

Village Jasper showing real potential in ^{Sports} Pacing Series

The \$100,000 North America Cup, June 14 at Woodbine, is a little more than a month away, but several hopefuls were put through their paces Friday in three divisions of the first leg of the Mohawk Pacing Series.

While not yet in the class of likely Cup favourites The Big Dog, His Mattjesty and Megamind, a superb effort by Cup eligible Village Jasper in the third division may have indicated a rosy future for the three-year-old pacing son of Jate Lobell.

With Paul MacDonell in the sulky, Village Jasper, second choice to Summers Fury, rocketed out of the pocket in mid-stretch and blew by the favourite, an eased up two-length winner in 1:53.4, the fastest of the three divisions. It was the fifth win in 10 starts this year for Village Jasper, co-owned and trained by Cambridge's Bill Wellwood. The colt was unraced as a juvenile.



Hoof Beat

with **BRUCE MURRAY**

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"He's the kind of horse that if he gets a trip, he fires home quick," said MacDonell. "He's improving with every start and I can't see why he can't pace with the best of them. We got a chance to race him at Woodbine during the winter and he seems to like the long stretch."

In the second division, Master Barney pulled off a major upset by scooting along the rail in the deep stretch to take the lead, then holding off Western Dreamer by a head, in 1:54.

Heavily favoured Rambaran, the leader for much of the contest, backed up late in the lane to finish a disappointing fourth for Ron Waples.

Also eligible to the Cup, Rambaran was suffering only his second loss in nine starts this year, yet he was only beaten by a length and a half.

Master Barney, with Dave Wall, twice had a good look at Rambaran's posterior in his last two efforts, but this time around, the tables were turned. It was the gelding's fourth win in 11 starts this year, as he has now earned more than \$60,000 for trainer Kenneth Switzer and owner Whitesand Valley Stables of Schomberg.

The first division turned into a battle of favourites, as Cam's Country Boy, the second choice with Doug Brown, nailed the odds-on pacesetter Nashville Road by a head at the wire, in 1:55.1. Owned by New York's Jeffrey Snyder, Cams Country Boy, a son of the Legendary Cam Fella, was posting his second win in five starts this year for trainer Shawn Robinson. Snyder raced the 1994 North America Cup winner and three-year-old champion Cam's Card Shark. Cam's Country Boy, though, is not eligible for the classic.

The second leg of the Mohawk Pacing Series is set for Friday, May 9 with the \$75,000 final scheduled for May 16.

In Thursday's Acton Series \$20,760 final, Beckstead, a five-year-old pacer owned and trained by James Gratton of Parkhill, Ontario, wired the field, winning by one and one-half lengths over Usher Hanover, with Kettle Bee, last year's victor, a head further back in third, in 1:55.4.

As the even-money choice, Beckstead, driven by Reg Gassien, notched his fourth win (third in a row) in 14 starts this year, in a campaign which has already equalled last season's bankroll.

"I'm really proud to beat horses of this calibre," said Gratton. "Three straight wins to finish the series after the second win, I wished we could've kept a rail draw in reserve. Then, when we got the rail again for the final, well, I guess it was just our turn."



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