

## Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs

### 2009 Season Review

Well, folks, it's a little bit hard to believe, but we have reached the conclusion of the 2009 racing season here at Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs. It seems like hardly any time has passed since I was penning the season preview, but, as the old saying goes, I guess time flies when you're watching horses run in a counterclockwise circle. (What? It's not an old saying? Well, it should be.)

Anyway, it's almost time for me to hibernate for the winter. My plans: Sleep in for about a week, eat, take a nap, put on some sweatpants, watch some college hoops, eat some more, watch some reality TV, go back to bed, play Wii with my daughter, watch some reality TV followed by some college hoops on the DVR, go to see some lousy Christmas movie/chick flick to make the Better Half happy, take another nap, watch the Better Half ritually burn my sweatpants, take one more nap. By then it should be spring. Who says track announcers don't lead glamorous lives?

All kidding aside, I shall probably end up reflecting quite a bit on the season that was, simply because the adrenaline will likely take quite a bit of time to wear off. It all goes by so fast during the season. You barely have enough time to digest an amazing race or a scintillating performance because another racing day is always coming up fast. Only now, with a little breather, can I, or any Pocono racing fan for that matter, properly look back and appreciate what we've seen.

For me, it will likely come back in snap shots. For instance, I'll remember June 12, when we witnessed not one, not two, but three track records fall, courtesy of Caviar Crown (3-year-old trotting colt record in 1:53:1), Shermans Mountain (3-year-old trotting gelding in 1:53:3), and Farasyoucansee (aged gelding in 1:48:4, the fastest mile of the 2009 Pocono season.) To say that they were flying that night would be the essence of understatement.

I'll remember September 12, also known as Pennsylvania Championship Day, when \$1,000,000 in purse was on the line in Sire Stakes races alone. The day was marked by the struggle of all of the heavy favorites and by the wild finishes in the four \$200,000 state finals for 3-year-olds. For whatever reason, an off-track played to the deep closers, meaning that we saw a bevy of nail-biting, come-from-way-behind wins. For Pocono fans, it was especially rewarding to see Billie Bluechip, stabled at Pocono and a veteran of overnight races at the track, win the title for 3-year-old pacing fillies for trainer/driver Joe Pavia Jr.

Speaking of Joe, he stands out as the epitome of driving excellence for the 2009 season, capturing his first driving title at Pocono just two years removed from a serious injury that could easily have ended his career. But the overall talent in the driving community will also be impossible to forget, with 7 different drivers going over 100 wins on the meet. (Special props to Jim Morrill Jr., who won the UDRS title.) On the training side, how about the dominance of Chris Oakes, who, at press time, seemed headed for the training wins title for the first time in his career at Pocono and once again captured the UDRS training crown.

Looming large in my memory are our two big stakes races, each won by a standout performer: Johnny Z, who has never lost at Pocono in his career, won the Max Hempt for 3-year-olds, while Yellow Diamond produced a sub-1:50 mile in winning the James Lynch. On top of all that were all of the Horses of the Year, a group that we feted last week in this column.

There are far more great moments from the 2009 season that I will remember than I have space to list here. Yet it's overwhelming to think that 2010 has the potential to be even better. The Breeders Crown, harness racing's preeminent event, will be contested on the Pocono oval on October 9, 2010, a feather in the cap of this track that was unthinkable just a few years ago. We are all humbled by the opportunity to host this prestigious day, and we're also excited beyond belief.

So I guess it won't be all about looking back for Pocono fans this offseason. I want to thank all of the readers of this column, all of the horses and horsemen who made the season so memorable, and every MSPD racing fan for supporting us not just in 2009 but throughout the years. Trust me: You won't believe the season to come.

For now, I'll say sayonara. Thanks again. Have safe and happy holidays, and come spring, I'll see you at the track. Feel free to e-mail me at [jbeviglia@mohegansunpocono.com](mailto:jbeviglia@mohegansunpocono.com).