

As we turn the page to a new year, Running Aces track announcer Darin Gagne reflects on the highlights of the 2023 season at the Minnesota oval.

Here are his top moments of last year's Aces action, in chronological order:

Mooney Milestone: Lemoyne “Mooney” Svendsen notched his 4,000th career driving win in race ten on Sunday (June 4) with a commanding win aboard Dance Traveler (Up Front Brad) in 1:53.1 which was a new career mark for the then 7-year-old gelding who was owned and trained by Michael Meza. In addition to his 4,000 plus wins, Svendsen has hit the top-3 more than 12,000 times and has banked more than \$15M in purses. He is a Minnesota Harness Racing Hall-of-famer along with his late father Lonz, and Mooney is also a Minnesota native, born in Albert Lea.

Magnificent Maggie: Ultra-talented pacing mare Maggie Rhee (Jereme’s Jet) dominated the top-level Aces distaff events throughout the first two months of 2023, including a sweep of her \$20,000 elimination and the \$35,000 final of the Ron Banks Memorial FFA Pace. She captured the final in 1:52.4 with regular pilot Todd Warren in the bike for trainer Tim Wilson, Jr. and assistant trainer Jenni De Menge. Maggie Rhee also wrote her name into the Aces record books on June 8 with a scintillating mile in 1:51 to equal the track mark for pacing mares. She was perfect in her Minnesota campaign (5-for-5) before returning to her home base in Indiana.

Barrier Broken: Breaking The 1:50 speed barrier at Running Aces had been an illusive prospect for many years, but on July 16 in the \$22,500 second division of the Dan Patch Elimination races lightning finally struck in the form of then 9-year-old gelding American Dreamer (American Ideal) who, with driver Todd Warren, converted a pocket-trip and drew away late to stop the timer in 1:49.2 as they wrote their names into Aces history as the first to break the barrier. Three weeks later on August 1 in the \$18,500 Open Handicap Pace, his stablemate Crooked Smile (Panther Hanover) equalled the record time with his own mile in 1:49.2 also with driver Todd Warren. Both horses are trained by Tim Wilson Jr. and assistant trainer Jenni De Menge.

Dazzling Dan Patch Final: The \$50,000 Dan Patch FFA Final on Sunday (July 23) certainly did not disappoint as it delivered excitement from start-to-finish as He’zzz A Wise Sky and Jacob Cutting powered away from post eight to immediately battle with heavily favored Crooked Smile and Todd Warren. He’zzz A Wise Sky made the lead past the :26.1 quarter and Crooked Smile traveled in the pocket through the middle stages (:54.4 and 1:22.4) before coming after the leader in the homestretch. Those two pacers took off the gloves and went at it bare-knuckles to the finish wire and it was too-close-to-call. The photo finish showed He’zzz A Wise Sky narrowly in front (by a head) in the 1:50.1 mile. The then 6-year-old winner is by Yankee Skyscraper and is owned by Triple Zzz Stables and trained by John Filomeno. He was bred by Donald and Joann Filomeno.

Shooting Star: Sophomore trotter BP’S Lucky Star (For You Almostfree) went on a very impressive tear at Running Aces from June 25 all the way to August 27, winning 6 of 7

Minnesota-sired events during that time and recording the fastest 3-year-old trotting mile ever (1:54.2) on Sunday (August 6). He is owned by trainer Rick Huffman, as well as Brenda Lovetinsky and Penny Lundell and was regularly driven by Mooney Svendsen, including the 1:54.2 track record mile.

Wire-to-wire Wiseman: The \$35,000 Steve Wiseman Memorial Trot went to post on Sunday (August 13) with a well-matched field of nine contenders but the winning move was made right out of the gate when driver Brad Irvine sent Perlucky to the front from the rail post. They led the contest at every call and held off a furious late charge from Chiplosive and driver Brady Jenson to hang on by a neck in the 1:54.3 mile. Perlucky was 8-years-old at the time, and he's one of the top progeny of Lucky Chucky. He is owned by The Stable Perlucky Group and was trained in Minnesota by Bob Lems.

Brady Bunch: Driver Brady Jenson posted a bunch of winners on Sunday night (August 13). His final tally was 6 wins on the night (5 driving wins plus a separate training win) he also had a second and two thirds on the 9-race program. Three of his driving wins that night were for trainer Jose Castillo. Jenson posted 50 driving wins at the 2023 Aces meet and registered over \$532k in purses for a top-4 finish, while as a trainer he posted 35 wins and earned over \$426k in purses for a top-2 finish.

The Comeback Kid: Though not really a kid anymore at 10 years old in 2023, Minnesota-sired star pacer Stuckey Dote (Voracious Hanover) made a valiant comeback from a broken foot suffered back in 2021 to make his way back to the Running Aces winners circle on August 29 and record his 46th career win in 1:54.1 for owner/breeder Merlin Van Otterloo and trainer Brett Ballinger. Two weeks later, Stuckey Dote was a fast-closing third in his final career start, pacing in 1:54 with a final quarter in :28 flat. Rick Magee was in the bike in both efforts. Stuckey Dote strutted off the track as the only horse to-date to win 5 Minnesota Championship races and as the second-richest Minnesota-sired performer to-date with over \$470k in the bank.

So long Pancetta: on Tuesday (September 12) Running Aces fans said goodbye to 14-year-old pacer Pancetta (No Pan Intended) who had been a consistent top performer at Aces for many years. He went out in fine style with a sharp second-place finish beaten just one length in 1:54 with Luke Plano in the bike for trainer Lino Pacheco and owners Richard Morita and David Yamada. Plano had a special connection to the horse dating back to the beginning of Pancetta's career, and had driven him to many wins over the years. The pint-sized pacer was small but mighty. He won 50 races and earned over \$567k during his impressive career. The connections reported plans for him to stand stud duty as his next adventure.

Night Of Champions Noteworthy:

Baby Flash- captured the freshman filly Pace in 2:01.2 and went 13-for-15 on the season for driver Chad Svendsen and trainer Rick Huffman.

DP Freedoms Chrome- completed an undefeated 10-for-10 freshman campaign with a track record 1:58.1 win by more than 4 lengths in the freshman colt trot final. James Gould was his pilot for trainer Elvin Zimmerman.

Iron Sharpens Iron- the reigning Minnesota Harness Racing Horse of The Year captured the sophomore colt trot championship race by more than 14 lengths in 1:55.4. He just plain destroyed the competition in the final quarter of a mile. Luke Plano was the pilot for trainer Dan Roland.

Fast Larry- drew away in the lane to win by more than 8 lengths in 1:54.4 in the freshman colt pace for his fourth straight win for trainer/driver Brady Jenson.

Apple Juice- prevailed over huge rival Deja Vu Babyboo in the freshman filly pace in 1:54.3. Apple Juice led at every call with Jacob Cutting in the bike for owner/trainer Scott Banitt.

Bringoverthemoney- picked up his fourth straight Night of Champions win in the aged male trot, in ultra-dominating fashion - by more than 15 lengths in 1:54.3 with Mooney Svendsen in the bike for trainer Katie Horvat, he is the Richest Minnesota-sired trotter to-date.

Gotbydashorthairs- continued her dominance of the sophomore filly pacing division with her customary rally from the back-of-the-pack style victory by one length in 1:56.4 with Nick Roland in the bike for trainer Gordon Graham.

Wisco Tootsie- delivered a knockout punch with a perfect pocket setup by driver Rick Magee to capture the sophomore filly trot final in 2:01 for The Sandstone Social Club and trainer Dan Roland. It was her 8th win of the season to that point.

Dougsmoneybusiness- posted a sharp gate-to-wire score in the sophomore colts pace in 1:55 by 3 lengths with Jacob Cutting in the bike for trainer Rick Bertrand. It was his seventh win of the year to that point.

Susie's Sister and Teachmehowtotory- made Night of Champions history with a thrilling dead-heat finish in the aged mares trot final, hitting the wire in unison in 1:57.4. Kevin Wallis was in the bike behind Susie's Sister for trainer Jenni King and Nick Roland was the winning trainer/driver for Teachmehowtotory. This was the first ever dead heat in a Minnesota Championship event.

Give Me This Dance- was a good looking, never-in-doubt winner by more than two lengths in the aged mares pace final in 1:56 with Todd Warren in the bike for trainer Justin Anfinson. The victory catapulted her career earnings past the \$275k mark.

SB Bodacious- made a bold move to the front just past the half and never looked back, drawing away impressively late to capture the aged male pace championship by more than 5 lengths in 1:51.4 which was by far the fastest mile of the night. This was one of the most

impressive performances of the entire 2023 season in what is always a very competitive division. Rick Magee was the winning pilot as well as owner/trainer.

While there were certainly many, many additional impressive races and accomplishments throughout the 2023 season, and we applaud them all equally, these were some of the standout moments for me. We can't wait until the 2024 Aces season begins to see what new stars will emerge and which records will be broken.

The 2024 Live Racing season at Running Aces will kick off on Sunday, May 20.

Horsemen's resources such as the 2024 Live Racing brochure and the 2024 Stall Applications and the 2024 Late Closing events info and nomination forms will all be available very soon on the Running Aces website.