

## The Meadowlands • August 4, 2018 • Purse \$1,000,000 Go Atlanta! The Filly Wins The Hambletonian

With files from the Horseman & Fair World

You'd have to reach way down to the bottom of the bag of improbable story lines to come up with the winner of the 93rd Hambletonian. The first foal – a filly, at that – from an unraced mare named for a Quentin Tarantino movie, trained and driven by a father and son team, marched through just four New York Sire Stake events into the Hambletonian winner circle and pulled a whole lot of history in with her.

Trainer Rick Zeron purchased a yearling daughter of Chapter Seven-Hemi Blue Chip for \$60,000 at the Standardbred Horse Sale in Harrisburg named Django Unchained by breeder Stefan Balazsi. He quickly renamed her Atlanta, and was pleased with her 2-year-old campaign, even though she had some missteps along the way. Atlanta recorded a solid \$100k freshman season, winning a Champlain division in Canada, a state-bred contest in New York, and was a respectable fourth in the Breeders Crown at Hoosier Park, behind of course, the latest four-legged comet from the Jimmy Takter Stable, Manchego. At the end of 2017, Manchego took divisional honors with a perfect 12-12 record and the Zerons took Atlanta to Florida for the winter.

Rick Zeron and his son, Scott are something of a rarity in modern-day harness racing. Both are skilled horsemen, both trainers and drivers, though in the last few years Rick has concentrated on training and Scott on driving. Scott already etched his name in the record books by becoming the youngest driver at age 27 to win the Trotting Triple Crown, capturing the first leg, the Hambletonian, with Marion Marauder for the Wellwood family in 2016. So with one Hambletonian to his credit, no one, not even Scott, foresaw himself hoisting the Hambo trophy just two years later.

"I never dreamed I'd win the Hambletonian for my Dad, let alone with a filly," said Zeron post-race.

But that's what horse racing is made of – dreams, and Rick allowed himself those thoughts during winter training with Atlanta. He believed his filly was headed for greatness. Though both Zerons sat behind Atlanta during her freshman season, it was her form in 2018 that made the senior Zeron sense something special was brewing. Those high expectations led to the Zeron's decision to not race Atlanta in the Oaks versus her own peers, but instead take on the colts in the Hambletonian.

And on a hot and humid Saturday afternoon, they were rewarded handsomely when Atlanta captured the \$1 million final of this year's Hambletonian.

17 colts and the lone filly entered the 93rd Hambletonian, splitting evenly into two nine-horse heats. The first elim featured Goodtimes winner Wolfgang as the slight favorite, sent to the gate by the powerhouse duo of Jimmy Takter/Yannick Gingras at 3/5.

Scott Zeron had other ideas, and didn't wait for the favorite and Gingras to dictate strategy. He rocketed out of the gate with Atlanta to record the fastest fractions in Hambletonian history – :26, :53.2 and 1:21.1, maintaining an unbelievable four-length lead over the field while doing it.

The torrid fractions took their toll on the filly though, with Crystal Fashion rallying to track down Atlanta, getting a neck past her at the wire. The 1:50.1 mile tied as the fastest Hambo heat ever, matching the legendary Muscle Hill's win in the final in 2009.

The second elim featured O'Brien divisional winner Alarm Detector and Dan Patch champ Fourth Dimension, both of whom had struggled to maintain their freshman form. The favorite, Six Pack, a picture of consistency with a record of 6-5-1-0, entered the Hambletonian fresh off a devastating world record of 1:50 in a Stanley Dancer Memorial division on July 14, making him the fastest three-year-old trotting colt in history. The mile broke the previous world mark of 1:50.1 co-held by 2009 Hambletonian winner Muscle Hill and Donato Hanover.

The intriguing Tactical Landing was trained and driven by Jimmy Takter only in the months leading up to the Hambletonian and had just three starts in 2018. The blue-blooded colt by Muscle Hill out of the Varenne mare and Breeders Crown champion Southwind Serena (making him a full brother to two-time champion Mission Brief) was an \$800,000 yearling buy, still seeking to justify his purchase price.

Tactical Landing dominated his elimination, winning by more than a length in 1:52.1 as Six Pack locked wheels with another competitor, Classichap, and was out of the money.

The stage was set for the \$1,000,000 final. Since elimination winners draw for inside posts 1-5, Atlanta was in the open draw, starting from post seven, as she had in her elim. Being in the first elim gave both Zeron and Atlanta an extra half hour to regroup.

"Yes, it was important because of the way I drove her in the first elim that she needed another 30 minutes," Scott told the Horseman & Fair World's Gordon Waterstone.

Scott also added that his thoughts of racing the filly off the pace in the final were extinguished when he saw the draw and realized post seven would dictate the same tactics used in the elim.

Heat winners Tactical Landing and Crystal Fashion drew posts two and three, respectively.

The final went the way Zeron hoped as Atlanta opened a two-length lead early with a 26.2 first quarter and never lost it as she sailed through more comfortable fractions. Opening up by three lengths in midstretch, Atlanta prevailed to a length win over Met's Hall and driver Andy Miller. Tactical Landing, who gave a valiant first-over effort, edged Crystal Fashion for third.

With an effort that defied belief—even for her connections—Atlanta proved she could be among the all-time great filly trotters when she stepped out to a 1:50.4 victory in the rich final. Atlanta joined Duenna (1983) and Continentalvictory (1996) as the only fillies to capture the Hambletonian since the race moved to the Meadowlands in 1981. With the Hambletonian trophy under her belt and the belief by her connections she could trot a mile in 1:49, Zeron was quizzed as to whether Atlanta was on her way to becoming the greatest filly of all time.

"Like Muscle Hill and Somebeachsomewhere, those are once in a lifetime," said Scott. "Those are the horses that have no boundaries and are the greatest. To me, that's Atlanta. Everybody remembers who won the Hambletonian. It doesn't get any better than that."

The final-heat victory also allowed Zeron, just 29 years old but a veteran with more than 22,000 drives and 3,400 wins, to quickly redeem himself for an elimination drive he said was the "worst mistake" he'd ever made in the sulky.

Rick Zeron shared ownership of Atlanta and he and partners Howard Taylor, Brad Grant, Al and Michelle Crawford (Crawford Farms) and William Holland (Holland Racing Stable), watched the elim from tables in the Trotters dining room.

It was the first Hambletonian win for everyone in the partnership, as well as the first breeding credit for Swedish breeder Stefan Balazsi's Order By Stable. Balazsi was a partnership owner of 2010 Hambletonian winner Muscle Massive.

The \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks was won for the eighth time, including the last six straight by a Jimmy Takter trainee, a record probably unmatched in any breed. It was also the sixth breeders credit for Brittany Farms, as Manchego (Muscle Hill-Secret Magic) won her elimination the week before and the final, easily tacking a 26.3 last quarter onto the fastest Oaks in history, 1:50.0. It was the fifth straight Oaks title for top reinsman Yannick Gingras.

Attendance on the day was 18,252 with more than \$6.8 million wagered, consistently the most by any harness track in North America.

## Atlanta

**ATLANTA**, bay filly, 3, by Chapter Seven-Hemi Blue Chip by Cantab Hall  
 Driver: Scott Zeron  
 Trainer: Rick Zeron  
 Owners: Rick Zeron, Crawford Fms, Holland Racing Stb, Howard Taylor, Brad Grant  
 Breeder: Order By Stable

TIME BY QUARTERS	¼	½	¾	MILE
1ST ELIMINATION	:26.0	:53.2	1:21.1	1:50.1
2ND ELIMINATION	:27.0	:54.4	1:23.3	1:52.1
FINAL	:26.2	:55.2	1:22.4	1:50.4

**MET'S HALL** bay colt 3, by Cantabl Hall-Met's Inn by Mutinee  
 Driver: Andy Miller  
 Trainer: Julie Miller  
 Owners: Stroy Inc [Julie Miller; Natalia Stroy], Andy Miller Stable  
 Breeder: Winbak Farm

FIRST ELIMINATION			SECOND ELIMINATION		
CRYSTAL FASHION	10.00	4.20	3.00	TACTICAL LANDING	3.60 3.40 2.10
ATLANTA		3.60	3.00	PATENT LEATHER	50.20 36.20
MET'S HALL			9.60	FASHIONWOODCHOPPER	21.40

**TACTICAL LANDING** bay colt, 3, by Muscle Hill-Southwind Serena by Varenne  
 Driver: Jimmy Takter  
 Trainer: Jimmy Takter  
 Owners: The Tactical Landing Stable[Kevin Greenfield, Andrea Lea Racing Stb, Michael Creps, Wayne Farthing, Michael Frank, Lynda Stewart, Taylor Stewart, Christina Takter, Howard Taylor & Jean Pierre Dubois' D Farm LLC]  
 Breeder: Steve Stewart, Black Creek Farm, Andrea Lea Racing Stable

**Final Payouts**

ATLANTA	6.40	4.20	3.60
MET'S HALL		19.40	7.60
TACTICAL LANDING			3.40



- "I thought I lost the Hambletonian in the elimination," admitted Zeron. "I thought I lost the race because I let her get away from me the whole mile when I should have reined her in."
- Atlanta's great Hambletonian Day on August 4, 2018, was a far cry from exactly one year ago when the daughter of Chapter Seven won a qualifier that was needed after making breaks her first two career starts in New York Sire Stakes (NYSS). "She was never ready to go to Yonkers or Batavia her first two starts. She was immature mentally," said Scott Zeron.
- Atlanta won her sophomore debut on May 11 in an overnight at the Meadowlands, besting older male trotters in the process. She then swept her way four straight times against New York-sired competition, including a 1:50.3 all-age track-record effort at Vernon Downs in the Empire Breeders Classic final.
- Atlanta wears trotting hobbles, though Scott said the hobbles are more for security than necessity. "Dad doesn't like to put trotting hobbles on but before she ever got to the races she would make breaks training," he said. "He put the belly hobbles on her just for the mental support. Aside from those early half-mile breaks, she's flawless with them. Training back down we tried to go without them but it felt like she needed that security of having them."
- Zeron is now the youngest two-time Hambletonian winner after capturing the 2016 renewal with Marion Marauder.
- 61-year-old Rick Zeron was born in Ottawa, Ont., and got his start in racing at Connaught Park in Quebec when he was 15. Training and driving, he later became a fixture at nearby Blue Bonnets Raceway before moving in 1995 to the Woodbine/Mohawk circuit. He has more than 8,100 driving wins, 1,400 training wins and two Canadian O'Brien Awards for Horsemanship to his credit.
- While Atlanta was Zeron's first Hambletonian starter, he trained and drove 2011 Hambletonian Oaks runner-up Lady Rainbow. The Zerons also teamed up two years ago on Marion Marauder's Hambletonian day with Shamballa, who won the U.S. Pacing Championship.
- Six Pack won the Yonkers Trot and Kentucky Futurity, while Atlanta went on to win the Kentucky Filly Futurity.
- She cruised to Dan Patch divisional honors and also earned Trotter of the Year in the U.S.
- Breeder of the Year went to Order By Stable and broodmare honors to Southwind Serena, dam of Tactical Landing.
- Atlanta is the fourth Hambletonian winner in four years to return to the races rather than head to the breeding shed. She joins 2015 gelding winner Pinkman, stallions Marion Marauder (2016) and Perfect Spirit (placed first in 2017) and now racing overseas, in making a triumphant return to the racetrack.

