

Mare Atlanta represents U.S. in Yonkers International Trot

October 11, 2019, by Brandon Valvo, for the SOA of NY

Yonkers, NY – At the beginning of 2019, Atlanta appeared primed to have an exceptional 4-year-old campaign. On the heels of a sophomore season that included victories in the Empire Breeders Classic, the Kentucky Filly Futurity, and the Hambletonian, Atlanta’s connections should have been riding on cloud nine with their distaff star.



Atlanta, a 4-year-old Chapter Seven mare, looks to win the Yonkers International Trot for the U.S. Saturday. Photo by Mark Hall/USTA.

However, after going through a public drama that ended with the mare being transferred from trainer Rick Zeron to Ron Burke, co-owner Michelle Crawford was nervous ahead of Atlanta’s seasonal debut in the \$100,000 Miami Valley Distaff.

“I think one of the most important races was in Ohio, her first start,” Crawford said. “We had that \$100,000 race and we were watching with huge anticipation. We went through a lot of drama in the beginning of the year, she changed trainers and you don’t know how they’re going to start up again as 4-year-olds.”

Atlanta extinguished any fears Crawford had with a 7-3/4 length romp in the Distaff May 6. Her first start with Yannick Gingras in the sulky, Atlanta led at every call and extended her advantage from a length at the half to five passing the three quarters before stopping the timer in 1:50.4.

After the Distaff, Atlanta’s Grand Circuit victories continued to pile up. She took a leg of the Graduate at Woodbine June 1 then captured the elimination and final of the Armbro Flight over the following two weeks. Atlanta returned to the Meadowlands to take another Graduate leg and the \$250,000 Graduate Final July 6, where she toppled male rival Six Pack in a lifetime best 1:49.1. In her career, Atlanta is 19-for-35 with \$1,799,089 earned.

Crawford isn't sure what enables Atlanta to go toe-to-toe with males like Six Pack, but believes her mare by Chapter Seven is simply a standout.

"I do know that some of the Chapter Sevens are freaks. I think they've shown themselves on the track for the last few years," Crawford said. "You have [Walner](#), you have Atlanta. There are some significant Chapter Sevens out there. I think when you have a filly or mare like this, anything goes."

In addition to her victories, Atlanta finished third (and was placed second) in the \$450,000 Hambletonian Maturity and second in both the elimination and final of the Maple Leaf Trot.

In the Maple Leaf Trot final, Atlanta left from post 10 and never saw pylons, tracking the cover of Crystal Fashion throughout. Despite her overland journey, Atlanta tipped off cover and cut into Guardian Angel As' lead in the stretch, losing by just a half-length in 1:50.4. Crawford felt Atlanta's defeat was one of her most impressive efforts yet.

"Even though she didn't win the one in Canada, I think she was the best horse in there that day," Crawford said.

After the Maple Leaf Trot, Atlanta recorded a hard-fought win by a head in the Charlie Hill Memorial Trot at Scioto Downs and now looks to add the \$1 million Yonkers International Trot to her resume.

It's a race Crawford has become accustomed to watching from the sidelines with dreams of winning.

"Who doesn't have that race on their bucket list? I think there are a few big races I've had on my bucket list and the International Trot, obviously we haven't had anything in there before," Crawford said. "To have a girl representing the U.S.A., I don't think it can get better than that.

"I've watched it before from the Yonkers bleachers and it's just a really powerful thing when they come out and the flags are flying. It's an honor to be part of that, Crawford added."

Heading into the Yonkers International Trot on Oct. 12, Atlanta hasn't raced since the Hill Sept. 7. She has one qualifying victory at Harrah's Philadelphia Sept. 24 and worked out 1-1/4 miles at Yonkers before the races Oct. 1. The break in Atlanta's racing schedule was by design.

"I think that she proved to us that she can do what she needed to do and she had some fabulous wins. I think there is something to be said about treating them at this level like Thoroughbreds," Crawford said. "Rick always did that last year, he treated her very much that way and it worked well. You don't need to race her week-in and week-out to keep her ship-shape, I think you need to protect her a little bit. Ronnie has done everything in between the races to keep her up and in shape."

Even with Atlanta's preparations at home and the qualifier, the workout over the half-mile track with Gingras in the bike was key. Atlanta made her first start as a 2-year-old in New York Sire Stakes at Yonkers July 18, 2017 and she made a break when trotting into the first turn. Her next start at Batavia produced an identical result as Atlanta jumped it off entering the first bend. She hasn't started on a half-mile track since.

"I think it was really important since she doesn't race on a half-mile. Ronnie needed to know up front if he needed to adjust or make any changes," Crawford said of the Oct. 1 workout, in which Atlanta successfully navigated the Yonkers oval, going the mile-and-a-quarter in approximately 2:26.

"Yannick was pretty happy with her. I was pretty pleased with the mile," Crawford said. "I think I would be more nervous if they came out of that training and said, 'we need to change a whole bunch of things because it wasn't that easy for her to get around.' Then I'd be a little bit more nervous. She's pretty pure-gaited. Given that, it should be a no-brainer for her."

Atlanta drew post position three in the \$1 million Yonkers International Trot and will again have Gingras in the sulky. She is the 3-1 morning line favorite. Cruzado Dela Noche seeks a title defense for Sweden and drew post seven in this year's International, one slot inside of last year's runner-up Lionel of Norway. Denmark's Slide So Easy also competed last year and returns; he drew post one.

Guardian Angel As will also represent the United States and will start from the second tier in post nine. Marion Marauder (post six) will make his third appearance in the

International representing Canada. European sensations Bahia Quesnot (France, post two), Uza Josselyn (Switzerland, post four), Zacon Gio (Italy, post five), and Norton Commander (Germany, post 10) complete the field.

"All of us are hoping she puts her head down and gets out of there and doesn't look back, doesn't look left or right, just keeps going," Crawford said. "It's hard to say. I can't predict how the race is going to set up. There are some fabulous horses in there and a lot of those horses like to be parked all of their miles; they have the endurance, so you really don't know. You have no idea what to expect, but I think Atlanta has proven to everybody that she definitely deserves to be there.

"It gives you goosebumps to see the company she's in and they're all coming over to the United States for this crazy race."

Atlanta would be the ninth mare to win the International Trot and the first since the race was revived in 2015 after Hannelore Hanover and Ariana G failed to join the ranks of Peace Corps (1991), Kit Lobell (1989), Classical Way (1980), Delmonica Hanover (1973 and 1974), Fresh Yankee (1970), Roquepine (1967 and 1968), and Armbro Flight (1966).

Crawford Farms Racing owns Atlanta in partnership with Bradley Grant and Howard Taylor, a group Crawford calls the dream team. The group will be in attendance Saturday to cheer their mare on.

"We'll all be there rooting her on together and I'm really excited about that, too," Crawford said. "We've come a long way and we have a great partnership. It's just a lot of fun."

The \$1 million Yonkers International Trot is slated for Saturday (Oct. 12) at Yonkers Raceway. The card will also feature a pair of \$250,000 invitationals, the 1-1/4 mile Harry Harvey Trot and mile Dan Rooney Pace. For more information on the event and its participants, click [here](#).

Yonkers Raceway features live harness racing Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. First post time is 6:50 p.m. For entries to the races, click [here](#).