

Heats Return in 2013; Hambletonian Maturity Race Added

An agreement to host the Hambletonian, the flagship event at The Meadowlands Racetrack for 30 years, has been finalized between leaseholder Jeff Gural and the Hambletonian Society, which owns and administers the Hambletonian Stake. A new race for four-year-old trotters, the Hambletonian Maturity, has also been created.

The Hambletonian is the preeminent event in harness racing, and has routinely set North American industry handle and attendance records since moving to the Meadowlands in 1981.

“We look forward to a new era with Jeff Gural,” said Tom Charters, president and CEO of the Hambletonian Society. “The Hambletonian has flourished under the management of the NJSEA over the years and we feel confident that growth will continue with the New Meadowlands LLC and the changes we are making to the race. We think returning to heats will be exciting for the fans, particularly those onsite at The New Meadowlands facility on a day that is always the sport’s greatest showcase.”

The 2012 race, slated for Saturday, August 4, carries a final purse of \$1.5 million. Last year’s event drew record international simulcast and enjoyed total wagering of \$8.4 million, the third highest harness handle in history. The NBC TV coverage of entrant Pastor Stephen earned a prestigious Hervey award for broadcast features.

In 2013, the purse for the Hambletonian final will be guaranteed at \$1 million, but payments for the Hambletonian and the companion filly event, the Hambletonian Oaks, will be lowered, and all finalists will receive purse money. The Hambletonian race will revert to the heat format utilized from 1991-1997, with eliminations, if necessary, raced on the same afternoon as the final. Should 13 or fewer horses enter, there will be one dash for the purse. Elimination heats for the Oaks, if necessary, may be raced the same day as the Final, or may be scheduled the prior week.

“We look forward to continuing the long relationship that the Meadowlands has had with the Hambletonian Society,” emphasized Gural. “I am thrilled that they have agreed to revert to the previous format of two heats on the same day, which I think will increase the excitement of the event dramatically.”

In 2014 a \$400,000 Hambletonian Maturity for eligible four-year-old trotters will be implemented, in keeping with the effort to provide incentives races for owners who choose to race their horses after their sophomore year. The Maturity will be raced as a single dash at a mile and an eighth, allow a maximum of 16 starters and have a purse structure that pays all starters.

The Hambletonian was first raced in 1926 and is known as America’s Trotting Classic. More information and specific racing conditions will be available at www.Hambletonian.org.