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PACESETTER

The Official Newsletter of the Standardbred Breeders & Owners Association of NJ

THE MEADOWLANDS ENTERS A POWERFUL NEW ERA

The New Meadowlands Racetrack, in conjunction with the Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association of New Jersey (SBOANJ), is pleased to announce an enhanced 2027 stakes schedule featuring premier new races and substantial purse increases for the sport's top events.

These updates reinforce the racetrack's commitment to the industry and solidifying the future of harness racing in New Jersey. Following the relocation of the Hambletonian, the Meadowlands Racetrack leadership, guided by Chairman and CEO Jeff Gural, proactively structured a premier Championship Meet for next summer.

The revised program introduces over $4 million in new races and purse increases, all set to take place at the iconic mile oval in East Rutherford, NJ, during the summer of 2027.

"While we were disappointed by the Hambletonian's move to Indiana, The Meadowlands and the SBOANJ chose to take a bold step forward," said Gural. "We are dedicated to ensuring our fans experience a world-class day of racing featuring the finest horses in the sport. We are incredibly proud to introduce the Meadowlands Trot and the Meadowlands Oaks Trot to our lineup."

Meadowlands Trot: $1 million – $50,000 eliminations on Saturday, July 24, and final on Saturday, July 31

Meadowlands Oaks Trot: $500,000 – $25,000 eliminations on Saturday, July 24, and final on Saturday, July 31

To anchor these landmark events, Chairman Jeff Gural is personally contributing $150,000 through Allerage Farms to sponsor the Meadowlands Trot. The racetrack is currently seeking sixteen $25,000 corporate sponsorships ($400,000 total) to support the remaining eight major stakes events.

In a significant boost for local operations, any New Jersey-sired horse that wins the Stanley Dancer Memorial, Del Miller Memorial, Meadowlands Trot, Meadowlands Oaks Trot, Cane Pace, or any Graduate Series event will earn a 20% purse bonus.

"What we are putting together should help the breeders and purchasers of yearlings, as there will be significantly more money available without leaving New Jersey," Gural noted.

SBOA NJ

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NJ CONNECTIONS DOMINATE THE HISTORIC 101ST HAMBLETONIAN

The 101st edition of Hambletonian Day at The Meadowlands Racetrack on Saturday, August 8, 2026, will be remembered as one of the most historic and fast-paced cards in harness racing history. Boasting over $4 million in total stakes purses, the afternoon featured a thrilling, record-setting performance in the main event and spectacular showcases from local New Jersey-sired talent on the undercard.

Melander Sweeps the Classics with Apex and Nezuko Kamado S
Trainer Marcus Melander enjoyed a career-defining afternoon, becoming just the fourth trainer in history to sweep both the Hambletonian and the Hambletonian Oaks on the same day.



Apex (#3) prevailed over Big Ranger (#4) in an epic stretch duel that turned the 101st Hambletonian into an instant trotting classic. Lisa Photo

In the $1 million Grade 1 Hambletonian Stakes, the three-year-old Walner colt Apex secured an instant classic. Driven by Dexter Dunn, Apex seized the lead early and dug deep in a grueling stretch duel to hold off the favorite, Big Ranger, by a mere nose. In doing so, Apex stopped the clock at 1:49.2, establishing a new stakes and track record as the fastest winner in the 101-year history of America's Trotting Classic.



Nezuko Kamado S with Yannick Gingras winning the $500,000 Hambletonian Oaks Final. Lisa Photo.

Two races prior, Melander captured the $500,000 Grade 1 Hambletonian Oaks with Nezuko Kamado S. With catch-driver Yannick Gingras in the bike, the standout filly used a tactical backstretch move to take control and held off a late surge from Carve to win in 1:51.4. The victory marked a personal record-best seventh Oaks title for driver Yannick Gingras.

The Hambletonian Day undercard featured the lucrative New Jersey Sire Stakes (NJSS) Platinum Series Finals for two-year-old trotters, highlighting the immense strength of the Garden State's breeding program.

In the $250,000 NJSS Platinum Final for 2-Year-Old Colts and Geldings, Lifetime Dreamer put on a masterclass for the ages. Driven by Yannick Gingras for trainer Åke Svanstedt, the freshman trotter blasted to the front, yielded briefly, and then reclaimed dominance to stop the timer in a blazing 1:51.1—uncorking a spectacular new world record for his division.



Wall Of Fame with Andy Miller winning the $220,000 NJSS Platinum Series final for 2-year-old trotting fillies. Lisa Photo

In the $312,500 NJSS Platinum Final for 2-Year-Old Filly Trotters, the spectacular Wall Of Fame kept her perfect freshman record intact. Guided by the husband-and-wife team of driver Andy Miller and trainer Julie Miller, the daughter of Walner launched a powerful bid on the far turn and drew away easily under minimal urging, stamping herself as the premier freshman filly of the season.

(Note: The companion $180,000 NJSS Platinum Final for 2-year-old male pacers was contested the night prior on a rain-drenched Friday, August 7 card, where Aintmyfirstro Deo extended his undefeated streak to four-for-four with a dominant :1:52 gate-to-wire romp.)

Grand Circuit Undercard Winners

The speed show continued across the remaining stakes events throughout the blockbuster afternoon:

• John Cashman Memorial ($390,556): Marcus Melander and Dexter Dunn teamed up yet again as Super Chapter fought off Lexus Kody in a thrilling stretch battle to win the Grade 1 older trotting event in 1:50.1.

• Cane Pace ($310,750): Longshot Sweet Lovin Lou caused a massive upset for trainer Daniel Lagace. Driven by Tim Tetrick, the sophomore pacer swept from last to first in deep stretch to claim the pacing Triple Crown leg in a lifetime-best 1:47.3.

• Sam McKee Memorial (G2): The open pacing event split into two action-packed divisions. The first $138,650 division saw a 17-1 upset by Women Layer (David Miller) in 1:48.2. The second $139,900 division was captured by Captain Albano in a gritty 1:48.3 performance.

• Dr. John Steele Memorial: Walspea delivered another major stakes victory on the day for driver Yannick Gingras.

• Shady Daisy ($123,200): Three-year-old filly pacer Sangria Summer rallied sharply in deep stretch to capture her test in a career-best 1:48.1.

With an attendance of 16,540 and a massive total handle of over $6.15 million, Hambletonian Day 2026 proved to be a resounding success, solidifying the Meadowlands and New Jersey's racing programs at the absolute pinnacle of the sport.

APEX BOUNCES BACK AND WRONG SOUNDS RIGHT MAKES HISTORY

Hambletonian champion Apex rebounded from an elimination loss to capture the $250,000 New Jersey Classic Final for 3-year-old trotting colts and geldings on Friday, Sept. 11, at The Meadowlands. Guided by driver Dexter Dunn, the Marcus Melander trainee assumed control past a comfortable :57 half-mile and cruised to an authoritative 1:52.2 victory by 1-1/4 lengths over stablemate Nix Nacken. Melander took full responsibility for the prior week's defeat, admitting he hadn't tightened the colt up enough following his Hambletonian triumph. The rebound performance pushed Apex's career earnings past $1.73 million for owners Jeffrey Snyder, S R F Stable, and Steve Stewart, returning a $2.80 mutuel to his backers.



Apex with Dexter Dunn winning the $250,000 New Jersey Classic Final for 3-year-old trotting colts and geldings. Lisa Photo

The star-studded card also featured a historic performance by the Jim Campbell-trained Wrong Sounds Right, who equaled the track record for 2-year-old trotting colts with a blistering 1:51.4 victory in his $250,000 final. Driven by Todd McCarthy, the colt tracked the leader closely from the pocket before pulling away in the stretch to win by 3-1/2 lengths over Easy Down Blonde. The milestone victory matched the track record marks held by Don't Let'em and Maryland, prompting owner-breeder Scott Farber of Runthetable Stables to confidently eye a future run at the Hambletonian.



Wall Of Fame with Andy Miller winning the $250,000 New Jersey Classic Final for 2-year-old trotting fillies. Lisa Photo

In the filly divisions, Wall Of Fame extended her perfect career record to 8-for-8 with a gutsy 1:53.1 score in the $250,000 final for 2-year-old trotting fillies. Driver Andy Miller sat patiently in fourth before executing a sweeping move to the lead on the final turn, keeping the daughter of Walner up to the task to fend off a late rally from Rio De Janeiro by a half-length.

Meanwhile, the 3-year-old trotting fillies put on a speed show as Custom braved a three-wide opening turn to clear to the front through a sharp :55.3 half-mile. Under the guidance of driver Jason Bartlett, the Petter Engblom trainee dug deep down the lane to stave off pocket-sitter Leading Lady by three-quarters of a length in a career-best 1:51.2, banking her seventh lifetime victory.

THE 2026 SBOANJ ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION TO TAKE PLACE ON NOVEMBER 18, 2026, AT KNOB HILL COUNTRY CLUB

Notification and advertising of the SBOANJ Annual Meeting and Election have been published on both the USTA and the SBOANJ websites.

Anyone interested in running for director must have sent a letter of intent to the SBOANJ office via certified mail, or in person, no later than October 3, 2026.

In order to qualify as a director, you must have been an active member for the past two years in the category in which you wish to run.

Running for reelection are: Mark Ford in the Driver/Trainer category, Steve Dey in the Breeder category plus 2 open seats, and Dan Baer & Bob Boni in the Owner category.

A copy of the By-Laws can be found on our website.

Please check the website(sboanj.com) for updates.

NJ CONNECTIONS DOMINATE THE RED MILE GRAND CIRCUIT

The historic red clay of The Red Mile in Lexington, Kentucky, once again served as the ultimate proving ground for the finest standardbreds in North America during the Grand Circuit meet. While the venue prepared for its massive role as the upcoming host of the 2027 Breeders Crown, it was the unmistakable power of New Jersey-based trainers, drivers, and homebred stars that stole the headlines this fall.

Many of the meet's most thrilling performances came from horses that cut their teeth in the New Jersey Sire Stakes (NJSS) program. Having already dominated the local circuit at The Meadowlands, these elite athletes transitioned seamlessly to Lexington's lightning-fast track.



Lifetime Dreamer with Yannick Gingras (Amanda Stephens Photo)

Lifetime Dreamer Sensational in Bluegrass Splits: The standout freshman trotting colt Lifetime Dreamer delivered a masterpiece. Driven by New Jersey regular Yannick Gingras and trained by the powerhouse Ake Svanstedt stable, the colt showcased blinding speed to capture his hefty $91,000 Bluegrass Series division. Pocket-sitting before storming home in the stretch, Lifetime Dreamer solidified his status as one of the sport's most exciting young prospects.



Wall Of Fame (5, inside) with Andy Miller winning the second Bluegrass division for 2-year-old trotting fillies. Amanda Stephens photo

Wall Of Fame Maintains Her Brilliance: Entering the meet with an flawless undefeated record generated right at home in New Jersey's premier stakes, the spectacular filly Wall Of Fame put her reputation on the line in the $377,000 Bluegrass Stakes. Managed by the formidable New Jersey duo of Andy and Julie Miller, her aggressive front-running style and signature stretch drives kept fans on the edge of their seats.

The immense success in Lexington directly underscores the strength of New Jersey's breeding and training infrastructure. Backed by world-class training facilities across the state and championed by top-tier drivers like Yannick Gingras and Dexter Dunn, New Jersey stables consistently peak at precisely the right moment on the Grand Circuit calendar.

JERSEY BULLDOG WRITES A RECORD-BREAKING CHAPTER

Jersey Bulldog, a two-year-old Standardbred pacing filly sired by global sensation Bulldog Hanover, exploded onto the Canadian harness racing scene in 2026. Bred by Mark Mullen and Stephen Dey of New Jersey and purchased at the Harrisburg Yearling Sale, she delivered a series of historic performances at Woodbine Mohawk Park in Milton, Ontario. Trained by John Pentland and driven with relentless aggression by Bob McClure, the filly proved that the jaw-dropping, record-shattering genes of her sire translate directly to the next generation.

Jersey Bulldog delivered her signature performance on October 10, 2026, capturing the $350,000 OSS Super Final for rookie pacing fillies in an astonishing 1:48.1. Sent off as the 5-2 second choice, McClure positioned her fourth early before making an aggressive move before the half-mile pole (:54.1), clearing the field and holding off 4-5 favorite Aceandaten by a length.

That clocking didn't just win the race—it smashed the Canadian, track, and Ontario Sires Stakes records, slicing more than a full second off the previous benchmark.

BECKWITH AND ENGBLOM SECURE TITLES AS BIG M MEET CONCLUDES

The 2026 Winter-Spring-Championship Meet at Meadowlands Racetrack concluded in spectacular fashion on Hambletonian Day, with driver Brett Beckwith and trainer Per Engblom walking away with the top honors for their respective occupations. Both secured the coveted dash-win titles, cementing their status at the peak of the sport after a thrilling meet at The Big M.



Brett Beckwith with Jason Settlemoir, Meadowlands Racetrack's Chief Operating Officer and General Manager. Lisa Photo

For the 23-year-old Beckwith, the driver title represents a remarkable back-to-back feat. Despite spending two months away from the track earlier this year recovering from injuries suffered in a racing spill, the young reinsman bounced back without missing a beat. Beckwith finished the championship meet with 101 victories, holding off a strong push from runner-up Joe Bongiorno by a margin of 10 wins. Following the conclusion of the meet, Beckwith's stellar performance across the broader 2026 calendar year pushed his stats to 122 wins from 579 starts at the Meadowlands, yielding over $1.5 million in total purse earnings.

"I ended up with more wins this year than I did last year during the meet," Beckwith noted following the trophy presentation. "I missed two months and I was just thankful that when I came back, I had the support from a lot of people, including Per."



Per Engblom with Jason Settlemoir, Meadowlands Racetrack's Chief Operating Officer and General Manager. Lisa Photo

On the training side, Per Engblom claimed the trainer dash title after an exceptional season managing a dominant stable. The powerful partnership between Engblom and Beckwith was on full display throughout the meet, culminating in major milestones—including Beckwith securing his very first career drive in the historic, $1 million Hambletonian behind Engblom's trainee, Captain Naughty.

The meet also featured massive stakes programs, with the track distributing portions of an estimated $18.5 million in overall seasonal stakes purses, highlighted by the star-studded $2.5 million Meadowlands Pace card in July and the $3 million total stakes portfolio on Hambletonian Day. With the championship meet wrapped up, Beckwith remains in a prime position to pursue his second consecutive yearly driving title at the Meadowlands, further solidifying a breakout year defined by resilience and elite performance.

SBOANJ ANNOUNCES RESIDENT MARE REBATE FOR 2026 FOALS

The SBOANJ's resident mare rebate for 2026 is $1000, designated for mares who reside in New Jersey 150 days, inclusive of foaling.

Please register foals early and include USTA foal registration along with the application and send to the SBOANJ no later than October 31. Foal registration must be included with application.

You must be a current SBOANJ member and have a 2025 W9 on file in order to receive your resident mare awards money.

For more information, please visit www.sboanj.com or call 732-462-2357.

There are membership and W9 forms on the SBOANJ website for your convenience.





TROT PAC

TrotPAC trustees continue to attend many political leaders' fundraisers during these uncertain times to help ensure the long-term viability of Standardbred racing and breeding in New Jersey. With the recent changes in Legislators it is more important than ever that TrotPAC make its presence known in Trenton. TrotPAC trustees must now educate and promote the importance of our industry to the new Governor and State Legislators. Most recently TrotPAC trustees attended events for the following people: Senator Paul Sarlo, Senator Vin Gopal, Assemblyman Clinton Calabrese, Assemblywoman Lisa Swain, Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald, Assemblyman Al Barlas, Assemblyman Alex Sauickie, Senator Benjie E. Wimberly, and Senator John Burzichelli.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As we head into the thick of autumn and our fall yearling sales, the state of New Jersey harness racing has a renewed energy. Rumors of the sport's decline at The Big M were put to rest with our joint announcement alongside Meadowlands Racetrack: we are turning a challenge into a major victory for the Garden State breeding and racing economy.

Looking Ahead to the 2027 Meadowlands Summer Meet

When the Hambletonian Society announced its relocation, Jeff Gural and the SBOANJ moved swiftly to protect our participants. On July 24th and July 31st, we are launching a brand-new, high-stakes lineup designed to keep the sport's premier horses right here in New Jersey:

- The $1-Million Meadowlands Trot (3-Year-Old Open, $3,000 sustaining payment due Feb. 15 / $10,000 starting fee)
- The $500,000 Meadowlands Oaks Trot (3-Year-Old Fillies, $2,000 sustaining payment due Feb. 15 / $5,000 starting fee)
- Enhanced Purses for fixtures like the Dancer, Miller, Cane Pace, Graduate Open Trot, Graduate Open Pace, NJ Classic Trot Finals.

Crucially, this partnership allows trainers to compete for massive purses over a concentrated schedule without the time and expense of constant cross-country shipping. It also reinforced commitments from top Breeder Syndicate Managers like Kevin Greenfield keeping star studs Tactical Landing and Karl anchored in New Jersey. (A quick reminder for 2027 eligibility: participating 2- and 3-year-olds must trace to stallions nominated by the February 15, 2026 deadline.)

Before we turn the calendar to 2027, all eyes are on Eldorado Scioto Downs in Columbus, Ohio, as the 2026 Breeders Crown gets underway with eliminations this weekend and the $7.2+ million finals on October 23–24.

On behalf of the entire SBOANJ Board, we want to wish the best of luck to every New Jersey-connected owner, driver, trainer, and caretaker shipping west. Representing the Garden State on harness racing's biggest world championship stage takes immense dedication, and we'll be cheering you on under the Scioto lights.

As you know the Lexington Sale was a great success. A review of both Lexington and Harrisburg sales will be highlighted in the next Pacesetter.

Safe travels and good racing,

Mark Ford



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