

Courtly Choice matures into Meadowlands Pace favorite

by Ken Weingartner, USTA Media Relations Manager

Hightstown, NJ --- When trainer Blake MacIntosh prepared Courtly Choice for his return to action this season, he sensed the 3-year-old pacer was more professional and focused.

Since then, Courtly Choice has seemed determined to prove MacIntosh correct. The colt, with the exception of two luckless starts, has landed in the winner's circle every time out this year and heads to Saturday's \$701,830 Crawford Farms Meadowlands Pace at the Meadowlands Racetrack as the 5-2 morning-line favorite.

"He just wants to win this year," MacIntosh said. "Even training down he was a totally different horse. As a 2-year-old he was looking all over the place and was real lazy. He's really matured a lot."

The Meadowlands Pace is part of a card with the \$471,100 William R. Haughton Memorial for older male pacers, \$405,850 Hambletonian Maturity for 4-year-old trotters, \$191,800 Mistletoe Shalee for 3-year-old female pacers, \$189,750 Golden Girls for older female pacers, two \$181,000 divisions of the Stanley Dancer Memorial for 3-year-old male trotters, two \$128,500 divisions of the Delvin Miller Memorial for 3-year-old female trotters, and two \$30,000 divisions of the Miss Versatility Series for older female trotters.

Seven of the top nine horses in the [Hambletonian Society/Breeders Crown poll](#) will be in action: No. 1 Hannelore Hanover (Miss Versatility), No. 2 Shartin N (Golden Girls), No. 5 McWicked (Haughton), No. 6 Manchego (Miller), No. 7 Ariana G (Maturity), No. 8 Kissin In The Sand (Mistletoe Shalee), and No. 9 Wolfgang (Dancer).

Racing begins at 6:35 p.m. (EDT).



Lisa photo

Courtly Choice has won five of seven starts this year, earning \$120,245.

Courtly Choice winning in 1:48.2 and Stay Hungry in 1:49. Stay Hungry, the 2017 O'Brien Award-winner as Canada's best 2-year-old male pacer, was made the 3-1 second choice.

Courtly Choice, a son of [Art Major](#) out of Hall of Fame broodmare Lady Ashlee Ann, won two of 12 races and earned \$53,351 last year. In his fourth career start, he equaled the track record at Saratoga with a 1:53.1 mile in a division of the New York Sire Stakes, but a tough trip in his next outing launched a six-race stretch in which he failed to hit the board.

"The next week (after Saratoga) he got his feelings a little bit hurt, he got parked, and he was sour for a couple starts," MacIntosh said. "He's just really matured. His feelings don't get hurt now; he wants to go and he wants to win races."

Courtly Choice's elimination victory was made possible by MacIntosh and the colt's fellow owners -- Joe Thomson, Daniel Plouffe, Steve Heimbecker, and Joe Intine -- paying in the

neighborhood of \$60,000 to enter the horse in the race because he was not previously staked to the event.

MacIntosh said the decision to pay the supplement was made after seeing North America Cup champion Lather Up and Dan Patch Award-winner Lost In Time would miss the race.

"I looked at the field and thought we had a good shot at this," MacIntosh said. "I texted Daniel Plouffe and said it's too bad we're not paid in and he said let's do it. He was all for it. I called the other partners and we all agreed to go ahead and do it."

Courtly Choice has won five of seven starts this year, earning \$120,245. His only losses came in two previous eliminations, the first for the Pepsi North America Cup and the other for the Max C. Hempt Memorial. He failed to advance to the final in both races, undone by hooking wheels with a rival in the Cup and unable to rally from an eighth-place start in the Hempt. He won each event's consolation race the following week.

Now he will get his chance in a final.

"I think he's a nice horse and deserves to be the favorite," MacIntosh said.