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Friday, January 1, 2021 - Happy New Year

In 2021, will handle take on a new meaning?

The pandemic placed more focus than ever on the need to grow handle to help the industry sustain itself.

by Brett Sturman

BETWEEN THE LINES



with BRETT STURMAN

In today's HRU

<i>Horsepeople talk 2020 and hopes for 2021</i>	page 4
<i>David Anderson with thoughts on whether expensive mares make good broodmares</i>	page 8
<i>Pandemic year was a game-changer for Austin Hanners</i>	page 10
<i>Promoting racing: it's up to us</i>	page 12
<i>Dan Patch Virtual Awards Show set for Jan. 16.</i>	page 15
<i>HRU's Barnsdale and Lomon finalists for SC Media Excellence Award</i>	page 16

If this past year has taught us anything as far as racing goes, it's that it's more pertinent than ever that tracks grow handle and become less dependent on subsidized sources to fund race purses.

I've long held the belief that given the opportunity to do so, governments and gaming companies would take any event possible as a reason to reduce or eliminate altogether their involvement in harness racing. This year, we've seen throughout North America the logistical issues that occur when harness racing operations are tied to the stability of other entities, such as the closing of a related casino.

In a direct reference to handle to sustain racing operations, thoroughbred track Penn National Race Course – whose casino is currently closed due to state restrictions in Pennsylvania – announced that they would continue horse racing through January so long as minimum handle requirements were met. For the company to break even, the estimated nightly handle to be reached is about \$1.4 million.

Going by recent historical handle, Penn National shouldn't have much trouble meeting that number. But what if similar requirements were put into place in our industry?

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Hip 100 PUT TO RIGHT p,3,1:50.2-'20

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In addition to the thoroughbred track, Penn National Gaming owns properties tied to harness tracks that include Freehold, Dayton, Plainridge and The Meadows. Handle at these tracks is relatively small, and a review of daily purses compared to daily handle these and most other harness tracks would show a wide disparity. And, Penn National Gaming is a company whose stock price has skyrocketed this year to boot. If a company in their position is applying pressure to one of its properties to produce handle in order to race, what does that say for tracks tied to lesser stable companies or governments operating under massive deficits?

Whatever the future holds, the need to take handle seriously and grow it this upcoming year should be self-evident. To that end, what wagering trends can be observed from this year that can be applied going forward?

Helpfully, the United States Trotting Association's annual economic indicators for 2020 have been segregated neatly between pre-shutdown of racing and the resumption of racing. At the start of the year through March 22, the handle on a per-race average basis was down 7 per cent when compared to the same time period in 2019. Similarly, amounts wagered overall was down 5 per cent year-over-year in the same period. However, June 1 onwards shows a totally different picture. In the final seven months of this year compared to last, the per-race average was up 20 per cent. This results in a 27 per cent swing from how racing was faring on a per-race average basis pre-shutdown and after it. Similarly, total handle overall went from being down 5 per cent year over year to up 5 per cent, another double-digit 10 per cent swing.

The difference on a per-race average basis is easily explainable. While this metric was up 20 per cent post-shutdown, the amount of race days was almost down that exact same amount. So, generally speaking, one could surmise that there is a total pool of money available to be wagered on harness racing and as fewer races were conducted, the money for wagering was diverted to the tracks that were able to conduct races. For example, Scioto Downs was able to benefit in part by being one of the first tracks to resume racing once Ohio got the go-ahead before other states did, and record amounts of handle went there (massively surpassing their prior year's per race average), as opposed to handle being spread out more evenly had the normal slate of tracks had been running.

More interestingly, and I would say is a positive takeaway, is the 10 per cent turnaround in the second half of the year when compared to how racing was doing in the first part of

the year compared to 2019. This is harder to pinpoint where the improvement came from, but it's something that racing can build on, nonetheless. Whether the increase is attributed to an overall surge in online wagering – including sports betting – which was a huge boon this year, or the fact that there's now a forced dynamic from on-track to wagering from home, perhaps there's potential for the trend to continue, but racing still needs to do its part.

To expand the pie itself, racing must listen to its customers. Takeout rates are still almost as high as ever at most places, and wagering menus increasingly feature the most unfriendly and counterproductive types of jackpot bets.

Take the Meadowlands from last Saturday. The track which is responsible for an overwhelming plurality of handle in the U.S., took in \$3.7 million the day after Christmas. This might sound good, but when put into perspective that \$3 million around this time of year is normal, had nearly all of the racing stage to itself, carded 15 races (which took nearly six hours by the way), and still couldn't reach \$4 million is a bit underwhelming. By comparison, Santa Anita racetrack on that same day under similar circumstances handled \$23 million, one of the highest in that track's history. The lesson is that it's not going to be enough to simply shift handle from one track to the other, but rather tracks need to incentivize so that total handle overall can grow.



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It becomes redundant to continuously talk about takeout, but it's a driving factor in what handle could potentially be. Handle explodes when there are carryover pools, which is no different than an effective reduction in takeout percentage. Tuesday night, Pompano Park handled nearly \$200,000 into a pick-5 (non-jackpot) carryover of \$20,000 from the night before. That sequence came within one race of a double-carryover, which had that happened might have been cause for a \$1 million pool next out.

Heading into this weekend, the Meadowlands finds itself in a similar position with a pick-5 carryover of \$47,000 from last Saturday. They have "guaranteed" the pick-5 pool to be \$150,000, but the upcoming pool is going to hit that amount at least two or three times over. The point in all this being is that there's still an appetite to grow harness racing handle but it needs to be in environments that are advantageous – or at least not larcenous – to those playing it.

The reality is that handle may still may not be of paramount concern for many in the industry, but it should be. In 2021, handle might not just be a statistic but rather a means as to if racing and go on.

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THE BANK

2, 1:53.4; 3, 1:50.4 (\$1,214,895)

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- Son of Lantern Kronos, 3, 1:52.3 (\$1,020,150)
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MEADOWLANDS MATTERS



with **DEBBIE LITTLE**

Horsepeople talk 2020 and hopes for 2021

Best memories of 2020, what they most want to do when the pandemic is over and much more.

by **Debbie Little**

To celebrate the New Year, I've asked some Meadowlands trainers and drivers the same four questions. Hopefully, this will become a yearly column – minus the COVID-19 references.

1. What is your best memory of the year: a) on the track, and b) off the track?
2. Have you ever made New Year's resolutions and did you keep them?
3. When COVID-19 is over, what do you want to do that you couldn't do in 2020?
4. Do you have something you'd like to accomplish in 2021?

Andy Miller

1a. "Probably the best memory on the track is our horse (Venerate) winning the Mohawk Million. Obviously, I wish it had been me driving him but the way it ended up, it worked out okay."

1b. "Spending more time with family, that's been good."

2. "The obvious ones like lose weight or exercise more, but everybody makes those. As far as New Year's resolutions in the business, I don't try to hold myself to something like that. You just want to stay healthy and hopefully have another successful year."

3. "Usually, we'll take a trip [out of the country], maybe to the tropics somewhere, and this winter, we're not going to do



Claus Andersen

Andy Miller.

that. We enjoy spending a week where it's warm and hopefully we can do that again next year.

4. "Of course, I have lots of things I'd like to accomplish. Obviously, I'd like to win some of the biggest races, but that's a yearly wish. [2020] started off a little slow but ended up very good and hopefully 2021 is a strong year for us."



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Dave Briggs

Nifty Norman.

Nifty Norman

- 1a.** "I think winning the Kentucky Futurity with Amigo Volo. That's a race that everybody loves to win and I've never even had a horse in it let alone win it."
- 1b.** "I just moved to [Ketcham Farm], a little private farm and it's got a half-mile track and it's worked out great. I really enjoy it. You feel like you're at home every day."
- 2.** "Not one that's turned out. I usually make one the day after [New Year's Eve] that I'm going to give up drinking."
- 3.** "Well, obviously, travel. For example, I'm from New Zealand and I wouldn't have been able to get back to New Zealand this year, which we have done in the past."
- 4.** "Nothing in particular. I'd like to be consistent. I'd like to stay healthy, obviously. I'd like to keep things going the way they are. I love training horses."



Claus Andersen

Julie Miller.

Julie Miller

- 1a.** "I should say Venerate first just because it was the million-dollar race, but it just was so disappointing not to be there. So, I'd probably have to go with Love A Good Story with the [Filly] Futurity. Being a New York girl, I feel like she kind of got underrated all year and I think she finally proved herself on a mile track that day that she was one of the top ones in the country."
- 1b.** "Probably my son, Tyler. Watching him mature. He's loving driving. He got me my 2,000th [training] win. He's really coming into his own in this sport and he loves it."
- 2.** "I'm sure I have in the past but I failed miserably by January 15th. If I would say one this year probably would be to have better posture and I think that could be attainable. And to not swear so much."
- 3.** "Ever since we moved to New Jersey, every year as a family,

we would go see the tree and go to dinner in [New York] City. And that tradition got ruined this year. This is the first year we're missing that since 2006."

4. "I'd sure like to win the Hambo and get that off the list. I'd like to see the restrictions lessen and people would be able to move around and stay healthy doing it. My next bucket list big trip is I'd like to do Thailand."

Scott Zeron

1a. "Beating Tall Dark Stranger in the Breeders Crown. On a daily basis, it felt more consistent and better aside from not having that one dominant horse. Across the board, I had good horses all year."

1b. "One night in Lexington I had dinner with [Tim] Tetrick, [David] Miller and Mark MacDonald. Breaking down everyone's list of top drivers. No mics/cameras/media, just raw honesty. A convo I'll never forget."

2. "I used to. When I was like 20 to 24, I was so fixated on the amount of wins and earnings I had. But through time I've realized that I'd rather just have progress than anything else."

3. "I do miss going to movie theaters. Vacations, too. I know some people travel but you're still worried about restrictions that they put everywhere."

4. "The only goals I have are certain workout weight goals. Ideally, I'd like to bench press this or squat this. That's about the only goals I've set. I feel like you have to set goals or it's really hard to push the envelope."



Claus Andersen

Scott Zeron.

Marcus Miller

1a. "My best thing from this year, even though the pandemic is horrible, a little bit of a silver lining was I did get to spend three months at home with my son and that felt really special to me. For nine months of the year I'm working seven days a week, so it was a little treat to actually get to be home day after day."

1b. "I went back to Illinois for their Super Night and a couple of their stakes nights leading up and that was a lot of fun. It was kind of a little homecoming retreat and I was able to make a little bit of money, too."

2. "I used to always make the resolution that I wanted to win more races the next year than I did the year before. But I stopped doing that when I moved to the East Coast."

3. "[Skiing is] my favorite thing to do outside of work. I end up going by myself a lot and one of the fun things that you do is ride up with people that you don't know on the lifts"



Dave Landry

Marcus Miller.

and you chat. And now you have to be alone or on the lift with your party. So, you miss out on a lot of that comradery you get with strangers.”

4. “Not a specific race or anything, but I would just like to get hooked up with a legit Grand Circuit horse. It’s been a couple of years since I’ve had one that was competitive on the big stage and I would like for that to work out.

* * *

On a personal note, I’d like to share my best moment of 2020, which was when HRU asked me to write this column.

The month before, I had been in the hospital battling COVID-19 and was just starting to feel like myself again when this opportunity came my way.

To everyone who has taken the time to speak with me, I love sharing your stories and want to thank you for trusting me to do so.

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David Anderson with thoughts on whether expensive mares make good broodmares

That and much more in this week's edition of harness racing's most popular advice column.

by Ron Gurfein

Tidbits: I get letters about bad positives all the time and many have merit. This one especially hit a vein. Tim Roach wrote his daughter got three Cannabis positives at Hoosier Park and after moving off track all the horses tested negative.

Subsequently, they were informed that another trainer in the same barn had the same positive at a previous time, yet no one in the judges' office ever bothered to inform them. I am not pointing any fingers, but if this is a true story I would like to hear from someone in the Indiana Racing Commission how something like this can happen. It is evident if the facts are correct someone dropped the ball.

* * *

I may have made a big mistake asking you to make a New Year's resolution to not ask me about why I defend certain people. I was deluged with complaints.

I will say I understand why there were complaints about my defense of Nick Surick and Lou Pena. They were two entirely different situations, but both were treated unfairly in the charges. Surick was banished without any due process. Lou Pena got railroaded by the New York racing commission with the most ridiculous trumped up charges that were so bizarre they could have put me out of business if similarly charged. I was never in either trainer's corner. In fact, if you read my column of two weeks ago, they both fit in my scenario of trainers I would throw out if I was a track owner not caring what they had to say in their own defense. To me, winning at the rates they accomplished is proof enough of cheating.

But the law is the law and we are all entitled to a fair and equitable judgement by our peers, which is something simply lacking in both these cases. Do I think they are both guilty of

using performance enhancing drugs? 100% YES. However, this is still the USA and you are innocent until proven guilty. People do not go to prison on opinion.

Kenneth Stout asks: *Just read an interesting article about some of the greatest racing fillies and mares that were duds as broodmares. I just saw that (thoroughbred) Monomoy Girl sold for \$9,500,000. Any thoughts?*

Unfortunately, I have had little success in that department myself. Thankfully, I learned early on that great fillies do not necessarily make great broodmares.

Just at the beginning of my career I was fortunate to have the first foal of Cami Almahurst, the fabulous Gene Reigle-trained lass. The colt was sired by none other than the top stallion of the day Speedy Crown. He had no ability and I learned my first big lesson.

Not one of the many great mares I have trained, like Imperfection, Continentalvictory, Cayster, Kerry's Crown, and Beat the Wheel, have ever had a great horse. Most have never had a nice horse.

Thankfully, I only bought one foal at public auction from all the foals they had and that one was a dud.

Wondering if the pickings were better on the thoroughbred side I called my good friend David Anderson who has had great success as a thoroughbred breeder. He sold the first foal of a good looking maiden, for \$1.1 million and this year sold a filly out of the same mare for \$1.6 million. He didn't have similar success in the standardbred business. However, he did get very lucky with his great racing filly Pampered Princess.

After having three foals that were less than wonderful he was fortunate to sell her to Brixton Medical for a nice high six-figure sum. She has yet to have a good foal.

David points out that many great thoroughbred mares fall into the same category.

Mandy Pope purchased Havre de Grace for \$10 million and John Ferguson bought Ashado for \$9 million. Both are mares as formidable as they come. We are still waiting to see a good runner from either one of these great mares. Zenyatta is another one that fits the same mold.

The one exception that David mentioned was Rachel Alexandra who has had a top filly.

He claims that rarely are these mares bought for the commercial market. Most often they are bought so the buyer can race their foals.

Anderson said, "It's like buying a piece of art."

From our conversation I learned that in the commercial market, which is mainly his objective, "if the yearling doesn't stand perfectly, doesn't vet, or the sire is not the flavor of the day, you are cooked. To have a major success the stars must be aligned."

Basically, there is no difference in the two breeds. It is no more likely for a great mare to have a great foal than a lesser one.

There are differences in the way a sophisticated buyer looks at the animal in the two sports. The thoroughbred buyer is more interested in appearance than pedigree. I think the opposite is more evident in our sport although not all the time. I have seen many beautiful yearlings over sell their pedigree.

David used Bob Baffert as the example of the profound horse buyer. He is rarely seen with a catalog in his hand. He stands in the back ring and watches every horse. He has made a career of buying an athlete.

Some interesting notes on our little talk. David had been out of the standardbred business since 2010 when his father Bob Anderson — A wonderful friend and an avid supporter of our sport — passed away. Since his return to our business he has noticed a lot of positive changes.

"I find a big improvement in conformation, no weak hind quarters and more balance. Many more good horses," he said.

A fault he finds is that many new, inexperienced owners think the horses are like race cars — fill them with gas, change the oil, put on new tires and go. It comes down to we must go to this race next week because it is on the list. There is never a thought that a horse may need a rest. That just never comes to mind.

On the brighter side, Anderson has been trying for months to buy a share in Charlatan the early favorite for the 2020 Kentucky Derby that tweaked an ankle winning the Arkansas Derby that ended his trail to the Triple Crown.

In the middle of last week his dream came true and he purchased a share, just three days before Charlatan set the horse world ablaze with an amazing five-length victory in the Grade 1 Malibu Stake at Santa Anita.

"Mike Smith shut him down mid-stretch or it would have been a stakes record," Anderson said.

The colt will have \$35 million in purses in his next three races. The Pegasus (\$3 million), the Dubai Cup (\$12 million) and the Saudi Cup (\$20 million). Good luck my friend.

Thomas Santoro asks: What are your thoughts on retiring 3 year olds? Does it hurt the game? Do you believe the sport needs its stars?



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What If?

This is certainly not the time to worry about the sport's stars. This is survival of the fittest. Let's be thankful we still have a sport and that it is — for all intents and purposes — thriving in its own way in a pandemic.

Sadly, the only thing that matters today is that the owners and breeders are able to make enough to stay afloat. The Lexington sale was amazing and with the change of venue Harrisburg survived. Sales in the Midwest were very good. How long can that sustain itself under these circumstances?

For the moment, cashing in 3 year olds is financially expedient. If times change would I like to see more horses remain on the track? Of course I would.

That said, I feel that being forced into a 4-year-old campaign by a Gural rule is counterproductive as has been proven with the test of time.

When life returns to normal, if the tracks want to encourage racing older horses let them put up the money to support it? Why not add 4-year-old and older stakes to the format. The fees could be small because of the amount of time involved in payments and it would provide a much more equal playing field than early closers that only attract stick out performers and very small fields.

Joel Cravet asks: What is the quickest you ever gave up on a yearling you bought as a non-athlete? What is the one you stuck with the longest to get the results you hoped for?

About 10 years ago I bought a Well Said colt in partnership with Jerry Silva at Harrisburg. I don't even remember his name or maybe I don't want to ever hear his name. To say he was non-athletic would be a compliment. He was sound, no EPM or motor problems, just totally uncoordinated. He would trip himself incessantly and oft-times fall down. Neither Chris Lakata, my assistant, nor I had any desire whatsoever to sit behind him. Top it all off, he was slow. Jerry to the rescue. All I had to say was we have to get rid of him and in 24 hours Jerry had him sold at a price I would be embarrassed to admit.

As far as hanging on to one for any length of time, that really never happened in my barn. I was filled with owners desiring instant gratification and in no way were they going to listen to "he needs more time." That's a quote from a sales catalogue not to be uttered from the lips of yours truly. Rarely did I have an owner that would want to bring an unraced 2-year-old back at 3. If one day I remember a story about one that I did spend some extra time with I will put it in print.

Thank you all once again for all the wonderful emails. Please keep the questions coming in. Have a healthy and happy New Year.

Have a question for The Guru?
Email him at GurfTrot@aol.com.

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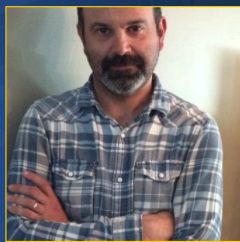
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GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE



with **CHRIS LOMON**

Pandemic year was a game-changer for Austin Hanners

by Chris Lomon

Austin Hanners never would have believed a pandemic could be a game changer for his driving career. But that's exactly what happened.

In a year that has yielded career-best numbers across the board, the 21-year-old reinsman is somewhat reluctant to point out a major reason for his 2020 success story.

It's understandable why he would feel that way.

"I would actually say, as strange as it seems, that the coronavirus has helped me the most," said Hanners. "I went out east – my mother [trainer, Alicia] and brother [trainer/driver, Luke] moved to Delaware – to help them with the horses and other stuff as well. When I came back to Ohio, I started driving for some new people, and I also drove at The Meadows a little bit. I was getting a little more exposure since I started driving at a few more places. When I got back to Ohio, I was doing as well here as I did out east. I think getting my name out there has had a big impact on my career."

Getting the opportunity to drive for new owners has translated into more confidence in the race bike and more chances to drive higher-caliber horses.

It's also meant a significant boost in Hanners' stat chart.

"I'm starting to drive for some powerful stables and that makes a big difference. When you're not going out on 30-1 or 40-1 horses all the time, you give yourself better odds to win or hit the board."



Brad Conrad

Hanners said when he got back to Ohio he was doing as well as he did out east. "I think getting my name out there has had a big impact on my career," he said.

Bigger numbers haven't resulted in an inflated ego for Hanners, who remains his own toughest critic.

One of the most impactful lessons he's learned about his craft: narrowing the lens.

"Just to take each race one at a time is what I try to do. When I get upset at what's happened or something I've done, I just try my best to move on to the next race and forget about that one. Even if I go to a different track, I can't let what happened at the track before affect what I'm setting out to do."

Such an approach isn't always easy to navigate.

"No, it isn't," Hanners said with a laugh. "It's much easier said than done."

One thing that the young horseman doesn't struggle with is setting goals.

Rather than jot down numbers he wants to achieve each year, the son of late long-time driver/trainer Brad Hanners (who passed away from cancer in 2015) prefers a different approach in determining what makes for a successful campaign.

"For me, it's more about personal achievements, look-in-the-mirror kind of goals... to feel at the end of the day that you did better than the day before. I definitely want to win more races than the year prior, but I just think that if you are able to be better every day, those numbers will come."

In 2016, his rookie season, Hanners recorded one win and posted five top-three showings in 17 starts. One year later, he made four trips to the winner's circle, increasing the total to 24 in 2018. After a tough 2019, when he won six races, this season has produced over 30 victories and nearly \$280,000 in purse earnings.

There have already been a few highlights in his young career.

"My actual first chair drive was in 2017 with a horse called Rehab Mountain," said Hanners of the bay trotting son of

Duke of York (ON). "Dad trained the horse, and I drove the horse in my dad's memorial race at his hometown fair. My first pari-mutuel drive came at Northfield Park in 2017, about a week or so after I turned 18. I had enough qualifiers in the fairs about a year and a half before that.

"A buddy of mine actually gave me the chance to drive a couple of his horses at Northfield. On that night, I actually hit the board in my first drive, which was big for me. Getting that confidence under my belt was huge. It made me feel like I belonged out there. Most of the guys you go up against are more seasoned and have much more experience, so you have to realize that you need to learn something each time you're out there. If you want to feel like you belong, you need to do the right things to believe that. It's the only way you'll get the skills and experience you need."

Away from the intensity of the racetrack, Hanners' first hobby of choice is shooting hoops.

While putting up points isn't his forte, preventing them is a skill that dates back to his elementary school days on the basketball court.

"I like to run a lot, but basketball is my favorite thing to do outside of driving. I think that's pretty much the only thing I do when I'm not racing. I guess defense is the best part of my game. I'm not a big scorer and I never was. In the mornings, I'll go out for a nice run, but there really isn't much time to do anything when you're in this industry. But I love this industry and I feel lucky to be part of it."

With the 2020 campaign out the way, he'll look to do even better in 2021.

Although he won't chase a particular number in the win column, he will strive to make it his best year in the sulky.

Hanners will also continue to take each race as it comes.

"Things are a lot easier when you're in more than a couple of races. It's definitely tough when you just have one or two drives on the night. When you have six, seven or more, it makes it much easier because you don't have any time to think about what happened the race prior. You shift your thoughts to the next race. I guess it's when I feel I messed up on my last drive of the evening – that's when it stays with me a little longer. But I've done much better with that over time."

It's also one of many reasons, COVID-19 not included, why Hanners continues to draw attention to his on-track talents.



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DEAN'S LIST



with DEAN HOFFMAN

Promoting racing: it's up to us

by Dean A. Hoffman

In the early summer of 1980, I climbed on a small private plane at an airport in central Ohio and greeted the two pilots as we awaited the fourth passenger.

When my traveling companion arrived, he greeted me and said, "Dean, I heard that Dick Buxton won a race in 1:59.3 on Saturday night at Scioto Downs. Pretty fast mile."

Coming from someone in harness racing, that comment would be routine, but the speaker was William B. Saxbe, who in the 1970s had been a United States Senator, U.S. Attorney General, and the U.S. Ambassador to India.

(Saxbe was Attorney General when Richard Nixon was president and Saxbe famously said that Nixon denying any knowledge of Watergate was "like a piano player in a bordello not knowing what was going on upstairs.")

I was then Saxbe's speechwriter and we were flying to a university in Ohio where he would deliver the commencement address.

It struck me as unusual that Saxbe would know about a routine race at Scioto Downs, but it reinforces the fact that harness racing once had a much higher public profile than it does now. In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson was at Roosevelt Raceway to honor the track's anniversary celebration.

In that era, race results were in every newspaper and most major daily papers had a racing writer.

Looking through old trophy presentations photos, I have seen legends such as Jesse Owens, Cab Calloway, James Cagney and others in the winner's circle.

At Hollywood Park in California, the late Hall of Famer Doug Ackerman told me once, "It wasn't unusual to see a half-dozen major movie stars at the races each evening."

(I have a photo of my father receiving a trophy from screen starlet Connie Stevens after the pacer Best Of All won a major race at Hollywood Park in 1968).

That was then. This is now.

We probably won't find presidents or prominent politicians

at the races too often. Ditto for big-name movie or TV stars. In fact, sadly, you probably won't see many people at all at tracks.

Can this be changed? Tracks owned by casinos don't see the need to promote racing because too many executives really don't want racing to be successful. Some would rather that racing just go away.

Many tracks no longer have publicity or marketing directors, although the adjacent racino usually has those positions well-staffed.

So, who's left to promote racing?

We are. It's up to us in racing to toot our own horn and promote our own product.

No, I don't expect owners and others in the sport to buy advertising on TV or billboards. But one thing that everyone can do is to serve as an ambassador for harness racing and bring friends, neighbors, and business associates.

It's an easy thing to do because you simply need to ask and offer to introduce them to racing. You can explain how harness racing works and what types of bets are available.

Information from a knowledgeable owner or fan is very important because tracks have often done a poor job of educating newcomers.

More accurately, tracks have *nothing* to educate newcomers. I have often said that if a person comes to the track for the first time totally ignorant of the sport, he all too often leaves with the same ignorance because tracks don't cater to newcomers.

Yes, there is often a brief explanation in the racing program, but when a newcomer confronts a page of past performance lines, it's like looking at an Amtrack schedule or a series of quadratic equations. What do all those numbers mean? Who knows?

You know what those numbers mean — and I know, too — but the first-time fan soon finds his eyes of glazing over. It's not an experience they want to repeat.

What's why existing owners or veteran are the best people to bring newbies to the track. They can patiently explain the hieroglyphics in the race program and the action on the track.

Decades ago, I met a young woman at Ohio State University whose family had harness horses and she knew the sport inside and out. Plus, she was extremely attractive. I suggested that Scioto Downs hire her as a "Greeter" who would welcome fans and answer any questions. Her appearance alone would appeal to the overwhelming male demographic, but she had the brains to go with her beauty.

Being a college student, she'd probably be anxious to earn extra money in this role, I emphasized to the track official.

He told me that they simply couldn't afford a part-time

greeter.

If harness racing is to survive, it's up to the people in the game. I lived in Cincinnati in the 1970s after leaving a job as assistant manager at Stoner Creek Stud in Kentucky. My neighbors were a young couple with no children and a substantial income. I saw them as perfect prospects to be racing fans or even horse owners.

I even treated them to a night at Scioto once. It was a couple hours up the interstate from Cincinnati to Scioto, but Scioto was then a showplace and first impressions count. (I didn't want to take them to nearby Lebanon Raceway, a far less impressive venue, for that reason).

This couple never took the bait, but I have taken others to the races in hopes that they might become fans first and perhaps owners later. I realize that some state harness associations have new owners' programs, but that doesn't preclude everyone from recruiting new fans and owners.

We all need to do this. If the people in the sport don't recruit new fans and potential owners, who will?

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Jay Bergman, Joe Kyle elected to Communicators Hall of Fame

by **USHWA**

One came to prominence in the shadow of New York City; the other is a son of the Midwest. One is primarily a writer who also has done much television journalism; the other achieved principal fame as a photographer, but he also wrote often and well.

What links them is their talent in communicating the abilities of the very best in harness racing, and thus Jay Bergman and Joe Kyle were voted in to the Communicators Hall of Fame by the United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA), the sport's leading journalism organization.

Bergman achieved his greatest impact during his 27 years of working at *Sports Eye*, a daily newspaper which primarily dealt with handicapping (Bergman was one of the key theorists behind the creation of a track "variant") but also offered opinions on the issues of the day – a position, especially after he became editor-in-chief in the 1980s, Bergman did frequently and forcefully, not afraid to offer criticism and call people and organizations to task. He won a 1984 Hervey Award in the "news and commentary" writing division.

A frequent author for many of the sport's most respected publications, Bergman is currently a columnist for *DRF Harness*, the harness racing arm of Daily Racing Form. He has served on-camera as television commentator for The Meadowlands and The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono, and also assisted television broadcasters behind the scenes of many of the sport's top races.

Kyle is a native of Decatur IL, 40 miles from the mile Grand Circuit track in Springfield IL and not far up the road from



Courtesy USHWA

Jay Bergman & Joe Kyle

DuQuoin IL, where the Hambletonian and then the World Trotting Derby were held. He covered the top Midwest racing for many years, and with his move to the staff of *The Horseman And Fair World* magazine in Lexington KY, Joe also wrote about and photographed the stars of the sulky game during the annual Grand Circuit visit to Lexington's Red Mile.

His photography has been cited by USHWA, with its Smallsreed Award, and the World Trotting Council. Ironically, that particular winning photo was taken at a race in Bergman's "back yard," The Meadowlands, after Scarlet Knight won the 2001 Hambletonian for trainer/driver Stefan "Tarzan" Melander – a noted photographer in his native Sweden. Kyle attended many of the sport's major races wearing both photographic and reporter hats during his time at *The Horseman*.

Jay Bergman and Joe Kyle will be honored at the 2022 Dan Patch Awards Banquet, as the 2021 Banquet has been cancelled due to health/travel considerations. That same year, they will be formally inducted into the Communicators Hall of Fame at the Harness Racing Museum in Goshen NY.

For and against the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act

The Meadowlands Racetrack announces its support for the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA), while the USTA continues its opposition to it in its current form.

The Meadowlands supports HISA

The Meadowlands supports the inclusion of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA) in the 2020 Omnibus Appropriations Bill.

The Omnibus passed through both houses of Congress last week and was signed into law by President Trump on Sunday (Dec. 27).

"The HISA is important to all of horse racing to demonstrate that we are addressing the problems that have plagued the sport for the last several decades. It is clear the past and current policies do not work," said Meadowlands chairman Jeff Gural.

"Virtually all the horsemen that I have asked support trying to eliminate trainers that drug the horses. Having the federal government involved will put some teeth into the effort to stop them as the indictments and subsequent arrests of last March showed.

"It seems inconceivable that in 2022 every thoroughbred racetrack will have uniform rules and be governed by this legislation while every standardbred racetrack will continue to be governed by the states despite the fact that 27 of the 29 people indicted earlier this year were associated with standardbred racing and only two were thoroughbred trainers.

"Hopefully, we can work with the USTA to modify the law next year to meet our needs which are considerably different than the thoroughbreds. If the USTA continues to oppose the legislation it would be our intention to ask the Racing Commissions in New York and New Jersey to allow us to opt in to the legislation since it does provide that option.

"I remain confident that the majority of the issues that concern the standardbred industry can be addressed and adjusted to where we can live with them."

Details on the HISA and its passage are available by visiting the ["WHOA" website](#) and consider joining that organization while you're on the site. It is free to join. The Water Hay Oats Alliance (WHOA) is a grassroots movement of like-minded individuals who support the passage of federal legislation to prohibit the use of performance-enhancing drugs in the sport of horse racing.

—Meadowlands Racetrack

USTA opposes HISA in its current form

Following is a response from USTA president Russell Williams on statement made Monday (Dec. 28) by the Meadowlands supporting the recently passed Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act:

"Mr. Gural's central message seems to be that he would like to see harness racing brought within the jurisdiction of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA) and that 'we can modify the law next year to meet our needs, which are considerably different than the thoroughbreds' so that we can 'live with' HISA.

"HISA supporters refused to countenance the slightest modification during more than three years of USTA effort to get something that we could live with. There is no reason to think that next year would be any different.

"HISA is unconstitutional and is very unlikely to withstand the legal challenges that will be forthcoming if an attempt is made to apply it to harness racing."

—Dan Leary / USTA director of marketing and communications

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HARNES RACING UPDATE

About Harness Racing Update

Harness Racing Update is owned by HRU Publications of Millwood, NY and will publish Fridays and Sundays from fall through late spring. HRU will add Saturday editions early summer through fall, publishing 3 days per week, and will add editions throughout the year as major news breaks.

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Dan Patch Virtual Awards Show set for Jan. 16.

The annual awards show, honoring 2020's starts, will be broadcast on Sat., Jan. 16 from 5-6 p.m.

by USHWA

The United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA), the group of the industry's communicators who are the primary voters on Hall of Fame and year-end honors, is announcing a special Dan Patch Virtual Awards Show, to be held on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2021 from 5 to 6 p.m.

The Dan Patch Awards Show can be watched live on [USHWA's Facebook page](#), as well as through the Meadowlands simulcast signal, on the [track's website](#) and through the RTN broadcast network. The next day it will be archived and available on the USTA's YouTube channel.

The Dan Patch Awards would normally be given at the writers' annual Dan Patch Banquet in association with their national meetings, but there will be no banquet this year due to health/travel concerns, and the USHWA meetings will be held electronically.

To be announced on this Virtual Awards Show will be the 12 divisional winners in the racehorse categories, along with Trotter of the Year, Pacer of the Year, and the prestigious E.R. Harriman Harness Horse of the Year.

Also to be announced are the Norman Woolworth Owner, Driver, and Breeder of the Year, along with the Trotting and Pacing Broodmares of the year. Nancy Takter, nominated as the Glen Garnsey Trainer of the Year by every chapter of USHWA and its At Large membership, was thus automatically declared the winner of that award. In addition, the Fair Island Farm Caretaker of the Year will be featured.

Media releases on all the winners, both human and equine, will be distributed as soon as possible after the Virtual Awards Show is completed. No winners in any of these categories will be released before the Awards Show.



Mark Hall / USTA

The prestigious E.R. Harriman Harness Horse of the Year will be announced live on Jan. 16, along with the 12 divisional winners in the racehorse categories, and the Trotter of the Year and Pacer of the Year.



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HRU's Barnsdale and Lomon finalists for SC Media Excellence Award

Standardbred Canada is pleased to announce the finalists for the 2020 Media Excellence Awards, sponsored by Ontario Racing for the fifth consecutive year.

Now in its 13th year, the Media Excellence Awards program honors those who have, through one piece of exceptional work, covered Canadian harness racing in a manner that is extraordinary and of broad national appeal.

The finalists in the Outstanding Written Work category are: Garnet Barnsdale for his "Buzzworthy" column about Bill Galvin and Chris Lomon for his feature, "Tracking Down A Long-Lost Connection."

Both Barnsdale and Lomon are regular HRU contributors.

Garnet Barnsdale's **"Buzzworthy" column** in the Oct. 2, 2020 edition of Harness Racing Update, recalled memories and paid tribute to the late Bill Galvin, a long-time promoter and marketer of horse racing and a member of the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame. Barnsdale is a freelance journalist for various harness racing publications, public handicapper for Woodbine Mohawk Park, and past president of the Canadian Chapter of USHWA (United States Harness Writers Association).

"Tracking Down a Long-Lost Connection", written by Chris Lomon, and featured on Ontario Racing's website, tells the story of how John Evans became reconnected with harness racing and joined the ranks of racehorse ownership. Lomon is the senior manager of website content and social media for Ontario Racing. He also is HRU's Grassroots Perspective columnist.

In the Outstanding Broadcast category the finalists are Horse Racing Alberta's Young Guns Feature and The Pepsi North America Cup broadcast, produced by Woodbine Entertainment.

The **"Young Guns"** Feature produced by Mike Little of Shinelight Entertainment and Jeff Robillard of Horse Racing Alberta (HRA) was released on Oct. 7, 2020 and shared on



New Image Media

Clive Cohen is again a finalist in the Outstanding Photography category, this time for "Training Day," a photo taken on May 27, 2020, the first day of training at Woodbine Mohawk Park after the first COVID-19 shutdown.

HRA's social media channels, and distributed to local television stations. The video showcases 'young guns' or rising stars in the harness racing industry including past Future Star winners, trainer/driver Dave Kelly and trainer Chris Lancaster along with trainer/driver Nathan Sobey and trainer Marissa Kleinsasser.

The **Pepsi North America Cup** aired on TSN on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2020 from 10-11 p.m. This one-hour special high-definition broadcast of the \$1 million Pepsi North America Cup was produced by Woodbine Entertainment's Broadcast Department, in partnership with TSN. Commentary was provided by Jason Portuondo and Chad Rozema of Woodbine Entertainment, and TSN's Laura Diakun and Brodie Lawson, with the race call by WEG's Ken Middleton.

The Outstanding Photography category finalists are Clive Cohen's "Training Day" shot and "In The Pocket", an action shot by John Watkins.

Clive Cohen's "Training Day" photo was taken on May 27, 2020, the first day of training at Woodbine Mohawk Park after the first COVID-19 shutdown. The image was published on the Woodbine Instagram and Facebook pages. Cohen, the official track photographer at Woodbine Mohawk Park, is a four-time (2013, 2014, 2016 and 2018) winner of the Media Excellence Award for photography.

Photographer John Watkins is a first-time finalist and his "In The Pocket" photo of Doug McNair was featured on the Ontario Racing website on Oct. 23, 2020. Watkins is a regular



John Watkins

John Watkins is a first-time finalist in the SC Outstanding Photography category for his "In The Pocket" photo of Doug McNair featured on the Ontario Racing website on Oct. 23, 2020. Watkins is a regular contributing photographer to Ontario Racing.

contributing photographer to Ontario Racing.

The six finalists were the top two point earners in their respective categories.

Standardbred Canada would like to extend its thanks and appreciation to everyone who submitted entries for the Media Awards and to all the judges.

Judges in the Outstanding Written Work category included Caroline Soble, Communications Coordinator for Equestrian Canada, Michelle Staples, author and horse safety specialist, and an instructor at Equine Guelph; and Jackie Bellamy - Zions, Communications Director at Equine Guelph.

The judges for the Broadcast category were veteran broadcaster Al Craig, sports information officer at Mohawk College and past colour commentator for the Hamilton Bulldogs; Brad Diamond, of Bradford Productions, producer of numerous award-winning programs, including 'Motoring,' a weekly national half-hour magazine-style television program on TSN (The Sports Network); and Toronto sportscaster Claude Feig.

The submissions for the Outstanding Photography category were scored by Skip Dickstein, a past Eclipse Award winner and staff photographer at the Albany Times Union; Brandon Hall, executive assistant with the Ontario Equine Federation; and Shawn Hamilton, owner of CLiX Photography, whose passion for photographing horses has landed her photos on the covers and inside magazines such as Corinthian Horse Sport magazine, The Canadian Horsemen, Horse Canada, and Equus.

To see a list of past winners of the Media Excellence Awards, [click here](#).

The winners will be announced at the Virtual O'Brien Awards Gala which can be viewed from 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. (EST) on Sunday, Jan. 31, 2021 on www.standardbredcanada.ca.

—Standardbred Canada

Survive & Win in the Meadowlands 2021 Winter Survival Challenge

The always popular Meadowlands Winter Meet Survival Challenge powered by 123Racing returns Saturday (Jan. 2). Cash prizes and World Harness Handicapping Championship presented by DerbyWars seats are up for grabs in this free online competition.

Trackmaster will provide Platinum Past Performances for each night of the contest.

The game covers the Meadowlands' Winter Meet and concludes on March 27, 2021.

The winner is determined by the highest total bankroll at the end of the Challenge based on a \$2 "across the board" wager [win, place and show] on selections for three designated races each program.

However, to continue in the game, entrants have to "survive" by finishing in-the-money [first through third] with at least one of their selections each day. Failing to do so or not making selections knocks the player out of the game. To aid in the player's survival a "lucky horseshoe" is given. The lucky horseshoe is a "free pass" given to all Challenge participants that allows the player to survive if he does not make selections for a race card or all three of his selections fail to hit the board.

The grand prize is \$500 & \$1,300 2021 WHHC Spot

The second-place prize is \$300 & \$1,300 2021 WHHC Spot

The third-place prize is \$200 & \$1,300 2021 WHHC Spot

The free contest is open to legal residents of the United States and Canada 18 years and older, and all selections must be made through the format provided on the Survival Challenge website page. No selections will be accepted by phone, fax, e-mail or any other means. Trackmaster Platinum Past performances for the three designated races will be provided through the game board.

The deadline for selections each day is 30 minutes before 6 p.m. post time for the first race through March 13. Post time then switches to 7:15pm for March 19-27. After 30 minutes to post, all selections are final.

To login or to register as a first time player, visit www.survival-challenge.com.

—Rachel Ryan / Meadowlands media relations






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RACE RESULTS - TUESDAY

DOVER DOWNS *report*

Tuesday's Results:

12, DD, \$20,000, Trot, OPEN HANDICAP POST POSITIONS ASSIGNED, 27.0, 56.0, 1:24.3, 1:52.3, FT

1-Jl Cruze (g, 9, Crazy--Topcat Hall, by Conway Hall) \$10,000, \$30,000 2012 SHS-HBG, Lifetime Record: 123-41-15-26, \$1,544,267
 O-William Kenneth Wood & William J Dittmar Jr & Stephen J Iaquina. B-Joanne M Morrison, CA & Glengate Farms, CA. T-Eric Ell. D-Dexter Dunn.



Preferred Equine YEARLING SALE
GRADUATE

2-Scirocco Rob (g, 5, Explosive Matter--Fun At Parties, by Lindy Lane) \$5,000, \$20,000 2016 SHS-HBG, Lifetime Record: 72-24-13-6, \$490,629
 O-Lewis W Whitaker Jr & Kathleen A Whitaker. B-Russell C Williams. T-Mark Silva. D-Tim Tetrick.

3-Jack Vernon (g, 7, Muscle Hill--Vernon Blue Chip, by Sir Taurus) \$2,400, \$50,000 2014 LEX-SEL, Lifetime Record: 109-30-19-12, \$449,803
 O-Howard A Taylor & Michael Casalino Jr. B-Al J Libfeld, CA. T-Dylan Davis. D-Corey Callahan.

►► [Replay](#) ►► Calls: 1H, 1H, 1T, Q, NK - Finish Order: Bluebird Jesse, Pat Matters, No Drama Please

THE MEADOWS *report*

Tuesday's Results:

8, Mea, \$16,200, Pace, **OPEN HANDICAP** P.P.1-3 DRAWN; 4-7 DRAWN, 26.3, 54.4, 1:22.4, 1:50.4, FT

1-Bettor Memories (g, 7, Bettor's Delight--Allamerican Memoir, by Western Ideal) \$8,100, \$85,000 2014 SHS-HBG, Lifetime Record: 145-35-24-23, \$709,656
 O-Burke Racing Stable LLC & Weaver Brussemi LLC & Phillip Collura. B-Frederick W Hertrich III. T-Ron Burke. D-Dave Palone.



Preferred Equine MIXED SALE
GRADUATE

2-Rock Candy (g, 4, Pet Rock--Cotton Candy, by Sportsmaster) \$4,050, \$60,000 2017 OH-SEL, Lifetime Record: 48-16-14-2, \$437,758
 O-Kenneth Ashba. B-Mark M Moger & Albert C Delia Jr. T-Paul Corey. D-Brady Brown.

3-Wild Wild Western (h, 4, Western Ideal--Caila Fra, by Artsplace) \$1,944, \$55,000 2017 SHS-HBG, Lifetime Record: 40-12-11-6, \$261,129
 O-Jacobs Creek Racing LLC & Andrew J Altobelli & John P Deters. B-Frederick W Hertrich III. T-Norm Parker. D-Tony Hall.

►► [Replay](#) ►► Calls: 1H, 1H, 1, 1H, NS - Finish Order: Macadoodledoo, Dew A Little Dance, Prince Of Tides, Cocosfella A

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RACE RESULTS - WEDNESDAY

DOVER DOWNS *report*

Wednesday's Results:

12, DD, \$16,000, Pace, FILLIES/MARES WINNERS OVER \$8,000 SELECT HANDICAP POST POSITION #1 ASSIGNED POST POSITIONS #2 - #5 DRAWN POST POSITIONS #6 - #8 DRAWN, 27.0, 54.4, 1:23.3, 1:52.0, FT

1-Shes Pukka N (m, 5, Betterthancheddar--Pukpuk Princess, by Grinfromeartoear) \$8,000, Lifetime Record: 49-13-14-9, \$193,569

O-Peter Paul Venturini. B-T J Armstrong, NZ. T-Brian Malone. D-Anthony Morgan.



2-Edge Of Eternity (m, 4, A Rocknroll Dance--Margin Blue Chip, by Artsplace) \$4,800, \$55,000 2017 LEX-SEL, Lifetime Record: 54-12-12-6, \$154,219

O-David R Hamm. B-Gabe K Prewitt & James R Mc Laughlin. T-Chuck Crissman Jr. D-Art Stafford Jr.

3-Feeling Sweet (f, 3, Sweet Lou--Feel Life, by Life Sign) \$2,304, \$20,000 2018 LEX-SEL, Lifetime Record: 39-9-3-9, \$99,014

O-George & Tina Dennis Racing. B-White Birch Farm. T-Joseph Columbo. D-Mike Cole.

▶▶ [Replay](#) ▶▶ Calls: 1, 1, 1H, 1H, 2Q - Finish Order: My Last Bet, Rockn Philly, Moments Of Joy, Anytime N, Vh Princess Brea

THE MEADOWS *report*

Wednesday's Results:

8, Mea, \$16,200, Trot, **OPEN HANDICAP** P.P.1-3 DRAWN; 4-6 DRAWN; 7-8 DRAWN, 27.2, 57.1, 1:25.3, 1:54.4, FT

1-Lady's Dude (g, 9, Victory Sam--Lady's Star, by Hi Noon Star) \$8,100, Lifetime Record: 141-51-19-18, \$854,090

O-Burke Racing Stable LLC & Weaver Brussemi LLC & Johnny E Yoder. B-Duane M Lowe. T-Ron Burke. D-Tony Hall.

2-Jeffery P (g, 5, Full Count--Betty Jean, by S J's Photo) \$4,050, \$14,000 2016 OH-SEL, Lifetime Record: 80-21-12-9, \$187,423

O-Miles E & Renna R Wollam & Dennis J Osterholt & Bob Troyer. B-Robert G Slowey & Anthony V Minute & Dennis J Osterholt. T-Miles Wollam. D-Brady Brown.

3-Maewegonow (m, 6, Deweycheatumnhowe--Mauresmo, by Windsong's Legacy) \$1,944, \$18,000 2015 LEX-SEL, Lifetime Record: 101-22-22-18, \$410,199

O-Win Rhythm Stables Inc. B-Stirling Brook Farms Inc. T-Richard Perfido. D-Dan Rawlings.

▶▶ [Replay](#) ▶▶ Calls: 2, 1H, 1H, 2, T - Finish Order: Overserved, Yes, Mr Vicktor, Full Surge, Jessiejesorjessica

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