

DWC Carnival

UPDATE

RACING AT MEYDAN

- Dubai a Senior Investment for McPeek
- Sands of Mali, Axelrod & Gronkowski
- Fire Up Phoenix's Dubai Arsenal
- Record-Setting Raven's Corner Returns
- Almond Eye Takes Gentildonna Route
- Quick Hits: Heavy Metal, et al.

DUBAI A SENIOR INVESTMENT FOR MCPEEK



Dubai Racing Club | Michael Adolphson

DUBAI (November 29, 2018)—American trainer Kenny McPeek has long made a good living by winning big races and making intelligent ventures with racehorses. Led now by the aptly named **Senior Investment** (above), he is set to invade the Dubai World Cup Carnival with a trio of intriguing prospects, marking him as the first American trainer to come to the Carnival as early as January with the full intention of campaigning throughout the two-month affair.

“We’re looking forward to it,” McPeek said. “Our horses are currently at Payson Park in Florida and they will ship together in early January.”

In the past, U.S.-based conditioners such as Kieran McLaughlin (**Frosted**), Dale Romans (**Keen Ice**), Art Sherman (**California Chrome**) and Steve Asmussen (**Curlin**) have taken aim on the Dubai World Cup with runners they prepped over the local surface four-to-five weeks out (late February/early March). Then again, if it is new territory, one can bet that the innovative mind of McPeek has its destiny in manifest.

In 1995, McPeek nearly upset the apple cart by finishing a hard-charging second in the Kentucky Derby (G1) with longshot **Tejano Run**, who split two champions in the process (**Thunder Gulch** and **Timber Country**). In 2002, he won his first American classic when shocking the world with **Sarava** (70-1) in the Belmont Stakes. In 2004, he took **Hard Buck** across the world twice to finish second in the Dubai Sheema Classic (G1) and King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (G1) at long odds. In 2005, he saw brilliance where others did not and picked eventual Dubai World Cup (G1) winner Curlin out of the Keeneland September yearling sale for a mere \$57,000—a horse who would go on to earn \$10.5 million and one of a slew of bargain buys who would land copious graded stakes for him and others.

In 2017, he—along with Linda Rice—became the first American trainers to have horses compete in South Korea when racing in the Korea Autumn Racing Carnival. And, of course, over the last few years he co-founded, developed and promoted one of the most popular smart phone applications in horseracing—*Horse Races Now*—which has helped effectively collate the way American racing fans acquire news and information. His sights are now set on the DWC Carnival and he brings three diverse prospects who appear thoughtfully, if not cleverly, selected.

Senior Investment is a consistent Grade 3 winner who should benefit from the longer dirt races available at Meydan, especially the 1900m and 2000m affairs. Classic-placed when third in the 2017 Preakness Stakes (G1), the son of Discreetly Mine recently returned from a five-month layoff to finish third in a 1700m conditioned allowance and then fifth in the 2800m Marathon (G2) over Breeders' Cup weekend. He has a trio of victories from 19 starts, but has dodged no one in the process—competing in eight graded stakes (three G1).

Similar to Senior Investment is **Harlan Strong**, a son of McPeek-conditioned Harlan's Holiday who has developed deliberately for the operation over 17 starts and two seasons. Bred in Argentina, he maintains a positive trajectory, especially in grass races at and beyond 1800m and possibly as far as 3200m. Earlier this season, he was second in the Louisville Handicap (G3) behind banner-mate **Vettori Kin**.

“Senior Investment is difficult to handle in the U.S., condition-wise,” McPeek explained. “He's run out of conditions to run in and I think the handicap racing there will suit him quite well. The nine-to-10 furlong races are what he should excel in and he's a solid, sound horse.

“Harlan Strong is similar,” McPeek continued. “He's at the stakes level where he's out of allowance conditions and he should do well in the handicaps in Dubai, hopefully. We actually had another in a similar situation in (multiple G3 winner) **Rated R Superstar**, but he unfortunately was claimed last week (for \$62,500 at Churchill Downs).”

The last and arguably most enthralling of the triad is Argentina's star juvenile of this past summer, **Grecko**, who boasts a flashy gray coat, immense amount of promise and appears a prime suspect for the road to the richest dirt derby in the world, the \$2.5 million UAE Derby (G2) on Mar. 30. The son of Not For Sale—the sire of 2006 UAE Derby winner Asiatic Boy—romped in June's Estrellas Juvenile (G1), covering 1600m in 1:34.01.

“He's a southern hemisphere 3-year-old and we bought him privately out of the Estrellas,” McPeek explained. “He has been with us for a few months now and I think that's important. The difficulty of going to Dubai is high, but a horse who's had time to acclimate better to our training has a better chance of doing well once we go there—and that's what we're trying to do.”

All three McPeek horses are fully or partially owned by Fern Circle Stables and are expected to be joined by assistant trainer Otto Draper, a former head trainer, jockey and exercise rider who has worked for the legendary likes of Charlie Whittingham and D. Wayne Lukas. Fern Circle's principal is American billionaire businessman and philanthropist Paul Fireman, who led Reebok to becoming one of the most successful shoe companies in the world in the 1980s and 1990s before eventually selling it to Adidas. With 31 winners from 198 starts alone or in partnership—and playing at the higher end—Fern Circle has quickly made its red, white and blue silks known in stakes across North America.

“Mr. Fireman is a wonderful guy to work for,” McPeck concluded. “We’ve talked about it and decided to come. The other option is to give these horses the winter off. Even then, that can be a little problematic, so I think that it’s a good time to do this. He has given us the opportunity to go to Dubai and that’s great.”

SANDS OF MALI, AXELROD & GRONKOWSKI FIRE UP PHOENIX’S DUBAI ARSENAL



Richard Fahey-trained **Sands of Mali**, a brilliant winner of the Group 1 British Champions Sprint over **Harry Angel** (above) in October, has been partially purchased by Phoenix Thoroughbreds and will now point to the Dubai World Cup card and a run in the \$2 million Al Quoz Sprint sponsored by Azizi Developments (G1).

“We have high hopes for him,” said Amer Abdulaziz, principal of Phoenix Thoroughbreds. “The Al Quoz will be his target and hopefully Royal Ascot after that. We have partners in the horse and we just thought he was a beautiful horse with so much speed and were very impressed with him (at Ascot on British Champions Day).

“He will stay with (trainer) Richard Fahey,” Abdulaziz continued. “Hopefully he comes forward and is an even better 4-year-old. And, like I said, he’s just a beautiful horse.”

Previously owned fully by The Cool Silk Partnership, the son of Panis raced five times as a juvenile in 2017, resulting in a rousing Group 2 victory in York’s Gimcrack Stakes. After a pair of subpar efforts in subsequent Group 1 affairs, he returned as a 3-year-old to win the Prix Sigy (G3) at Chantilly in April and Haydock’s Sandy Lane Stakes (G2) six weeks later. Second in the Commonwealth Cup (G1) at Royal Ascot, he then had a trio of disappointing runs in G1 events before returning to form in a big way on Oct. 20 and defeating 2017’s aforementioned top-rated sprinter in the world. A run at the DWC Carnival prior to the Al Quoz Sprint has not yet been ruled out, but is unlikely.

Phoenix Thoroughbreds also has two high-profile 3-year-olds who appear to be prime prospects for the Dubai World Cup sponsored by Emirates Airline (G1), the world’s richest race at \$12 million. Multiple graded stakes winner and Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1) alumnus **Axelrod** and Belmont Stakes (G1) runner-up **Gronkowski** are headed to Dubai to join the yard of Sandeep Jadhav at the end of the month.

“Gronkowski and Axelrod will both be put into quarantine at the end of December,” Abdulaziz said. “We just found out that they are both approved for the Dubai Carnival, so that’s good news. We will point to the Maktoum Challenge races with them and hopefully trial them toward the Dubai World Cup.”

A good-looking son of Warrior’s Reward, Axelrod made a brief rally but had to settle for ninth in the Breeders’ Cup Classic, a race in which 2018 Dubai World Cup winner **Thunder Snow** was third. Previously, he was second in the Pennsylvania Derby (G1) and won both the Indiana Derby (G3) and Smarty Jones (G3) leading into that effort for trainer Mike McCarthy. He returned to the work tab this week with a sharp 800m breeze in 48 flat and remains co-owned by Slam Dunk Racing.

“He ran a good race, to be honest,” Abdulaziz continued. “You know how it is with horses. You want them to run well and we think he did. He’s only a 3-year-old and he wasn’t far behind (fifth-place) **Mendelssohn**. We have high hopes with him. He’s a beautiful horse.”

Gronkowski has failed to show the same spark he displayed in the Belmont Stakes, finishing eighth in the Travers (G1), sixth in the Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1) and third last out (Nov. 24) in the Discovery Stakes (G3) as well-backed second choice.

“Gronkowski disappointed us a bit last out, but we think he ran a good race,” he continued. “We thought he could win and the trainer (Chad Brown) thought so too, but we will see what happens after this and once he gets to Dubai.”

Abdulaziz also expressed excitement about Phoenix’s presence at the DWC Carnival, namely with the likes of dirt-bred **Pocket Dynamo**, a Group 2-placed juvenile who exits a ninth in the \$1 million Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Turf Sprint (Listed), as well as Group 3-placed 3-year-old **Lansky**, who appears to be a promising 1200-1600m turf type. Both are trained by Robert Cowell and will remain in his care while based at Meydan.

“We want our best horses at the Carnival and that’s what a lot of our trainers have been instructed to do,” Abdulaziz concluded. “Hopefully we do well.”

RECORD-SETTING RAVEN'S CORNER RETURNS

Dubai Racing Club | Andrew Watkins



Track record holder and Godolphin Mile (G2) alumnus **Raven's Corner** appeared to be one to watch at the end of last season. He blazed his way to a 1:23.07 1400m DWC Carnival victory—blistering, considering there is zero run-up—and proceeded to perform credibly, despite horrid draws (11 and 14) in the Mahab Al Shimaal (G3) and Godolphin Mile (G2).

Eight months later, all levels appear at homeostasis for the mercurial charge and Dubai racing fans will soon find out if the Satish Seemar trainee can take the necessary steps to stamp himself as one of the best 1200-1600m horses in the region—a level with which he has consistently flirted. Said commencement is set for next Thursday's Listed Garhoud Sprint over 1200m, a salty prep for sprinters and milers who have DWC Carnival aspirations and an event in which his not-so-love affair with the starting gate tumbled to its trench when balking badly, rearing, flipping and ultimately being scratched.

Raven's Corner also carries the hopes of owner Touch Gold Racing, a partnership of youthful and enthusiastic investors who have a great deal of affection for the game, as well as their star pupil. Playing in a proverbial stadium replete with royalty and various other power-players, Touch Gold and similar syndicates are signs of the times; an inspiring diversification trend that infuses the market with private, incremental investors who wish to parlay their enthusiasm into pay days on the podium.

"He's in good form at home," said Mike Kaye, principal. "He worked really well on Sunday and we're hoping we might have him a bit more forward than we did at this time last year. That said, he is a very big horse, so I'd be surprised if he stripped fit enough to win this first up. This is just the starting point.

"Of course, in this race last year, we had the unfortunate stalls incident, so right now we are really just hoping he gets through this unscathed and puts in a solid effort," Kaye continued. "That will give us much more time to build towards the big end-of-season races, where hopefully we'll see a better horse."

ALMOND EYE TAKES GENTILDONNA ROUTE



In 2012, Sunday Racing's **Gentildonna** flashed through a brilliant 3-year-old campaign, dismantling her female foes in the Filly Triple Crown of Japan and then finishing off her season with a scintillating performance in the Japan Cup (G1), defeating the awesome **Orfevre**. She carried that momentum into the following season and was the one to beat in the Longines Dubai Sheema Classic (G1).

In 2018, Almond Eye steamrolled over her generational foes of the same sex and then laughed at her elders in equally—and some say more—impressive fashion. She now has been pointed to the same Dubai World Cup night fixture, where she will try to do her predecessor one better.

While Gentildonna did return to impressively win the 2014 Dubai Sheema Classic, she was unsuccessful in 2013 at age four, when she ran into a world-traveling superstar **St Nicholas Abbey** (over whom she was a slight favourite). Almond Eye, owned by Silk Racing, has targeted the 2400m affair and appears ripe to make history, already being established as an overwhelming early favourite. Last out, in her Japan Cup, she made Longines proud (who sponsored the race), smashing the 2400m course record to 2:20.60.

“I was a little worried with such a fast pace, but it was an amazing performance” said Silk Racing Club president Masashi Yonemoto through an official translation. “After talking with Mr. Kunieda (trainer), from here we take her abroad. Will be our first time going abroad like this, but it has been a dream to have a horse like this. She won her first race here at Tokyo a year ago and now, to have come this far, is unbelievable.

“As she went along, it became clear what the future could hold and if she won the Japan Cup, we would decide to take her abroad,” Yonemoto continued. “There are so many strong fillies in the world right now. Spring will likely be Dubai as the main target. After that, the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. Then there are so many other races we want to consider for her as we go along.”

Yonemoto also did not rule out the possibility of running in the 1800m Dubai Turf (G1) in lieu of the Dubai Sheema Classic, but appears to be leaning toward the latter. A possible prep for her could come in the Kyoto Kinen (G2) in mid-February over 2000m.



QUICK HITS: Popular Sandeep Jadhav-trained miler **Heavy Metal** is preparing to defend his title in the Al Maktoum Challenge R1 (G3) on Jan. 10, a race that has been upped in purse to \$350,000 and in which the Godolphin Mile (G2) winner defeated Thunder Snow last season... The small and mighty **Imperial Hint**, who heads the aspirants for the Dubai Golden Shaheen (G1), has returned to training in the United States and will likely have one prep at his base of Tampa Bay Downs before heading to Dubai for trainer Luis Carvajal, Jr... Trainer Chris Waller of Winx fame appears primed to invade for his first DWC Carnival. Two to watch from his yard are Doomben Cup (G1) winner **Comin Through**, as well as talented filly **Savacool**. The former is set to compete in the Hong Kong Mile (G1) before likely heading to Dubai, while the latter could take advantage of sex-restricted DWC Carnival events like the Cape Verdi (G2) and Balanchine (G2)... Also on the Aussie front, trainer Darren Weir's Toorak Handicap (G1) winner **Land of Plenty** appears primed for the DWC Carnival and could fit multiple Group affairs with his 1200-1800m versatility... According to trainer Satish Seemar, 2018 Burj Nahaar (G3)-placed **Secret Ambition** is possible for the Garhoud Sprint (Listed) on Dec. 6 or the Dubai Creek Mile (Listed) on Dec. 20.

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