

Sunday, March 22, 2020

And then there was one

Cal Expo the last NA harness track racing in the midst of the COVID-19.

by Bill Finley

California



There's only one left.

Cal Expo has received permission from state officials in California to continue racing and will try to finish out its meet, which is scheduled to end April 25.

Saratoga Harness is scheduled to race today, but has announced that it will close up afterwards, the latest track shut down by COVID-19. Starting Monday, Cal Expo will be the only North American harness track still operating.

In an effort to maximize handle, Cal Expo will race on Tuesdays and Wednesdays with a first post of 3:05 Pacific Time. In that slot, it will be the only U.S. track of any breed racing and will have the simulcast market all to itself.

"That they're still racing, that is really good news for us," said trainer Bobby Johnson. "We're like everybody else. If they shut us down, we'd all go broke. There'd be no income."

Cal Expo's immediate future looked to be in jeopardy when California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a "stay at home" order Thursday telling the state's residents that they should remain indoors. On Friday, just an hour before the scheduled first race at Santa Anita, the Stronach Group, which operates Santa Anita and Golden Gate Fields in the San Francisco area, received permission from the state to continue racing. Along with Del Mar and the Thoroughbred Owners of California, the thoroughbred groups convinced Lourdes M. Castro Ramirez, secretary of California Business, Consumer

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Services and Housing Agency, and to the California Horse Racing Board that it was feasible to continue racing.

Their primary argument was that even if racing shut down the horses would still have to be exercised and the backstretch employees would still have to come to work, which meant that racing the horses in the afternoon would not create any additional dangers. Cal Expo and the Los Alamitos quarter horse track were lumped in with Santa Anita and Golden Gate when approval was given to continue racing.

When Cal Expo raced Friday night, every precaution was made to keep the trainers and drivers safe. General manager Chris Schick said that no one was able to enter the paddock until their temperature was taken and one person, whose temperatures was 101 degrees, was told to leave.

"We're practicing the social distancing and following all the guidelines from the CDC (Center for Disease Control) and all the state guidelines," Schick said.

Last week, a number of thoroughbred tracks announced that they would be closing due to COVID-19. The list included Keeneland, which announced that it would not be running its spring meet and that it had canceled the April 2-year-old sale held there. On Saturday, the tracks running beside Santa Anita and Golden Gate were the Fair Grounds, Charles Town, Oaklawn, Sam Houston, Tampa Bay Downs and Turfway Park. Shortly before starting its card, which included the \$1 million Louisiana Derby, Fair Grounds announced that it would cease racing starting Sunday.

Even though there was little competition for the gambling dollar on Friday, the Cal Expo races did not produce a good handle. Schick said that \$668,000 was bet on the card and that, normally, the Friday night handle is about \$800,000. He said the problem was that California's off-track betting network was closed down and that it normally yields between \$350,000 and \$375,000 in handle.

"We are operating under a totally different model with no California handle," Schick said. "The dollars we get vis a vis home wagering from outside California produce a much smaller percentage than the money bet in California. We need way more dollars to end up somewhere close to the same place."

Schick hopes that problem can be solved by moving to Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

"We've talked with TVG and there is absolutely no track

racing at those times," he said. "We're going to hop into that slot. We need way more handle to survive."

Schick said plans are already being made about what to do with the horses on the backstretch once the meet is over. Normally, the barn area closes about a week after the season ends, but Schick realizes the horses may have nowhere to go.

"We're prepared to keep the barn area open as long as (the California State Fair) will let us," he said. "Our number one concern right now is helping our horses and our horsemen."

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STATE TREASURER

p, 2, 1:52.3; 3, 1:50; 1:47 (\$2,072,450)

"STATE TREASURER was all I would ever want in a racehorse. He had high speed, great gait, but above all tremendous will and desire to race and win. I have three of his babies training here in Florida and all three of them are showing the same characteristics already. Looking forward to racing them this summer."

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Coping with COVID-19, continued

A few more individual industry stories and thoughts from the front lines in North America.

by Dave Briggs

Harness Racing Update asked a wide number of people in the harness racing industry to share their personal stories and thoughts about coping with COVID-19. Most of the responses were published March 20 ([full story here](#)), but a few more responses came in after the deadline and we share those here now. We hope to publish more individual stories from across North America in the weeks to come.

Each person was asked the following questions:

- 1. Where are you located right now and how are you and your family coping with the COVID-19 situation?**
- 2. What is the situation like in your area?**
- 3. How has it impacted your work in the industry, so far, and what are you most concerned about in the weeks and months ahead?**
- 4. This is an industry big on hope and helping others. What suggestions can you offer for how people can help others in the industry through this crisis?**
- 5. Where do you see the harness racing industry in 2-3 months?**

We thank everyone for taking the time to respond.

FLORIDA

Jimmy Takter

- 1. Where are you located right now and how are you and your family coping with the COVID-19 situation?**

I'm in Florida. We stay in constant contact with our kids on the phone and it's very active corona virus in our area and we are very nervous about it.

- 2. What is the situation like in your area?**

Well, they just closed the beach. We have a condo on the beach and cannot be on the beach and the pool area is empty. I think many (Snowbirds) went back home. There are many French Canadians here and most went back.

- 3. How has it impacted your work in the industry, so far, and what are you most concerned about in the weeks and months ahead?**

I'm in contact daily with New Jersey and have been up there a few days every month. I was planning to go back in

early April, but now I'm not sure. If they close everything we might go any day. We are living day to day.

My main concern is stake races getting closer and we need to have our horses ready but will wait to press them. I'm sure we will find out something in next few weeks. I also worry about people that may get sick that work on our farm, caring for the horses could be a major mess.

- 4. This is an industry big on hope and helping others. What suggestions can you offer for how people can help others in the industry through this crisis?**

First thing, stay away from contact with other people. Social media gets information out about what's going on if any are sick so we know what's going on in our area.

Wash your hands. Pray.

- 5. Where do you see the harness racing industry in 2-3 months?**

I'm not sure we will even be back racing in this time. If we are not, I really cannot see this will be a good year for racing. I'm not sure we will survive this Corona virus and the drug scandal. Many people will have a problem feeding their horses and paying their help. Horses will start selling off.

I'm an optimistic person, but cannot see this ending well, unless we get a big break in the form of a vaccine.

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ONTARIO

Pat Woods

1. Where are you located right now and how are you and your family coping with the COVID-19 situation?

We are at Winbak Farm of Canada, Inglewood, ON. I live on the farm. We are doing okay here, and trying to be very cautious. We are doing what we can to social distance ourselves from the world. My kids are off school now, and trying to entertain themselves the best they can and only visiting family.

2. What is the situation like in your area?

Because our farm is close to Brampton, we deal with some of the stresses of the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) situation. It's very concerning due to the large population in such a close proximity to us. Store shelves are bare and people are very nervous about the future. There are very nervous people who don't deal with the unknown very well.

3. How has it impacted your work at Winbak, so far, and what are you most concerned about in the weeks and months ahead?

We have been very lucky so far, compared to a lot of people. Our business hasn't been impacted much, we are still all systems go. Winbak staff have been working hard to keep day-to-day operations flowing smoothly. Our horses need to be cared for regardless of what's happening in the world around us. And foals are coming whether we are ready or not. We are still shipping semen across North America, borders are open for us, luckily, so we can still service our clients. Our suppliers have us stocked up and are making sure we don't run out of anything. We are very fortunate that our staff is so dedicated and doing their best to stay safe for the sake of the horses.

4. This is an industry big on hope and helping others. What suggestions can you offer for how people can help others in the industry through this crisis?

We have a great industry that always seems to prevail through the worst of times. Success and survival in this business have always come from hardworking people, and we have some of the most resilient in the standardbred world. Fellow horsemen and horsewomen step up when times are tough and when they see someone else struggle. I am very confident that we, as horsemen, will get through this setback. If we stay positive, offer a hand to those in need,

work together as an industry, then we will come out of this better than most industries. One of the ways Winbak Canada is trying to help, is by securing additional barns and pasture to accommodate horsemen for layups and/or resident broodmares. Our owners, Joe and JoAnn Thomson, didn't want to see horsemen in Ontario without options if they needed space for their horses during these tough times.

5. Where do you see the harness racing industry in 2-3 months?

I hope to see our industry dust itself off, get back to business and be full of promise again. I hope that we are excited about our new 2020 foals born and dream of them being champions. I hope that we are looking forward to our 2-year-olds qualifying, full of potential and promise. And I hope to be watching our grooms working, drivers driving, trainers training, owners buying, and breeding farms winding down from successful breeding season. I love this industry and only hope for the best for everyone involved. We will make it back.

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PA'S BEST CHOICE

WINBAK Farm

HESTON BLUE CHIP

p, 2, 1:50.4f; 3, 1:48f (\$1,781,881)
American Ideal-Shot Togo Bluechip-Cam's Card Shark

- USHWA Dan Patch 3-Year-Old Pacing Colt of the Year against a tough crop that included A Rocknroll Dance, Bettor's Edge, Sweet Lou & Thinking Out Loud
- Sire of 2019 NYSS Final Winner, Zero Tolerance, p, 3, 1:50.2f -'19 (\$980,736)

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EUROPEAN REPORT



with **THOMAS HEDLUND**

Racing in Europe is quiet with only Sweden racing

by *Thomas Hedlund*

The situation in Europe regarding harness racing is cool at the moment. Sweden is the only "big" racing country that still follows the race card schedule and yesterday (Saturday, March 21) Swedish track Bergsåker took over the arrangement of the V75, which normally would have been raced at Momarken in Norway.

Big races in Europe are seriously threatened by the COVID-19 situation this spring. Finlandia-ajo at Varmo racetrack in Helsinki, Finland, is scheduled for May 9, but it's very uncertain if the race can be held on that date. France has declared that all races will be cancelled until April 15.

Sweden continues to race without spectators and, so far, the active horsemen have done their job perfectly following the orders given by Swedish health authorities. The betting handle in the north European country is rising every week due to the lack of other betting objects on the market at this moment. Every European soccer league, hockey league and other big sports leagues is cancelled and as long as harness racing keep going, the industry can – however bizarre it sounds in times like these – benefit from the situation that prevails.

Betting handle in Sweden yesterday on V75 specifically was \$13,183,140.

What the economic status of the harness racing business will look like in Europe later this spring is almost impossible to predict, but it's clear that COVID-19 has cut deep wounds in the shield of the business and it's quite sure that several branches connected to harness racing will bleed in any way, soon.

Elitloppet at Solvalla is hot stuff in discussions on social media and it seems like every fan has their own opinion on how the COVID-19 situation will be the last weekend in May. As it looks right now, it seems more or less like a utopia that

Elitloppet can be held like we're used to, with a crowd of 25,000 people surrounding the track of Solvalla and it's also a tough case for the staff at Solvalla to invite horses from other countries since races are cancelled and big races postponed to dates later on this year. One option is to race the Elitloppet without spectators, but it's still too early to tell what will happen in the end of May.

Sports news? Well, some of the biggest stars are beginning to leave their winter dormancy and on Wednesday night, Petri Salmela trained Makethemark (Maharajah), third in Elitloppet 2019, made his comeback at the track and driver Ulf Ohlsson didn't need to use all of the 7-year-old Maharajah son's capacity when the duo won in mile rate 1:58.1 over 1.3 miles from position first over.

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THE BANK

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

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- Son of O'Brien & USHA Dan Patch 3-Year-Old Trotting Filly of the Year, Lantern Kronos, 3, 1:52.3 (\$1,020,150)
- At 2, Winner of Bluegrass & PA All Stars division
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Remembering my beau-frère Geoff Stein

by Murray Brown

My beau-frère (French for brother in law) Geoffrey Stein would have been 67 last Sunday.

He passed before his 59th birthday on March 4, 2012.

It was a grievous loss to everyone who was privileged to have known him.

What made it so unsettling was that Geoff was the picture of health. Nobody that I've ever known lived such a health conscious life.

He didn't eat meat or dairy throughout his adult life. He exercised by running, every single day. It was while running, that he succumbed to a fatal heart attack.

The irony of this is that, rare was the day when he didn't try to help me by urging me to watch my eating habits and get more exercise.

He would say to me "You've got a lot to live for. You need to take better care of yourself"

I always agreed with him, but rarely followed his advice.

There are very few people that I've known, who I've never heard anyone say an unkind word about.

Geoff Stein was such a person.

He started out in our business as I and many others have — he liked to bet on the horses.

For him, his choice venues were Foxboro and Rockingham Park, both now sadly gone.

As a student at Brandeis University, he, the late Charlie Singer, the soon to be Dr. Richard Gordon and others would frequent any harness track they could find.

When he graduated from school, Geoff secured a job at *Sports Eye*, in part, thanks to his friendship with Bob Marks.

From there, he began putting horse partnership groups together. These groups consisted mostly of relatives and friends and friends of relatives and friends. Among the horses that he purchased for his groups was the Sheppard winner Simcoe Hanover and the world champion filly Razzle

Hanover.

However, those were mostly the exceptions.

At its genesis, Geoff's emphasis was on overnight racehorses which his groups would come to see, bet and root on mostly at Yonkers and Roosevelt.

Little did I know that one of those involved in his groups was my future wife, his sister, Carol.

In 1984, Geoffrey, together with Hal Jones, was asked to do an appraisal of the broodmares owned by Boardwalk Associates which were resident at Saratoga Standardbreds in Saratoga Springs, NY.

While there, the person showing them the mares was a young man recently graduated from Morrisville State College named David Reid.

A little while later, Geoff was asked by Saratoga Standardbred's CEO John Signorelli to head their sales division called Preferred Equine.

Geoffrey felt that he was quite capable of handling the work involved in attracting business in the form of horses and consignors, but he lacked any talent in the physical nuts and bolts of the business.

He was much like me, if he looked at a screwdriver, he began to bleed.

He thought of the young man who had been his guide. He asked Mr. Signorelli if he could co-op Reid from Saratoga

NEW YORK BREEDER'S CHOICE

Multiple Stakes Winner

Dude's The Man

p, 2, 1:51.3, 3, 1:48.4f (\$792,387)


Bh 2012 • American Ideal - Art's Risk - Artsplace (**Delinquent Account**)

Well bred son of AMERICAN IDEAL

2020 Fee: \$2,000

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Photo Chris Tully



Standing at Morrisville College Equine Institute

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Standardbred into its sales division.

Thus began the partnership that was to become arguably the biggest sales entity that our business has ever known.

Geoff was the ideal Mr. Outside, where David became Mr. Inside.

Within a short period of time, Saratoga Standardbred was disbanded, but its sales division remained under the ownership and partnership of Stein and Reid.

They quickly realized that their roles in the business should not be restricted to representing people at horse sales. They branched out to stallion management, managing horse sales and becoming active in just about everything related to the business.

In late 1992, Geoff and Dave negotiated the acquisition of Phil Tully's Garden State Horse Sales Company for the owners of Standardbred Horse Sales Company and served as sales managers of that entity until 1999, while conducting sales at The Meadowlands and Showplace Farm.

Geoff had a multitude of friends and contacts in the business, but none more important or closer than Sonny Antonacci and his sons Frank and Gerry.

Sonny had seen a 2-year-old Speedy Crown filly who's ability and pedigree impressed him greatly. He contacted Geoff and proposed that they try to buy her.

Sonny knew that she was already very good, but he felt that she had the potential to become great.

Negotiations began late in her 2-year-old season. However, a deal was not reached.

In the Spring of 1996, conversations began again between the ownership of Moni Maker and Geoffrey acting on behalf of a partnership of Lindy Farms (the Antonacci Family), Paul & Antoinette Nigito, Harvey Gold as well as Geoff and David.

Please allow me to interject a personal memory. Geoff Stein was perhaps the greatest salesman I've ever known. His talent was very much of the soft sell variety. There was nothing at all pushy about his methods.

Geoff, Frank Antonacci and I were in Paris to see Moni Maker race in the Prix d'Amerique. It was the Saturday evening before the race. We were hungry. We hadn't yet had dinner. I suggested that we go to Willi's Wine Bar, a place that was not only noted for its good wines, but also has a terrific bistro type restaurant. We asked the bartender for a menu. He says "I am sorry monsieur. The restaurant is closed. We close at 10 p.m." It was about 10 minutes past that time. I don't know how Geoff knew, but it turned out that the chef was at the bar relaxing and having a glass of wine after a hot day behind the stoves. Geoff approached him and somehow convinced him to open his now closed kitchen and prepare dinner for us. It turned out to be a wonderful meal. I still smile broadly every time I think of it.

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**p,2,1:52.3s; 3,1:48.3s, 1:50.3h; 4,1:48.1s (\$1,457,405)
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An agreement to buy Moni Maker was reached just prior to the Hambletonian Oaks.

The game plan from the deal's inception was for the new group to own Moni Maker together with her previous owners until the end of her 3-year-old season with Bill Andrews remaining as her trainer and Wally Hennessey doing the driving.

Her first of numerous Classics wins was the Hambletonian Oaks, the same year that Continental victory won the Hambletonian in defeating the boys.

It was Ladies Day at The Meadowlands.

Moni Maker would end the season winning 19 of her 20 starts.

Following her 3-year-old season, per the agreement previously reached, the management and ownership of the filly would be turned entirely over to the new group.

Sonny, gave her to Jimmy Takter to train as previously planned, with Jimmy and Geoff managing her racing career thenceforth.

Thus began a larger than life wild world tour with which I was a privileged spectator enjoying every minute of it.

The Moni Maker entourage made trips to France, Italy, Sweden and Denmark to cheer this great mare on to wins in most of Europe's Classic races, including the Prix d'Amerique and the Elitloppet, arguably two of the three most important trotting races in the world.

In the interim, Geoff and David, together with my dear friend Randy Manges, became managers of the Lexington Selected Yearling Sale, a merging of the two previously existing Kentucky yearling sales.

Geoff was on top of the world, he had a thriving business, a great family, his wife Ann, sons Joey, Mike and Jordan and daughter Holly.

I often think of how proud he would be of those that were left behind.

Then came that fateful Sunday in early March 2012 when we received a call from a near hysterical Holly telling us the horrible news. Geoff had died while running in one of his favorite places on earth, the Rockefeller State Park preserve in Mount Pleasant, NY.

The lesson to be learned from all this – aside from only the good die young – is that life is fleeting.

Hug those that you love at every opportunity. You never know how long they will be with you.

Have a question for The Curmudgeon?

Reach him by email at: hofmurray@aol.com.

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TWOS IN
TRAINING

Anthony MacDonald



Anthony MacDonald in the HRU Twos in Training video spotlight

In the second installment of HRU's 2020 Twos in Training videos, Jaimi MacDonald interviews trainer Anthony MacDonald at the Tomiko Training Centre in Ontario about the 63 2-year-olds he has in training.

by Dave Briggs

TheStable.ca's Anthony MacDonald is the second trainer in the spotlight in HRU's 2020 Twos in Training video series now posted on our [YouTube channel](#).

MacDonald was interviewed by his sister-in-law Jaimi MacDonald at the Tomiko Training Centre in Ontario about the 63 2-year-olds he has in training.

That video, produced by Curtis MacDonald's CUJO Entertainment, is available [here](#).

Special thanks to [Bow River Jewelry](#) and [Woodbine Mohawk](#)

TWOS IN TRAINING 2020 - Anthony MacDonald



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Foal of the Week

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To our harness racing friends
who have lost a loved one,
we grieve for you.

To our friends who are sick,
we pray and hope for your speedy recovery.

Each of us has unique burdens to carry
in the face of this global disaster,
but remember that *nobody is alone* and
there *will* be an end to this nightmare.

*Stay healthy, stay strong, and take care of
yourselves, your loved ones, and your horses.*

The sport we love will be waiting for us
when life gets back to normal.

Hanover stands with you
and if there is *anything* we can do to help,
please let us know.

Foal of the Week

Barbara Matthews photo

This colt, from the first crop of Tactical Landing, was foaled on March 3 in Cream Ridge, NJ. Already named Cool Change, the colt is the first foal out of Yankee Glide mare Cool Cates, who earned just shy of \$270,000 under the tutelage of Noel Daley racing in 2016 and 2017. The colt and mare are owned by Barbara Matthews of Chesterfield, NJ.

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SUPERSTAR FEMALES OF HARNESS RACING



with VICTORIA M. HOWARD

Meegan Sattelberg – caretaker

by Victoria M. Howard

If you are involved in harness racing, you've most likely heard the name 'Buter,' for Terry, Tim, and Todd have been prominent names in the racing scene.

Years ago, Terry was in Michigan and Tim was in Pennsylvania. Today, Terry and Tim are semi-retired, but the legacy continues with brother Todd and his son Tyler who race mainly on the east coast and Terry's daughter, Meegan Sattelberg, is a long-time horseperson now working as a caretaker.

"I was born and raised in Michigan and spent most of my youth in a barn. My father Terry trained and drove standardbreds and my mother Dixie was an outrider at Jackson and Wolverine Raceway," Sattelberg said.

"As a child my sister, Kris, and I showed horses so I was on top of one long before I sat behind one. As I started to get more interested in the racehorses, I really enjoyed it. I'm sure I tortured my dad's help by being in the way, asking questions, and rolling stall bandages backwards.

"A lot of horsemen lived close by us, such as Gerry Bookmeyer and Chris Boring. Gerry's stepson, Jimmy Morand, and I grew up together. During summer vacation, uncles Tim and Todd would come up from St. Clairsville, Ohio, and the



Courtesy Meegan Sattelberg

Caretaker Meegan Sattelberg and trainer Fred Grant.

three of us would help mom and dad in the barn.

"When I graduated from high school, Todd and I got a place together in Northville. I got a job working for Lee Sattelberg who I later married. We primarily raced in Michigan and the colt stakes program there. We had some really nice horses such as Lightning Mick, Keystone Hylo, Super Dev, and my all-time favorite, Patriot Lobell — a free-legged pacer by Adios Vic out of Prelude Lobell."

It's not easy being married and in the business as it can take a toll on your marriage. The long hours, too much time together, raising a family, and bringing your problems home can be overwhelming.

"After my divorce I went to The Meadows in Washington, PA and worked for trainers Greg Wright and Mike Palone. When I worked for Mike he sent me to Illinois with Ramilette Hanover to race. She got sick, thus I was delayed in returning to The Meadows. Trainer Joe Anderson asked if I wanted to work for him and I said yes so I remained in Illinois. Shortly later, Joe sent me to Jersey. After working for Joe, I worked for



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Joe Holloway, Linda Toscano, and Bill Popfinger.”

While working for Popfinger, Meegan relocated to south Florida.

“When I came to Florida I started dating trainer Fred Grant. Fast forward 14 years – I’m still with Fred and we currently have 17 horses in the barn. Although I’ve worked for some really good trainers, I have to say I’ve learned the most working with Fred.

“I also really admire Chuck Sylvester. I’ve known Chuck since I was a kid and he is one of the most knowledgeable horsemen I know. Even Fred’s not too proud to ask for Chuck’s advice.

“The success Chuck has had throughout the years is a testament to his talent, knowledge, and ability. Even with all his success, he’s never changed. He’s a wonderful person, as is his wife Sharon.”

Throughout the years, Sattelberg has cared for some pretty nice horses for Fred and their owners.

“I’ve been lucky to have taken care of several Kentucky Sires Stake final winners, such as Debbie Hall, Felicity Hall, Sorrento Hall and Jayne Eyre. Probably one of my all time favorite memories and highlights in the business is when I shipped to The Meadows and won two divisions of the Keystone Classic with Groom Hanover and Decolletage.

“Last year, Explosive Breakaway, a trotter I take care of won a division of the Keystone Classic, his division of the Liberty Bell as a 2- and 3-year-old (never missed a check and hit the board every time but one when he finished fifth due to a layoff) as well as being very competitive in the Pa. Sires Stakes. He is the best horse I’ve taken care of for Fred.

“Although I don’t train, it’s my job and goal to take the best possible care of the horses I’m in charge of. It’s very important to watch everything – a leg that’s filled, changes in behavior to not eating, etc. I feel it’s my responsibility for I’m the one who spends the most time with them.

These days I’m not out on the racetrack hardly at all, but when I was younger you couldn’t get me off. I did it all: jog, train and warm up. Now I prefer to stay in the barn, taking care of the horses and keeping on top of things.”

As far as women in the business, Meegan thinks they get

more credit today than they did back in the days of the great Bea Farber.

“I think women are taken more seriously today. You have trainers like Linda Toscano, Nancy Takter, Julie Miller and Casie Coleman who all have had great success. It’s great seeing them get the recognition and glory they deserve.”

Meegan sees her family regularly as her parents still own a few horses and have the farm in Michigan.

“With the state of harness racing in Michigan, I was glad to see my cousin, Tyler, and his wife Amber move out east. I was also glad that Uncle Todd and his wife Lynette decided to do the same. They have enjoyed great success and I’m Tyler’s #1 fan.”

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HARNES RACING UPDATE

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Editor: Dave Briggs

Production: Brian Fuller

Graphic Design, Ads & Placement: Lisa Bihuniak

Advertising Sales: Wilma Van Vaerenbergh | [contact for ad sales/questions](#)

Results & Stats Editor: Lisa Duong

Founder: Bill Finley

Contributors: Claus Andersen, Garnet Barnsdale, Tim Bojarksi, Jerry Connors, Frank Cotolo, The Curmudgeon, Paul Delean, Bill Finley, Joe FitzGerald, Dean Gillette, Ron Gurfein, Thomas Hedlund, Bill Heller, Bob Heyden, Dean Hoffman, Victoria Howard, Melissa Keith, Dave Landry, Lauren Lee, Dave Little, Chris Lomon, David Mattia, Trey Nosrac, Tom Pedulla, Andrea Pietrzak, James Platz, Bob Roberts, Sandra Snyder, Brett Sturman, Jay Wolf

Get in touch with HRU

PO Box 230 | Millwood, NY | 10546 | Telephone: (226) 374-9999

Editor/News Stories: editor@harnessracingupdate.com

Advertising: advertising@harnessracingupdate.com

Customer Service: customerservice@harnessracingupdate.com

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HISTORIC HARNESS SITES



with DEAN HOFFMAN

Remembering Du Quoin State Fairgrounds and Meadow Lands Farm

by Dean A. Hoffman

If there is a more beautiful setting for harness racing, I've never seen it.

The mile track at the Du Quoin State Fairgrounds in southern Illinois provides a beautiful pastoral panorama that makes it so delightful for spectators. They could sweep their eyes across the scene and focus on the racing competition without many of the unsightly distractions found at other tracks.

It was this natural beauty that spectators and horsemen enjoyed when attending the races at Du Quoin. Harness racing had its roots in rural America and no setting better allowed horses to display their talents on a more glorious stage.

That is why the Hambletonian enjoyed more than three decades of glory at Du Quoin, starting in 1957 and continuing through 1980.

No doubt about it, however: Du Quoin was remote. It was in the "Little Egypt" section of southern Illinois. It was over 300 miles south of Chicago, and 90 miles southeast of St. Louis. Getting there was challenging by air or by car. The nearest airport of consequence was in Carbondale, the home of Southern Illinois University, 20 miles to the south. That made it challenging for the national media to cover trotting's greatest event in the pre-Internet era.

Racing continues today in Du Quoin but gone are the glory days of the Grand Circuit, the week around Labor Day when the best horses and best horsemen would trek to Little Egypt for the chance to race on a track usually groomed to billiard-table perfection.

Harness racing hospitality in Du Quoin was brought to its pinnacle by brothers Don and Gene Hayes, who owned a



The Du Quoin State Fairgrounds, the former home of the Hambletonian.

Coca-Cola bottling plant and who cherished an abiding love for harness horses. In 1950, they scored a remarkable double when their colts Lusty Song and Dudley Hanover, selected and developed by Dr. H.M. Parshall and driven to victory by young Delvin Miller, won the Hambletonian and Little Brown Jug.

The only thing better than winning the Hambletonian, the Hayes brothers agreed, would be playing host to the Hambletonian. They gained that privilege in 1957 when Good Time Park in Goshen, NY, closed. So the best 3-year-old trotters would now fight for the biggest prize on a mile track a thousand miles west of Goshen.

The Hayes brothers weren't content to merely play host to the Hambletonian; they also were determined to showcase it and provide the participants with unparalleled hospitality. Owners and horsemen were treated royally and the pre-Hambletonian parties on the lawn of the Hayes homes at the fairgrounds were legendary.

The first Hambletonian in 1957 came down to a duel between a colt and a filly with the same initials in their names: Hickory Smoke and Hoot Song. With 22 entrants, the race was split into divisions and both horses won two heats. Hickory Smoke edged the filly in a third-heat raceoff.

It seemed that every Hambletonian provided new drama and dramatic demonstrations of ever-increasing trotting speed. The fastest mile ever in the Hambletonian at Good Time Park in Goshen had been Hoot Mon's 2:00 in 1947, but that mark took a terrible beating at Du Quoin.

The filly Emily's Pride lowered it, first but by 1964 the Hambletonian time standard was at 1:56.4, courtesy of the speedball Ayres.

The Hambletonian, of course, was part of a larger Grand Circuit week that provided a showcase for other stars.

Despite the unrelenting efforts of the Hayes family, there were persistent attempts to move the Hambletonian to a more accessible and modern setting and rid the race of its image as the Corn Tassel Derby. Many tracks made valiant efforts to secure the prize.

Those efforts all failed until a Super Track called the Meadowlands opened within the shadows of Manhattan skyscrapers. Track officials at the Big M dreamed big and they set their eyes on the prize, ultimately playing host to

the first Hambletonian on a rainy afternoon in August, 1981.

Illinois racing officials had a ready replacement in a new event called the World Trotting Derby, which gained enormous prestige and attracted the best sophomore trotters until its demise in 2009.

Racing continues at Du Quoin but the glory days of the Hambletonian and Grand Circuit are now a fading memory. Harness racing in Illinois suffered several grievous blows that vitiated its once-vital racing program.

Meadow Lands Farm, Meadow Lands, PA

After serving his country on the CBI (China- Burma-India) Theater in World War II, a young Pennsylvanian named Delvin Miller returned to his roots in hills of western Pennsylvania determined to make a mark in harness racing.

To those who were watching closely, Miller had already made his mark. He won the 1940 Fox Stake, then by far the greatest prize for juvenile pacers, with a calf-kneed colt named Blackhawk. Even during the dreary years of the Depression in the 1930s, young Miller impressed others with his ability and ambition.

But he wanted a farm of his own and ultimately a stallion. In both cases, he chose wisely.

Miller bought a farm on hilly ground 25 miles south of Pittsburgh in the hamlet of Meadow Lands, not far from Route 19 that ran south out of Pittsburgh. It was surely no rival to the showplaces of the Bluegrass in Kentucky, but Miller was a practical horseman first and foremost. The farm was christened with the name of the town: Meadow Lands.

After he had the farm, Miller needed a stallion. Like real estate, stallions were not cheap. And Delvin Miller was not rich. He surveyed the standardbred scene and found such stars as The Widower and other top flight pacers suitable for stud duty.

For advice, he learned on his mentor, Dr H. M, Parshall, a veterinarian who spent his career training and racing horses. Fifteen years separated them in age, but Miller assiduously soaked up the wisdom of the Parshall.

"You don't want just any horse," emphasized Parshall. "You want Adios. I guarantee you he'll sire good fillies."

"No one could sell me quite like Doc could because I believed in him so much," Miller said later.



Adios sold at auction at the Tattersalls facility in Kentucky and Miller was short on cash for a man long on ambition. When the bidding reached \$20,000, Miller was out of money but raised one finder to indicate a bid of \$20,100. Auctioneer George Swinebroad took it as a bid of \$21,000 and hammered the horse down to Miller.

Miller protested because 900 bucks was, after all, a lot of money to him. But sale officials were resolute.

So Miller trucked Adios back to western Pennsylvania and began hustling mares for his new horse at \$300 for a live foal.

Miracles soon began to happen. The sons and daughters of Adios represented a new dimension in standardbred speed. The first 2:00 juvenile pacers of both sexes, the colt Adios Boy and the filly Adios Betty, set their marks in 1953.

In 1955, Adios was syndicated for \$500,000 with Hanover Shoe Farms and Max Hempt sharing ownership with Miller. Adios remained at Meadow Lands until his death a decade later.

Miller added other stallions, but they all stood in the shadow of Adios. That included Dale Frost, although in 1960

his son Meadow Skipper was foaled and the dark brown colt became the heir apparent to Adios in pacing domination.

While his stallions stood at Meadow Lands Farm, Miller raised his yearlings at his boyhood home near Avella, PA. It was rugged, hilly land.

The late Norman Woolworth visited the farm in Avella and marveled at its terrain.

"I'm surprised that the yearlings didn't have one leg much shorter than on the other side because they were raised on such steep hills," he joked.

When the Adios Stake was started in 1967 at The Meadows, Miller and his wife Mary Lib played host to epic parties to welcome the Grand Circuit crowd.

Meadow Lands Farm exists today primarily as a training center for horses racing at The Meadows, but visitors to the farm can make a pilgrimage to the gravesites of both Adios and Dale Frost.

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Waiting out the winter and COVID-19

Top Truro Raceway trainer George Rennison talks 2019 awards and upcoming season.

by Melissa Keith

When George Rennison (Truro UTRS .294) was named last year's "Top Dash Trainer over 100" starts at Truro Raceway, he was the winner of a match race against the Nova Scotia track's only other candidate with that many starts, Paul Langille (Truro UTRS .281). Even so, Rennison, 42, admitted he was surprised by the honor, which was announced at Truro Raceway's Feb. 15 award banquet. "It didn't really seem like we were having that great a year," he told HRU. "It kind of just peaked there, near the end. Throughout the year, it seemed like we were just kind of having an average year. The last month, or six weeks, we had a little spurt. It took us from an average year to a good year."

His sense of surprise at earning the 2019 training title is because Rennison isn't a man who chases awards or publicity. He's a 20-plus-year veteran of the sport who has focused on the blue collar racing stock that comprises the

lifeblood of harness racing in his home province. Rennison said he's recently seen a major decline in this long-standing tradition.

"You look around the Maritimes: There's not many racehorse stables. I mean, years ago, Gary MacDonald, Blair Laffin... A lot of the stables were racehorse guys. Now, everybody just seems to be training a few colts for some people with some money," he said.

Rennison Racing integrates a few young stakes prospects with the stable's seasoned older horses, a model that's been working for George and family. His wife, Andrea, was named Truro Raceway's 2019 Horsewoman of the Year, and shared Owner of the Year honors with son Ryder.

George said that his father, Albert, takes care of the horses every morning, then "goes home and has a coffee after feeding them."

The barn currently has 10 horses awaiting their home track's re-opening in April.

Truro Raceway general manager Kelly MacEachen said this week that "nothing right now" had been decided regarding the upcoming racing season, which was slated to begin April



George Rennison with wife Andrea, son Ryder and Electric Syl.



Kyle Burton

Ryder Rennison driving George Rennison-trained Distinctiv Rusty to victory in June, 2019 at Truro Raceway.

10. All Canadian tracks have currently postponed live racing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Two 2-year-olds, one 3-year-old [**Anne With An E**], and seven racehorses: **Lively Freddie**, **Electric Syl**, **Distinctiv Rusty**, **Global Seelster**, **Seethelightsngo**, **Bettim Jenny**, and **Giant Slayer** — we just got him a week or so ago,” said Rennison, adding that PEI horseman Jeff Lilley often sends horses to him.

“I’ve got a colt [**Bettim Again**] with Jeff right now and I’ve got **Bettim Jenny** [p, 6, 1:56.2f; \$71,809],” Rennison said, naming Lilley homebreds owned by small regional racing partnerships.

The Truro Raceway conditioner said 2-year-old Bettim Again could become an Atlantic Sires Stakes performer to watch this season. “He’s a Malicious colt, a brother to **Bettim Jackie** [p, 4, 1:51.1f; \$176,009]. We just brought him in a week or two ago. He could make a liar out of me, but I like him a lot right now.”

It would mean a lot to see Bettim Again succeed in stakes competition. Despite being a licensed trainer since 1996, George Rennison said he hasn’t developed a true stakes star. Early in his driving career, the protégé of Danny Romo and Butch Horne piloted one filly to three Atlantic Sires Stakes victories at three different tracks for owner/trainer Terry Osbourne. “When I first got my license, **Flashy Family** [p, 2, 2:00.1h; \$29,907]. She made \$30,000 as a 2-year old. That

was probably one of the funner years that I drove.”

Rennison added that he’s moved increasingly into the training side of the game because catch drivers outperform trainer/drivers. “I started to realize I could put them in the right places but other people could get more out of them,” he said. “I think it’s a hands thing. I think it’s a thing you’ve either got or you don’t.”

Fortunately, 20-year-old Ryder Matthews Rennison has got the driving talent. His father noted he would like to see Ryder become a fully-licensed driver in 2020. “It’s working out pretty good, timing-wise. I’m getting out of the way,” he said with a grin. Ryder has participated in PEI’s matinee racing circuit and amateur races at Truro Raceway’s Hubtown Community Day, but previously lacked the duration of groom’s licensing needed to fulfill the requirements to become a driver.

The Rennisons are bringing back **Distinctiv Rusty** (p, 5, 1:55.2s; \$62,097) this season, as the reigning Truro Raceway Horse of the Year seeks to build upon last year’s nine wins in 31 starts. The 9-year-old Rambaran—Winnees Luck (by Camluck) stallion concluded 2019 with a trio of victories, including a going-away 2:00.3h effort on closing night at his home track.

“He’s been a pretty nice horse,” said his trainer. “He’s bounced around and was probably better a couple of years ago, but there were better horses around the first year or two

we had him. He was a real nice horse, 1-2-3 in the top class, every night. He'd go through ups and downs last year. When he was good, he was real good; when he was bad, not so much."

Distinctiv Rusty is a particular favourite of Ryder, while Electric Syl (p,6, 1:56.0h; \$67,617) is both a Raceway regular and Andrea Rennison's personal pet.

"This is the eighth [year] I think for him. We got him when he was 4 and I think he's 12 now," said George. "He's definitely the longest I've ever had one. He can feed himself. I don't think he's going anywhere."

The family lost pacing mare Always Reese (p, 4, 1:53.1s; \$57,788) in a claiming race at Charlottetown last Old Home Week. Racing stock which not long ago sold in the \$2,000-\$3,000 range is now priced from \$6,000-\$7,000, which the conditioner said makes it tougher to replenish the active horse population in the Maritimes.

The business of operating a racing stable in a small province poses an ongoing challenge. Trainer Rennison also works in building maintenance for Cobequid Housing, but the grandson of legendary horseman Clayton MacLeod remains devoted to the family tradition.

"We get a new [racehorse] whenever we can. It's nice to freshen up the barn a little. It gets stale when it's the same faces all the time," he said, pointing out the regional impact of low purses and expensive racehorses. "You get the average horse making \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year – that's almost the break-even point for somebody paying board. You shouldn't have to have the best horse in the Maritimes to break even."

Adding to the struggle for small stables based in the Maritimes is the lack of winter racing dates. There are no regional racetracks operational through the winter months anymore; the currently-dormant Red Shores Charlottetown played host to the final live cards until spring, back in January.

"I think we could go with less dates and not the standard shutdown," said a frustrated Rennison. "There shouldn't be a dark [period]. There should always be someplace open to go and race in the Maritimes, in my opinion... At one time, that's what the cheap horses did, because all the better ones were shut down. It served the little guys a lot better, racing them in the winter, because your poorer horses moved up a class or two."

He noted that the scarcity of racehorses across North America means that better Maritime stock commonly ends up in Ontario or the USA over the winter, while the

remainder are sought out as road horses by Amish buyers. Local fractional ownership groups like Truro Raceway's own Hubtown Horse Owners Club (launched to a sold-out membership in 2019) help bring in racehorses; Rennison and Paul Langille trained pacers Larjon Lachlan and Well Did for the Club last season, and Dave Carey and Bernard McCallum will train new Hubtown fractional horses in 2020. Even so, Rennison said it's the independent racing stables which are really needed to create the full fields conducive to a solid wagering product. He would like to see three or four more at the Bible Hill backstretch, and is doing his part in the meantime. "We trained a bunch this week, in around :30," he told HRU. "I don't know how [Truro Raceway's] horse population is going to hold up, but we're trying to have ours ready, anyway."

The alternative to selling – waiting for Truro to reopen for live racing in April – isn't palatable to many owners.

"I have a hard job marketing a horse to an owner to race for six months and [be] down for six months," he explained. "It's hard enough for them to pay the bills when they're racing, let alone standing in a stall."

Rennison unexpectedly lost three horses from his barn last year: promising stakes colt **Howmac Finale** (3, 1:59.0h; \$12,388) broke a bone and was euthanized; 5-year-old mare **Woodmere Finesse** (p, 5, 1:55.2f; \$58,332) was found deceased in her stall at morning feeding time; a boarder's 30-year-old pleasure horse succumbed to the ravages of age. Their deaths made 2019 a sad year for the family-run stable.

"People don't always see it, but the way you care for them relates to what you get out of them on the track," he said.

And that's not more awards, he added. "We had enough [2019] awards banquets to last me a lifetime! Andrea is a Standardbred Canada director, so we went to the O'Briens, and then we went to the Cape Breton banquet there too. It was good fun; it's just more dress-up than I'm used to."

His goals for the 2020 season?

"Nothing specific. I think we were hovering around 40 wins; it would be nice to break 50 wins."

In fact, Rennison recorded a lifetime-best 47 training victories from 217 purse starts last year, so there's a good chance that he'll reach that milestone this season.

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BREAKING STRIDE

with TREY NOSRAC

Under the Table

by Trey Nosrac

"What was the worst job you ever had?" My boss asked the question on his first visit to Chez Trey where we dined on foot-long Subways.

"Easy, private investigator."

"Are you joking?"

"My job description was a joke, all they asked me to do was get dirt for divorces."

"How?"

"I knew a sleazy dude who eavesdropped on cheating spouses for a lawyer. One year he had a backlog of cases, and he outsourced some of his dirty work to me."

He raised his eyebrow, "Wow, quite a cast of characters you hang with."

"You want crazy. One of my cases — well, I only had three before I bailed — took place on a Tuesday morning at nine. I'm waiting for Cruise to meet his girlfriend at Starbucks for their usual tryst at the table by the fireplace. I gave him the codename Cruise because he looked a little like a beefy version of the Scientology actor, but this Cruise never showed the big white smile."

"Was he a plaintiff or perpetrator?"

"I think he was Italian. My MO was to take a few photos from across the room with my cellphone. To collect additional evidence, I duct-taped a cheap cellphone on the underside of the table where they always sat."

"You know there is improved technology on the market?"

"No doubt, but I'm a low tech kind of guy and this was only my second case. Anyway, my plan went bad. The girlfriend did not show. Instead of a stocky blonde woman, an ancient, skinny guy, wearing a red jogging suit circa 1975 with stringy, grey, slick-backed hair sat down across from Cruise. I had to wait around for over an hour to retrieve my phone."

He asked, "Is recording like that legal?"

"Possibly, I worked on the principle of don't ask, don't tell. The young guy kept waving his hands to try to make the geezer lower his voice. Anyway, when I got it home and

listened to the playback, well, it's like when you catch a big, ugly fish with teeth and don't know what the hell to do with it. Hey, maybe you do."

I headed to my junk drawer in the kitchen and dug out a memory stick and plugged it into my laptop. Then I said, "Listen to this file. There is some talk about sheltering money that the lawyer used to push for a settlement, then out of the blue they start to talk about horse racing."

"Horse racing?"

I nodded, "See what you think."

[Listen here](#)

"Looking sharp gramps."

"How's the divorce going kiddo?"

"Ugly, real ugly, she's got her claws out."

"Kiddo, If there's one thing I can't stand it's a good looking wife with a bad attitude."

"She's a nightmare."

"So how hard can she squeeze you without kids and after what, four years?"

"Like a python on steroids Gramps, I'm just glad I kept most of my money dark."

"If there's one thing I can't stand it's a woman taking money she didn't earn, or at least swindle."

"Amen."

(sounds of coffee being sipped)

"Ya know kid, I used to run a book, just like you."

"Trust me gramps; your book was nothing like mine."

"You take in money. You hand money out. You take a cut and chase down clowns that don't pay. Only difference is you use the computer and your cellphone."

"There are plenty of differences. It's apples and oranges."

"Like what?"

"Like I never see my players, like I only have about a dozen, like my players use skill, and like...I don't get caught."

"That was what, 40 years ago? The guy was undercover. You think the government can't go undercover with you? It would be a hell of a lot easier to trap you on a computer."

"Nobody wants to trap me. The players I use are clean and they are flush. The play they make is a weird kind of racing called harness horse racing and they are very happy with my service. Besides, I'm not even sure it's illegal."

"Hah. Kid, if you ain't paying the government, if you ain't paying the racetracks, you ain't legit."

"The Internet is different; nobody knows what the hell is going on, and..."

"The money kid, they can always follow the money. That's how they shut down those off-shore outfits."

"Those earlier outfits taking bets from the public were asking for trouble. The offshore gambling got pinched because of the banking part. I have that covered."

"How?"

"You won't understand Gramps."

"I been scamming since you was a wet dream. Try me."

(laughter)

"You know what an app is?"

"I'm old, I ain't stupid. If there's one thing I can't stand its people thinking old equals have lost their marbles."

"We use an app that allows what is called peer-to-peer payments. My players run invisible tabs."

"What's your vig?"

"Five per cent."

"Kind of low."

"Yes, but it's easy. I sit at my computer. I don't need to chase people around. It's not like cops and robbers, and if my players were on the open market they would be paying a lot more."

"How'd you find 'em?"

"The internet, that's how you find anyone these days. I hooked a couple of big fish on social media. The play was simple... 'Hey guys, I'm in the same boat, I like the trotters and pacers but hate the odds. What about we simply start gambling on harness races among ourselves?' I make it sound all friendly, like I'm just thinking on the fly."

"You never meet them in person?"

"No. I researched them on the Internet and made my pitch on the Internet, chatted them up on the Internet with, 'Guys, in our new little word, our take-out is ZERO. We can set up any sort of wagers we want. I will take it upon myself to organize our private group of harness players and just take a pinch for hosting.'"

"These players you got, they aren't scared?"

"A little, but they were doable."

"What did you tell 'em?"

"The truth, 'Nobody knows what is legal on the computer; laws are all over the map. The courts won't bother us. No individual has ever been charged using an online service to bet on sport. You think we will be the first? It's as if we were making bets at the local pub and the winner gets paid off, or pays for the next round, and the loser says he will square up later. We don't even have to pay bank or credit card fees. We can gamble our mobile hearts out. Who's gonna stop us."

"Kid, it's easy to see you are family."

(laughter...then a pause)

"I might run a second gift, especially if I need money to cover the divorce, but I got a problem."

"What's that?"

"I kinda like the stupid sport, harness horse racing. I needed to play, to bet on the races to keep up appearances, to be in the club. I got pulled into the goofy little world. It's fun. In other swindles, I never felt a twinge of guilt. This play nags at me. They don't even know that I'm robbing them blind."

"Well kid, maybe we ain't related after all. I don't know if I should be touched or smack you upside your head. Here's some advice. Keep it business. You don't run these players, somebody else will. The sport, what is it, again?"

"Harness horse racing, with the buggies."

"Kid, they gotta cover themselves. That's been true since Ben Hur. If you feel so bad for horse racing, change your game to something like football."

"Nah, the money works better in horse racing because I can give my clients a nice deal; other sports my margin isn't as good. What makes me feel bad is the sport lives off gambling, and that's where they have a soft underbelly."

"Kid, if there's one thing I can't stand, it's confusing business with social work. Get soft and you lose your action, that's the world."

I pulled the memory stick out of my laptop and said, "Well, there you go. Don't ask me if this is the tip of the iceberg or the whole iceberg. Hell, this type of scam may just be an aberration, maybe just a few gamblers are playing in the dark web. I do know that about a hundred years ago, bookmaking almost killed horse racing, and you know what they say about history repeating itself"

My pal, David, took a minute to process everything, and then he said, "This doesn't surprise me. The concept of people stealing the racing product has crossed my mind. All I know is you guys better keep your eye on your horse races because Internet sharpies will take down anyone and anything in their path. Guys like Cruise can kill you. He sounds like a flat-out crook, but there are semi-respectable parasites out there that can bleed you dry. Hey, ask the people in the music business about pirates, they have stories that will break your heart."

I closed my laptop, gently tossed it onto the back seat, and sighed, "This sport doesn't need any more problems."

Then he said something cryptic, "Protecting your product is doable. A lot of things are doable on the web. Good things."

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Ontario Racing creates task force to address financial impacts on the industry

In response to the many challenges horse racing and its horsepeople are currently facing, Ontario Racing has created a task force, which includes representatives from all three breeds (quarter horse, standardbred and thoroughbred) in the province.

"This newly-formed task force is committed to addressing the financial burdens that have arisen for the dedicated horsepeople of Ontario due to the temporary cancellation of live horse racing in the province," said Katherine Curry, executive director, Ontario Racing Management (ORM). "Ontario Racing, in concert with its Board of Directors and the task force, is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation as it relates to the industry."

The task force will hold regular meetings to discuss the financial impact the coronavirus has had and will have on the approximately 45,000 jobs per year that are attributed to the horse racing and breeding industry in Ontario.

During this time of uncertainty, the task force will continually update the horse racing community, keeping horsepeople and industry stakeholders informed of any pertinent developments as we move forward.

Pompano Park rescinds eviction notice

A crowd of more than 100 harness racing horsemen and women met outside the race paddock at the Isle Pompano Park Saturday morning and heard the positive news they were hoping for. No eviction from the backstretch for horse

people and their horses.

"Whatever you have heard or read over the past few days is to be forgotten," said Joe Pennacchio of the Florida Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association. "We have nothing but good news today."

Pennacchio then introduced Joe Morris, the new vice-president of racing for Eldorado Casinos that owns Pompano Park. Morris, a standardbred owner and breeder and former trainer, was hired just three weeks ago by Eldorado. He is well known by many of the horsemen at Pompano Park and received a loud applause before he spoke.

"There is no eviction notice," Morris started out stating. "We have to look out for each other. We will not evict any horses or people. We will not be throwing out anyone in the dorms. If we (Eldorado) need to help feed people in the backstretch, we will do it. If a trainer can't afford feed or hay for their horses, we will help them. If a horseman has the opportunity to ship and race at another track and can't afford it, we will help them."

"We don't know how long this coronavirus will keep us shut down. We don't know if we will be able to race this meet right now, but we are already meeting and planning for the race meet next season."

"We are also looking into your health insurance. We will not allow anyone in the backstretch to go without health insurance at a time like this. In today's world you have to have health insurance and if need be, we will help fund it. We have to look out after each other."

"Things are hard enough nowadays. And we do not want you to have to worry about going anywhere until you are ready and we want you all to know that we are here to help you."

— *Steve Wolf for harnesslink.com*

Mohawk Park to mail checks

Woodbine Mohawk Park would like to inform all horsepeople that check pickup in the bookkeeper's office will not be available until further notice.

All checks issued will be mailed to horsepeople.

— *Mark McKelvie / Woodbine communications*



Harness Racing Update on Twitter

@HARNESSUPDATE



Bridgette Jablonsky and Patti Murphy deserve commendation as outstanding members of the harness racing community. Bridgette has kept the breeding process going smoothly, which will pay off not just for Hanover Shoe Farms, but also for a myriad of other breeders two years from now, after we've gotten this public health threat under

Marie Curie once said, "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood." Our understanding of this situation advances hourly. We must not succumb to fear, and we need not. The grace and courage of the people of Hanover Shoe Farms and of harness racing generally should give us solace

and encouragement as we look forward. I am sincerely grateful to them.

—*Russell C. Williams / president, Hanover Shoe Farms, Inc.*

Gural on indictments and the need to pass the Horse Racing Integrity Act

When I took over the Meadowlands I made a promise to myself to eliminate the use of performance enhancing drugs at the Meadowlands. I did not realize how difficult it would be. I hired Brice Cote after he retired from the New Jersey State Police and gave him the assignment of surveillance and taking out of competition samples. We were able to make an arrangement with a lab in Hong Kong to test the samples and worked with them to try to find what illegal drugs were being used. While we had some success, and fortunately we won our court case against Lou Pena which gave us the right to exclude those trainers that we suspected of using PEDs, we knew that we still had a problem.

Fortunately, the FBI took an interest and with the tools available to them they were able to finally bring to justice those participants in both standardbred and thoroughbred racing who were in fact at the center of the illegal drug operation. I commend both the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office for their work on this project as we cooperated with them over the last two years to bring about the results we saw last week. Obviously, not everyone has been detained but I know from speaking with the FBI that they believe that they have arrested the four major leading suppliers of illegal PEDs and the expectation is that they will try to mitigate their sentence and give the FBI additional information as to who, in fact, their customers were. I subsequently received a call that Renee Allard had been arrested in Las Vegas and, obviously, while he was on our exclusion list, since he began buying yearlings I was under a lot of pressure to allow those horses to race in our stakes. Now that problem is solved.

In any case, had it not been for this horrible virus this would have been great news, but hopefully when that crisis passes we can all reflect on the fact that something most people thought was impossible, ridding horse racing of the chemists, is on its way to finally being accomplished. Right now, the most important thing for our industry is to protect the subsidy. In order to do that we must reverse course and support the passage of the Horse Racing Integrity Act. Over the past year, I begged (USTA president) Russell Williams to convince his board to support this legislation and I told him repeatedly that this scandal was coming and we had a

problem. Unfortunately, I was not able to convince him, so hopefully now that we know how bad it is, our industry can come together and support this federal legislation that would allow USADA to take over drug testing. The funny thing is, whenever I would ask someone who opposed this legislation if they thought the current system was working, they would always say "no" so I'm not exactly sure what people wanted to see happen. Now that politicians are aware of the fact that we have a major problem with illegal performance enhancing drugs, we must do everything possible to ensure that they don't look to eliminate the subsidy. I don't see how we can convince them that we really care if we continue to oppose this legislation.

—*Jeff Gural / owner Meadowlands Racetrack*

Thoughts on cheaters, the integrity act and more

I just was amazed that Ron Gurfein stood up for Rene Allard ([full story here](#)). Really, why? Everyone knew he was dirty! Kind of like horse racing knew Navarro was dirty! And the worst of this? Horses DIED!! DEAD! They thought it was a joke! Where the hell were the damn regulators when horses were dying? How do horses disappear and No One Notices? I didn't used to be in favor of the Horse Racing Integrity Act,



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but, sorry, apparently racing are idiots. So yes feds must regulate and I agree with Dana Parham – commissioner needed. Owners quit sending your horses to the cheaters. If your horse tests positive, owner is now on notice that trainer is dirty. Take horses away or face suspension of all your horses. Maybe six months would get your notice.

—*Shari Hazlett / Hillsdale, NY*

The glass is half-empty

As the hooves continue to drop for the FBI investigation, I currently see little regarding any steps taken to remedy the business-as-usual corruption by those at the tracks charged with oversight and adherence to rules, enforcement and looking out for the betting public. Before you comment on the cheating vs. integrity, I grew up watching and wagering at Detroit Race Course (DRC) so if it walks, quacks or cheats, I've seen it and I can recognize it.

There are two key people at every racetrack, the chief steward and the track veterinarian. When you see a horse back-up through the field and doesn't lead, close or make any run, then he should not have been cleared by the vet or entered by the trainer. This is a clear violation in our trust of the presiding officials. Each racetrack has a website to report violations, fines and findings. This a good place to go to determine if your being served by the chief steward or racing commissioner for that matter. If, on the occasion (and that includes a number of race favorites) a horse does back up or totally quits, then the website should disclose causal factors and actions taken by the track with owners, trainers and the vet who declared the horse fit to race. Perhaps the FBI needs to look into the actions or non-actions (in the case of most) by the presiding officials.

Betting irregularities: Once the crooks realize you're on to the PEDs they are using and you're watching for it, they'll change the game. That new game might be pool manipulation and include placing a few hundred dollars EARLY on what might appear to be a major contender to divert attention, backing out the early money just before post at the same time crushing the exotic pools. Of course, there are many ways to cheat us if you put your crook hat on. In the majority of races, there are going to be usually two truly superior horses. If you own one, you simply manage to look good while finishing second and you kill the exotics while giving away some of the purse dollars. The following week and you're not the favorite you take down both in winning. In 2018-2019 there was a Canadian-trained open filly (a stone closer) that managed to seem like she got wound-up a little

too late for many of her starts. Did she? In terms of oversight, it's my belief that if the customer was a prime consideration then why doesn't the track have a state entity develop an algorithm, insert it into the Tote system for tracking large off-track bets on single-combination exotic bets.

The long and short of this story is that the tracks and management refuse to change and will be protesting till the all the lights go off in the building. Like the horse and buggy maybe it's time to move on.

—*David Perry / Dearborn, MI*

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