

Charlie May, American Courage make 2022 debuts Saturday

By Jay Bergman

Spring is in the air and as sprouts of new foliage emerge from the ground so to do we find some of last year's outstanding 3-year-olds getting ready to spread their wings and fly into stakes season. Among the long list of possible contenders in an elite 4-year-old division are a pair of horses set for debuts this Saturday at different locales.

Charlie May, a horse that crossed the finish wire first in last year's Meadowlands Pace but was subsequently taken down for an alleged infraction, returns to East Rutherford for trainer Steve Carter for his first pari-mutuel start of 2022. Earlier in the day, last year's Messenger Stakes winner American Courage hopes to get his season started on the right hoof facing five in a \$25,000 Winners Over contest at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono.

In spite of the Meadowlands Pace setback Charlie May had an outstanding sophomore campaign, winning 10 times in 22 starts with earnings above \$879K for the year. Owned and bred by Don Tiger, the altered son of McArdle has captured two qualifiers this April at Miami Valley in advance of Saturday's first real test.

"He qualified in 1:51 and change," said Carter. "He's very good coming into this race."

Charlie May and driver David Miller landed post 4 in the \$31,500 Open Handicap at The Meadowlands carded as race 10 and Carter is just hoping to get a race in to have him sharp for the coming season.

"It's just a prep for next week's Graduate," said Carter, pointing at the stakes calendar that commences on Kentucky Derby night at The Meadowlands with an exclusive race for 4-year-old male pacers.

Looking forward, the trainer is hoping for a long and successful season. "Ultimately, I'd like to win the Breeders Crown with him," said Carter, who noted that owner Tiger is looking forward to the Confederation Cup.

Charlie May is the lone 4-year-old in the six-horse feature at The Meadowlands, with the hard-hitting Let It Ride N (post 6) the likely favorite coming off a season's best 1:48 3/5 victory in last Saturday's (April 23) featured pace. Seasoned performers American History (post 1) and Backstreet Shadow (post 2) are looking to get back on the winning track in this group and trainer Jenn Bongiorno sends out a pair in Vettel N (post 3) and No Lou Zing (post 5) to complete the field.

Driver Matt Kakaley is hoping that American Courage will emerge this season as a 4-year-old. The son of American Ideal has shown a world of talent in his first two years on the racetrack but at the same time has only made 19 career starts in that span.

"I was very happy with the way he qualified," said Kakaley of American Courage, who posted 1:52 2/5 and 1:52 4/5 clockings winning on consecutive weeks over the Pocono five-eighths mile oval.

Last year American Courage won five of his 11 starts and like Charlie May qualified for the Meadowlands Pace finale as well. American Courage landed post 10 on that occasion and was a non-factor in the event.

On Saturday American Courage landed post 2 in the eighth race on the Pocono program and may need to bring his A-game if he's to handle five other older horses. At the top of the list in this event is Nicholas Beach. A leg winner in the recently completed MGM Borgata series, Nicholas Beach finds his way into the Pocono Open under rather strange circumstances.

"We weren't able to race him in New York or New Jersey," said Joe Bongiorno of the 6-year-old trained by his sister Jenn. "He was ok to race in Pennsylvania."

At issue with Nicholas Beach in New York and New Jersey was an obscure ruling that comes into play when a horse that was previously on Lasix, as Nicholas Beach had been prior to joining the Bongiorno stable,



(ABOVE) KEN WEINGARTNER - (BELOW) CURTIS SALONICK

Trainer Steve Carter and Charlie May (above) will be at The Meadowlands on Saturday night while American Courage and Matt Kakaley will be competing at The Downs at Pocono that afternoon.



and needs to be put back on the medication. Nicholas Beach had been entered at Yonkers for the April 18 final leg of the Borgata series with the stable scheduling him to race with Lasix. The judges informed the stable of the rules and subsequently he was scratched.

"Maybe it was a blessing in disguise," said Joe Bongiorno. "He's got a lot of big races ahead of him."

Nicholas Beach races with Lasix the first time (this year) from post 5 in Saturday's eighth race.

A total of 41 horses remained eligible to the Graduate Series that consists of three preliminary legs (May 7 at The Meadowlands, June 4 at Woodbine Mohawk Park and June 25 at The Meadowlands) in advance of a \$250,000 estimated final on July 9 at The Meadowlands. With many of the nominees currently competing, there is a strong likelihood for as many as three divisions on May 7.

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