

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2016

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## EDITOR'S EYE

# Top Ten 3-year-old pacers for 2016

By Derick Givner

Now midway through April, with the next wave of stakes payments due today (Friday), we are starting to see some of the elite 2-year-old pacers from 2015 return to the track for qualifying action. One from my Top 10 list actually showed up at The Meadowlands last Saturday, prompting this column of my leading 3-year-old pacing prospects this year.

My criteria for evaluating horses that likely haven't started since last Fall involves almost equal parts "feel" and pure data. Pure speed is a factor. If a horse is fast as a 2-year-old, they are likely to be at least as fast a year later. But at least you can measure speed. You have to watch a horse race to determine class and "heart".

In the end, below is simply my best educated guess. I'm sure many of you will disagree and I'm even more sure as these horses return to the races, some will underperform and others will shine. Let's dig in with the countdown.

## 10-AMERICAN PASSPORT

He didn't win his first race until late September last year, but displayed good speed at both ends of his miles and hinted at big ability. He should be coming north from Florida any day now to qualify at The Meadowlands.

## 9-SHEZAREALDEAL

Ross Croghan trainee made a good deal of money (\$353,336) as a rookie while displaying impressive speed. I'm hesitant to use three fillies on my list since the boys go for so much more money, but I'd be more upset if I left her off and she had a big year. She qualified on April 9 at Pompano in 1:55, finishing third.



DERICK GIVNER

**Tony Alagna trains two of Givner's early Spring favorites for 2016.**

## 8-BIG TOP HANOVER

He was one of five quality 3-year-olds that Yannick Gingras had a choice of driving last Saturday (4/9) in a qualifier and he stuck with this \$450,253 earner. He was on the rim briefly on the final turn and ducked inside to finish up willingly. Western Ideal colt showed promise at age 2... let's see how he progresses in terms of speed.

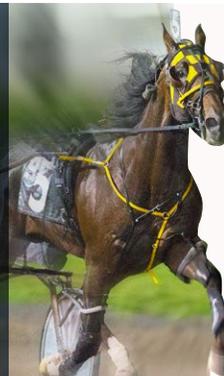
## 7-TRAVEL PLAYLIST

The numbers say he was the fastest rookie pacer. The son of Art Major-Village Madonna won in 1:49 2/5 at Vernon Downs, which is very impressive. While the speed is there, he made much of his money in NY Sire Stakes races and will still need to prove himself against Open company.

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# Pure Country is the No. 1 ranked filly on Giwner's Top Ten list

## 6-CONTROL THE MOMENT

This Well Said-sired colt was the only other 2-year-old to join Travel Playlist in the sub-1:50 club in 2015, pacing a 1:49 4/5 mile in his Metro Pace win. He did just about everything right until getting dethroned as the odds-on favorite in the Breeders Crown.

## 5-L A DELIGHT

She only lost once in 12 starts as a freshman and was seemingly unbeatable. But she never hooked up with the unbeaten Pure Country, so the jury is still out on which filly is better. The one thing we do know is that she is in top hands with Robert McIntosh training.

## 4-PURE COUNTRY

Undefeated filly was perfect in 10 starts and earned the most money by a 2-year-old pacer in 2015. Jimmy Takter-trained lass proved versatile by winning on the lead and off the pace, most of the time by open lengths. She trained Saturday morning (4/9) before the qualifiers and was said to have gone in about 1:55. I didn't see the mile, but I saw her in the paddock and she certainly looked the part of a champion. She will qual-



DERICK GIWNER

**Check Six finished third in his first qualifier of 2016 at The Meadowlands.**

ify on Saturday at the Meadowlands.

## 3-RACING HILL

He peaked late in 2015 and looked the part of a top horse. While he faltered in the Breeders Crown, he worked very hard during that race, and let's remember that he was the

second choice that night behind Control The Moment. My gut tells me that if he came out of the winter months with a bit more speed, he could be very dangerous. Like Tony Alagna stablemate American Passport, expect to see him returning soon.

## 2-CHECK SIX

This guy was one of the better (if not the best) 2-year-olds in Pennsylvania last year before getting derailed by a foot issue. He tried to make a late season comeback but just couldn't get up to speed quickly enough. I've heard good things about him in recent weeks and his comeback qualifier was solid (3rd, 1:53 2/5).

## 1-BOSTON RED ROCKS

As the Breeders Crown and Governors Cup winner, I'm giving him the respect of the No. 1 slot. Don't get me wrong, he raced super in the majority of his starts and is a very deserving Winter Book favorite, but I never felt like he separated himself from the pack as a clear-cut leader.

Hopefully the majority of the pacers above and a few new shooters enter the fray to produce a great year of racing. Good luck to all the connections. Dream big!

# Training the Harness Racing leaders of tomorrow

By Keith Gisser

While there will always be a generation gap in harness racing, we currently have a group of solid young leaders in this business, both on the backstretch and in the front office. As our fan base ages, these young people are critical to harness racing's survival. But they will age, just as the previous generations of young front office superstars did. Even The Meadowlands' Jason Settlemyre is almost 40! From where will the next generation come and how will they be trained?

Our business has never done a great job recruiting. Yes, there is the Racetrack Industry Program at the University of Arizona and Louisville's Equine Industry Program for college students, but other entities within our business have not offered enough, at least not in an organized manner. There have been some limited programs – I think the Clyde Hirt Workshop for aspiring journalists—held during Hambletonian week at the Meadowlands—is a great example, but we can do more.

When I was a publicist at Northfield Park, Dave Bianconi and I had several interns – Tyler Amos, Chris Williams and Wendy Ross to name a few, but in each case, they sought us out. We did not advertise an internship – paid or unpaid. Yet, those experiences were important for them.

"I started my internship at Northfield Park in the Winter of 2008 during my final semester at Youngstown State University," Ross explains. "I had a friend, who knew a friend, who put me in contact with Dave Bianconi.

I was a communication and public relations major so Dave insisted I be on TV. That led to the opportunities I have had. I still recommend to people, when they tell me that they want to be in the industry, to do an internship at a racetrack and learn the ins and outs of how things work. I am still very involved in the industry, although I did make a recent career change into pharmacy. I will still be on the Jug TV crew and my internship was truly the beginning of it all."

Ross's experience was valuable, but how many talented future managers or horsemen are we missing out on? That's why I am very pleased that the Harness Horse Youth Foundation has taken on the task of offering, organizing and publishing internship opportunities in our sport. The internship directory, at [www.hhyf.org/internships](http://www.hhyf.org/internships), is open to any racing related business that offers an internship program. Both paid and unpaid internships will be included, regardless of duration. I am very excited to have been chosen to be the point man on this initiative, so please send me your internship opportunities – whether you are a farm, stable, racetrack or other harness-racing related business. Send the details to [keith@hhyf.org](mailto:keith@hhyf.org) and I will get your information posted.

One of the great advantages of an internship as a training tool is its flexibility. It can be short-term or long-term, full-time or part-time. Here in Cleveland, Trinity High School offers a year-round, one-day a week internship program that currently includes 260 students and 80 employers annually during

the school year. My non-profit, the Herps Alive Foundation, has had a Trinity intern each of the past two years and both have been dependable, high-quality dedicated workers. Breeding farms may only need interns during spring foaling season. HHYF needs interns during its summer camp schedule. A racetrack probably won't need an intern if it is not racing live.

Ben Hollingsworth, now 24, served as an intern with the Harness Horse Youth Foundation in the summer of 2011 and 2012, shipping in from Truro, Nova Scotia. Last summer he moved on from his base in Eastern Canada to work for Tony Alagna. He also worked for Lindy Farms in 2014.

Hollingsworth explained, "As the HHYF intern I was responsible for teaching people in many different ways. I performed harnessing demos in front of Girl Guide groups, pony clubs and library groups. During the intense 5-Day camps at Pocono Downs, Vernon Downs, Gaitway Farms and Indiana Downs I would aid in teaching basic horsemanship skills while also teaching students how to harness and jog horses."

He continued, "After completing my university degree I worked for Tony Alagna in his Canadian Stable. Currently I am working as a second trainer for trotting trainer extraordinaire Benoit Baillargeon."

Internships can take many forms. As part of its educational mission, HHYF has introduced the opportunity to link highly-motivated young

# Santa Fe Beachboy aims to secure spot in Levy Memorial final

By Jay Bergman

There's a lot on the line this Saturday night at Yonkers Raceway. Though just three \$50,000 divisions of the George Morton Levy series were drawn, there are a host of horses on the outside of the \$607,000 final on April 23 hoping to squeak in. Ironically, one of those horses is the fastest preliminary leg winner, Santa Fe Beachboy. The 6-year-old son of Somebeachsomewhere could get into the final with a fourth-place finish providing there are no major upsets. Wiggle It Jiggleit, the 2015 Horse of the Year, was late to the first big dance of the season and he's got plenty of catching up to do on Saturday. A victory will give him an even 200 points, but that may not be enough should Domemethatagain, the 2015 Levy champion, hit the board.

There are many scenarios and the easiest way for Santa Fe Beachboy to stamp his ticket to the rich Levy final is to show up much like he did on April 2 when he cruised to a 1:50 2/5 mile.

"I think he can go in 1:50," said Rich Banca, who trains Santa Fe Beachboy. "In the first leg (March 19) he was just pushed too hard setting the pace and got tired."

Last week, Santa Fe Beachboy was used early taking a tuck and then pushed the pace hard without cover before tiring in the stretch.

"He went at it with Take It Back Terry," said Banca, accepting the fifth-place finish as the price of the difficult journey.

The draw didn't exactly work in Santa Fe Beachboy's favor for Saturday as he landed post six in the seven-horse sixth race division. Jason Bartlett will handle the lines for Banca, who had Santa Fe Beachboy join his stable in early March.

"Brian Brown sent him to me," said Banca. "He does such a great job that I didn't make any changes."

What Banca has done is limit the workload for his horse between starts and he feels that's kept him fresh.

Santa Fe Beachboy faces two horses that will likely be in the final in Mach It So (post 2) and Lucan Hanover (post 7). Foiled Again returns from a week off and drew the pole position in this field looking for a supporting role in the Levy consolation with a good effort. Domemethatagain may have to be more assertive this week if he's to earn a spot in the final. Dan Dube drives for trainer Rene Allard from post three.

It may still be quite early in the season for the aged pacing set, but Saturday's seventh race could provide a glimpse of what's in store at the highest level. That's because Bit Of A Legend N (post 4) will look for a preliminary leg sweep while meeting Wiggle It Jiggleit for the first time since shipping to North America.



MIKE LUZZI

Santa Fe Beachboy paced the fastest mile (1:50 2/5) in the Levy series this year.

No horse in this series has accomplished what Bit Of A Legend N has done to date, winning on the front and coming from last among his four triumphs in the series. Wiggle It Jiggleit faced adversity in his first trip over the track, finishing second after an impossible journey. Driver Montrell Teague needs a victory behind Wiggle It Jiggleit, but he will also have to overcome post seven as well as the aforementioned import.

Wiggle It Jiggleit was most impressive winning a division last week while sprinting home in 27 flat at the end of a 1:51 1/5 mile. Yet Bit Of A Legend N showed his star quality as well, taking the lead and making a rival work hard before yielding to a pocket trip. Driver Jordan Stratton, who has really come of age in the series, showed his cool in the stretch with Bit Of A Legend N clicking off his second straight 1:51 2/5 victory for trainer Pete Tritton.

P H Supercam drew the rail in the first \$50,000 division of the evening, race five on the program. The 2014 Levy champion has been limited by some tough racing luck in this series this year, but the pole position after last week's solid second to Wiggle It Jiggleit should hold him regain winning form.

Take It Back Terry, a three-leg winner has already secured a spot in the final and has taken the week off.

The 12-race program at Yonkers kicks off at 7:10 p.m.

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# Harness Horse Youth Foundation gets youngsters involved

adults with harness racing's top professionals, allowing them to experience first-hand the realities, responsibilities and requirements of our sport. The first of these "All-Star Interns" in 2016 was 17-year-old Travis Ceppaluni, who spent several days at the end of March shadowing superstar Tim Tetrick. Travis kept racing fans up to date through Twitter (@hhyfexperience) and Instagram (HarnessHorseYouth-Foundation) as well as on Facebook. Team Tetrick also used social media to share and promote the experience.

Was the experience worthwhile? Let's ask Ceppaluni.

"I wish words could describe how grateful I am," said Ceppaluni. "If it weren't for the HHYF I would not be anywhere close to where I am today. In saying that, if it were not for Team Tetrick, this amazing weekend would not have been possible. From beginning to end,

I felt as if I were right at home with you guys. I learned tons from Tim and many others along the way. While learning, I had tons of fun and really enjoyed spending time with the Tetrick family. Although I didn't think it was possible, I love the sport of harness racing even more after this trip. I hope one day that I can do all that you guys have done for me, for another young harness racing fanatic."

HHYF hopes to offer additional opportunities. Participants must apply to HHYF to be considered for selection and may select professionals in their area of interest, which may include driving, training, farm management and racetrack management, among others. Hopefully other racing related businesses will embrace the initiative so we can do more than just introduce our youth, but actually train them in how to work within the sport and become the next generation of harness racing leaders.



MIKE LIZZI

Travis Ceppaluni checks out Tim Tetrick's colors after spending a weekend with the driver as part of the Harness Horse Youth Foundation.

# Permanent move from Woodbine to Mohawk hardly a slam dunk decision

By Garnet Barnsdale

Woodbine Entertainment Group CEO, Jim Lawson, announced this month that plans are in the works for year-round harness racing at Mohawk Racetrack, adding that "our horsemen would love it". But the possibility of harness racing moving out of the city for good doesn't sit well with all local horsemen.

Prominent trainer Blair Burgess – despite living year-round a stone's throw from Mohawk – is one of the more vocal opponents of the plan. "Since I live in Campbellville and have a farm here, year-round racing at Mohawk would both enhance the value of my property and make my life as a trainer more convenient," said the two-time Hambletonian winning trainer. "With that being said, I still vehemently oppose moving to Mohawk full time."

Burgess mentioned the closing of several harness tracks (Windsor, Woodstock and Sudbury) since 2012, that was commensurate with the cancellation of the lucrative Slots at Racetracks program, as a concerning pattern.

"Additionally, Hiawatha and Georgian Downs have much reduced racing dates, which in the case of Georgian is a terrible shame as it is not only a well built and inviting facility for patrons and horsemen, it also boasts a good 5/8 mile track," said Burgess. "This has resulted in primarily half-mile track racing in Ontario for the majority of the year. Leaving Woodbine and moving full-time to Mohawk, despite there initially being no reduction in racing dates, will still mean the closing of yet another harness racing facility."

Burgess believes that moving out of the city will be bad for an already hurting business. "I argue that it is still crucial for harness racing to maintain any sort of presence in the Greater Toronto Area," said Burgess. "As harness racing sees very little media coverage as it is,



Trainer Blair Burgess

once it physically leaves the city it will get none. I know there will be some who say Milton is almost part of the city because of all the recent development and prime 401 access, however it is still a warehouse and bedroom community. Maybe more are too young to understand but Toronto does have a long history of harness racing with Dufferin Park, Thorncliffe Park, and of course Greenwood Raceway. When we leave Woodbine, harness racing will never come back to the city."

Another major issue for Burgess on the move involves WEG's announced plan to "winterize" Mohawk. "I don't believe WEG has carefully thought this through," he said. "I believe [Jim Lawson] said they would spend 3 million on upgrades at Mohawk. That is peanuts and would in no way allow us to make Mohawk into the facility it would need to be in order to attract patrons on a year round basis. It presently has an inadequate, outdated, un-winterized grandstand. The paddock is an embarrassment for any horsemen coming

from other major tracks across North America."

This plan is mostly to benefit the thoroughbred set, said Burgess. "I think it is also important to understand WEG's thought process in this," he continued. "Their incentive for moving harness racing to Mohawk full time is not for the betterment of their Standardbred product - it is for the betterment of the Thoroughbred product. They will take our harness track and make it into a smaller turf track, as they think having two turf tracks would increase their horse population and entries as well as their handle. I find this decision by WEG a tad arrogant and biased."

But some would argue that Mohawk provides a better overall harness racing experience where fans can at least see and hear the action close up.

"Yes, sight lines are better at Mohawk and the longer stretch may make for racing that is fairer," Burgess agreed, "but I don't know that this necessarily translates into better betting. Some other tracks in Ontario have even more fan-friendly intimate environments than Mohawk and their on track handles don't seem to reflect this asset. There are so many downsides in moving to Mohawk full-time for harness racing in Ontario in general, that the fan friendly experience in itself does not justify it. This part of Mohawk racing that people enjoy, the close-up patio, the BBQ, the restaurant balcony, etc. is primarily enjoyable because of the warm summer weather. Campbellville is consistently 3 to 4 degrees colder than even Milton in the winter months and it has a documented fog problem in the spring and the fall."

Burgess indicated that despite reduced shipping costs and other benefits, many horsemen share his opposition to year-round racing at Mohawk. This is likely not the last we will hear on this topic. Stay tuned.