

TWENTY-NINTH NEW YORK NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS IN THREE ACTS
BY FRANK DRUCKER, Publicity Director, Empire City @ Yonkers Raceway

YONKERS, NY, Saturday, September 22, 2018—What did we learn Saturday (Sept. 22nd) during Yonkers Raceway's hosting of the Empire State's richest night of racing, the 29th New York Night of Champions?

The \$1.8 million event—eight, \$225,000 sire stakes finals for freshmen and sophomores of both sexes and gaits—produced the expected, the unexpected and the ‘it’s a good thing no one was hurt.’”

ACT I—The Expected

Odds-on numbers Winndevie (Trond Smedshammer, \$2.30), Gimpanzee (Brian Sears, \$2.30), Plunge Blue Chip (Ake Svanstedt, \$2.20), Wisdom Tree (Tim Tetrick, \$2.50) and Helpisontheway (Jim Morrill Jr., \$3.50) delivered their short parimutuel promises.

Winndevie grinded by leader Quincy Blue Chip (Morrill Jr.), winning the *Crawford Farms 2-Year-Old Filly Trot* in 1:59. The latter led through intervals of :28.2, :59 and 1:27.4, but couldn't stall the first-over (from post position No. 2) foe, who prevailed by three-quarters of a length. Sensibility (Jordan Stratton) was third, with Amal Hall (Andy Miller) fourth.

The daughter of Credit Winner, trained by her driver for owner Purple Haze Stables, is now 6-for-7 this season (3-for-3 here), with earnings of \$227,858. The exacta paid \$8.50, the triple returned \$42.40 and the superfecta paid \$108.50.

Despite the win, Winndevie's ‘date’ did not seem impressed.

“She wasn't at her best,” Smedshammer said. “She's much better in the turns than she was tonight. Very bumpy. She won because no one else was there with her.”

Smedshammer said Winndevie was eligible to the Breeders Crown, but “the way she was tonight, she's better off out in the field.”

Gimpanzee made it 7-for-7, winning the Agriculture and NYS Horse Breeding Development Fund 2-Year-Old Colt/Gelding Trot in 1:56.3...a track record for his weight class.

From post No. 5, he was third at the :28.2 quarter-mile, then made the lead before a :58.2 intermission. He then finished it off, getting a 1:27.1 three-quarters before that new track standard. Gimpanzee defeated Thunder (Jason Bartlett) by a half-length, his narrowest margin of victory this season. Our White Knight (Miller) was third—some dozen lengths behind—with Horns for Three (Jim Maroon Jr.) fourth.

Gimpanzee, a son of Chapter Seven, saw the bankroll improve to \$278,858 for co-owners Courant Inc. and S R F Stable. The exacta (two wagering choices) paid \$3.40, the triple returned \$11.40 and the superfecta paid \$94.

“Very professional, very mature,” Sears said, “He knows what he has to do and goes out there and does it.”

“I knew all along he’d be a good one, from when he was training down,” trainer Marcus Melander said. “Just a good horse to be around.”

All-age track record-holder Plunge Blue Chip had nary more than a qualifier for money in the *Allerage Farm 3-Year-Old Filly Trot*. From post No. 2—and one Svanstedt’s five entrants in the race—she strolled early and lost ‘em late (:29.2, :58.1, 1:26.3, 1:55.3).

Plunge Blue Chip avenged last season’s poor sire stakes finale effort, rolling home by seven lengths. Lima Novelty (Morrill Jr.) was the best of the rest, with Ciao Dolce (Miller) and Fury Road (Dan Dube) rounding out the gimmick finishers.

Plunge Blue Chip, a Muscle Mass lass, has six wins, three seconds and thirds in 11 ’18 tries (\$485,101). She is co-owned by her driver/trainer Blue Chip Bloodstock, Little E LLC, Tomas Andersson and Rick Zeron Stables.

Wisdom Tree was the best in her division coming in and coming out, easily winning the *Cameo Hills Farm 3-Year-Old Filly Pace*. From post No. 4, she worked around Newsday (Stratton), then had few issues (:27.4, :57.1, 1:25.2, 1:53.2).

Wisdom Tree defeated Newsday by a length-and-a-half, with a first-up Alexis Faith (Morrill Jr.) third and Checkered Past (Bartlett) fourth.

It was the 11th win in 14 seasonal starts (\$387,351) for Wisdom Tree, a daughter of Betterthancheddar co-owned by Thomas Pollack & Jeff Cullipher and trained by Ed Hart. The exacta paid \$9.10, the triple returned \$22.40 and the superfecta paid \$63.50.

“I’m glad it’s over,” Hart said. “She’s been racing on the front every start, probably because she’s the best in there. We haven’t put her in a lot of the open stakes since we wanted to stay in the sires, but she’s eligible to one at Indiana (Hoosier), Northfield and the Matron (Dover), so she’s not done yet.”

As for Helpisontheway, he was certainly helped by Yonkers Trot winner Six Pack being ineligible to the final (not enough prelim starts). So, after finished second to that in the Trot and a statebred event here, Helpisontheway had his way in the *Morrisville College Equine Institute 3-Year-Old Colt/Gelding Trot*.

Away fourth from post No. 4, he watched Winning Shadow (Mike Simons) lead (:28, 57, 1:25.3) before that one was put away by 50-1 Purpose Blue Chip (Dan Daley). Helpisontheway was towed behind that live longshot, widening to win by 2¼ lengths.

An out-the-mile The Veteran (Stratton) was second, with Purpose Blue Chip, who outraced hid odds, and Winning Shadow were respectively third and fourth.

Helpisontheway, a Chapter Seven colt trained by Linda Toscano for co-owners Camelot & Bay’s Stable and Little E LLC, has seven wins and four seconds in his 13 ’18 tries (\$467,775). The exacta (two wagering choices) paid \$15.40, the triple returned \$188 and the superfecta paid \$568.

“Versatility,” Toscano said. “He can leave and sit back the way he raced tonight.

“Last season (1-for-8), he was immature. Some 2-year-olds just don’t get it. The ability was there. He just needed to figure it out.”

ACT II—The Unexpected

Reigning Deo (Morrill Jr., \$42.20) closed from third-over, winning the *Agriculture and NYS Horse Breeding Development Fund 2-Year-Old Colt/Gelding Pace* in 1:54.4. From post No. 4, he watched as Hickfromfrenchlick (Tetrick) led through intervals of :28, :57.1 and 1:25.1. The Sheppard winner slugged it out with Melodie's Magic (Tyler Buter), who surprisingly did not leave from the pole.

Deepest of all arrived Reigning Deo, who whipped 'Melodie' by a length-and-a-half. Artie's Ideal (Marcus Miller) was a pocket third, with Hickfromfenchlick fading to fourth.

For fifth choice Reigning Deo, a son of Rock N Roll Heaven co-owned by (breeder) Deo Volente Farms, (trainer) Brett Pelling and Brian Gordon, it was his third win in seven first-season starts (\$193,712). The exacta paid \$89, the triple returned \$661 and the superfecta paid \$2,355.

"We wanted to go through the (sire stakes) program with him," Pelling said. "I mean, he's always carried himself well. We weren't planning to race him at Batavia (10 nights ago), but he was seventh in points, so we figured we needed to."

They were correct, and rewarded.

Moneyshot Hanover (Buter, \$10) 'won the bob' over So Awesome (Tetrick) in the *Winbak Farm 2-Year-Old Filly Pace*. So Awesome was the first leader before giving up to St. Somewhere (George Brennan), That one laid down the law (:27.4, :56) before making an ugly break down the backside the second time.

So Awesome then inherited the front of the fray, getting three-quarters in 1:24.4. She owned a length lead into the lane, but Moneyshot Hanover was able to tag her at the line. Third went to JK American Beauty (Sears), with Hurrikane Norakane (Dube) fourth.

For third choice Moneyshot Hanover, a daughter of Art Major co-owned by (trainer) Mark Harder, Rick Phillips and Deena Frost, she now 3-for-8 (\$203,408) this season. The exacta paid \$25.20, the triple returned \$151.50 and the superfecta paid \$750.

"She's two fingers to drive," Buter said. "She was bumpy around the last turn, but she dug in

ACT III—The 'It's a Good Thing No One Was Hurt'

The outset of the night's final statebred event, the *Blue Chip Farms 3-Year-Old Colt/Gelding Pace*, was the sort of stuff one can't unsee.

Pole-sitting 6-5 favorite Springsteen (Sears) was off the gate at the start, then hung a dead right, perhaps the victim of some equipment issue. Equipment or not, he impeded those who did not leave, including Heavenly Sound (Marohn Jr.), Rootin' Tootin' (Mark MacDonald) and Twin B Tuffenuff (Brennan).

Getting the worst of it was Ghost Dance (Morrill Jr.), who ended up locking wheels with Springsteen as both found their way to the back fence. That left three horses in contention, with Rockapelo (Bartlett, \$11.40) moving from third down the backside the second time and taking over the lead.

From post No. 4, he won by 4½ lengths in 1:53.1. My Delight (Brent Holland) was second, with Ostro Hanover (Dube) third and Heavenly Sound fourth.

Neither two- nor four-legged creature involved in the incident seemed any worse for wear.

For third choice Rockapelo, a Rock N Roll Heaven gelding trained by Toscano for owner Enviro Stables, it was his third win in 13 seasonal starts (\$203,5452) and pushed Bartlett over the \$100 million career earnings plateau. The exacta paid \$82.50, the triple returned \$482 and the superfecta paid \$1,943.

“I didn’t see what happened, but I heard yelling and I know when you the inside and you go right, it’s not a good thing,” Bartlett said.

Saturday night’s \$44,000 Open Handicap Pace and Trot were won by Great Vintage (MacDonald, \$45.80) in 1:52.2, and Yes Mickey (Bartlett, \$5.60) in 1:54.2.