the Ontario government announced a framework to gradually reopen the Province in stages. Stage 1, which is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, May 19, allows for horse racing without spectators and physical distancing measures in place.

“This is great news for the sport of horse racing and the tens of thousands of people it employs throughout the Province,” said Jim Lawson, CEO, Woodbine Entertainment.

“With this news, our plans to resume Standardbred racing at Mohawk Park on June 5 and Thoroughbred racing on June 6 at Woodbine remain on track. We appreciate the government’s recognition that we can operate spectator-free horse racing safely by following strict physical distancing protocols.

“I would also like to thank the entire horse racing community for their patience, understanding and commitment in following health guidelines during this time. In doing so, it has put the entire industry in the position to resume live horse racing in the coming weeks.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, harness racing at Mohawk Park was suspended on March 19, while the opening of Woodbine’s Thoroughbred season, originally scheduled for April 18, was postponed.

Lawson said earlier this week that Woodbine Mohawk Park would open for training in advance of the reopening.

“Our plan is to open up Mohawk for training on Wednesday, May 27,” Lawson said. To adhere to physical distancing protocols, sessions will be limited to 50 horses each, with signups to take place online in advance of each session. “Thereafter, we’ll go Wednesdays and Sundays for training at Mohawk.”

May 27 is also the target date for Mohawk’s first condition sheet to be published. The rescheduling of stakes is also being assessed now.

“We are planning on effectively leaving the stakes schedule as it is,” Lawson assured. “It begs the question on the North America Cup, but right now we’re contemplating on that being in late August.”

To maximize visibility of the Woodbine and Mohawk products in the absence of spectators in grandstands, Lawson mentioned a marketing push for their HPI advance wagering platform and outlined talks between Woodbine and TSN to air horse racing live in prime time.

“I think it would be great for our sport to be prime time on a major network,” said Lawson.

Given the fragile nature of racing’s resumption, Lawson implored all racing participants to act responsibly and mindfully of the greater good of the industry.

“I would just ask people to be respectful,” he said. “You’re only as strong as your weakest link. Let’s not go backwards and undo everything we’ve done. Our management has done a great job, and our horsepeople have done a great job. Let’s keep our guard up; let’s not give anyone any excuses to have [our target date] be delayed.

“We’re prepared to do the homework, take the right steps, work with medical consultants, and do the right thing.”

(with files from WEG/SC)
Tioga, Vernon Hoping For Racing Resumption

In light of the recent announcement that the New York regions containing both Tioga and Vernon Downs will be among the first to make a gradual return to business, track owner Jeff Gural is working toward opening those tracks for live racing.

"I'm waiting for an answer from the governor’s office," Gural said Thursday afternoon. "If they will accept that we are an agricultural business, which we are, I think we should be able to race. But I am waiting to hear about that. I'm hoping I’ll know something no later than Friday."

Negotiations with the horsemen's organizations regarding details on just how to accomplish that in a fashion that would give racing the best chance to be conducted safely are underway.

"Although it’s not in my best business interests to open for racing before the casinos get back going as originally planned, being a horseman I sympathize with the guys that race with us and the situation they have found themselves in through no fault of their own," said Gural.

Another key issue is the status of the New York Sires Stakes (NYSS) program. There are a lot of unknowns about the other tracks, when they will be able to open and what the landscape will look like when they do. I understand that Buffalo has chosen not to host NYSS races, so if we’re able to get open we’ll include that leg with those raced at Tioga and Vernon and get the program started."

SBOANJ Reaches Out To Lawmakers To Talk Racing

The Standardbred Owners and Breeders Association of New Jersey (SBOANJ) released the following statement regarding its activity to be considered as a business that can reopen as soon as possible:

As we work towards a plan to re-open racing at the Meadowlands, the SBOANJ has been in constant contact with a number of New Jersey legislators that have consistently been supportive of our program, including Senate President Sweeney and Senators Sarlo and Gopal.

Senator Sarlo has been appointed by Senator Sweeney to head “The Strategy for Fiscal Recovery to Restart the New Jersey Economy” Committee and both Sarlo and Gopal were sponsors of our Appropriation Bill.

Assemblyman Ron Dancer, a longtime friend of our racing and breeding industry, was one of the invited participants to a special conference call with Governor Murphy.

Assemblyman Ron Dancer, a longtime friend of our racing and breeding industry, was one of the invited participants to a special conference call with Governor Murphy this past Saturday, when the Governor acknowledged that he is aware of what we are doing to return to “spectator-less” racing. Governor Murphy added that his team is reviewing our plan and also commented that his office would follow up this week with more specifics.

In conjunction with Dr. Karyn Malinowski, Director of the Rutgers Equine Science Center, we have submitted an extremely comprehensive “Risk Management Plan” of safety and sanitation protocols to commence racing at the Meadowlands.

This plan, along with significant information referencing the much needed economic benefit to New Jersey of the Meadowlands return to racing, has been presented to Governor Murphy as well as to the New Jersey Racing Commission and Douglas Fisher, the Secretary of Agriculture.

Additionally, Jeff Gural from the Meadowlands and Dennis Drazin from Monmouth Park, have been appointed to the “Tourism Advisory Committee,” in regard to the state’s racing programs, giving us more important representation.

Assemblyman Dancer also advised us that Governor Murphy said he would be making further announcements this week about the “restarting and recovery” of the New Jersey economy, and we are hopeful that there will be some indication of our future racing prospects.

We appreciate the patience of our racing and breeding community in these most trying of times and we will continue to update you with any pertinent information. (SBOANJ)
SUSTAINING PAYMENTS DUE MAY 15
Previous payments must have been made to be eligible

Two-Year-Olds

BREEDERS CROWN No. 34
$600,000 in 2020
To race Friday, October 30, at Harrah’s Hoosier Park, Anderson, Indiana
Elimination heats, if necessary, will be raced Saturday, October 23
-Entrance Fee: $600

THE ELEVATION
-$125,000 Est. in 2020
-$500
Open. To be raced Monday, September 25 at Harrah’s Hoosier Park
-Entrance Fee: $750

FOX STAKE No. 94
$55,150 in 2019
-$450
Open. To be raced Wednesday, August 12 at the Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis. One heat only.
-Entrance Fee: $1,200

HOOSIER STAKE No. 84
$91,400 total in 2019
-$100
To be raced Wednesday, August 12 at the Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis
-Entrance Fee: $200

KENTUCKIANA STALLION MANAGEMENT PACE/TROT 2020
-$200,000 Est. in 2020
To race Friday, September 25 at Harrah’s Hoosier Park
-$1,000
-Entrance Fee: $1,500

KEYSTONE CLASSICS 2020
Early Closing Events For Pennsylvania-Sired 2-Year-Olds
$339,600 total in 2019
-$400
Colt & Gelding Pace/Trot to be raced Monday, September 14 at The Meadowlands
Filly Pace/Trot to be raced Tuesday, September 15 at The Meadowlands
-Entrance Fee: $400

LANDMARK STAKE EARLY CLOSER
-$42,500 Est. total in 2020
-Colts & Geldings: $250
-Fillies: $125
To be raced Friday, July 3 at Goshen Historic Track
-Entrance Fee: $300
-Fillies Entrance Fee: $150

LIBERTY BELL 2020
Early Closing Events For Pennsylvania-Sired 2-Year-Olds
-$75,000 Est. in 2020
-$400
Colt & Gelding Trot/Pace to be raced Friday, October 9 at Harrah’s Philadelphia
Filly Pace/Trot to be raced Wednesday, September 23 at Harrah’s Philadelphia
-Entrance Fee: $400

MATRON SERIES 2020 (for 2-year-olds)
$692,200 total in 2019
-$500
To be raced Thursday, November 5 at Dover Downs
Top 8 format.
-Entrance Fee: $1,000

RALPH WILFONG No. 83
$33,383 in 2019
-$400
Open. To be raced Wednesday, August 12 at the Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis.
-One heat only.
-Entrance Fee: $600

W.N. REYNOLDS MEMORIAL EARLY CLOSER
$246,100 total in 2019
-$300
All divisions to be raced Friday, August 28 at The Meadowlands
-Entrance Fee: $500

JOHN SIMPSON MEMORIAL EARLY CLOSER
$442,400 total in 2019
-$400
Colt & Gelding Trot/Pace to be raced Friday, October 23 at Harrah’s Philadelphia
Filly Trot/Pace to be raced Friday, October 16 at Harrah’s Philadelphia
-Entrance Fee: $400

TOMPKINS-GEERS EARLY CLOSER
$260,700 total in 2019
-$300
All divisions to be raced Friday, July 3 at The Meadowlands
-Entrance Fee: $500

Three-Year-Olds

SUPPLEMENTS (Early Closers)

THE COURAGEOUS LADY FILLY PACE
-$125,000 Est. in 2020
-Supplemental Nomination: May 15 - $3,500
To race Saturday, October 17 at Northfield Park
-Entrance Fee: $1,500

Make checks payable and send all entries to: THE HAMBLETONIAN SOCIETY
Cranbury Gates Office Park, 109 South Main St., Suite 18, Cranbury, NJ 08512-3174
Williams Has Hope For Pennsylvania; Foaling At Huntorton Different

As with everyone in the world caught in the covid-19 pandemic, we must find ways to live and work as safely as possible and conduct our business. But making our case that we can work and race safely has proven to take more time than we would like, even with Thoroughbred tracks throughout the country racing safely, although without spectators. Even Santa Anita, in the locked-down area of southern California, has received approval to race without spectators beginning May 15.

The letter earlier this week from Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf to the state’s Secretary of Agriculture, Russell Reading, denying live racing without spectators was disappointing, especially since The Meadows is in an area of the state that is opening some businesses on Friday (May 15) under the governor’s “yellow” phase of the reopening process.

The sport’s leading breeding farm, Hanover Shoe Farms, is located in Adams County, Pa., not far from the state capitol in Harrisburg. Needless to say, Gov. Wolf’s letter was disappointing to the folks at Hanover Shoe, including the farm’s president and CEO, Russell Williams.

“When you read Secretary Reading’s letter to the governor, he was clearly on our side. If we handle this correctly and get the governor’s ear, I’m hopeful we can get this reversed,” said Williams, who has served on a board with Gov. Wolf and had many conversations with him over the years. “He is very serious about public service, and I believe the state is inundated with these requests from businesses. We just need to make our case again that we can conduct our business safely.”

While the covid-19 pandemic has shut down racing, foaling and breeding mares has continued. As of Thursday morning, May 14, Dr. Bridgette Jablonsky, executive vice president at Hanover, reported the farm has 278 foals on the ground with another 54 mares left to foal.

In Kentucky, Steve Stewart said Hunterton Farm is also well past the halfway mark in terms of foalings.

“Today we had our 100th foal,” he said on Wednesday, May 13, noting the birth of a filly by Sweet Lou out of the Courant-owned Wicked Little Minx at 10:30 a.m.

Stewart said he is particularly pleased with recent foals from two mares the farm acquired last fall from the White Birch Farm dispersal: Act Now, who last fall had a colt by Captaintreacherous sell for $165,000, delivered another colt by Captaintreacherous. Hunterton and partners bought Act Now last fall for $175,000.

My Little Dragon, another mare acquired from the White Birch dispersal, spending $230,000, gave birth to a filly by Captaintreacherous. My Little Dragon is the dam of the stakes-winning colt Stay Hungry.

Stewart said the farm will foal almost 140 mares this season, and the last mare he expects to foal is Southwind Serena, the dam of Tactical Landing and Mission Brief. Since foaling Tactical Landing in 2015 via cesarean section and shortly thereafter needing surgery for colic, Southwind Serena has battled. She conceived following the colic, but the embryo was transferred to a surrogate mare. Then for the next three years, Serena’s body seemed to want to take some time off.

Despite three years with no foals, Stewart bred Serena late last year in hopes she would respond and conceive and carry a foal. She was bred to Walner on July 10 and conceived.

“She looks better than ever, and when it’s Southwind Serena, you really can’t care about the foaling date,” said Stewart about his prolific producer, who is now 16 years old.

Since March, Stewart and the Hunterton crew have had to handle the foaling without the farm’s most experienced employee at foaling, Tommy Clem. Clem, who worked at Stoner Creek Stud and Hunterton at Stoner Creek for 57 years, died on April 2. The last mare he foaled was the world champion D’One.

“This foaling season has turned out to be stressful for me because he had been there with us, with the Hunterton crew, for 22 years,” said Stewart. “He worked for my late brother, Tom, when Tom ran Stoner Creek. Tommy gave us such a comfort level. He knew the foal was coming before the mare knew. I think his record was nine foals in one 24-hour period.”

Clem, who was 74, died of cancer. He joined Stoner Creek Stud back in 1964, a part of the farm’s transition from a Thoroughbred farm—and with Thoroughbred Triple Crown winner Count Fleet still in residence there—to a Standardbred farm for Norman Woolworth and David Johnston.

Clem will always be remembered at Hunterton and Stoner Creek. There’s a barn located near Stoner Creek—the actual creek that runs through the property—that is called “The Clem Barn.” — By Kathy Parker
Roses Are Red (2) won the second leg of the Mistletoe Shalee Series for 3-year-old filly pacers on May 15, 1979, at the Meadowlands. Driven by John Kopas, the daughter of Meadow Skipper won in 1:57.3, her first victory of the year and a new lifetime mark. After rallying from far back in the stretch, Meadow Beaut, who had won one of two divisions of the opening leg of the series the week before, finished a length behind in second for Greg Wright. Roses Are Red went on to win the third series leg and then the $32,500 final in 2:01.3 over a “slow” track. In the final, Roses Are Red battled first-over against the leading Meadow Beaut, with the latter stumbling and falling in the stretch. Meadow Beaut suffered only minor bruises in the fall. (Jim Raftery-Turfotos)

Hoosier Park Requests June 16 Reopening

Pending approval from the Indiana Horse Racing Commission, Harrah’s Hoosier Park will kick off the delayed start of its 2020 Racing Season on Tuesday, June 16, with a 6:30 pm EDT first post time. Racing will be contested on a Tuesday through Saturday schedule through Nov. 21 for a total of 111 days. It should also be noted that racing will be conducted in a “Spectator Free” manner until further notice.

“We again want to thank Governor Eric Holcomb and the Indiana Horse Racing Commission staff for their leadership in paving the way for the opening of our barn area and ultimately the ability to conduct live racing,” said Trent McIntosh, senior vice president and general manager. I want to assure everyone that as we embark on the start of our race meet, we will do so in a manner whereby we will take every precaution to ensure the health and safety of our employees and horsemen.”

“While the opening night of every racing season is special this one will be even more so,” said Rick Moore, vice president and general manager of racing. “We want to thank our horsemen for their patience during this most difficult of times and wish everyone the very best of luck throughout the meet.” (Harrah’s Hoosier Park)

Harrisburg Sale Moved To Tuesday Start Due To Breeders Crown

The Standardbred Horse Sales Company has announced that the sale dates for its 2020 annual sale in Harrisburg will be shifted forward one day to accommodate potential travel challenges for customers who attend the Breeders Crown races at Harrah’s Hoosier Park. The new dates for the 2020 annual yearling sale are Tuesday, Nov. 3, through Thursday, Nov. 5. The new dates for the 2020 annual mixed sale are Friday, Nov. 6, and Saturday, Nov. 7.

In addition, in light of the unique challenges posed by COVID-19 and associated restrictions, Standardbred is exploring options for online bidding and expanded telephone bidding to accommodate customers who may not be able to attend the sale in person. Standardbred is also exploring additional sanitary and safety measures in conjunction with PA Farm Show Complex officials. Additional information will be provided as conditions for the sale become clear. (Standardbred Horse Sales)
Harness Racing At Hawthorne
On Hold Until Governor Says OK

Hawthorne Race Course’s Director of Publicity, Jim Miller, sent the following letter to the Illinois Harness Horsemen’s Association this week, explaining the delays in resuming live racing in the state of Illinois:

This will be quite detailed, but here goes. The second week of March was when the Executive Order was put into place by (Illinois) Governor (J. B.) Pritzker. At that time there were a few things stated that indirectly pertained to racing that Hawthorne, Fairmount, and horsemen had to follow. First was in regard to residents and the care for horses. The EO (Executive Order) stated that landlords were not allowed to evict residents during the length of the order. What many don’t know is that Hawthorne has over 500 residents on the backstretch. Of those residents, the vast majority work with the thoroughbred horses and remain on the grounds of Hawthorne as they await Arlington Park to open their backstretch. Nothing in the order states Arlington cannot open their backstretch but they have chosen not to do so and cannot be forced to open.

Second, the order stated that essential work surrounding agriculture was allowed to continue. In Illinois, horse racing and the racing industry falls under the Department of Agriculture. Therefore the daily care, training, and medical operations that take place on the backstretch are allowed to continue and are essential.

Please know that at no time during this period has Hawthorne intended on kicking out horses or residents.

Here’s where things get bad for our industry unfortunately. In the same EO, while residents, horses, and those who care for the horses remain, Hawthorne Race Course and our OTB locations were deemed as entertainment and not agriculture and were forced to close. These locations are regulated by the state of Illinois and thus are subject to losing their licenses if we disobey the order. During the vast majority of the time we have been shuttered, Hawthorne Race Course held host status as well.

Host status is important as this is the mechanism to fund both purses for the horsemen and commissions for the racetrack. Therefore, aside from the ClubHawthorne online app, there has been basically no income for the purses for the horsemen or the racetrack for operations. Thus, we look at a situation where operations are forced to continue at Hawthorne without any income for all involved.

For where we are for racing: from the start of this EO, we at Hawthorne have been in constant contact with members of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, the IHHA, ILHBA at Fairmount Park, Fairmount Park management, the RICF, and members of city, county and state departments of Public Health. Since both Hawthorne and Fairmount were racing at the time of the order and want to get back to racing, even without spectators, we have worked in a coordinated effort.

What also needs to be understood is that even if we got back to racing, without fans, it is done in a way to provide for the racing industry to survive and have a chance at income. Even if we wagered $3 million a night through ADW, that would barely cover purses and as a racetrack without on-site fans or fans at OTBS, we would be lucky to break even. We understand the importance of purse income to our horsemen though and the need to keep horsemen in business.

Three weeks ago the staff of the Governor came to the racetracks, horsemen’s groups, and Illinois Department of Agriculture asking for a plan to be formulated for a safe return to racing. We immediately got to work with all involved on plans that would be implemented with strict safety precautions. Early in this process we received more input from the Governor’s staff on what protocols they would like in place. All of that information is included in our five page plan that was submitted to the Governor three weeks ago.

Where we stand now is this: we await an answer from the Governor or his staff. I can tell you that members of the racetracks, members of the horsemen’s associations, and members of the Illinois Department of Agriculture all were told weeks ago that an answer was coming soon. Since that time Tony Somone and Clark Fairley have worked phones on behalf of the IHHA, Jim Watkins is constantly working on behalf of the ILHBA, and our staff and lobbyists are asking daily for any response as well. In recent days the Governor’s staff has not replied.

Trust me, we want to get back to racing. We can get back to racing very quickly if allowed. Our protocols are likely more strict than tracks that have continued to race through this pandemic along with tracks that are returning to race. Unfortunately all we can do now is wait for an answer. We cannot jeopardize the loss of a racing license though by disobeying the order.

Hopefully this helps and please know representatives of all affected by this are working very hard to get us back to racing as soon as possible. (Hawthorne Race Course)

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IMPORTANT NOTICE TO BREEDERS

The Breeders Crown No. 35 Yearling Payment of $150.00
For foals of 2019 is due on May 15, 2020.

This payment makes yearlings by the following stallions eligible to race in the Breeders Crown as 2-year-olds in 2021 and 3-year-olds in 2022, subject to the conditions and payments in those years.

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<td>A Rocknroll Dance</td>
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<td>Always A Virgin</td>
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The above list is subject to omissions and corrections

Foals of 2019 by the above stallions will be eligible to the open division (for 3-year-olds and older) of the Breeders Crown in 2022 and to the Breeders Crown open division in subsequent years upon payment of the advertised fees for the specific year’s open event. Owners of eligible 3-year-olds will have the option of entering either or both the 3-year-old and the open event by making the 3-year-old payment due February 15, 2022. Conditions for Breeders Crown No. 35 are available from The Hambletonian Society website: www.hambletonian.com or in the 2020 U.S.T.A. Stakes/ Futurities Nomination Booklet.

For more information contact:

BREEDERS CROWN at (609) 371-2211

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Muscles Yankee Dies At Perretti Farms At 25

Muscles Yankee, the Hambletonian champion of 1998 and among the greatest trotting stallions in history, passed away peacefully in his paddock at Perretti Farms on Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 9, it was reported by Nicola Abrams, manager of the still existing Cream Ridge New Jersey farm. He had been most recently standing stud at Winbak Farm of New York, but was retired from stallion duty last year.

As a stallion, Muscles Yankee produced three consecutive Hambletonian winners: Deweycheatumnhowe, Muscle Hill and Muscle Massive. Overall, Muscles Yankee sired 1,076 starters which earned more than $98.4 million on the racetrack. His richest performer is Mr. Muscleman, who had purse earnings of more than $3.5 million. Muscle Hill and Deweycheatumnhowe also topped the $3-million mark in career earnings while Deweycheatumnhowe surpassed $2 million. In all, Muscles Yankee produced 13 millionaires, with 24 surpassing the $500,000 mark.

A son of Valley Victory, Muscles Yankee won 15 of 21 starts at ages two and three and retired with earnings of $1,424,938. A foal of 1995, Muscles Yankee was 25.

Owned by Perretti Farms, Irv Liverman and David French, Muscles Yankee won the Hambletonian in a career-best 1:52.2, and then captured the Yonkers Trot. He missed capturing the Triple Crown when he finished third in the second heat of the Kentucky Futurity. Muscles Yankee was retired following his win a few weeks later in the Breeders Crown final at Colonial Downs.

“I remember that when we got him he had OCDs taken out of his hocks...and when we x-rayed him, he still had OCDs in his hocks. So he had to be operated on again,” remembered Chuck Sylvester, who trained Muscles Yankee. “So he got a late start because of that. He never had a bad training day. He was always a horse that was ready to do his work and it came easy to him. He never had any problems. He was a horse that always wanted to please you.

“He was gaited even though he had a dish foot in his right front. We always had to worry and work on that. But he was a very smart and very good horse. I knew that with the way he was built that he’d be a good sire.

He was a good-sized Valley Victory, and never touched his boots or anything.”

Muscles Yankee was one of four Hambletonian victories for Sylvester, and one of six wins for driver John Campbell.

“He was exceptional,” said Campbell, currently the president of The Hambletonian Society. “I’ve always said it is hard to compare horses from one year to another, and they can only be compared to the ones they raced against. He certainly compared quite favorably his year.

“He had enough ability at the end of his 2-year-old year that he won some Grand Circuit races, but he got a little over-aggressive at the end of the year and that cost him some money and races. But I think certainly ability wise he was on par to be successful. He really matured both physically and mentally over the winter, and when he came back he was just a professional horse. And a very easy horse to drive. He certainly left his mark as a stallion, and that is going to show up for generations.

“I would have liked to have seen him come back as a 4 year old because I think he would have been bigger and stronger. But the economics of him going to stud didn’t allow for that, and I certainly understand it. I think he would have proven himself even more on the track had he had another year.” —By Gordon Waterstone
Stars Desperately Seeking Racing—Part 5

There appears to be light at the end of the tunnel as some racetracks are nearing a return to racing. Horses continue to be trained in preparation for the reopening, and Gordon Waterstone caught up with a couple more trainers to ask about their returning stars.

**WIGGLE IT JIGGLEIT**

After making 13 starts in his comeback after a three-year absence from racing due to health issues, Wiggle It Jiggleit is back on the sidelines awaiting the re-opening of racetracks that have been shuttered as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

The 2015 Horse of the Year, Wiggle It Jiggleit’s racing career came to a halt at the end of 2016, leaving him less than $100,000 shy of reaching the $4-million mark in career earnings for owners George Teague Jr. Inc. and Teague Racing Partnership. Three years of nurturing by Teague and Clyde Francis, the listed trainer for the Teague’s 25-horse Delaware-based stable, paid off when Wiggle It Jiggleit made his way back to the track in late 2019.

After going winless in four starts last year, Wiggle It Jiggleit got 2020 going on a high note when he won a $30,000 Preferred Pace on Jan. 2 at Dover Downs in 1:51. The 8-year-old gelding then went winless in eight starts, including a third-place finish in the $30,000 Blue Hen at Dover Downs on March 5 in what was his final appearance before the shutdown.

“T’m training him in (2):18 just to keep him fit,” said George Teague Jr. “I’m trying to get him to where he needs to be mid-summer. I didn’t want to train him into the ground so I let him rest awhile and brought him back to that mile in (2):18.

“I was pretty comfortable that any given day he could do something. I wanted him to make the speed, I didn’t want to back off on that part.”

Teague said he expected to see Wiggle It Jiggleit in the MGM Borgata (formerly the Levy) Series at Yonkers Raceway until the multi-leg event was canceled. He admits he was looking past the $4-million level for the pacing star, who boasts a career mark of 1:47.2.

“I would like to make another million,” Teague said with a laugh. “If I didn’t think he could make money, he would still be standing in the field. I think he’s capable of making money—big sums of money. Unfortunately, this is going to set him back.”

Teague said Wiggle It Jiggleit still shows the desire in his training sessions.

“He’s as sound as he’s ever been,” he said. “He didn’t need the break; he needed to get fit. You can train him until the cows come home, but it’s not like going behind the gate and going horse for horse. He needed the racing to get himself mentally back in the game. It’s a matter of time. I see it training that he still has what it takes to be a good horse.

“The bigger picture is to get him fit enough and mentally good enough. He still was quite a bit overweight, but he’s trimmed down a little bit. I can see it training that he’s still there. I wish I could say that he wasn’t like he was, but he is. I didn’t know if he would win at the percentage he did, but I thought he would definitely step up and win a few races.”

**HICKFROMFRENCHLICK**

Named for Indiana native and basketball star Larry Bird, Hickfromfrenchlick had a slam dunk season as a 3-year-old in 2019, winning 11 of 15 races, with three seconds and a third. At year’s end, the son of So Surreal’s bankroll stood at $500,136, bringing his career total to $638,677 for owners Nolamaura Racing, Thomas Spatorico and trainer Ray Schnittker.

Hickfromfrenchlick dominated his peers on the New York Sires Stakes (NYSS) circuit, scoring victories at Monticello, Tioga Downs, Yonkers Raceway and Batavia Downs, where he led wire to wire in capturing the $225,000 NYSS final.

Hickfromfrenchlick also won the $238,200 Empire Breeders Classic at Tioga Downs in a career-best 1:48.4, missing the divisional track record set in 2018 by Courtly Choice by just one-fifth of a second.

Venturing out of the Empire State for his last four starts of the year, Hickfromfrenchlick won a Simpson division at Harrah’s Philadelphia as well as divisions of the Pegasus and Circle City at Harrah’s Hoosier Park. His sophomore season came to end with a second-place finish in the $225,300 Monument Circle at Hoosier Park.

“He’s real good. He’s been in 1:55 a bunch of times, now I’m just waiting for us to be able to race,” said Schnittker, who is based at the half-mile oval at Historic Track that is adjacent to harness racing’s Museum and Hall of Fame in Goshen, N.Y. “He’s ready to go and was headed for the Graduate, and hopefully that will be rescheduled later in the year.”

Schnittker has been outspoken against qualifiers, and he said Hickfromfrenchlick is ready to race off his training sessions. Schnittker said plans to hold qualifiers at Goshen were squashed by local authorities.

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“He’s ready to go,” said Schnittker. “He’ll be able to qualify in (1): 50 in his first start. He came back really strong. “It’s going to be a joke, all this qualifying crap. But we’ll have to do it, I guess.”

WORKIN ONA MYSTERY

After posting five wins in six starts in 2018, including a 1:49.3 effort at The Red Mile that tied as the fifth fastest mile by a freshman pacer that year, Workin Ona Mystery was expected to be one of last year’s leading sophomores.

Workin Ona Mystery got off to a fast start in 2019, winning his first three races before finishing a close third in both the $750,000 North America Cup and $682,650 Meadowlands Pace. Health issues then caused the horse to turn in four consecutive off-the-board finishes before finally getting back on the winning track in a Bluegrass division at The Red Mile, where he scored in a career-best 1:48.1.

The health bug bit again after that Bluegrass win on Sept. 29, and Workin Ona Mystery’s 3-year-old season ended after just 11 starts, but still with $329,941 in earnings for owners Stambaugh Leeman Stable, Alan Keith, Wingfield Brothers and Diamond Creek Racing.

“It was his white count,” explained trainer Brian Brown of Workin Ona Mystery’s shortened season. “He had a vein bothering him that was almost up in his jaw. He just wasn’t able to keep going. He was fighting it all summer and three days after the race at The Red Mile his neck and up high on his jaw swelled up. He never got to go again.”

Brown said since he hadn’t planned on racing Workin Ona Mystery until mid-June at the earliest, there aren’t any missed races on his schedule.

“We’re not going to try the bigger races against the older horses until August,” said Brown. “But if they had a Graduate race he might race there, but not until I get at least two qualifiers and at least two starts. And those would only be stakes races against 4 year olds. In August we would hopefully be ready to try the older horses.”

So how is Workin Ona Mystery coming back?

“He’s coming back really good,” answered Brown about the son of Captaintreacherous. “He’s been really quiet. We took the open bridle off him that we raced him in the last two starts. He’s been right at 2:02.

“I won’t qualify him until June 1. He still has at least three weeks of training before he’s ready to qualify. And that’s fine because we didn’t get him started until the middle of February and we knew it would be the middle of June before he’d be ready to race.

“Knock on wood, I trained him on a little bit of Lasix in 2:02 and scoped him afterward and there was not a drop of blood. So I think we’re in pretty good shape health-wise.”

PROOF

Brian Brown trains at the Delaware, Ohio fairgrounds, and the site of the Little Brown Jug will hold qualifiers for the first time this year on Tuesday, May 19. Being at his home base, Brown will send out a few starters in the qualifiers, including the $476,299-winning Proof, who will be making his 4-year-old debut.

Proof had an outstanding 2-year-old season in 2018, winning six of 11 starts with earnings of $436,435 for the home-bred of Diamond Creek Farm. The son of A Rocknroll Dance returned in 2019 and in his fifth start of the year won an elimination of the Max Hempt Memorial on June 22 at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono in 1:48.1.

Proof disappointed in the $500,000 final, finishing a non-factor sixth. It was Proof’s final appearance of the year. After being examined by his own vet, Proof was sent to Rood & Riddle in Lexington, Ky., where the problem was discovered.

“In the elim he wore some pads on him, similar to a flip-flop, and the sole was open and at the back of it was a little bit of a wedge, and it broke out,” explained Brown. “It let his ankle drop down pretty good and he hurt a knee. He was going to crack the knee if he didn’t stop, so that’s why we quit.”

Brown, who trained a stable of nearly 70 horses at his spring base at Spring Garden Ranch in Florida before shipping home to Ohio last month, said Proof is ready for Tuesday’s qualifier.

“He’s been coming back pretty good,” said Brown. “He trained in 1:57, a half in :56 the other day. He’s ready to go. I’ll qualify him twice.

“We weren’t going to try any bigger races until August with him, but he might be able to catch a Graduate race now.”
PA Gov says no racing without casinos; coalition says why?
The following letter was sent by Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf to Russell Redding, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. Dated May 12, the letter is in response to Redding’s letter asking when the horse racing industry in the commonwealth might be permitted to reopen for racing.

SOANY helping grooms with another check
The Standardbred Owners Association of New York (SOANY) has announced that it will be providing a second grant to qualified grooms (those who have paddocked horses more than a threshold number of racing nights) in order to further assist them during the shutdown of racing at Yonkers Raceway. Last month, the SOANY provided a stipend of $400, and an additional payment of $400 is being issued this week.

Qualifiers set for May 19-20 at Delaware, Ohio
Qualifying races will be held at the Delaware County Fairgrounds in Delaware, Ohio, on Tuesday, May 19, and Wednesday, May 20. Post time each day will be at 11 a.m. These races are for horses trained by Ohio trainers only. No spectators will be allowed.

SOANY announces Goshen qualifiers canceled
The Standardbred Owners Association of New York (SOANY) has posted the following information announcing the cancellation of qualifiers at Goshen Historic Track.

Percy’s Z Tam keeps grinding away
A name not recognized on the Grand Circuit stage, but a local New York favorite is Percy’s Z Tam, a former champion who continues to shine bright after returning home to where it all began.

Scioto Downs cancels 2020 Ewart, Hill Memorials
Eldorado Scioto Downs has announced that the $400,000 Jim Ewart Memorial and the $200,000 Charlie Hill Memorial will be suspended for the upcoming racing season.

Gold Cup & Saucer still on Red Shores calendar
The PEI Provincial Association of Exhibitions issued a press release stating Old Home Week has been cancelled. While this announcement unfortunately affects the Provincial Exhibition/ Old Home Week such as the midway, horse shows and agriculture displays, this does not impact the harness racing events scheduled from Aug. 13 to Aug. 22 including the Guardian Gold Cup & Saucer at Red Shores Racetrack & Casino at the Charlottetown Driving Park.

Northfield cancels ’20 Battle of Lake Erie, Cleveland Classic
MGM Northfield Park announces the cancellation of both the $200,000 Battle of Lake Erie (June 6) and the $175,000 Cleveland Trotting Classic (July 3). Both “By-Invitation-Only” events are among the highlights of Northfield’s year-round racing calendar, and annually feature the best veteran pacers and trotters in North America.

Indiana star May Baby romps in Gil Crest qualifier
James Yoder steered a pair of Guccio sophomore fillies to victory during qualifiers held at Gil Crest Training Center in Bell, Fla. Saturday, May 9. Queen Margherita and May Baby were both winners in their individual races.

HHIA scholarship deadline extended to June 1
Due to the interruptions and limitations caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Harness Horsermen International’s (HHI) Board of Directors has extended the deadline for 31st annual Jerome Hauck Scholarship application to June 1, 2020.

Kentucky star Camgrandest dies at 12
Camgrandest, who starred in Kentucky over the past decade and earned more than $300,000 on the racetrack, died Friday, May 8, at Dragonsmeade Farm in Winchester, Ky. He was 12.

Longtime Batavia horseman Bernie Hanley dies
Bernie E. Hanley, age 84, of Batavia, N.Y., died peacefully on Thursday, May 7, at the home of his daughter while under the care of Hospice and his loving family.