

Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs Week in Review

May 21-27, 2010

We're all still buzzing from the excitement provided by the Max C. Hempt Memorial stakes race held last Saturday, and it's no surprise that the winner of that race heads up the weekly award winners at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs.

PACER OF THE WEEK: FRED AND GINGER

It's always a thrill when a highly-anticipated race lives up to its billing, but I'd say that this year's edition of the Hempt, with a purse of \$300,000 up for grabs among the nation's finest 3-year-old pacers, even exceeded the lofty expectations. When it was over and the dust had cleared, Fred And Ginger had emerged with a front-running victory in 1:49:4, breaking a stakes record set by the sublime Badlands Nitro just two years ago.

But it wasn't nearly that simple. One More Laugh, a superstar as a 2-year-old in 2009 who came off a significant layoff to win a Hempt elimination two weeks ago, figured to have a large say in the race, but he couldn't stay on stride, breaking twice in his attempt for the win. Even with that powerhouse out of the way, Fred And Ginger still had to deal with Pang Shui, who sat 3rd behind the hot pace before uncorking a furious run in the stretch.

In the end though, Fred And Ginger persevered to get the record-setting win by only a neck. Dave Palone did the driving for Ron Burke, the nation's leading trainer who's also leading the Pocono training colony in wins. For the 3-year-old colt, it had to ease the sting of a near-miss second-place finish in the Berry's Creek Final at the Meadowlands a few weeks back. That he earned that measure of redemption in such exhilarating fashion is the mark of a true champion.

Honorable mention on the pacing side of the ledger this week goes to: Bully McCool (George Napolitano Jr., Laura Shock), who moved up into the \$30,000 claimers on Tuesday and still rolled to his third straight win in a career-best time of 1:51; OK Braveheart (Jim Morrill Jr., Chris Oakes), who now has two wins and a place against Open Handicap company this season after a triumph on Saturday in 1:50:3; and Indianridge Sophia (George Napolitano Jr., Lou Pena), a mare with 6 wins in 7 tries in the meet after an easy \$10,000 claiming victory on Tuesday in 1:53:2.

TROTTER OF THE WEEK: BIGPEPPER

There is a tendency in this sport to think of claiming races as somehow lesser than some of the other races on the card. This trotter from the Steve Salerno barn proved in a win on Saturday that underestimation of the claiming ranks is folly of the highest degree.

Facing a small field in the \$25,000 claiming group, Bigpepper, with George Napolitano Jr. in the bike, hustled to the front end and just kept rolling. The win was his second straight, but even more impressive was the winning time of 1:53:1. That's faster than any trotter has gone on the Pocono oval so far in the 2010 season, and that's a time of which to be proud, no matter the class.

Other trotters who shined this week: Ashcroft (Kevin Sizer, Celine Harvey), who conquered the unforgiving distance of 1 ¼ miles for a win in a tough \$20,000 claiming class on Friday; Camelot Kosmos (Matt Kakaley, Tyler Raymer), owner of two straight front-running claiming wins after a victory on Saturday for a \$12,500 tag in 1:55; and Dennis (George Napolitano Jr., Tabitha Teresczuk), who dropped down in class to beat a rugged condition group on Tuesday in 1:54:1.

LONG SHOT OF THE WEEK: MAC MARTINI

The mare came into the race winless in 6 tries in 2010, but she turned that around with an upset win in a \$15,000 claimer on Wednesday night. Mac Martini (Howard Parker, Clarence Martin Jr.) went off at 49-1 to pay out \$100.60 on a \$2 win ticket.

DRIVER OF THE WEEK: JIM MORRILL JR.

Morrill continued his recent torrid streak by ripping off 12 more driving wins, cutting the gap between him and Pocono driving leader George Napolitano Jr. Jim's big week was highlighted by a 6-win explosion last Friday night.

TRAINER OF THE WEEK: CLARENCE MARTIN JR.

Martin punctuated the week with three training wins on Wednesday night. That gave him 4 for the week to help him vault toward the Top 10 in training wins.

That will do it for this week, but I'll see you at the track. Feel free to e-mail me at jbeviglia@mohegansunpocono.com.