

NYSS Night of Champions splits for the first time ever

by Frank Drucker, publicity director, Empire City at Yonkers Raceway

Yonkers, NY --- This Saturday (Sept. 12) the best 3-year-old trotters and pacers bred in New York State descend upon the historic Yonkers Raceway at Empire City Casino for the first of the two-part annual New York Night of Champions.

The competition, inaugurated in 1990 by the New York Sire Stakes, celebrates its 26th anniversary this year. For the first time, the finals are held on two nights, both featuring four sire stakes finals at \$225,000 each.

Part II of the competition takes place Saturday (Sept. 26), with New York's premier 2-year-old trotters and pacers. All eight finals are again sponsored by prominent Empire breeding farms.

"It's always an honor for Yonkers Raceway to host the New York Night of Champions," Raceway COO Bob Galterio said. "With Yonkers generating far and away the highest revenue among all New York harness tracks, it's only fitting the divisional champions are crowned here."

First post time of the night is at 7:10 p.m. at Yonkers Raceway with the NYSS Night of Champions taking races five through eight on the dozen-race card. Highlights are below:

Fifth Race (Majestic View Farms Filly Trot): Barn Doll (driven by Jeff Gregory, post six) looks to repeat as divisional champ. This season's points leader has been ultra-consistent, as in 10-for-12 this season (\$352,863) and 17-for-21 lifetime. The daughter of [Conway Hall](#), co-owned and trained by Steve Pratt, enters off a blowout win at Yonkers Raceway earlier this month. Jewels In Hock (driven by Jim Morrill Jr., post four), one of a select few who knocked off Barn Doll, enters winning half of her 16 tries in 2015 (\$241,496). Lady Winona (driven by Jason Bartlett, post seven) is the stronger lass in the Julie Miller-trained entry.

Sixth Race (Cameo Hill Farm Filly Pace): Bettorhaveanother (driven by Tyler Buter, post three), Band Of Angels (driven by Jason Bartlett, post eight) and defending champ Mosquito Blue Chip (driven by Jim Morrill Jr., post seven) have all enjoyed successful summers, though Mosquito Blue Chip did make an uncharacteristic break in her latest try at Yonkers Raceway. Bedroomconfessions (driven by Dan Dube, post six) enters as hot as any of these, with three wins in her last four tries.

Seventh Race (Morrisville College Equine Institute Colt/Gelding Trot): Is there anything Yonkers Trot winner Habitat (driven by Jim Morrill Jr., post three) can do for an encore? A career millionaire off his open-length win this past Saturday, the son of [Conway Hall](#) gets another look at Trot finalists Buen Camino (driven by Trond Smedshammer, post one) and Workout Wonder (driven by Dan Dube, post six). Royal Deceptor (driven by Mickey McGivern, post five) and Wings Of Royalty (driven by Jason Bartlett, post seven) have both had productive seasons.

Eighth Race (Blue Chips Farms Colt/Gelding Pace): Artistic Major (driven by Jim Morrill Jr., post three), the leader in the clubhouse, has some talented foes in Betting Exchange (driven by Jason Bartlett, post five) and National Seelster (driven by Andy Miller, post seven), among others.

The lineup for Part II of the New York Night of Champions is to be drawn Tuesday (Sept. 22).

About the New York Sire Stakes: The New York Sire Stakes was the first program of its kind developed in North America and later became the model for state-bred racing programs in nearly all of the major harness racing states and provinces on the continent.

Sponsored by NYS harness racing industry organizations, the first NYSS events were held in 1961. The official New York Sire Stakes program was inaugurated in 1965 when the state's harness tracks and breeding industry leaders who sought to spur the breeding industry successfully lobbied the State Legislature for support of their endeavor. The group was led by the late Dr. Harry M. Zweig, a distinguished veterinarian from Nassau, N.Y. Dr. Zweig's tireless efforts proved successful when the Laverne Law was enacted. The legislation created the Agriculture and New York State Horse Breeding Development Fund, the public benefit corporation that administers the New York Sire Stakes program. The law mandates the Fund to receive a percentage of the industry's betting handle to manage the NYSS program and to perpetuate its mission.

The New York horse racing industry came together once again in 2001 to advance the sport of harness racing in the state through the addition of video lottery terminals at each race track. With harness racing's late Bruce Hamilton leading the way, the industry again ran a successful campaign and the NYS legislature amended the pari-mutuel law, allowing video lottery terminals at the state's harness racetracks. The first racino opened at Saratoga Raceway in 2004, paving the way for racinos at the remaining six race tracks statewide. Since the inception of racinos at harness tracks, New York Sire Stakes purses have more than doubled and continue to increase.