

Mission Brief to take on the boys in 90th Hambletonian

From Meadowlands Media Relations

East Rutherford, NJ --- When the field is drawn Monday morning for the Hambletonian Oaks, Mission Brief's name won't be among the entries. On Sunday night, trainer Ron Burke confirmed to The Meadowlands Racetrack that his star 3-year-old filly will take on the boys in the 90th Hambletonian on Saturday, August 8.

"We're going," said Burke. "The plan has always been to go as long as she was good and today at Vernon she was as good as she has been. She had to be super and she was."

The Hambletonian is raced in heat format, which means if at least 14 horses enter, the winner of the Hambletonian would have to race twice in the same day. But Burke said that was not a concern. "I'm really not worried about that. She is just so athletic; I really don't think it will be a problem."

If there are 13 horses or less entered in The Hambletonian, it will be raced as one dash for the cash.

As for the reason why Burke and his ownership chose The Hambletonian over the Oaks, it came down to a simple notion. "If we win this race, it will change our lives and it makes her career. I know the Oaks is \$500,000 and she would be odds-on to win that race, but it wouldn't change our lives. Winning The Hambletonian changes lives."

The sportsmanship of Ron Burke and the ownership of Mission Brief were on display with this decision as well. "It will be great for the sport, to have a filly like this trying to beat all of Takter's horses. This will be a great story. I think we have the filly to do it. If I am wrong, I'm wrong and I have been wrong and criticized before, but I really think she can do it."

There is one question that remains, who will Yannick Gingras drive? Gingras pilots both Mission Brief and the best 3-year-old colt in the country, Pinkman. As of now, Ron Burke says that Gingras has not committed to either horse.

"If they both race huge in the eliminations (assuming they are in separate eliminations), he might not be able to decide until after the first heat."

That storyline is one that may go down in the annals of harness racing history. A decision of a lifetime some might say. Gingras may literally have to choose between two dynamic trotters in the sport's biggest race in the hour leading up to the race. Gingras has done it all in the sport, but still seeks his first Hambletonian, adding to the pressure of this decision.

Gingras was quoted in an interview after winning the Zweig stating he "hoped Mission Brief went in the Oaks." But, given that he also drives Pinkman, it is certainly understandable why Gingras shared that sentiment. Gingras was reached Sunday night and confirmed a decision on his part has not been made as of yet.

The last filly to win The Hambletonian was Continental Victory in 1996. Mission Brief looks to add her name to the list of fillies that have accomplished this most herculean fete.

The Hambletonian will headline what may prove to be one of the greatest days in harness racing history that will also include Wiggle It Jiggle it in the first jewel of the Pacing Triple Crown, The Cane Pace.

Hambletonian Day is Saturday, August 8 at The Meadowlands. Post time is 12:00 p.m. The Hambletonian Final will be race 13 on a 15-race program with a post time of 5:15 p.m.