Empire Breeders Classic elims, Tompkins-Geers headline all-stakes card at Tioga
James Witherite, Tioga Downs racing media

Nichols, NY --- Sixteen stakes events comprised Sunday (Aug. 16) afternoon's card at Tioga Downs, and while In The Arsenal ($3.50) and Divine Caroline ($6.90) punched their tickets for next week's Empire Breeders Classic finals by way of sub-1:50 miles, it was 2-year-old trotter Jack Vernon ($3.40) who stole the show with a 1:53.3 effort in his Tompkins-Geers Memorial division.

Other notable Tompkins-Geers winners on the afternoon were 3-year-old Conway Hall colt Habitat ($2.30, Yannick Gingras), who pulled clear at will for a decisive 1:53 triumph in a lone $58,662 division, and 3-year-old Donato Hanover filly I'm So Fancy ($4.00, Gingras), a 1:54.1 pillar-to-post winner in her $33,832 event.

Sixteen New York-sired 3-year-old pacing colts and geldings contested two $12,500 eliminations for the Empire Breeders Classic, and Brian Sears swept both splits. In addition to his 1:49.3 win with Kelvin Harrison trainee In The Arsenal, he sustained a first-over trip with the Casie Coleman-trained Arque Hanover ($7.50) to just stave off Americanprimetime (Jason Bartlett) in 1:50.

The connections of In The Arsenal selected post two for next week's final, while the connections of Arque Hanover selected post one. They will be joined by Artistic Major, A Bettor Hat, Rockin In Heaven, Americanprimetime, National Seelster, and Betting Exchange. Completing the field will be fifth-place finisher Sicily, who was drawn in by lot. Oneisaloneynumber -- the other fifth-place finisher -- is the lone also-eligible.

Of the 21 New York-sired 3-year-old pacing fillies split into three $12,500 Classic eliminations, Moremercy Bluechip ($7.20, Andy Miller) and Band Of Angels ($2.50, Gingras) controlled the terms for at least the closing circuit of their victories, while Divine Caroline ($6.90, David Miller) pushed clear off a pocket trip in the final quarter-mile of her 1:49.4 triumph.

For next week's distaff final, Band Of Angels will start from post three, Divine Caroline from post two, and Moremercy Bluechip from post four, as selected by their connections. The trio of elimination winners will be joined by Devil Child, She's Heavenly, Rock Me Gently, Hipnumberone, Mosquito Blue Chip, and Beyonces Rockn. Heart Major and Single Me have been drawn as the two also-eligibles.

Live racing returns to Tioga on Monday (Aug. 17) evening, with the first of 12 races due off at 6:15 p.m. (EDT).