

Major In Art has left his mark on his young trainer

By David Mattia, USTA Senior Correspondent

Plainfield, NJ --- Justin Lebo, a 26-year-old resident of Carlisle, Pa., has a soft spot in his heart and a sore spot on his shoulder; both courtesy of the champion horse he trains named Major In Art. This year's Woodrow Wilson and Metro winner has not only put young Lebo on the harness map, he's also put him in the hospital.

"After the Metro, I took him out to grass him," recalled Lebo. "He was feeling so good that day he threw me down and dislocated my shoulder. When I walked him out he was jumping around. He wound up breaking the lead shank and he took my shoulder out of joint. An hour and a half later I was still in the emergency room waiting to get my shoulder put back in the socket.

"Actually, he does nothing wrong. He's just a little cocky when you take him to the paddock but that's to be expected. He's basically a mild mannered horse. Everybody who sees him says he's got the look, he's the real deal, he has that 'it' factor."



USTA/Mark Hall photo

Major In Art won the \$350,000 Woodrow Wilson Final in 1:50.4 for Brian Sears.

Major In Art is indeed the real deal and he has the stats to prove it. When he's not having a good-natured smack down with his tolerant trainer, he's beating up on some pretty mean opposition in some very prestigious races. So far this year the 2-year-old son of Art Major—Miami Spice has five wins in six starts and earnings of \$700,600. His only pari-mutuel defeat came on July 25, when he finished second to Vertigo Hanover in his Woodrow Wilson elimination.

"For one thing, he'd never had to go that fast before," Lebo said of his horse's lone defeat. "It was an exceptionally fast mile (1:51.1) and he just wasn't tight enough for that mile but when he came back we made a couple of changes and he went on to win the final."

Major In Art went into the Wilson Final without the services of John Campbell. Prior to his second-place Wilson elimination, Campbell had also driven the colt to victory in a \$41,800 Goshen Cup division at The Meadowlands on June 26, and a late closing \$11,000 event at Harrah's Chester on July 9, but he opted instead to drive Get Jazzed in the \$350,000 Wilson Final for trainer Chris Ryder.

Brian Sears inherited the drive on Major In Art and he made the most of it with a 1:50.4 front-end victory over Mysticism (Ron Pierce) and Vertigo Hanover (Jody Jamieson). Get Jazzed got involved in some heavy traffic and had to settle for a fifth-place check.

Subsequent to the Woodrow Wilson, Major In Art and Justin Lebo ventured north to Mohawk Racetrack for a clash in a \$38,400 elimination of the Metro. While he won that elimination handily for Brian Sears in 1:53 over Part Shark (Jack Moiseyev) and Nicholas C Hanover (John Campbell), the rapidly developing colt would flash his true skills a week later in the \$950,000 Metro final.

Moving around the cover of Well Said through three-quarters in 1:22.4, Major In Art muscled boldly to the top and bravely held off the late charge of Nebupanezzar to win the Metro final in 1:51.2.

"To see him win like that was surprising but it couldn't have worked out better for us," said Lebo. "The way the race set up for us was what we talked to Brian (Sears) about before the race. That's why we picked the four hole. He raced really well, and to beat some of the colts that were in there, we were definitely surprised.

Lebo's energetic and youthful career has a lot left in the tank for 2008, and Major In Art, a youngster himself, has a few more races in which he has to compete before he gets an extended break.

"He's been off since the Metro so we gave him two qualifying races to tighten him up," Lebo said. "I figure the other horses have been racing in between but we decided to give him time off and tighten him up for the Governor's Cup (eliminations) on October 18.

"After that we're going to hit the Breeders Crown and then give him some time off. I'll get back on him next year, see how he trains down, and hopefully hit all the big money races in 2009. I'm sure all the other horses are going to grow up and be right there with him next year and it will be a lot tougher."

Major In Art was bred by Southwind Farm and is currently owned by Major In Art Stable -- (Chester G. Lebo, Jr., Tina Martinez, and Jerry Silva).

According to Lebo, Ernie Martinez, an owner with whom the Lebo family has been doing business for years, originally purchased Major In Art from Southwind Farm as a weanling for the bargain price of \$4,000.

"Ernie bought him right from Southwind Farm and we turned him out until we brought him in to break," recalled Lebo. "He was a classy horse since day one. He always had a good head on his shoulders and he knew what to do and when to do it."

Justin Lebo comes from a family of horsemen, and while it was inevitable that Justin would eventually take up his position in the jog cart, his quick success on the other hand is something for the record books.

Lebo has only been licensed since 2006, but according to Meadowlands racing analyst, Bob "Hollywood" Heyden, he is the youngest trainer to win the Woodrow Wilson and the youngest to win the Metro. Previously, Blair Burgess, who won the Metro in 1989 with Road Machine, was the youngest Metro winner at 27.

"It was definitely an honor to race against some of the guys I've grown up listening to," said Lebo. "It's definitely an honor in that regard. Hopefully I'll get a couple of more horses like this throughout my training career.

"Horses have always been in my family. My father's grandfather was into the trotting ponies here in Pennsylvania and then my dad cut off from the ponies and went into the Standardbreds in the mid 1980s. I grew up around them and after high school I wanted to pursue a career in harness racing."

As far as Justin Lebo and Major In Art are concerned, it looks like two careers are getting off to great start, and as long as nothing goes out of joint, the future is looking pretty bright for both for of them.