



By Ray Cotolo (JGS Photo)

MAY BABY (Guccio—Free Wheeling—Credit Winner)

Breeder: Oakwood Farms, *Montgomery, IN*

Owners: Cheyenne Yoder, *Bell, FL*

Trainer: James Yoder

Driver: James Yoder

Purchase: \$8,500 Hoosier Classic Yearling Sale

When training down for her two-year-old season, **May Baby** conditioned alongside **Reba Blue Chip**, trained by James “J. D.” Yoder’s father Verlin. Verlin always planned to race **Reba Blue Chip** on the Grand Circuit, and because **May Baby** progressed with her at the same pace, J. D. was convinced to try her on the big stage.

“I more or less looked at Cheyenne and said ‘You know, if Rebas going to be going into these big races, we might as well try our luck and maybe we’ll end up in one of those big races,” J. D. said.

That’s where May Baby ended up. Dominating the Indiana Sires Stakes as a two-year-old but finishing second in the \$270,000 final, J. D. decided to try his Guccio filly in the Breeders Crown at Woodbine Mohawk Park. She launched from post 9 in the elimination and faltered to fourth, but raced first over in the \$600,000 final and faded to eighth.

“She ended up scoping a little sick in the final,” J. D. said. “We learned a little bit more about her and what we can do to her and what we can’t do.”

May Baby came back at three to win three races straight, including a nine-length blowout in a preliminary of the Indiana Sires Stakes. She then shipped to the Meadowlands to race over the track in the \$15,000 Hambletonian Oaks “Prep”, grinding first over to finish second to **Hypnotic AM**.

“Going into a 12-horse final, she might get stuck in a position where she might be stuck out there and it’s not going to be as easy as getting to the front at Hoosier and racing on the front,” J. D. said. “She could be stuck in a bad spot.

“I’m happy going into the final with her. She trained good [Tuesday] so we’ll try to make sure she’s feeling good and have her sharp going into the final.”

J. D. Yoder will try to become the eighth trainer to drive their horse to victory in the Hambletonian Oaks, joining the likes of Glen Garnsey (1971, 1973, 1974), Joe O’Brien (1972, 1976), Henri Filion (1977), Bill Herman (1978), Bill Popfinger (1980), Howard Beissinger (1982) and George Sholty (1987). Sholty was the last trainer to drive an Oaks winner, taking the race with Armbro Fling.

Yoder began his own training operation in 2015, racing mainly at Running Aces in Minnesota and Pompano Park in Florida before transitioning his barn to Hoosier Park starting in 2018.