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**Diamond Creek's
CONFEDERATE
is voted U.S. Horse of the Year.**

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Monday, February 26, 2024



Dave Landry
Confederate
(Tim Tetrick) is
the Horse of the
Year and Pacer
of the Year for
2023.

Confederate tops phenomenal year with U.S. Horse of the Year title

The superstar pacer capped a phenomenal 2023 campaign by his owner and breeder Diamond Creek Farm. He was also voted Pacer of the Year and sophomore pacing colt of the year as Diamond Creek had a piece of 11 Dan Patch awards.

story by Ken Weingartner / USTA media relations manager for USHWA

quotes by Dave Briggs

Harness racing's richest and fastest performer last season, **Confederate**, added another honor to his résumé Sunday (Feb. 25) when he was named the 2023 Horse of the Year to conclude the U.S. Harness Writers Association's Dan Patch Awards banquet, presented by Caesars Entertainment, at Rosen Centre in Orlando, FL.

Confederate, a 3-year-old colt who also received Pacer of the Year on Sunday, was named Horse of the Year on 112 of the 129

returned ballots. Three-year-old colt **Tactical Approach**, who was announced as Trotter of the Year on Sunday, was second with seven votes.

They were followed by 3-year-old pacing filly Sylvia Hanover with three, 4-year-old pacing gelding Bythemissal and 4-year-old trotting mare Jiggy Jog S with two, and 6-year-old trotting stallion It's Academic and 2-year-old trotting colt Karl with one.

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ABOUT HARNESS RACING UPDATE

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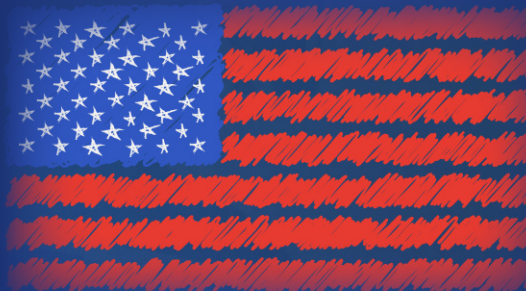
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Dave Landry

Tactical Approach (Scott Zeron) was named the 2023 Trotter of the Year and was runner-up in the Horse of the Year voting.

Confederate became the eighth 3-year-old male pacer this century to be honored as Horse of the Year, and the 20th overall since the award was first given in 1947.

In balloting for Pacer of the Year, Confederate received 122 votes to top a group of four horses to receive at least one nod. In balloting for Trotter of the Year, Tactical Approach garnered 99 votes, followed by Jiggy Jog 5 with 10 and Karl with nine. Four other trotters received at least one vote.

Confederate won 13 of 15 races last season and earned \$1.63 million. In addition to leading the sport in purses, Confederate became the fastest 3-year-old pacer in history thanks to his 1:46.1 score in September at Lexington's Red Mile. His time bettered the previous mark by three-fifths of a second and only four older pacers have gone faster, topped by Bulldog Hanover's 1:45.4 mile in 2022.

A son of Sweet Lou—Geothermal, Confederate was trained by Brett Pelling, driven by Tim Tetrick, owned by Diamond Creek Racing, and bred by Diamond Creek Farm. Diamond Creek Racing was honored as the 2023 Owner of the Year while Diamond Creek Farm was the Breeder of the Year.

"It's the culmination of the hard work and the blood sweat and tears that everybody's poured into it and the Super Bowl and NBA championship all wrapped up in one, said Diamond Creek owner and founder Adam Bowden, who added that winning the Horse of the Year title with a homebred was, "the ultimate. I don't know that there is a bigger crowning achievement."

Bowden started Diamond Creek 18 years ago and even brought his banker to the Dan Patch Awards partly to prove he wasn't crazy to have started a horse farm.

"My father and I started it, and his father that introduced me to the sport," Bowden said. "Now I get to pass it on to my kids."

Bowden was clearly delighted his young son and daughter took center stage at the Dan Patch Awards.

"You saw my son, so you know, he's obsessed and it runs through his blood, too. So, it's kind of nice, and there's four generations, they're all wrapped up in one horse."

Earlier in the evening, Bowden thanked trainer Brian Brown for conditioning Confederate at 2 and for always being the first person to text after Confederate won a race at 3 while in Pelling's barn.

The colt was Pelling's second Horse of the Year winner in three years, joining Test Of Faith in 2021, and his third overall, with Rocknroll Hanover in 2005. Tetrick has been the regular driver of three Horse of the Year honorees, with Confederate joining Shartin N in 2019 and Chapter Seven in 2012.

Pelling said his biggest point of emphasis was, "just making sure [Confederate] stayed strong. I think that was that was it more than anything... I never wanted to see him get tired.

"He's always been a high speed horse. So, I never felt he was going to be compromised by not being in the lead. He could chase horses down and everything."

Along the way, the trainer developed a deep admiration for Confederate.

“He is a beautiful, kind horse,” Pelling said. “He was eager to please. And you know, I’ve never thought the other Sweet Lous [I’ve trained] were mean. I haven’t had a lot of them, but I never thought they were my friends. But he was my friend.”

Confederate’s wins included the Meadowlands Pace, Breeders Crown, Cane Pace, Max C. Hempt Memorial, and Kentucky Sire Stakes Championship Series final. After finishing second by a head in the North America Cup, he reeled off 11 consecutive victories, with nine coming by two lengths or more.

Tactical Approach was the season’s richest trotter, with \$1.5 million in purses, good for 10th in history for a 3-year-old male trotter. The colt hit the board in 17 of 19 races, winning 10, with his triumphs including the Hambletonian, Breeders Crown and Kentucky Futurity.

A son of Tactical Landing—Sarcy, Tactical Approach was trained by Nancy Takter, driven by Scott Zeron, owned by Robert LeBlanc, John Fielding, and Joe Sbrocco & JAF Racing, and bred by Steve Stewart and Oakwood Farms. Zeron was the 2023 Driver of the Year.

Previously announced Dan Patch Award divisional champions also were honored Sunday at the banquet.

Division-winning pacers were 2-year-old colt **Captain Albano**, 2-year-old filly **Geocentric**, 3-year-old filly **Sylvia Hanover**, 4-year-old gelding **Bythemissal**, 5-year-old mare **Grace Hill**, and Confederate.

Division-winning trotters were 2-year-old colt **Karl**, 2-year-old filly **Soiree Hanover**, 3-year-old filly **Bond**, 6-year-old stallion **It’s Academic**, 4-year-old mare **Jiggy Jog S**, and Tactical Approach.

Other honorees included Stan Bergstein-Proximity Achievement Award winners Brittany Farms and Jason Settlemaier, Trainer of the Year Ake Svanstedt, and Rising Star Jay Hochstetler.

Also recognized at the banquet were the members of the 2024 Hall of Fame class, which will be inducted on July 7 in Goshen, N.Y.: Jim Campbell, Ed Lohmeyer, and David McDuffee, as well as communicators Tim Bojarski and the late Dave Brower.

A complete list of winners can be found [here](#) on the U.S. Harness Writers Association’s website. For complete Horse of the Year, Pacer of the Year, and Trotter of the Year vote totals, click [here](#).

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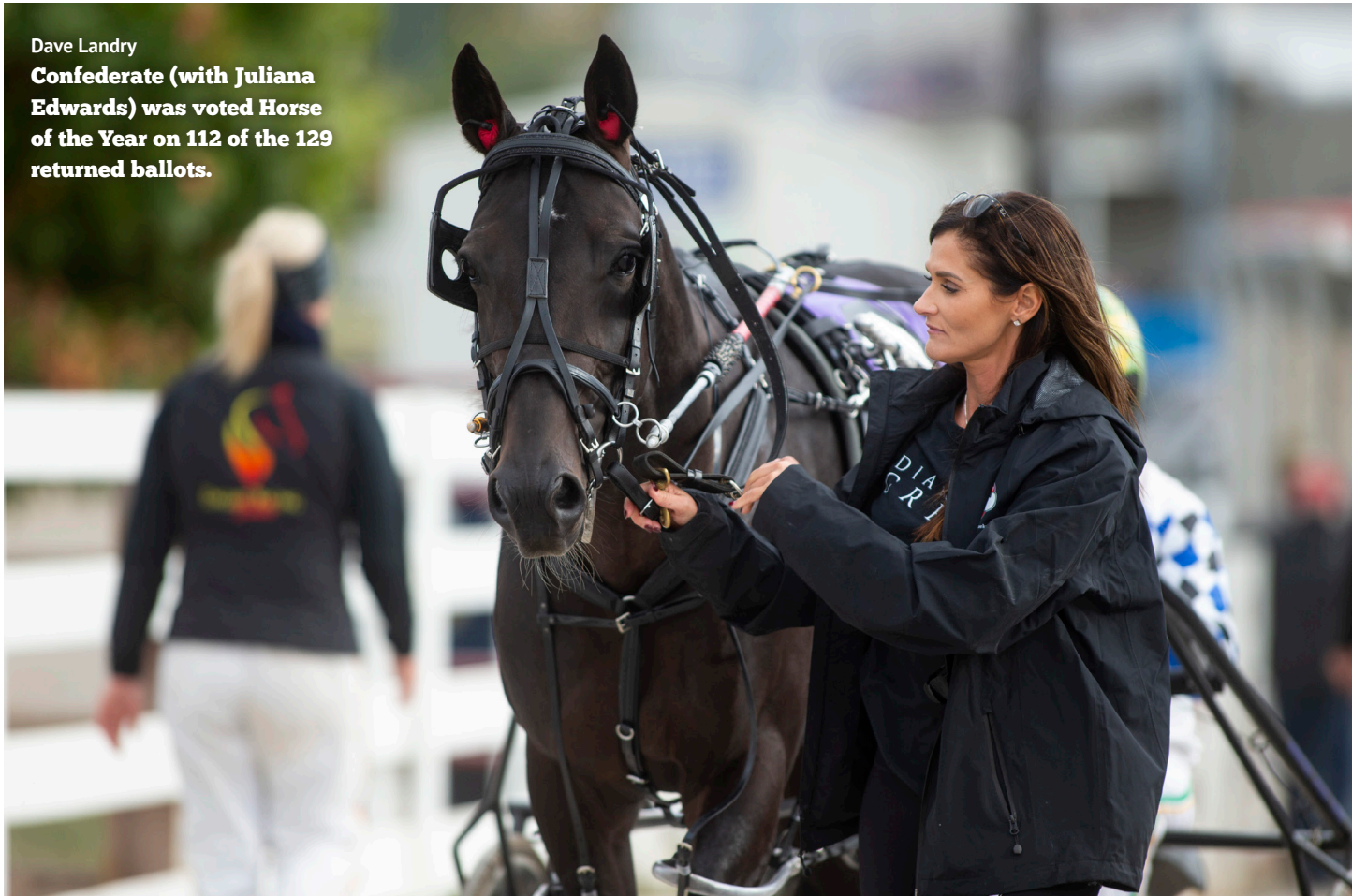


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Dave Landry

Confederate (with Juliana Edwards) was voted Horse of the Year on 112 of the 129 returned ballots.



SPEED WINS

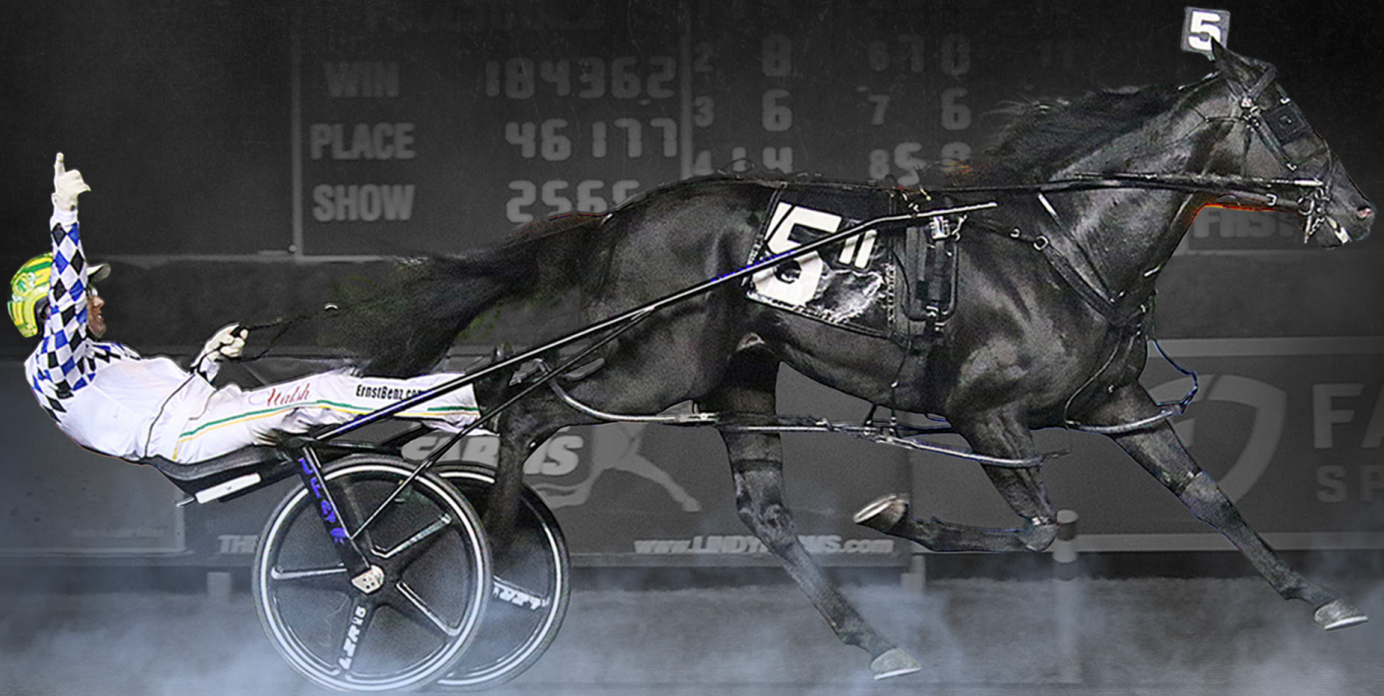
CONFEDERATE

Winner of the \$600,000 Breeders Crown Final | Earnings: \$2,077,554

Dan Patch 3YO Pacing Colt of the Year

Thank you to his entire team and enthusiastic supporters for an exceptional championship season.

And congratulations to the **Diamond Creek Farm** team for being honored as **Owner and Breeder of the Year**. The recognition is a sign of an unwavering commitment to excellence in the equine industry. With the support of dedicated owners and breeders, we look forward to continued success.



Confederate's abilities are unquestionable, but it's his willingness to compete that gives me the utmost admiration for him.

-Brett Pelling



CONFEDERATE

Sweet Lou-Geothermal, by A Rocknroll Dance
(1:46.1, \$2,074,054)



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EUROPEAN REPORT



with **THOMAS HEDLUND**

Magnifique! Hussard du Landret wins marathon Prix de Paris

by Thomas Hedlund

The third and concluding Grand Prix-race during Paris' winter meeting, the \$430,000 Prix de Paris, was on Vincennes' Sunday (Feb. 25) race card and the spectators got to see an outstanding performance by one of France's true fighters.

Benoit Robin-trained **Hussard du Landret** (Bird Parker), who has been one of the most successful horses at Vincennes during

the last two seasons, proved strongest in the 4,150 meters long marathon race.

Paired with Yoann Lebourgeois, Hussard du Landret had to trot the entire race in second line — and most of the time first over — a few lengths behind leader Izoard Vedaquais.

The pace was high throughout the whole race and Izoard Vedaquais was fired up in the lead. The horses in front of the field battled until the end, but leader Izoard Vedaquais was beaten and tired before the last turn and Hussard du Landret became the new leader, with horses like Hooker Berry, Ganay de Banville and Inmarosa chasing from behind.

Hussard du Landret kept his pace strong in the stretch and the performance was truly mind blowing as he took a safe win in Paris' third Grand Prix for the season. The mile rate for 4,150 meters (approximately 2.6 miles) was 1:55.3. Contesting the uphill part of the track two times is a demanding task and, historically, Prix de Paris' previous record time was 1:58, set by Diable de Vauvert 2022.

Inmarosa finished strongly as the runner up ahead of Hooker Berry.

The next big race at Vincennes is on Saturday (March 2), when Idao de Tillard will contest the \$250,000 Prix de Selection. After that, the meeting in Paris is over for this winter.

Prix de Paris [replay](#).



Gerard Forni

Hussard du Landret (Yoann Lebourgeois) won the 4,150-metre (2.6 miles) \$430,000 Prix de Paris on Sunday at Vincennes in a mile rate of 1:55.3.

IDAO DE TILLARD GETS FIRST INVITE TO ELITLOPPET

May might seem far away, but time flies and spring approaches, even in the cold and dark Nordic European countries. Already on Saturday afternoon (Feb. 24), the harness racing fans got a taste of spring as the first invitation to Elitloppet was announced by Solvalla's sports manager Anders Malmrot. And the first horse receiving a ticket to Solvalla's big event on May 26 is French top trotter and Prix d'Amérique winner Idao de Tillard, trained by Thierry Duvaldestin. Idao de Tillard might very well be the best older trotter in the world right now and this is of course a big honor for Solvalla, to attract a horse like Idao de Tillard. Great news for all harness racing fans in the world.

BIG UPSET IN CRITERIUM DES JEUNES

Three-year-old trotters battled in the \$220,000 Criterium des Jeunes at Vincennes on Sunday (Feb. 18) last week and the event ended with a massive upset winner (90-1) as Louis Baudron trained **La Joyeuse Wicz** (Fabulous Wood) sprinted to victory for a quite unknown driver named Gwenn Junod.

Junod served the 3-year-old filly a ground saving trip as fourth on the inside and when La Joyeuse Wicz found a gap between horses in the last turn, she had plenty of speed to use in the stretch.

Louis Baudron's trotter won in a mile rate of 1:59.4 over 1.6 miles.

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Leap To Fame earns spot in \$1 million Miracle Mile at Menangle

by Adam Hamilton

Down Under's biggest sprint race is really taking shape, but with three crucial chapters still to play out.

If you've read this column recently, you'll know **Leap To Fame** is the pin-up pacer in Australasia and he is certainly the horse they all have to beat in Saturday's (March 9) \$1 million Miracle Mile at Menangle.

Some markets have him as short as \$1.80 (for a \$1 bet).

Despite his greatness, Leap To Fame is more a stayer than speedster so the mile takes him out of his comfort zone.

That said, he toyed with his rivals, albeit in moderate company, to post his 34th win from just 44 starts in last Friday night's (Feb. 23) \$100,000 Group 2 Newcastle Mile.

Trainer-driver Grant Dixon deliberately targeted Newcastle because victory would guarantee Leap To Fame a Miracle Mile spot and also a 15-day break between races.

The champion Queensland horseman thinks it will be a key advantage over his seven rivals in the Miracle Mile, given all of them will have to qualify through one of the three remaining lead-up races at Menangle this Saturday night (March 2).

Those races are the \$250,000 Chariots Of Fire for 4-year-olds and two \$100,000 Group 2 qualifying sprint races for open-class pacers.

More of those races soon.

Dixon is maximizing the gap between races by taking Leap To Fame on an eight-hour road trip from Newcastle back to his Tambourine stables outside of Brisbane just hours after last Friday night's win.

"He was home in his own yard just after lunchtime Saturday," he said. "Nothing beats training them at home. We thought



seriously about leaving him down at Menangle, but the trip down to Newcastle was so easy, we thought we'd just take him back home again straight away.

"We'll wait as late as possible before heading down to Menangle, but knowing he'll need to be there sometime on Thursday [next week] to go into the retention barn."

It's that retention barn which concerns Dixon as much as any of Leap To Fame's likely rivals in the Miracle Mile.

"He's a stallion who trains out of a paddock at home and he's got to stand in a box for a couple of days before he races," Dixon said. "He doesn't enjoy that, it's not ideal. I don't have an issue with the concept of the retention barn, but it suits some horses better than others.

"When you combine that with the short distance, which doesn't play to his strength, it's far from an ideal race for him. I'll be honest, if it wasn't worth so much and didn't mean so much to Kevin [Seymour, owner], I'd happily stay home and give it a miss."

Seymour, a leviathan owner, breeder and sponsor of Aussie harness, has won every major race in his homeland except the Miracle Mile.

Leap To Fame is trying to create history as the first pacer to win Australia's "Triple Crown" – the Inter Dominion pacing final, Hunter Cup and Miracle Mile in the same campaign.

"The other two were staying races and this is a sprint, so it'll be by far the hardest of the lot to win," Dixon said. "We'll need a good draw and a lot of luck, but we couldn't have him any better going into it and I love the 15 days between races."

Let's get back to that 4-year-old crop, which looms ominously for Leap To Fame in the Miracle Mile.

They will all clash in Australasia's biggest 4-year-old feature, the \$250,000 Group 1 Chariots Of Fire at Menangle on Saturday night.

Heading the crop is Mark and Nathan Purdon's latest young star Don't Stop Dreaming, who posted his 14th win from just 20 starts when he cruised to victory against older rivals in a 2,300m free-for-all at Menangle last night.

It was little more than trackwork as Purdon worked to the front, dictated terms and blasted home in :25.7sec to win seemingly without being extended.

History says the Chariots Of Fire is a superb Miracle Mile pointer with the past eight Chariots winners either winning or finishing top three in the Miracle Mile.

The one change this year is the Chariots is only a week before the Mile, which will present a bigger challenge for the 4-year-olds to back up so quickly.

But Don't Stop Dreaming, Its Merlin, Jason Grimson's new star Frankie Ferocious and brilliant Bathurst pacer Better Be The Best make for a heck of a Chariots.



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“[Leap To Fame is] a stallion who trains out of a paddock at home and he’s got to stand in a box for a couple of days before he races. He doesn’t enjoy that, it’s not ideal. I don’t have an issue with the concept of the retention barn, but it suits some horses better than others.”

~ Grant Dixon

CATCH A WAVE OUT OF MIRACLE MILE

Brilliant Victorian pacer Catch A Wave won’t defend his Miracle Mile crown.

The 5-year-old, who burst into the big league winning the Chariots Of Fire/Miracle Mile double this time last year, sustained an injury in last Friday night’s (Feb. 23) Geelong Rocket.

But driver Kate Gath couldn’t hide her relief after an exhaustive veterinary inspection the following morning.

“We feared the worst... he was very lame after the race,” she said. “By the time we got him back to his stall, he couldn’t put his foot on the ground. He took a couple of steps and the vet said, ‘don’t let him walk anymore.’”

Catch A Wave was medicated, returned to Team Gath’s stables and seemed better the next morning.

“I still couldn’t believe it when Andy [Gath’s husband and trainer of Catch A Wave] rang me and said all they could find was a corn. They cut it out and said he should be right to go again in a couple of weeks.”

Catch A Wave has raced 33 times for 19 wins, six placings and banked almost \$1.3 million.

JUST BELIEVE WINS TROTTING GRAND PRIX

It wasn’t all just about the pacers Down Under last weekend.

Champion trotter **Just Believe** further stamped his greatness with a remarkable win in the Group 1 Australian Trotting Grand Prix (2240m) at Melton.

Fresh off a very rare defeat by French-bred European import Callmethebreeze in the Group 1 Great Southern Star final on Feb. 3, it was revenge time last Saturday night (Feb. 24).

Helped by a daring and stunning Greg Sugars drive, Just Believe sprouted wings from a seemingly hopeless position to snatch a last stride win from emerging star Arcee Phoenix.

Callmethebreeze wasn’t the same horse he was in the Great Southern Star. He worked to the lead, but was struggling before the finish bend and finished a well beaten fourth.

Just Believe, who campaigned so well during a three-race Swedish raid in the middle of last year, has raced 10 times since returning home for nine wins and a second.

He’s now won 27 of his 70 starts with another 21 placings and banked over \$1.1 million.

Just Believe’s next major target is another overseas trip for the inaugural \$575,000 TAB Trot slot race at Cambridge in New Zealand on April 12.

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SWEET LOU

THE DECADE OF "LOU" PACING SIRE OF THE YEAR

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CONFEDERATE

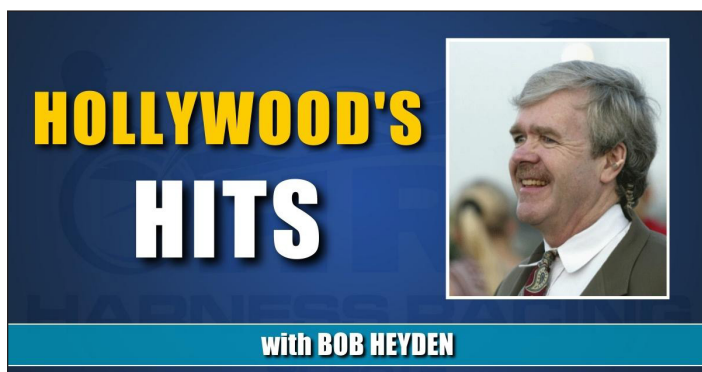
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FULL IN 2024 FOR THE 10TH YEAR IN A ROW



Dave McConnaughey gone but, hopefully, no longer forgotten

by Bob Heyden

His name was Dave McConnaughey. He would have been 80 years old on Sunday (Feb. 18). He never made it past 22, killed in action in Vietnam on March 30, 1966, eight months after he was drafted at age 21. Coming up on 58 years ago. McConnaughey was part of a harness racing loving family, that relocated when he was a wee kid, from Hillsboro, OH to the Lebanon Fairgrounds because they wanted to be closer to the sport they loved/lived 24/7. It was twin brothers Ronald and Donald, 13 years Dave's senior, as well as mom, Bertha, and dad, Mason. Even sister Joy married a man who would become a racing official in Ohio, Bobby Gray. A family dedication of the highest order.

Dave was an eager young driver, and a good one. Here's his line from the 1965 Trotting and Pacing Guide from the 1964 Spring Fair Meet at Lebanon Raceway: 47 11-6-6 .348, good for third in the final tally. He was 20-years-old. In his two years of driving, he won 28 then 35 races. In his first 21 fair races, he hit the board in 14 of them.

Mike Woebkenberg, the starter of more than 100,000 career races and still going strong — currently starting at Miami Valley — idolized Dave to a degree. "Oh yes, there was an eight- or nine-year age difference and I was 12 or so, but I sure looked up to him," Woebkenberg said. "He was going to be the next superstar, the next great driver. That was the buzz back then."

Woebkenberg said the whole family made their living at the races.

"The brothers had green and orange colors and green and white," Woebkenberg said. "They always had three, four horses at a time and a good one in Mister Budmite. They did a lot of their work with trotters like him. The family was known for using sheepskin back then."

"We lost Bill Bailey to Vietnam back then, Ronny Millington went too, but he came back."

David L. McConnaughey is how his name appears on the Vietnam Memorial. There are 58,220 names with 1,919 from Ohio and 10 from Lebanon. The army private first class is honored on panel 6E, line 67 of the wall.

Some good souls have left remembrances online for PFC McConnaughey, here are a few:

- Jerry Sandwisch posted on 11/2/17, "The war may be forgotten, but the warrior will always be remembered. All Gave Some- Some Gave All. Rest In Peace David."
- On 2/14/03 Donald Lytle said in part, "As a fellow Buckeye, I say 'Thank you.' As a Veteran, I say 'Job Well Done Soldier.'"
- Lucy Micik posted on 8/2/20, "Dear PFC David McConnaughey, Thank you for your service as an Infantryman with the 1st Cavalry. Saying thank you isn't enough, but it is from the heart. Time passes quickly, but our world needs help. Please watch over America, it stills needs your strength, courage, guidance and faithfulness. Rest in peace with the angels."
- Ross Snyder on 3/31/17 posted in part, "I knew Davey and his family while growing up in Lebanon, OH. It was so tragic when Davey was killed. He was [a] great harness racing driver who had so much more to offer here on earth."

That last sentence is the one that got me dumped out of the lawn chair into action.

"So much more to offer."

For a second let's look at the probably unfair comparison to Peter Haughton, a shining light in the industry who was lost to an auto accident at age 25 in 1980.

Peter Haughton was the "Chosen One."

Dave McConnaughey is the "Forgotten One," by us, the industry, for the most part. I get it, there were 56 fairs in Ohio — from Ashland to Zanesville; from Lebanon the first, to Lancaster the

"Oh yes, there was an eight- or nine-year age difference and I was 12 or so, but I sure looked up to [Dave McConnaughey]," Woebkenberg said. "He was going to be the next superstar, the next great driver. That was the buzz back then."

~ Mike Woebkenberg

“ I knew Davey and his family while growing up in Lebanon, OH. It was so tragic when Davey was killed. He was [a] great harness racing driver who had so much more to offer here on earth. ”

~ Ross Snyder

last — during 1964-65. There was no simulcasting then. Herve Filion was just about to enter the 1,000-win club. It was that far back.

Peter was born into racing royalty and had no problem rolling up his sleeves.

Dave's family was one of many on the fair circuit, in many ways the essence of the industry.

Dave was drafted in May 1965 and made his way to Vietnam by October that year. It was in March we lost him. He died of small arms fire bullet wounds in an Army hospital March 30, 1966. The story first appeared in the Lebanon Post and Star on April 2.

His family? Mom, Bertha, passed at 68 on April 11, 1978. Dad at 75 in February 1977. The twin brothers are also no longer here. Donald died on Feb. 29, 1984 and has a harness horse on his headstone. Ronald passed at 66 on Sept. 17 1996 and a winner's circle picture of a standardbred is his headstone. All are buried together. Dave's headstone reads: David L. McConnaughey Section H Lot 118-1 PFC TRP A 9 CAV I Cav DIV

No, Dave is not James Dean with a frozen-in-time-oh-what could-have-been look on his face. And he was not very likely heading to a Peter Haughton like career. His aspirations in the sport were not to be. He would not see Bret Hanover win his third straight Horse of the Year title, He loved standardbreds and his country, paying the ultimate price. He never would make it to Goshen, NY, 633 miles away, to either go in himself or root on some of his buddies who did. Heck, maybe David McDuffee, half a dozen years older than Dave McConnaughey, would have noticed Dave and referred to as “kid” on Hall Night 2024. Nobody knows.

For too long his name has been one of many from a war most have long since etch-a-sketched from their life. In the 1960s, our nightly news led off with a body count from Vietnam. The war went from 1961-75. Dave found what he wanted to do and maybe he would have been the most famous driving Buckeye “Dave” pre-Dave Miller, who got his start in the Ohio fair circuit too.

To quote Mike Woebkenberg again, “Then Vietnam happened.”

Casualties rarely had an eternal flame. We had a bad habit back here in the USA of lumping them all together; a horrible dream in search of some kind of ending. There was none. Masses of evil, 8,649 miles away were now part of our routine. You were far more likely in 1966 to see Walter Cronkite in a battlefield helmet than Dave with a driving one.

Personally, I want to shine the spotlight on those people/stories that remain dormant. How wonderful would it be to see Dave McConnaughey's name on an Ohio Fair Driver of the Year award? Or to see his bio in the Miami Valley/Northfield Park program. To remember his birthday going forward. He just turned the Big 8-0 with little, well no, fanfare. I have undertaken the task of not letting that happen again. He wasn't sky diving or treasure hunting in the deep ocean folks. He was serving his country! His obit was filler in the trades back near 60 years ago. Nobody's at fault. The magazines and the sport were deluged at the time. A pretty safe bet here is that Dave would have been chomping at the bit when his service was complete to get back to racing. He didn't get that choice. But we have one, to honor and remember and promote those who went above and beyond, all with a love of standardbred racing as the foundation. Dave seems to be a wonderful place to start.

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Judy Davis-Wilson, Debbie Little on ballot for Communicators Hall of Fame

Judy Davis-Wilson and Debbie Little were selected as the two candidates advancing to this summer's balloting for the Communicators Hall of Fame (CHOF), as determined during the Saturday (Feb. 24) directors meeting of the United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA).

Judy Davis-Wilson, from one of the leading extended families in Delaware harness racing, started out helping around the barn, then spent the next part of her racing life as a clerk of course and program director (including at the only harness meet at Canterbury) before spending several years as the stakes manager for the Hambletonian Society. She then returned to Delaware and has been the major force behind that state's Sire Stakes program for over two decades. Davis-Wilson served as treasurer and president of USHWA, and was the Association's Member of the Year in 2013.

Debbie Little held several jobs learning the standardbred communication ropes before earning the position of harness racing reporter for the New York Post, handicapping at several tracks while writing about both the local and the national harness scene. Little is now the associate editor and a regular columnist for Harness Racing Update. A Hervey Award winner, Little has also been President of USHWA and the USHWA's of the Year (2022), and with her placement on the CHOF ballot, she uniquely has the opportunity to join her husband Dave (a 2018 inductee) in the Communicators Hall.

Davis-Wilson and Little will go before the USHWA voters during the midsummer balloting for Communicators Hall of Fame election, as will those nominees for the sport's Hall of Fame determined during a July meeting of USHWA's screening committee, to be held in Goshen, NY. A nominee must get three-quarters of the yes-no votes in order to receive their grand honor. Announcements are usually made within a couple of days of the Labor Day weekend.

A summary release of the directors and membership meetings of USHWA will be sent out this midweek, after the honorees at the Dan Patch Awards Banquet, presented by Caesars Entertainment, get their rightful spotlight call following the Sunday night dinner.

The United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA) is the leading group of communicators about the standardbred horse. USHWA conducts the official annual balloting for the sport's most prestigious honors: induction to the Hall of Fame and Communicators Hall of Fame, along with the selection of the Horse of the Year, Trotter and Pacer of the Year, and the leading divisional horses of each season. Each year USHWA hosts the Dan Patch Awards Banquet, honoring the best and brightest performers in North American harness racing. This banquet is the Association's principal source of funding, and with generous financial support from the harness racing and breeding industry, USHWA is able to host the banquet at a world-class facility in a first-class manner.

United States Harness Writers Association

Necropsy results on Meadowlands equine fatality

On Friday (Jan. 26) the 5-year-old pacing mare Phenom Seelster died during the contesting of race 7 on the card at The Meadowlands.

Phenom Seelster was owned by Daniel Sarafian, trained by Per Engblom and driven on that night by Matt Athearn.

As is done in all cases of equine mortality at The Meadowlands, Tioga and Vernon Downs, Phenom Seelster was sent for necropsy at the expense of the racetrack.

The necropsy was performed at the [New Jersey Animal Health Diagnostic Lab](#) which reported the cause of death as a ruptured pulmonary artery aneurysm.

Nick Salvi / The Meadowlands

Oakwood Ardan IR wins sixth straight at Big M

Facing his toughest test yet, the incredible **Oakwood Ardan IR** passed with flying colors once again, registering his sixth win in as many starts since shipping in from Great Britain last September in the Saturday night (Feb. 24) feature at The Meadowlands.

The Robert Cleary-trained Irish-bred set foot for the first time on North American soil last fall and qualified a winner at Harrah's Philadelphia on Nov. 28 in 1:56.4.

His first parimutuel start came at The Big M on Dec. 16 and the 5-year-old gelded son of Sweet Lou—Trend Setter hit the ground running — or pacing, if you prefer — scoring from off the pace in 1:50.4.

Saturday night, bumping up in class to the high-end non-winners of \$14,000 level where he would have to face foes older than 5 for the first time, Oakwood Ardan IR chalked up his sixth straight Big M score in the \$18,000 event.

“He’s not bad,” said Cleary with a laugh. “He does what he likes to do. Chase down horses.”

Sent to the gate for a fifth straight outing as an odds-on favorite, driver Andy McCarthy had Oakwood Ardan IR sitting off the action in fifth early as longshot Ever Hoping A led at the quarter in :28.4 before 2-1 second choice American Dealer N grabbed control at the half in :57.

At that moment, McCarthy asked for speed and got it, as Oakwood Ardan IR moved to the outside and quickly sprinted up to challenge the leader, and was just a head behind that foe at three-quarters in 1:25.3. Oakwood Ardan IR then had little trouble through the stretch, easing to the lead before polishing off a safe half-length score in 1:52.3 using a :27 final quarter to keep American Dealer N at bay. Captain Cowboy was third.

“I didn’t think he’d be this good,” said Cleary. “But after I trained him, I knew he was a pretty talented horse. He’s got real high speed. His biggest asset is, whoever is in front of him, he wants to run them down. We’re just going to take care of him and go week to week, step by step and protect our horse.”

“What makes me happiest is that the owners are the best people in the world. They love watching their horse on a Saturday night and are the most loyal people in the business who are the nicest to deal with. They deserve a horse like this.”

As the 3-5 public choice, Oakwood Ardan IR returned \$3.20 to win and has now won 15 of 34 lifetime outings for owners Royal Wire Products Inc.

A LITTLE MORE: McCarthy finished the night with five winners on the card, becoming only the second driver to turn the trick in 2024. Jason Bartlett was the other (on Jan. 19). Crissy Crissman-Bier and Jeff Cullipher led the trainers with two wins apiece. Betting stayed brisk as all-source handle totaled \$3,218,328, giving The Big M nine consecutive programs when wagering has gone past the \$3-million mark. Overall, total action has been over \$3 million on 13 of 15 programs this year. Racing resumes Friday at 6:20 p.m.

Dave Little / Meadowlands media relations



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