New York breeders and fans of New York racing will hear something new on tomorrow’s SiriusXM “Down the Stretch” broadcast with hosts Bill Finley and Dave Johnson: promotions for the NY-bred program and the announcement of this month’s NY-Bred of the Month. The show airs each Saturday morning on satellite radio from ten a.m. to noon.

If you’re still in your car for the 5:05 post time of the Grade III Gotham for three-year-olds, follow the race when Finley and Johnson return to cover the action at Aqueduct. SiriusXM subscribers can listen on Sirius 93 and XM 209 or online at www.siriusxm.com.

The $400,000 Gotham is often a stepping stone to the Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May. Show producer Ed Pappas explains the coverage, saying “The Gotham has never before been a part of our Road to the Derby package, but when you get a $400,000 purse and a great field that includes the 2-year-old champion, it’s a race you have to include.”

Down the Stretch will return to Aqueduct Racetrack on April 7 for the Grade-I $1 million Resorts World Casino New York City Wood Memorial.

NYRA NOTES

- Romans looks for more surprises in 2012 with Suns Out Guns Out, Finnegans Wake
- Grove, second in 2011 Gotham with Norman Asbjornson, hopes to go one better with Pretension
- Tiger Walk seeks “good spot” from post 13 in Gotham
- Napravnik returning to New York in April
- Stay Thirsty gearing up for comeback breeze at Palm Meadows, eyes major New York races in second half of year

OZONE PARK, N.Y. – Anyone following last year’s Triple Crown trail knows trainer Dale Romans can send out unheralded horses to do big things at ridiculously long odds. His eventual Preakness winner, Shackleford, ran second at 68-1 in the Florida Derby.

Romans has entered two Florida shippers in Saturday’s Grade 3, $400,000 Gotham at Aqueduct Racetrack, and one of them, Suns Out Guns Out, is still a maiden. The other, Finnegans Wake, most recently ran on the turf.
Suns Out Guns Out is a $325,000 son of Empire Maker owned by West Point Thoroughbreds. His 0-for-4 record wouldn’t look like one worth bringing into a contentious Gotham renewal, but Romans saw his last race as a key heat.

In a 1 1/8-mile allowance on February 4 at Gulfstream, Suns Out Guns Out tracked Teeth of the Dog in fourth around the track and then dug in through the stretch and placed third, just three-quarters of a length back.

On February 25, the last-place finisher in the heat, Delta Ranger, came back to win on the grass.

“If he’s going to jump up and run big, he might as well do it in a race with graded earnings and get on the Derby path,” Romans said of Suns Out Guns out, 30-1 on the morning line. “You’re running out of time, and you have to time their big race. When you think they’re sitting on a big effort, you need to run it instead of running around in a maiden race.”

Romans mentioned Paddy O’Prado, who broke his maiden in the Grade 3 Palm Beach in 2010 after four career losses. That colt, owned by Donegal Racing – the same owner as Finnegans Wake – went on to finish third in the Kentucky Derby and won three more graded stakes races that year.

“I know the horse is doing well and has a big breakthrough race coming,” Romans said. “He’s training well.”

Jockey Irad Ortiz, Jr. picks up the mount on Suns Out Guns Out, who starts in post position No. 7.

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One year after finishing second behind Stay Thirsty in the Grade 3 Gotham with Norman Asbjornson at odds of 47-1, Maryland-based trainer Chris Grove returns to the race with Pretension, who despite his strong record could be another runner with long odds.

“I’m surprised I was 20-1 [on the morning line], but who the hell is Chris Grove?” the trainer joked Friday morning.

Owned by Irving Kidwell, who has raced for more than 30 years as Kidwells Petite Stable, Pretension ought to be a little more familiar to Aqueduct followers than Norman Asbjornson, who showed up for the Gotham after runs at Penn National and Parx Racing.

Pretension, a New York-bred son of Bluegrass Cat, comes in following a sharp score over Swag Daddy in the restricted Sweet Envoy Stakes on February 11 over the
Aqueduct inner track. Swag Daddy had beaten Pretension by a head in the Damon Runyon, also for statebreds.

The Damon Runyon was Pretension’s first try around two turns after a 4 ½-furlong and a 5 ½-furlong sprint.

“I knew he wanted to go long,” Grove said. “That first race going long was when I was most excited. He should have won that day. Swag Daddy caught him on the last jump and beat him a head. He came back going long at Laurel and the 3-5 favorite got loose that day, and we spotted him three to five lengths. We made a run at him, but if we had gone head-and-head with him, I think the outcome would have been different.”

With five exacta finishes in five starts, Pretension gives Grove confidence, and the chestnut colt has improved his Beyer Speed Figure in every outing. Grove realizes beating 2011 Breeders’ Cup Juvenile winner Hansen is a tall order. Tall, but not necessarily impossible.

“I’m sure it’s Hansen and then wide open but [Hansen] being out there in the 12 hole, it’s going to be difficult for him to overcome,” Grove said. “[Pretension] won’t be too far back. He’s got a nice post position [No. 4]. He proved at Laurel he will come off of it. This colt has run, and he has run all the way to the wire. Like a basketball team, he’s starting to play all four quarters, not just once in a while.”

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Much is being made of 2011 Breeders’ Cup Juvenile winner Hansen drawing the No. 12 post position for the Grade 3, $400,000 Gotham on Saturday, but how about Tiger Walk, who drew the outside No. 13?

“I think we’re going to run anyway,” said Ignacio “Nacho” Correas, IV, trainer of Tiger Walk for Sagamore Farm. “At this time of the year, the horses need to run. I think where we are up on the first turn is going to tell it. He needs to get a good spot. Thirteen horses on that track, you need a lot of luck. I think he’s a good horse. If we get a good trip, we should run a good race, whatever that means. To hit the board from the 13th post position, you need a dream trip.”

Post positions 9 and out are a combined 8-for-77 in route races at Aqueduct since November 30 last year.

Still, Tiger Walk has every right to be a good horse. After two nondescript starts on grass last summer at Saratoga, Correas put the son of Tale of the Cat away for three months and returned in November at Laurel Park, where he broke his maiden going a mile on the turf and winning by five lengths.
“He won at a mile on the grass, but he was training on the dirt so good I was hoping they would take the race off the grass,” he said. “He was training like a freak on the dirt. We decided not to go to Florida with him. We went into an allowance [on the dirt at Laurel], and I think it was a very good allowance, and he won good. We figured we’d give it a shot at the Triple Crown trail and see what we’ve got.”

The trail led to a start in the Grade 3 Withers on February 4 on the Aqueduct inner dirt, and Tiger Walk finished third behind highly regarded Alpha, taking dirt kickback for the first time.

Because of the post position for the Gotham, Correas has lowered his expectations for the outcome and has firmly set his sights on the Grade 1, $1 million Resorts World Casino New York City Wood Memorial on April 7 at Aqueduct.

“We’re taking this step by step,” the trainer said. “I’m trying to build a horse that has so far been good to me. His test is going to be in the Wood. There are very few horses that can win every race that they run, so you have to be happy if they show you something. We’re looking for the right signals from the horse.”

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Jockey Rosie Napravnik, currently the leading rider at the Fair Grounds, plans to return to New York to ride full time beginning next month.

“I’m very excited about moving my tack to New York full time,” said Napravnik, who finished third in the Big A’s inner track jockey standings in 2009-10 and fourth in 2008-09. “Having had some success there in the past and also the momentum of coming off another great Fair Grounds meet will hopefully start us off in the right direction.

“I’m really looking forward to riding with the top riders on a daily basis because I will learn so much and become an even better rider,” added Napravnik, who won her first graded stakes at Aqueduct on March 20, 2010 aboard Liam’s Dream in the Grade 3 Cicada. “There’s no doubt that especially now with the huge purses, New York will be the toughest competition out there, but I’m ready to put 110 percent into it!”

After the end of the Fair Grounds meet on April 1, the 24-year-old Napravnik will be represented by agent Matt Muzikar, who will continue to hold Javier Castellano’s book. The agent will part ways with Cornelio Velasquez when Castellano returns to New York.

“I think her timing is pretty much impeccable,” said Muzikar. “She’s had two successful years, two solid meets at Fair Grounds. Last year she was the leading rider at Fair Grounds, and she’s running away with it again this year. She has what looks like a pretty nice 3-year-old in Mark Valeski [second by a nose to El Padrino}
in the Risen Star]. She’s a young, up-and-coming rider and it’s time for her to try and take it to the next level. Hopefully I can accommodate her in accomplishing that goal.”

Last year, Napravnik became the first female to win the jockey title at Fair Grounds with 110 victories in 2011, including the Grade 2, $1 million Louisiana Derby aboard Pants On Fire, who later finished ninth in the Kentucky Derby with Napravnik aboard.

Through March 1, Napravnik has ridden 1,266 winners of more than $33.4 million.

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With Calibrachoa set to carry the torch for Repole Stable in Saturday’s Grade 3, $200,000 Tom Fool Handicap, Stay Thirsty, the operation’s 2011 Travers winner, is beginning to gear up for his 2012 campaign, having entered light training at Palm Meadows.

“We wanted to give him a meaningful break with a focus on Saratoga and the Jockey Club Gold Cup,” said trainer Todd Pletcher. “Hopefully, we’ll have him still at a peak in the fall, unlike last year. We’ll probably breeze him in 10 days to two weeks from now and go from there. He’s galloping every day and is approaching being ready to breeze.”

Pletcher said that while Saratoga Race Course’s Grade 1 Whitney Invitational Handicap on August 4 is Stay Thirsty’s “first major goal,” the trainer would like to first give him a prep at Belmont Park during the spring/summer meet.

“Ideally, we’d have at least one race before the Whitney,” said Pletcher. “It’s not important what it is.”

Owner Mike Repole concurred with the plan.

“We’ve been pointing for the second half of the year and we know he likes New York,” said Repole. “We’re looking to give him a prep at Belmont, then race in the Whitney and Woodward [at Saratoga], then the Jockey Club Gold Cup before we hopefully go on the Breeders’ Cup Classic [at Santa Anita].”