



Slides Choice Noses Out Pay The Man And Catlaunch Rolls On As Best Of Ohio Races Turn Into Instant Classic Encounters

All season long, three horses --- Catlaunch, Slides Choice, and Pay The Man -- have dominated the Ohio Fund roster of stakes races. Too bad one of them had to lose Saturday at Thistledown.

The Best of Ohio, a series of five added-money races, was renewed for the 24th time on a rainy day at the North Randall oval with Slides Choice edging Pay The Man in an epic duel in the \$75,000 Distaff, followed by the evergreen Catlaunch defying the odds and his age, winning the \$75,000 Endurance at nine in a front-running dominant performance.

In between the two Buckeye classics, Startin Something won the John Galbreath Memorial Stakes for juvenile fillies, Tri Uimet defended his title in the Best of Ohio Sprint, and Jump Boots upset the Juvenile Stakes.

But it was Mary Crawford and Gerald Brown's Slides Choice, the 2009 Ohio Horse of the Year, racing head-to-head with Pyrite Stables' Pay The Man from the start to the shadow of the finish line before dropping her head on the wire for a nose decision. The two outstanding female runners did the same thing in last year's Distaff with Slides Choice also proving a nose the better. Slides Choice, trained by Tim Hamm and ridden by Jason Lumpkins, was winning for the 10th time in 22 career starts. The \$45,000 that she banked lifted her lifetime bankroll to \$473,465.

"They ran hard," said Hamm. "These are two classic fillies. At the wire, I didn't know who won."

"I wasn't thinking I had it or lost it," said Lumpkins. "I concentrated on keeping my filly at the task at hand. Any little mess up could have cost us."

"I thought I won it," said Ricardo Feliciano, who rode Pay The Man for his uncle, trainer Miguel (Angel) Feliciano. "I really can't believe I lost the (head) bob. What's the difference between these two? Two inches. One inch?"

Slides Choice ran the Distaff's 1 1/8 miles in 1:52 1/5 over a sticky track labeled as "good." She paid \$5.80 for a \$2 win ticket as the race's 9-5 second choice. Pay The Man was the 6-5 betting favorite. She earned \$15,000 for second, adding to her record lifetime bankroll of \$606,981 for an Ohio-bred filly or mare.

Scioto Farm's Catlaunch, who entered the starting gate attempting to erase the memory of his 10th place finish in last year's running of the Endurance, wasted little time in attaining redemption. Under jockey Luis Gonzalez he bounded to the front and, after a breather in the stretch turn, extended his lead to four lengths at the finish. He ran 1 1/4 miles in 2:04 1/5, earned \$45,000, and paid \$6.80 as the race's second betting choice.

Raise the Reward rallied for second, as That's a Heckofacat, who loomed boldly in the stretch turn, tired but saved third money.

"He thinks he's a young boy," said Ron Fields, who owns and bred Catlaunch. "Me? He's not making me any younger. In fact, I have to watch my heart when he runs."

Records are sketchy, but Catlaunch is believed to be the first nine-year-old to win a Best of Ohio stakes race. He has now earned \$883,554, second only to Harlan's Holiday (\$3.2 million) on the all-time Ohio-bred money list.

"Will he run at 10? Why wouldn't he? Absolutely, he will," said Fields.