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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2000

Top horses set for tonight's Breeders Crown



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Campbellville's Blair Burgess with undefeated two-year-old colt pacer Real Desire.

By **BRUCE MURRAY***Special to The Champion*

The richest Breeders Crown in its 16-year history will be presented tonight at Campbellville's Mohawk Racetrack, as the top two- and three-year-olds in North America compete in eight races worth \$5.7 million Canadian.

With divisional and possible Horse of the Year honours on the line, the Breeders Crown is harness racing's championship evening. CTV Sportsnet will televise a live two-hour show from 9 to 11 p.m. ET while ESPN2 will have a one-hour 'Crown' special from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Post positions for the three-year-old colt pace and colt trot were drawn Tuesday at a press conference in Toronto with guest drawmasters boxer Bill 'The Kid' Irwin and former Maple Leaf favourite Wendel Clark. Post positions for the other six finals were drawn on the weekend.

Gallo Blue Chip the favourite

Heading the \$602,680 Three-Year-Old Colt Pace, at 10:45 p.m. is Gallo Blue Chip, trained by Mark Ford, who has been established as the prohibitive 6-5 favourite. The gelded son of Magical Mike earned a trip to the final with a gutsy performance in his elimination. Challenged virtually every step, Gallo Blue Chip still managed to prevail by three-quarters-of-a-length over On Line Service in 1:52, with Little Brown Jug winner Astreos third.

Miltonian Chris Christoforou, who will driver his father's colt Astreos, expects a very fast race given the post position draw.

"I think with where Gallo Blue Chip drew (post six) it will make it tough on everyone," said Christoforou, who will start from post eight. "You have all the speed horses on the outside and Gallo can leave well too. I expect big, big fractions."

Owned by Martin Scharf of Lawrence, New York, Gallo Blue Chip is a leading candidate for not only divisional but also Horse of the Year honours. He's won two \$1 million races this year — the North America Cup and Meadowlands Pace — as well as

captured 15 of 23 starts and banked over \$1.9 million. Amongst his challengers are Astreos, the second choice at 7-2, and Messenger champion Ain't No Stop'n' Him, the 4-1 third choice.

In the \$562,948 Three-Year-Old Colt Trot, scheduled for 8:15 p.m., Credit Winner has been installed the 8-5 morning line favourite. The colt is on a five-race win streak, including Saturday's elimination. In that race, Hambletonian winner Yankee Paco made a break while moving to challenge the leaders and unfortunately did not qualify for the final.

Credit Winner has won six of 13 starts this season and over \$1.3 million in his career. The Per Eriksson-trainee also won the recent Kentucky Futurity at Lexington. His rivals include Dr. Ronerall, who won his elimination by one-and-three-quarter lengths in 1:55.3, two seconds faster than Credit Winner.

Unbeaten colt heads up richest race

The richest race of the evening is the Two-Year-Old Colt Pace, at 10:15 p.m., it's worth \$871,475 and is headed by undefeated Real Desire. A perfect seven-for-seven, Real Desire, trained by Blair Burgess of Campbellville showed his heels to Metro Pace winner Pro Bono Best in his elimination, winning by two lengths in 1:53. On October 4, Real Desire set a world mark of 1:50.4 in Lexington. The 7-5 morning line favourite is expected to be driven once again by Trevor Ritchie, substituting for recently-injured Randy Waples and will leave from post three.

Pro Bono Best, co-owned and trained by Whitby's Des Tackoor, will try to turn the tables on Real Desire. A winner of seven in 11 starts, including the rich Metro Pace at Woodbine for earnings of \$509,717, the son of Cambest drew post eight with John Campbell and is listed at 7-2. Bettors Delight won the other elimination in track record time of 1:51.3, and is the 4-1 third choice.

Pretzel Hanover has been established as a slight 5-2 favourite in the \$755,911 Two-Year-Old Filly Trot, at 7:15 p.m. She finished second last Friday to the fastest of the elimination winners, Syrinx Hanover — her first defeat after three wins.

Though Arts Value was a close second to Popcorn Penny in her elimination, she is the 5-2 favourite in the \$783,484 Three-Year-Old Filly Pace at 7:45 p.m. Popcorn Penny, the 3-1 second choice and fellow elimination winner Shifty B, the 7-2 third choice, are the other major contenders.

Banker Hall fastest in eliminations

The \$705,889 Two-Year-Old Colt Trot, at 8:45 p.m., features the fastest elimination winner Banker Hall, as the early 3-1 favourite. The second choice, at 7-2, is Chasing Tail, who finished a close second to Banker Hall in 1:57.2.

The \$715,080 Two-Year-Old Filly Pace, at 9:15 p.m., brings together the division's leading-money winner Dex The Balls, along with an impeccably bred duo of Gothic Lady and Lady MacBeach.

Dex The Balls, the second choice at 3-1, captured her elimination impressively after replusing a challenge from Castanet Hall in 1:54.3. It was her sixth win in 11 starts and she's now earned \$536,889 with her biggest score coming in the \$700,000 She's A Great Lady at Woodbine. Gothic Lady, the 5-2 favourite, won her elimination in identical time, 1:54.3 decisioning favoured Lady MacBeach, the 7-2 third choice, is also a daughter of 'Crown' champions Jennas Beach Boy and She's A Great Lady.

The \$602,680 Three-Year-Old Filly Trot, with a post time of 9:45 p.m., shapes up as a battle between elimination winners and stablemates Bold Dreamer at 5-2 and Day For Night at 3-1. Both fillies are daughters of Donerall and are trained by Chuck Sylvester, who is tied with Robert McIntosh for most Breeders Crown wins, 12, amongst trainers.

Merchants drop another road game

By **STEVE LeBLANC***The Champion*

The Jr. A Merchants have quickly gone from road warriors to road kill.

Since taking five of its first six games away from Memorial Arena, Milton has gone three straight without a victory in hostile territory.

And the team's past couple of road trips have met with rather humbling results — including the latest to Hamilton's Mountain Arena Monday.

Outmatched physically and between the pipes, the local juniors were dumped by the Kilty Bees 5-2. This marked their third loss in four games and dropped their record to 9-4-2.

"In a nutshell ... goaltending," said Nick Slawson — Milton's director of hockey operations — referring to the

main reason behind the loss.

"We have to have better goaltending if we're going to reach our potential this year."

Joel Cameron was chased from the net before the midway mark of the opening frame — surrendering three goals on just five shots.

Replacement Anthony Marshall stopped the bleeding for a sizable chunk of the evening but did allow a suspect tally in the third which essentially ended his club's comeback hopes.

Netminding aside, the Merchants have been physically uninspiring as of late — a trend that's starting to concern Slawson.

"We're not the big and tough team we once were," he noted. "Plus we're having some slow starts and it's becoming

chronic."

That was certainly the case in Hamilton Monday.

Milton fell behind 31 seconds into the night and while steadily improving freshman Kevin Arruda evened things up just moments later, the team was beat twice more in short order and played catch-up the rest of the way.

Also scoring for the visitors was captain John Nadalin. His powerplay marker was assisted by Flavio Fagionni and Andy Rozak.

Merchant notes: Flavio Fagionni and Ian LaBrash lead team scoring with eight goals apiece ... Milton squares off with Burlington in a home-and-home weekend series beginning tonight at Memorial Arena at 8 p.m. Sunday the teams are at Central Arena for a 7:30 p.m. start.

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