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Ryan Roshau for The Racing Journal

2015 will be known as the year of the Triple Crown in thoroughbred racing.

The same can be said for the state of North Dakota.

The Backhaus Family from New Salem wrapped up the Chippewa Downs meet with a pair of dominant efforts, in the process sweeping the state's thoroughbred Maturity (won in June by Nicks Star), Derby, and Futurity.

Big Cats Echo started the meet's final weekend win parade with an 18 ½ length romp in the \$10,250 North Dakota Derby. The dark bay filly by King Cha Cha, inexplicably sixth in an Allowance start a week earlier, led every step of the way under jockey Jeremy Fennell to reward her backers with a \$8.60 payoff. Winning owner Leigh Backhaus was delighted in victory and knew she would respond better than she showed in her last. "Half way through that last race she quit," Backhaus sheepishly explained. "After the race we realized we forgot to put the tongue tie in."



Big Cat's Echo front and center in the North Dakota Derby

With the oversight corrected, the blinkered beauty left her competitors fit to be tied when she quickly opened up an eight length lead after a quarter mile before drawing off in the lane to finish the six and half panels in 1:31 2/5. Spy Guy, also from the Backhaus barn was second while Butch Herman's Goddess Artemis was third. 6-5 favorite Really Unique, an Assiniboia Downs shipper, finished fifth.

The winning effort was the third for Big Cats Echo in six career starts and her second win in stakes company as she took the NDToba Stallion Stakes Futurity last summer at Chippewa. After a runner-up effort in the North Dakota Futurity in Fargo, she finished tenth and last in the \$75,000 Shakopee Juvenile at Canterbury.

Backhaus credits his son, 24 year-old trainer-of-record Lexon Backhaus for the horse's progress. "She was great last year but she had knee problems and we laid her up and Lexon got her right." The family patriarch continued, "Lexon started training when he was 15 underneath me, we're all growing and he's learning, but this filly has got the speed and she carried it out."



Krews Pass showing top freshman form

Another green member of the Backhaus stable is its latest juvenile star **Krews Pass** who delivered yet another knockout punch for the family when he won the \$10,250 North Dakota Futurity by 10 ½ lengths in :58 for 4 ½ furlongs. Under the careful guidance of Donovan Azure, the Dark Bay colt cruised home in hand as the 5-2 second choice besting Rachel Backhaus' Valiant Quiz. The husband-wife exacta paid \$10.80 in front of Doug Demontigny's Rockin Clyde.

The Futurity was the second straight win for the son of Be Valiant. An allowance win on June 28th came off of his career debut, a second place run in the Chippewa Downs Futurity on June 20th when a bad break saw him finish with a flurry.

Both horses are likely to move on to Canterbury Park or other Midwestern locales but as they depart the Peace Garden State, and impressive chorus of accolades follow with them. After all, it is becoming apparent the 2015 meet may have ushered in a new era of dominance in the state as the Backhaus band is only starting to build momentum.

"It was a great weekend and a great meet, and it's been a great year," Leigh Backhaus said in the aftermath. "We are having a ball and we're growing, every year trying to get better." The 2014 ND Breeder of the Year expounded, "Right now I have 22 foals and 16 yearlings and next year I will have five stallions and 40 foals."

In a farm-to-table model, Backhaus, a custom fencer by trade, sees the importance of having his four sons involved in all aspects of the game. "It's a lifetime thing because it's not just training your horses, it's training your kids. We have multi-generations here with my family and multi-generations of horses, and that's special."

Backhaus has been a part of bush tracks, Indian Relay Races, and county fairs and agrees in the family approach. "I've tried to send horses to trainers before but this is a people business and in my kids I have the right people who have been riding since they were six and now we have winners."

Winners in 2015, and maybe more winners to come