

## DREAMS SOAR AS SEASON OF HOPE BEGINS

By Phil Nero, HHBNYS Communications

Frank Dettore hopes lightning will strike twice – not on his Ohio horse farm, but figuratively at harness tracks to the east where the 2009 New York Sire Stakes racing season for 2-year-olds opens this week with all its inherent dreams and hopes.

Few things are as unpredictable as lightning or a yearling's future, and perhaps no one caught Sire Stakes lightning in a bottle with 2-year-olds quite like Dettore in 2008, when pacing sensations Stolly Up Bluechip and Eagle Way were totally electric in racking up multiple wins and a divisional championship.

This year Dettore puts his freshman hopes in Eagle Art M (Art Major-Stasia's Girl), a full brother to Stolly Up Bluechip who Dettore says compares well to his successful older sibling. "He's a little bit bigger and a little bit stronger. He seems like he does everything right. I'm hoping he has the same kind of heart," says Dettore.

In full swing for sophomores since early June, the 28-stop Sire Stakes schedule for freshmen gets under way with four consecutive days of multi-race events beginning Wednesday (July 8) for trotting colts at Buffalo Raceway. Then comes 2-year-old pacing colts Thursday at Monticello; trotting fillies Friday at Vernon Downs; and filly pacers Saturday when they shuffle back to Buffalo.

"There's nothing like hoping on a dream, and there's no dream better than watching your young horses begin to compete in earnest, racing for sizeable purses, and hopefully fulfilling your dreams and their potential," Dettore says. "You gamble when you buy these young horses. You don't know where they're at or what they're going to do. You have high hopes, and it's a thrill when they're fulfilled."

Another Sire Stakes devotee, Ken Jacobs, is also dreaming big about several would-be freshman stars he hopes will give him the kind of thrills his recently retired pacer Kenneth J provided over the past several years.

Jacobs hopes to fill Kenneth J's shoes with a potentially impressive '09 freshman roster that includes colts He's Gorgeous (Art Major-So Ravishing) and It'sabouttime (Pro Bono Best-Artsplate). The fillies he's high on are Truly A Treasure (Art Major-Private Treasure); Swap Blue Chip (Art Major-R Lannie H); and Lady Major (Art Major-Eastern Lady).



"They're all pacers, and they're scaring the hell out of everyone in a good way," he says of the group that's been rounding into form with "baby" races on the larger tracks at Vernon Downs and the Meadowlands. "Truly A Treasure got beat by a head in 1:56. He's Gorgeous just won two baby races and came home in :27. After It'sabouttime won [in 1:57.4], I said from now on just sit on him and don't pull on the right line till the last quarter. Lady Major won by 10 lengths at Vernon in 1:58.4."

Next time out she led into the stretch against colts missing by about a length in a race that went in 158.0 on June 27 at Saratoga.

Rattling off the early outings from memory, there's no hiding the excitement he's feeling about the opportunities ahead. "This is probably my best crop as a whole," says Jacobs. "But it's early and you never know. Now's the time for dreaming."

That's exactly what trainer Jeff Deslandes is doing in a big way with Glacier Girl, a daughter of Sealed and Delivered out of Cirque, by Dragon's Lair. Deslandes and owner/breeder John Boll have high hopes she could be this season's 2-year-old version of Stolly Up Bluechip or Eagle Way.

"Wally Hennessey called her 'the real deal' the first time he got off her. I had the same impression the very first time I had her on a jog cart." She trained well enough and performed so strongly in baby races that Boll recently declined a very attractive offer to sell. That came as big relief to Deslandes who began learning the business in high school and has been training for 21 years. He believes Glacier Girl might not only enjoy early Sire Stakes success, but also earn him a return trip to the finals, which he missed in '08.

"I instantly knew by the way she carried herself from the start that she could be something special, and she's done nothing at all to discourage me. She can leave; you can take her back. She acts like an aged horse. She's so smart and we've yet to be all out with her," says Deslandes. That includes her first pari-mutuel race at Saratoga on June 20, a strong second against the boys at Saratoga. She paced the mile in 202.1, coming the last quarter in :29.

He harbors additional hopes for several of about 10 stakes-eligible horses under his tutelage. They include BJ's Super Trooper, a 2-year-old trotting colt he has a half ownership interest in and "is one of the best-gaited trotters I've ever worked with."

Trotters – that's the gait trainer Allan McCarty, prefers focusing his dreams on, in part "because there are fewer of them," so the odds for success are enhanced. He has enjoyed the chase and excitement of Sire Stakes competition and racing in general for decades, beginning under his father's guidance as a teen.

His most memorable year was 2006 when then 2-year-old Hitwiththeladies was a hit at tracks across the state en route to the Sire Stakes record books. With Jack Flanigen in the bike, the son of Giant Hit trotted to victory in all five of his divisional contests. He maintained Sire Stakes perfection by winning the 2-year-old championship final at Saratoga in 1:59.0, even overcoming a break at the start.

This year McCarty's looking to make a similar hero out of Proper Villain, a 2-year-old son of Conway Hall he trains and co-owns with Robert Hime and his daughter Sharon Hime, along with Bob Kowalewski and David Wahl. Bred by Carlo Lattinelli and Deanna Domain, Proper Villain was foaled at Morrisville College and sold there last September for \$47,000.

"I liked what I saw at auction," says McCarty. "I look for breeding, then individual characteristics. He looks like an athlete. He has the confirmation I wanted and is a very smart horse." So far Proper Villain has provided reason to dream. "He's done very, very well in baby races at Buffalo Raceway ... where he won in 2:05.1 and came the last quarter in 29 and a piece."

On the distaff side McCarty is looking to Belle Of The Brawl, a daughter of Malabar Man, to dance her way to either late closer or Sire Stakes competition, though maybe not until deeper into the schedule. "She has a tremendous gait and a good attitude. I think she can come along and be sire a stakes filly. I have great hopes for her. She's a very nice, well bred horse, and she's real smart. You've gotta have smart, otherwise they're not worth two dead flies."

There's nothing like the feeling you get when it all comes together, McCarty says. "It's the adrenalin rush of the whole thing when you have a horse that might be a contender. Once you've had a good horse that's in the Sire Stakes you want to stay there. It's where the money and the excitement's at. And it's a lot more fun than racing overnight horses."

Saratoga-based trainer John Stark agrees. "I like the idea of starting from scratch with a horse and seeing how far you can go," says Stark, part owner in filly trotter Sheezacredit, he hopes will go pretty far in her division. Purchased for \$70,000 last fall at the Lexington Select Yearling Sale, this daughter of Credit Winner won her first baby race in 2:07.1, and then followed that with a 2:03.3 effort. "That's pretty awesome for a two-year old making her second start on a half-mile track," says Stark of the filly who's also growing rapidly and adjusting her body to her gait. "She has some issues to get over that way, and she'll act a little funny at times. She fusses with her head, and if you don't tie her tail she tries to flip it over the line. But when she makes up her mind to race somebody, she goes right after them."

Stark is also hopeful about pacing filly Lislea. Owned by Yonkers Raceway owner Timothy J. Rooney, this 2-year-old daughter of Lislea Reardon has shown off her bloodline links to No Nukes and Cam Fella by qualifying in 2:00.0 on a half-mile track.

Also developing well and winning baby races at Saratoga are Secret Credit and Three Crow Beau, both under trainer Paul Kelley, and examples of the different paths that can lead to potential success

A daughter of Credit Winner, Secret Credit was bred by Silver Linden Farms of Indiana, foaled in New Jersey, purchased at the Harrisburg sales for \$90,000, and is co-owned by Kelley Racing Stables and Bill Weaver. "We've liked her right from the onset, and she's done nothing to change our minds since. She's very well gaited, has a good attitude, and is a pretty smart filly. She qualified nicely with a two hole trip, slid out at the three-quarter pole, and finished up good." He called it an impressive effort by a very green horse. "She won in 2:05.4 with a back half in 101.4. I'd like to qualify her one more time up at Vernon Downs before starting her in the Sire Stakes there."

Three Crow Beau, on the other hand, was homebred by Mike Andrew of Gorham, Maine and foaled in nearby Saco. A son of Malabar Man, he was broken and schooled over the winter at Pinehurst, North Carolina by another Maine horseman, Gordon Corey, before arriving at Kelley's Gansevoort training center. "Gordon deserves all the credit with Three Crow Beau," says Kelley. "He came to our barn six days before his qualifier. The first time he'd ever seen the track at Saratoga was the day of his first baby race. He went around that track like it was his own, winning gate-to-wire in 2:05.2."

So no matter who's your daddy, owner, or trainer, horses of all different backgrounds, gaits, genders, and colors can make it big on the New York Sire Stakes stage where the show, along with the win and the place, create a different ending every night – and for a far-reaching audience.

"Owners and trainers getting excited about their up-and-coming Sire Stakes stars racing for large purses is just a piece of the economic impact these races have on the State's economy. The program as a whole creates an agricultural economic multiplier. There's a tremendous amount of time, effort, and exchange of money and services that go into breeding mares, raising foals, and selling yearlings that many people don't realize," says Dave Hanson, Harness Horse Breeders of New York State president. "From pari-mutuel Sire Stakes and Late Closers or County Fairs, to have a competitive horse racing

also creates an excitement that's infectious in a way that connects with fans who love these races and spend their entertainment dollars at tracks across the state.”

In the weeks and months ahead other harness venues including Yonkers and Saratoga raceways and Tioga Downs in Nichols will also host events. Each stop offers opportunities for fulfilling hopes and dreams, big purse money, and valuable qualifying points leading up to the 2009 Night of Champions finals at Vernon Downs on Sept. 26th.

*Photo credit: Dave Oxford*