

A Superhorse Works Miracles At Wolverine

By DOC MINARD

Superhorse Albatross accomplished everything Wolverine Raceway management predicted he would when it first learned the greatest pacer of all time would compete in the Matron four year old pace.

Just to add a bit of excitement to the program, management scheduled the celebration of the annual "Good Ol' Times" event and everything worked out as expected.

The double feature attracted the second largest crowd in Michigan harness racing history with 18,273 going through the turnstiles. It was a bit short of the all-time record of 19,715 that turned out in 1970 for the initial celebration. And wagering this time sent Wolverine past the million mark for the first time with a total of \$1,024,101... a first in Michigan.

The Bird set a few records of his own by winning the four year old stake in 1:58.2, fastest clocking of the meeting. It gave the great star an unprecedented sweep of Matron stakes in each of the three years of competition Albatross won as a two, a three and now as a four... the first standardbred ever to win all three. It won't be repeated for the simple reason that this was the final year of the four year old stake.

It was The Bird's sixth straight victory after finishing second in his first three starts of the year. The stake was worth \$58,255 of which the \$29,000 winner's share boosted Albatross within \$21,000 of the desired earnings of a million. He should pass that mark within three weeks and become one of six millionaires of harness racing. It is expected he will go well past a million since present plans are to keep him racing until the end of the California season in late November and then retire him to stud duties.

THAT'S ONLY a small part of the Albatross story. By the

end of Saturday's card, Wolverine had just about rewritten the record books for business during a six night week.

Saturday's crowd of 10,945 sent \$835,825 through the mutual machines and gave Wolverine its first \$4 million week. The final figure showed a total of \$4,008,283, another all-time Michigan high, with betting for the weekend surpassing to another peak of \$1,859,926. Average betting for the week was an astronomical \$668,047.

Thus with only two nights remaining of the 82-night season, Wolverine has bettered every record for wagering with a total of \$48,752,701 for the 80 nights and a nightly average of \$609,405. This compares with \$571,554 for 71 nights a year ago.

Two other betting marks faded into oblivion Friday when the pools for the nightly double and the trifecta were shattered. The double wagering climbed to \$81,878 compared to the previous high of \$76,732 and the trifecta on the sixth race totaled \$93,024 against the former mark of \$89,880.

The track management allowed win and place betting on the Matron stake with the result that \$61,376 of the \$91,798 backed Albatross and cost \$2,452 in a minus pool on the place end. This was way below the almost \$14,000 minus pool of the previous Albatross appearance with win, place and show betting.

KENTUCKY, the spectacular five year old from the Quaker City Stable of Salem, O., returned to Wolverine Saturday and showed why he's rated second only to Albatross in horses competing today.

Kentucky set the track record of 1:57.4 a year ago in the Matron four year old pace and came back to race in the \$10,000 Open-Invitational feature. He won in 2:00 flat but probably could have gone much faster had it been necessary.

With Max Lynch, second trainer for the Bruce Nickells stable in the sulky, Kentucky took the early lead, lost it to Windy Way for a few strides on the backstretch, then came on to move ahead and turn into the stretch with two lengths lead.

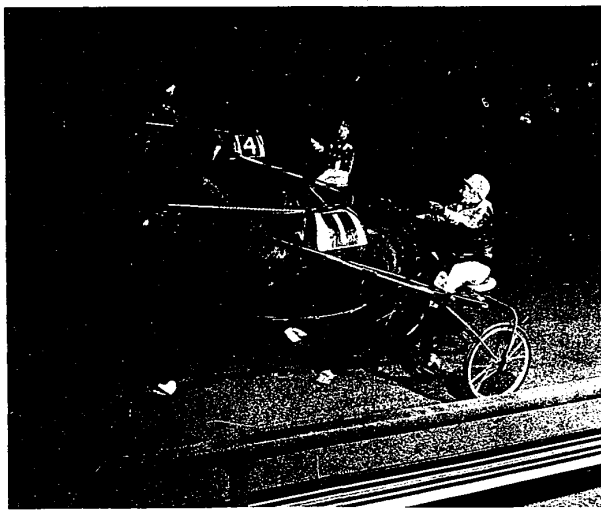
Lynch eased Kentucky up in the closing strides but still had more than a length edge when he hit the wire. Windy Way was second and Bramble Hall made a big bid in the final sixteenth to finish third.

ALTHOUGH the head-to-head battle for patronage won't begin until Wednesday, Windsor Raceway got a four-day jump on Northville Downs with a Sunday matinee opening that brought a June crowd of 6,382.

A year ago, the track lured barely 5,000 even with a free gate on a Sunday for thoroughbred racing. The big attraction was Fresh Yankee, the millionaire mare who made off with the winner's share of the \$7,500 in one of the easiest victories of her career.

There wasn't the kind of competition Fresh Yankee has been facing and she boosted her earnings to \$1,203,377 with the 2:00 triumph. The victory gave her half of the purse. Strangely enough, the crowd was large for even a Sunday matinee but it wasn't in a wagering mood. The handle for the 10-race program was \$56,346, one that could be considered disappointing.

Windsor was dark Monday and Tuesday rather than face competition from Wolverine Raceway... 'tis said in some circles that Vice President and General Manager Dick Wilson, of Wolverine, was considering a free gate for the final two nights had Windsor decided to race. Whether that was the reason for the dark nights, one will never know but it is an indication that Windsor believes it can compete against Northville Downs but not against Wolverine or Hazel Park.



SUPERHORSE ALBATROSS (1) finishes a half-length in front of fast closing rival Nansemond (4).



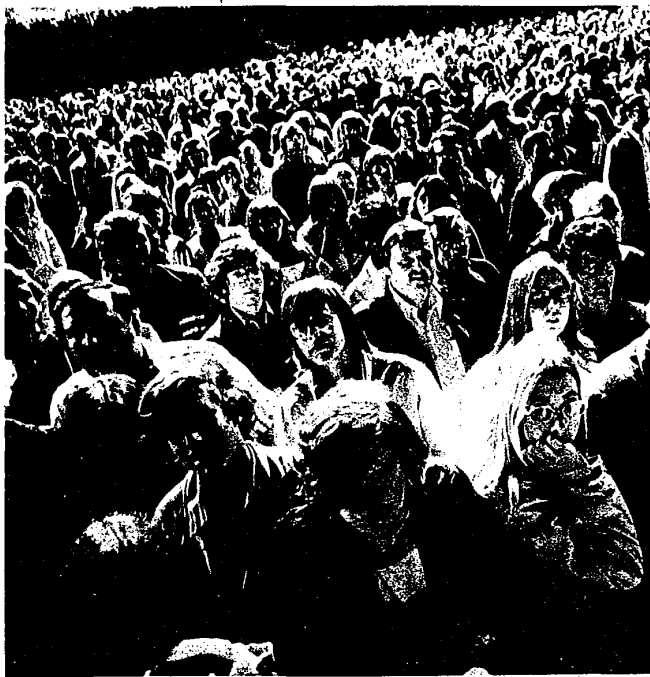
HUNDREDS OF HOT DOGS, all for a dime each, kept concessionaires busy throughout the evening. This salesgirl had her griddle jammed in preparation for the big rush.



FAMILIAR SIGHT -- There isn't any way of filling the stomachs of hungry boys with their bottomless pits. But these youngsters were in line early putting everything on their 'dogs.



THERE ISN'T any age limit for the annual "Good Ol' Times" celebration at Wolverine Raceway. This proud Mom brought her tiny youngster along to view all the sights, eat a hot dog and watch the great Albatross.



THOUSANDS jammed against the rail for the races and as far back as one could see there was nothing but a sea of faces. This is a small part of the 18,273, second largest gathering in Michigan harness racing history, that turned out for the big night.

Observer
Photos
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