



Kantarmaci continues dominance in Under 20's Claiming Challenge with another title during Aqueduct stint

Trainer **Mertkan Kantarmaci** continued his domination of NYRA's "Under 20s Claiming Challenge" with another title for the concluded winter/spring meet at Aqueduct Racetrack, marking the fourth consecutive time he has finished atop the leaderboard.

The "Under 20s Claiming Challenge," launched in 2018, is open to local trainers with 20 or fewer horses nationwide. The most recently completed challenge launched on December 10, Opening Day of the 56-day winter meet, and ran through the 11-day Big A spring meet that concluded April 18.

Kantarmaci topped the standings, racking up 133 points in the unique contest that highlighted horses' performances in winners' claiming races on the main track. Randi Persaud was second with 83 points, with Edward Barker [68] and A.C. Avila [65] rounding out the quartet who cracked the 60-point threshold.

The top-eight trainers in the contest shared a prize pool of \$80,000, with Kantarmaci earning the first-place prize of \$16,000.

The outright win for Kantarmaci followed a 2020 in which he tied Barker for the title during the Big A's winter meet. The Turkish-born conditioner was also the stand-alone challenge winner for the 2018-19 winter meet and the 2019 Belmont Park spring/summer meet.

"It's a great feeling and to get a title like this racing in New York, I'm really delighted with that," Kantarmaci said. "It shows we can have consistent success with the claiming horses, and most of them have improved from when they were claimed, and some of them have gone on to allowance races. I couldn't get points with those, but of course, I made money with them by moving them up."

When the winter and spring meets are factored in, Kantarmaci compiled a 10-12-9 record with 74 starters, finishing in the money 41.89 percent of the time and winning at a 13.51 percent clip, with his horses earning \$600,617.

“I think I’m one of the best claiming trainers in New York right now,” Kantarmaci said. “I’ve won a few at Aqueduct and one Belmont. So, it shows we can do well at Belmont and at Aqueduct, which has a long winter meet. There aren’t many young trainers in New York; just a few. It’s hard to win that much with just claiming horses. But it’s gotten people’s attention and some owners have asked us if we’re available to train their horses, so a claiming title like this in New York has been really helpful.”

Among Kantarmaci’s highlights for the concluded Big A stint was the Chilean-bred Mi Tres Por Ciento in an \$84,000 allowance optional claimer title on December 19 and an allowance optional claimer worth \$84,000 on February 13. Reed Kan also won two of his four starts during the Claiming Championship period, while Dust Devil won a claiming title on January 18 and added another victory in a starter allowance race on April 1.

Looking to parlay that success to the current meet, Kantarmaci has two runners entered for Sunday’s program, with Castagno entered for Race 4, a \$55,000 claiming contest, and Front Man entered in a \$55,000 starter allowance in Race 6.

Overall, Kantarmaci said he has 19 horses in his barn at Belmont and praised NYRA for continuing to sponsor the Claiming Challenge Series.

“We are really happy and thankful for the opportunities it gives to claiming trainers,” Kantarmaci said. “Maybe one day, I’ll have high-class stakes horses and maybe some others will have the opportunity to take advantage of this claiming challenge as well.”

The Under 20’s Claiming Challenge continues into the current spring/summer meet at Belmont Park, which started April 22 and runs through Closing Day of the 48-day meet on Sunday, July 11. This contest encompasses both main track and turf contests.

To retain eligibility, there can be no more than 20 horses on a trainer’s roster at any given time, although a trainer’s stable may grow above 20 horses through claiming activity. But only roster horses can earn points. A trainer may replace a claimed horse who was on their roster with another claimed horse. After a horse is claimed, it will be added to the trainer’s roster only at the trainer’s request.

Horses in for a tag in an allowance optional claiming race will qualify for contest points. Points are not earned in maiden, allowance, starter allowance or stakes races.

A horse that ends up on the stewards’ list for poor performance [defeated 25 or more lengths] will not earn the trainer points for that race. Horses that are running for 50 percent or less of the claiming price from their most recent start will only be eligible to earn 50 percent of the typical points for that race.

In addition, horses can only earn contest points for two races within a given 30-day time period. A horse may enter in additional races during that timeframe but will not earn contest points for those additional races.

For more information, please contact the racing office at 718-659-4241.

Contest Point Structure:

Dirt Races – All claiming races for winners, including horses in for an optional tag:

1st Place – 6 points

2nd Place – 5 points

3rd Place – 4 points

4th Place – 3 points

5th Place – 2 points

Turf Races- All claiming races for winners, including horses in for an optional tag

1st Place – 5 points

2nd Place – 4 points

3rd Place – 3 points

4th Place – 2 points

5th Place – 1 point
