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\$75,000 Southern Park Stakes the first of 2019 Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund features

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by Kimberly Rinker, *Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund*

The 2019 stakes season for Ohio-bred Thoroughbreds kicks off this Saturday (March 23) with the fifth running of the \$75,000 Southern Park Stakes at Mahoning Valley Racetrack. Post time for the featured event—race six—is set at 2:34 pm, ET. Post time for the first race on the eight-race card is 12:15 pm, ET.

The six-furlong contest for Ohio-registered 3-year-old fillies is named in honor of Southern Park, a racetrack that operated 105 years ago in nearby Boardman, OH, and later slipped into oblivion as did so many tracks during the Great Depression.

The half-mile oval was originally christened Southern Park Trotting Track, and featured Thoroughbred, Standardbred, greyhound, auto racing and flying exhibitions, as well as school track meets. Horses arriving from out-of-town were shipped to the track via direct railway lines, and accommodations were constructed for trainers, owners, grooms and jockeys.

The inaugural 2015 Southern Park Stakes saw Robert Gorham's Justalittle smoke win in 1:10.69 with jockey Terry Houghton up, while the 2016 edition saw Barefoot Gypsy score in 1:14.55 with jockey Albin Jimenez riding for trainer Wesley Ward.

In 2017, it was the seemingly indefatigable Nikki My Darling who won the third calling of the Southern Park Stakes, in 1:15.64 for trainer Jeff Radosevich and jockey Luis Colon.

Last year, trainer William Cowans saddled both the winner and second-place finisher as Tango Run sprinted to a modest 1:14.85 clocking for jockey Rex Stokes, III, with stablemate Fancy Feelin second best for rider William De La Cruz.

This year, a field of seven will break from the Mahoning gate, with the triple-winning **Totally Obsessed** poised as the horse to beat. This daughter of Tale of Ekati, out of the Grand Slam mare Dark Obsession was second in two Ohio stakes last season but has rattled off a pair of victories against allowance company this year. Both triumphs came at Mahoning for trainer

Gary Johnson—the first on Feb. 11 and the second on March 11—with jockey Luis Quinones in the irons. This 3-year-old lass already has \$43,480 in her 2019 coffers and lifetime totals of \$108,517 from three wins and two seconds in eight career starts. Owner Ron Paolucci purchased the dark bay or brown filly from the June 2018 Ocala Breeders' Sales Company 2-year-olds and horses of racing age for \$50,000. Her lone victory at two came in her career debut, when she romped to victory by nearly seven lengths in a 5½ furlong sprint at Jack Thistledown.

Totally Obsessed will have to contend with rival **Drillit**, a \$179,300-winning daughter of Drill-Way to Fly, By Bowman's Band. Trained by Robert Gorham—who incidentally will saddle three fillies in the Southern Park—Drillit has never finished worse than third in any of her six lifetime starts and owns two stakes triumphs along with two stakes-placed finishes. Owned by Mast Thoroughbreds LLC, Drillit was bred by Eric Heyman. This chestnut filly broke her maiden at two on June 23 at Thistledown, was second in the \$75,000 Hoover Stakes and third in the \$75,000 Miss Ohio before squashing her competition in the \$150,000 Galbreath by 16¼ lengths. In her first start this season she was soundly beaten, finish third in a Mahoning allowance test on March 11 to the aforementioned Totally Obsessed.

Drillit's stablemates, **Dolly Dear** and **Candy Lane**, will also ply their wares in the Southern Park. Both are owned by Marion Gorham, with Dolly Dear, a daughter of Justin Phillip, and Candy Lane, a Twirling Candy lass, both seeking their first stakes triumph. Candy Lane was second to Totally Obsessed in that March 11 allowance race, while Dolly Dear finished third to that same rival on Feb. 11 in a similar event.

Pearls in Charge makes her foray into stakes competition for owner-breeder Susan King and trainer William Cowans. This Take Charge Indy lass was lightly raced at two, winning her final start of the season on Dec. 19 at Mahoning, a 6-furlong maiden special weight, by nearly five lengths. Most recently, the \$30,240-winner was second to Totally Obsessed in that Feb. 11 allowance race.

The lightly raced **Cinder Queen** makes her 3-year-old debut in the Southern Park for trainer Michael Rone, while the hard-luck homebred filly **Market Success** looks for an upswing in performance for trainer James Jackson and owners Elkhorn Oaks.