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\$75,000 Southern Park Stakes Kick off 2018 Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund events

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by Kimberly Rinker, for the Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund

The 2018 stakes season for Ohio-bred Thoroughbreds kicks off this Saturday (March 24) with the fourth running of the \$75,000 Southern Park Stakes at Mahoning Valley Racetrack. Post time for the featured event—race seven—is approximately 3:02 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 more than 101 years ago in nearby Boardman, OH.

Originally christened Southern Park Trotting Track, the half-mile raceway 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.

With the onset of the Great Depression, however, Southern Park slipped into oblivion as did so many tracks during those tortured years, and its memory is honored annually as the first Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund stake each season.

The inaugural Southern Park Stakes in 2015 was captured by trainer Robert Gorham's Justalittle smoke 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.

Last year, 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.

This year, a field of seven sophomore fillies vie over the Austintown dirt, including **Missap**, an impressive freshman winner of the \$150,000 Galbreath Stakes last fall at Belterra Park on Best Of Ohio day. The daughter by A. P. Warrior is owned by breeder the Beckett Racing Team and trained by Kellyn Gorder. Missap owns a lifetime bankroll of \$123,400 coming into the Southern Park and has Dean Sarvis in the saddle.

Michael Foster's **Tango Run** was third in the Galbreath to Missap, but does have three wins to her credit in just four career starts, including triumphs in both the \$75,000 Miss Ohio Stakes and the \$75,000 Tah Dah Stakes in 2017. A winner of \$124,500 lifetime, the daughter of Run Away And Hide just might give trainer William Cowans his first Southern Park Stakes victory. Rex Stokes rides.

The Ohio breeding and racing program continues to show steady improvement in several areas, according to figures in The Jockey Club's 2018 Ohio Fact Book.

Although there was a slight decrease in mares bred in Ohio in 2017—381 compared with 434 bred in 2016—and the number of in-state stallions decreased from 50 in 2014 to 47 in 2017, the number of starters and Ohio-accredited foals are on the rise.

For instance, in 2012 there were just 57 Thoroughbred foals conceived and born in Ohio, while in 2017, that number rose to a healthier 177. As well, the total foal crop for Ohio increased from 173 in 2011 to 381 in 2016.

Trainers are now more likely to race their Ohio-breds in the Buckeye State than ever before. Ohio-breds garnered 91.62% of their earnings in the Buckeye State in 2017, compared with 79.60% in 2013. As a result, since 2015 Ohio has remained slightly above the national average in regards to field (number of starters) size per start—up from a low point in 2012.

The number of Ohio races and purses have increased substantially over the past five years as well: from 2,155 races in 2013, offering \$17.3 million to 3,304 starters, to 2,400 races in 2017 offering \$45,538,700 to 4,496 starters. The average purse per race increased 224% from \$5,864 in 2010 to \$18,974 in 2017.

There were 770 Ohio-bred starters in 2017 who earned \$16,637,495, compared with 540 starters in 2013 who earned \$6,901,310, an increase of 141%. The average earnings per start for those same years was \$12,780 in 2013 and \$21,607 in 2017—a 69% increase.

Multiple graded stakes winner Cowtown Cat, a 2004 son of Distorted Humor, was Ohio's leading earnings sire in 2017. Standing at Mapleton Thoroughbred Farm after moving to the Buckeye State from Florida in 2015, he sired the winners of slightly more than \$2 million with 49 winners from 91 starters, including his top progeny Tiger Blood (\$141,100).

Meadow Springs Farm's City Weekend saw total foal earnings of \$693,499 last year, while Poplar Creek Horse Center stallions Indy Wind and Parent's Reward were third and fourth in this same category with \$603,387 and \$485,876 respectively in 2017.

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Photo: Missap captured the \$150,000 John W. Galbreath Stakes in 2017 and appears ready for another win in Saturday's \$75,000 Southern Park Stakes at Mahoning Valley. *Photo by Coady*