

## **Western New York Connections In Hambletonian**

by Brian J. Mazurek, for Buffalo Raceway

HAMBURG, N.Y. --- It's a rarity to see a Western New York connection in the Hambletonian but there's one set for the 2016 edition which is scheduled for this Saturday afternoon (August 6) at The Meadowlands in East Rutherford, N.J.

Buffalo Trotting Association President Bill Richardson along with former Buffalo Raceway regular Jeff Gregory have teamed up along with Jesmeral Stable (Steven Finklestein) to send the three-year-old gelded trotter Tight Lines (Yankee Glide-IIia) into this year's Hambletonian.

"I've never been to a Hambletonian before and I am thrilled to death to be going this year," the 83-year-old Richardson said. "I've been involved in racing for more than 45 years and this is the highlight. I'm excited to get a chance to see Tight Lines participate in the Hambletonian."

The last time Western New York was represented at the Hambletonian was in 2012 where Archangel battled it out for trainer/co-owner Pete Arrigenna and driver Jim Morrill Jr. Archangel finished second in his elimination, losing to eventual Hambletonian winner Market Share in 1:52.2.

Tight Lines drew the seven post into the first elimination scheduled as the eighth race with an approximate post time of 2:20 p.m. and is a long shot at 25-1. To advance to the \$1 million finals, Tight Lines needs to finish in the top five of his elimination which has nine entrants.

"I think we have a really good chance of doing that," Richardson said confidently.

The morning line odds didn't bother Richardson at all. "I'm realistic about our chances. Tight Lines is a really nice colt who's had a little bit of bad luck. Jeff (Gregory) is very high on him and believes he is better than what a lot of people think."

Gregory said, "Obviously he's going to be a long shot, but this is a tough race to pass up. He's a nice little horse. He's an over-achiever, if anything. He's never really disappointed us. By no means do we expect anybody to respect us too much, but we didn't want to pass up the opportunity. You don't know how many more of these opportunities you'll get. It's a shot in the dark but we want to give it a try."

Tight Lines missed most of his two-year-old campaign due to an injury but Gregory thinks he might just be rounding into top form.

"We just started him a couple times to get him some experience," Gregory said. "But he was one of my better 2-year-olds training down last year. He's a little bit green this year, but he's really done everything we've asked of him. He's learning. It doesn't seem like he's ever tired. He's always willing. He raced super in the Zweig. We had a terrible post (nine) and he finished great. He came home in :27.1 and did it the right way."

With three victories in 11 career starts, Tight Lines has won \$50,781 in his brief career. All of his wins have come at Pocono Downs.

For Richardson, he was offered a unique chance to get in on 25 percent of Tight Lines.

The 49-year-old Gregory bought Tight Lines as a yearling for owner Bill Weaver. A renowned owner and breeder and a member of the Harness Racing Hall of Fame, Weaver passed away in February and thus giving Richardson and Steven Finkelstein's Jesmeral Stable an opportunity to buy in.

Richardson said, "Oddly enough, I have yet to meet Steven Finkelstein."

But nothing would be better for them to get to know each other on Saturday in the winner's circle.

The CBS Sports Network will have a 90-minute live broadcast including the \$1 million Hambletonian final, the \$225,550 U.S. Pacing Championship, and the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks beginning at 4 p.m. The first post for Hambletonian Day at The Meadowlands is noon.