

Greg Wright vies for national title

Wolverine Raceway driving star Greg Wright, who has almost completely dominated the Detroit-area harness racing scene the past two years, is now officially the winningest sulky sifter in North America.

Latest statistics issued by the U.S. Trotting Association give Wright credit for 210 victories in 1975 compared with 199 for runner-up Carmine Abbatiello of New York. Walter Paisley, an annual leader in Chicago harness cir-

cles is in third place with 196 wins. Although numbered among the sport's top ten through each of the last five years, Wright has never enjoyed the leadership this late in the season. Herve Filion, the reigning Canadian super star, has been making a runaway of the race since 1968, even using a personal helicopter to compete in the afternoon and evening at different tracks.

"With Herve settled down a bit after breaking every record in the book, maybe I can win it this year," Wright laughed on a recent night at Wolverine. "My stable has never been this well balanced and so far I'm getting my share of the driving luck."

The 29-year-old Windsor, Canada, native had just reeled off 1:58 and 1:58.4 race victories behind Armbryst and Ickawick at Wolverine and had pushed his record at the big Livonia mile track to 23 victories through the first 23 nights. Earlier in the summer at Hazel Park he had set a new all-time Michigan record of 90 wins during an 82-night meeting.

"Certainly I'd like to win the national title and all the nice things that go with it," Wright freely admitted. "But I'm not going to let it pressure me. I have a fine bunch of horse owners in my stable and I'm only trying to do the best I can for them. That's the name of the game."

Training harness horses while he was still in high school, Wright was fifth in the North American rankings in 1972, ninth in 1973 and a strong third in 1974. Now in his tenth year as a driver, he has won over 1,750 races and his horses have logged earnings approaching \$4-million.

In the Michigan neighborhood the past two years the handsome, quiet talking Canadian has been downright invincible. He won driving titles at

both Wolverine and Hazel Park in 1974, and added still another championship at Windsor Raceway during the winter.

"I didn't bust into this sport overnight," Wright emphasizes. "I was hanging around the barn when I was nine or 10, jogging them on the track when I was 13 and making \$40 a week before and after my high school classes getting horses ready for another man to race. I know a lot of guys who get their driver's license after they've been around horses only a little while, and after a year they're dropping out."

At age 13, with not enough money to invest in a stopwatch, Greg persuaded an old man to help him work a horse. "He owned a watch and he'd stand at the side of the track and wave his hand if I was taking the horse too slow, or hold up his hand if I was too fast. I learned how to rate a mile pretty good that way."

Wright will never talk about his successes without mentioning his No. 1 assistant, Jerry Moffat. Moffat never races a horse, just helps Greg train them. And Wright says he's "the best."

"When you're racing seven, eight races a night, you need help," Wright explains. "Jerry is like my right hand and I rely on him completely. When he says a horse is ready to go you can believe him."

Everybody believes Wright and Moffat at Wolverine these evenings. Of the 26 5-minute miles turned in thus far, horses from the Greg Wright barn have contributed six. And if the overall victory clip continues, track patrons will see an unprecedented 100 wins hung up by one lone harness racing operation.

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TELEGRAPH

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