

## French amateurs to compete at NY-NJ tracks

from the USTA Communications Department

**Columbus, OH ---** The French-American Friendship Competition, which involves five drivers from France who will compete against American amateurs, begins on Tuesday (April 21) at Yonkers Raceway, followed by Monticello Raceway on Wednesday (April 22), Thursday (April 23) at Freehold Raceway with the finale on Friday night (April 24) at The Meadowlands.

The quintet from France includes Sophie Blanchetiere, winner of four French amateur championships including the last two; Romain Poree, amateur world champion in 2010 and French champion in 2009; Michel Poirier, who was the top French amateur in 2003; and Christophe Roszak, who finished in the top ten of the French championships.

The fifth driver, Hubert Jay, is the club representative and will only drive in the two races at Yonkers and The Meadowlands when there will be a field of 10 starters.

"The dates have been set and the final details are being worked out in order to host our amateur friends who will be coming from across the sea," said North American Amateur Driving Association President Joe Faraldo. "It will be the first time that we (America) will race against our French counterparts on American soil."

Blanchetiere, whose father was a harness trainer, works with her partner trainer/driver Yannick-Alain Briand in France. She has driven more than 1,800 races with just over 350 wins and competed internationally in Sweden, Malta and Switzerland. Blanchetiere started driving when she was 16.

"I have never been to America, so I look forward to it," said Blanchetiere. "I have had a look at the Yonkers races that they show on Equidia here in France. It's very different from everything I know. I assume I will need a few races to adjust, but it's going to be fun."



*Photo courtesy of NAADA*

**Romain Poree was the amateur world champion in 2010.**

Poree is a racing journalist and son of a harness trainer who raced 1989 UET Grand Prix winner Tipouf and also took him to the International Trot at Yonkers a year later. He has extensive international experience having also driven in Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland and Germany. He has accumulated nearly 140 wins in more than 800 races.

"I never went to the States, but I have been dreaming of driving over there," said Poree. "I also like to follow the top drivers, like Tim Tetrick, but Brian Sears is definitely my favorite. I like his style, he's a fine driver."

Poirier, who will turn 60 years old on April 16, is a farmer who also breeds trotters. He started driving horses at the track of local trainer Guy Dreux, who encouraged him to get an amateur license. Poirier won his first race at Alencon on May 29, 1977 and has more than 300 career wins in some 2,300 races with international experience in Spain and Italy.

"I've never been to the States, so it is a big trip for me," said Poirier. "My wife is coming along and I am happy that we travel with other drivers because I would feel a bit lost on my own in New York."

Roszak is a breeder from Normandy who became interested in harness racing during his youth from his monthly trips to the track with his father and got his amateur license in 1994. He tried his hand at training for a while before switching over to the breeding side of the business.

"I have never been (to the U.S.) and feel privileged to go," said Roszak. "I hope that we will make the most of it and have good fun with our fellow Americans."

Club manager Hubert Jay, who won the French Amateur Cup in 2004, was around horses at a very young age with his grandfather who was a trainer. He won his first race at age 17, but soon after had to focus his attention on academic studies.

"I had to give it up, but I always wanted to keep on training and driving as a hobby," explained Jay who has been to the U.S. before. "I studied in Minnesota and South Dakota, but did not go racing over there. It's an honor to drive at The Meadowlands and Yonkers, world famous racetracks."

The NAADA is planning to host another amateur series involving drivers from Spain in June.