

Filion looks to defend O'Brien Driver of the Year award

Sylvain Filion has already defended one driver-of-the-year title, and hopes to do so again next month.

Finishing 2013 as Woodbine Entertainment Group's leading driver — with 248 wins amassed at Mohawk and Woodbine — the 44-year-old Milton harness racing reinsman is up for Standardbred Canada's Driver of the Year. Standing in the way of his second straight O'Brien Award is 24-year-old first-time nominee Doug McNair of Guelph.

Filion holds the edge in overall earnings — having banked \$6,207,242 in 2013 — and collected 294 wins, four less than McNair. He had 297 second-place finishes and took third 259 times. Among the biggest victories last season for the Quebec native was in the Metro Pace with Boom Boom Ballykeel.

He's also the regular driver for Intimide, a finalist for the Older Trotting Horse of the Year.

"This past year has been a memorable one for me both on and off the track," said Filion, who recently surpassed the \$80-million mark in lifetime earnings.

"I drove many terrific horses and am very thankful for the opportunity. Winning with Boom Boom Ballykeel (in the \$683,000 Metro Pace for trainer Richard Moreau) was certainly unexpected and that was a great thrill. Off the track, my wife and I adopted a baby and that's something very special."

McNair was also the regular driver of O'Brien finalists Precocious Beauty and Love Canal — up for Two-Year-Old Pacing Filly and Three-Year-Old Pacing Filly of the Year respectively.

Other O'Brien Award nominees with local connections are as follows:



- Luck Be Withyou (Two-Year-Old Pacing Colt, trained by Milton's Bill Cass)
- Miss Aultsville (Two-Year-Old Trotting Filly, co-owned and trained by Milton's John Kopos)
- Vegas Vacation (Three-Year-Old Pacing Colt, co-owned by Milton's Adriana Sorello)
- Bax Of Life (Older Trotting Mare, owned by Joanne Wray and Jerry Dufford of Campbellville).

The winners will be announced at an awards gala Charlottetown, PEI, February 8.



Sylvain Filion, nominated again for Standardbred Canada's Driver of the Year, holds the Metro Pace Cup this past summer after winning it with Boom Boom Ballykeel. Photo courtesy of New Image Media

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