

BIGLY BREAKS ALL-AGE TRACK TROT MARK AT WATTSBURG (PA)

ATTRIBUTION -- Meadows Standardbred Owners Association, Pennsylvania Harness Horsemen's Association, and Pennsylvania Fair Harness Horsemen's Association partnership

WATTSBURG PA – The 32-year-old “youthful veteran” horseman Aaron Johnston (this is his 16th year of driving) capped off a big two-day Pennsylvania Fair Sire Stakes racing stand for himself and the Erie County Fair in this northwestern Pennsylvania borough when he guided the Cantab Hall sophomore gelding Bigly to a mile in 2:03.2 – the fastest trotting mile ever at the Wattsburg oval.

Undefeated in five 2022 fair starts and with a pari-mutuel Stallion Series win to his credit, it wasn't a surprise Bigly went on to victory for trainer/driver Johnston and owners Jennifer Johnston and Brian Taylor. But whenever you beat a record that began 34 years ago, you immediately become part of a special history: Bigly's 2:03.2 erased the track's all-age trot standard first set by Smokey Crown in 1988 and later tied by Major Matter (2016) and New Heaven (2017) – all of them three-year-old males like Bigly.

Fastest mile of the meet at Wattsburg came in the first race on Tuesday, the day given over to sophomore PaFSS racing. It was posted by the Betting Line filly Cathy Hanover, who won in 2:01.3, with Aaron Johnston doing the sulky honors for trainer Nathan Bresnahan and owner Matthew Miller.

We keep taking pains to say “Aaron Johnston” because two other members of Clan Johnston, driver Shawn and trainer Gary, both had good meets, but it was again Aaron Johnston who was the trainer and driver of the horse who altered another line in the Wattsburg annals on Monday, the day of two-year-old action. And that honor also went to owners Jennifer Johnston and Brian Taylor, when their International Moni – Fan Favourite trotting colt Momoni De Vie was victorious in 2:05.4, reducing the divisional record of Tag The Lady by a tick and also equaling the filly Lovebeinglucky as the fastest two-year-old trotting winner ever at Wattsburg.

Fortunately, Momoni De Vie's race was scheduled early on the Monday card, as a storm came in after race nine and forced the cancellation of the day's final five races. It was the first cancellation due to weather for the heretofore-lucky Pennsylvania Fair Sire Stakes trail, which had gone two months and a day without a rainout before Monday.

Aaron Johnston and Wayne Long each drove six winners during the shortened two-day Wattsburg stand to share driving honors; of Long's sextet, five came from his own barn as he won the trainers crown by one over his co-sulky champion.

State fair racing is right back in the game at Stoneboro PA on Thursday (two-year-olds, 6:30 p.m.) and Friday (three-year-olds, noon).