Tall Dark Stranger is a danger, especially with his back to the wall.

Pushed to the max by old rival Papi Rob Hanover, Tall Dark Stranger battled back in deep stretch to win the $636,650 Meadowlands Pace by a neck on Saturday night (July 18).

In a gutsy effort, Tall Dark Stranger, the 1-2 favorite, captured the first major stakes of the season for 3-year-old pacers. Normally, the Pace follows the North America Cup, but the ongoing pandemic shuffled the calendar. This time, the Pace was the division’s leadoff event, and it was a dandy.

Tall Dark Stranger, last year’s Dan Patch winner, took charge with a strong move down the backstretch. Papi Rob Hanover and driver David Miller ranged up to challenge on the turn and fought their way to a clear advantage in the stretch. Even driver Yannick Gingras thought he and Tall Dark Stranger were finished.

“I said after the Breeders Crown that he was coming back to win that race,” Gingras said. “There are a lot of doubters out there, but tonight is the proof that my horse loves to fight.”

Tall Dark Stranger improved his season mark to 3-for-3 with the 11th win of his 12-race career.

Nancy Takter, daughter of Hall of Famer Jimmy Takter, got her first Pace victory, following Linda Toscano as consecutive female training winners of The Meadowlands Racetrack’s signature event.

It was also the second straight Pace win for sire Bettor’s Delight following last year’s 27-1 upset by Best In Show.

Tall Dark Stranger became the sport’s latest millionaire for the ownership team of Crawford Farms, Marvin Katz, Caviart Farms and Howard Taylor.

The time for the mile was 1:47.2. Tall Dark Stranger paid $3.00, $2.10 and $2.10. Brett Pelling, all-time Pace training leader with four wins, settled for second and third, as Papi Rob Hanover returned $3.60 and $2.80 and Allywag Hanover paid $2.40 to show.

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Tall Dark Stranger wasn’t done in this shootout. He surged again, pushing back to secure the win and give Gingras his second Pace win.

It wrote another chapter in a rivalry that dates back to the 2019 Breeders Crown, where Tall Dark Stranger was elevated to victory when Papi Rob Hanover was disqualified for interference.

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