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Friday, April 17, 2020

Weaver on navigating the pandemic shutdown as an owner

Mega-owner Mark Weaver on how the Burke Brigade is navigating COVID-19.

Step one is finding a new way to, temporarily, sell about 50 horses.

by Brett Sturman

BETWEEN THE LINES



with BRETT STURMAN

With the industry's current shutdown inclusive of not only racing but also public sales, owner Mark Weaver took to a new medium this week in an effort to disperse many of his racing horses. On Facebook, Weaver offered to send a list of 40 horses with sale prices to anyone interested as to make room for his new group of 2-year-olds that will soon be arriving north from Florida. It's one of the challenges facing him as some creativity is required to weather the current dynamics.

"Ohio has a sale every May, and that's where we'd normally sell," said Weaver. "The Meadowlands has had sales in May that they try to give it a go but the last year or two it hasn't filled. We have 70 2-year-olds coming up from Florida every year in the middle of May that we need to make room for, and it's hard to sell 70 horses at once. We usually have to move about 50 of them. And you don't want to flood the market, so we try to put some in online sales, put some in the Springfield, Ohio sale, and we would sell some privately and get some of them claimed while racing. But with no sale and no racing to lose them, I figured I'd put it out there on

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p. 2, 1:50f, 3, 1:48.3f, 1:48, BT1:46.2
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—Jeff Fought

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Facebook and try it that way.”

Weaver, who comprises half of the Weaver Brusceci partnership and owns the horses with trainer Ron Burke, sees the online dispersal as a potentially decent opportunity for buyers. It’s not that Weaver is letting his racehorses go as part of a fire sale, but the horses are priced at a discounted rate for the reason that there is some urgency for these horses to sell, as well as the reality that there’s nowhere right now for the horses to race anyway.

As Weaver explains it, having a pretty good idea of what the market is, he and Burke determined how to structure the pricing for the horses. “We came up with a list of horses that are sell-able and that other people would like; horses without problems and ready to race,” said Weaver. “Ronnie and I agreed that we can’t sell them at 50 cents on the dollar, but that something around 80 cents on the dollar is something that was about right. I came up with my price and Ronnie came up with his based on what we’d value the horses under normal conditions, and then we took off 15 per cent to 20 per cent from those prices.” Weaver estimated he had one hundred responses in his first 20 minutes of posting, with many of 40 horses listed having already been sold.

While not every owner has Weaver’s problem of making room for dozens of promising 2-year-olds (which isn’t necessarily even the worst problem to have, you could argue), he is like all other owners in that he has a stable of horses with no source of racing income.

Now more than mid-way through April, it’s impossible to pinpoint when racing will start to return. Multiple 3-year-old stakes scheduled to take place in the U.S. in May and June have been scrapped, and news came Thursday that the North America Cup schedule at Woodbine Mohawk for June 20 has also now been postponed until further notice. It seems to be an ominous sign, and the question is how much longer can owners endure before they can’t sustain any longer?

“I’m sure in some situations it’s already happened,” said Weaver. And not just in harness racing but in any industry. It’s been about a month so far, and for a lot of people that will be enough to ruin them. At two months, it’s going to ruin a whole new group of people.

“Whether it’s in harness racing or elsewhere, it’s just not sustainable. For our group, with our size, we are probably positioned to handle the initial month or so better than most operations, but at the same time the longer it goes we get hurt more than the average person because of our sheer size and if this were to go on much longer, it would definitely get tougher.



Dave Landry

Mark Weaver (center) and other core members of the Burke Brigade (Mike Brusceci, left, and trainer Ron Burke, right) after winning the 2017 Kentucky Futurity with Snowstorm Hanover.

A promotional graphic for the "Foal of the Week" feature. It features a central image of a brown foal with a white blaze on its face, standing against a blue background with white radiating lines. Above the foal, the text "HRU WANTS YOUR BEST FOAL PHOTOS FOR OUR NEW FEATURE" is written in a bold, stylized font. Below the foal, the text "Foal of the Week" is written in a large, red, cursive font. At the bottom, there is a call to action: "SEND PHOTOS AND AS MUCH INFORMATION ABOUT THE FOAL & FAMILY AS POSSIBLE TO: DAVE BRIGGS · HRUEDITOR@GMAIL.COM". In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for "HRU HARNESS RACING UPDATE" featuring a silhouette of a horse and jockey.

"Another thing is the way the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) works, many other industries are protected more than we are. In other industries the majority of their expenses are payroll, so you can get assistance for that and cover your payroll and make up the difference. But for us in the horse industry, payroll is a small part of the upkeep. I'd say payroll represents 20 to 25 per cent of our total costs, so we basically have to eat the other 75 to 80 per cent as an expense that we'll never be able to get back. That's what hurts us."

As the racing calendar shortens and stakes races are cancelled that owners count on each year for sources of income and justification for their costly investments into young horses, Weaver sees there being a trickle-down impact. There will be less money to spend for when racing quickly approaches the yearling and breeding season.

One source of income that Weaver has going for him is in breeding.

"Owning Sweet Lou is helping. This time of year, he's having a bunch of foals being born so that revenue will help us," said Weaver. "But normally you don't really even think about that revenue, but in this case where there are literally zero dollars coming in from racing it's nice to at least have a separate part of the industry to bring us some revenue."

"And one other thing – the stake payments that were due (Wednesday) – and I've been pretty vocal about it – but to me, that was a total joke and I'm embarrassed as somebody that makes their living in this industry that people thought those payments needed to be made on April 15. Mortgages and taxes and other things a lot more important than staking was pushed back, but us as an industry couldn't come to that. I don't think those making the decisions understand that the average person making these payments was probably not in the best position to be forking out thousands of dollars to make sure that their horses could race – for races that may not even go. People just don't have the money

right now, it's hard for a lot of people."

No one can predict when racing will return, but for Weaver and all other owners that time can't come fast enough. "Hopefully we get back racing soon and we're already in a position where we race in pretty much every state, so if some tracks open sooner than others then we'll be ready to go."

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HARNESS RACING UPDATE

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Chris Tully Trot.com



EUROPEAN REPORT



with **THOMAS HEDLUND**

Decision made, Elitloppet will be held

by *Thomas Hedlund*

Question marks still remain, but as it looks right now, Solvalla will play host to Elitloppet on the last Sunday in May as scheduled.

The COVID-19 situation in Europe is still troubling the harness racing business, but Sweden still roll on with the race cards and the big issue since the outbreak of the virus has been whether the Elitloppet would be raced in May. Solvalla announced earlier this week that the decision is made and that there will be a race called Elitloppet.

"Elitloppet is an annual highlight for many Swedes and we feel confident that we can conduct the competitions safely and responsibly", said Solvalla CEO Jörgen Forsberg at Solvalla's web site solvalla.se.

"Our decision is made with reservations. If the situation in our society get worse, the conditions for us will change but at present most things point to the fact that we can arrange Elitloppet weekend without spectators at the arena. Of course, I hope that our fantastic audience can be there, but if the prevailing conditions prevents it, the Elitloppet and the whole weekend will be held. We will make a final decision on the public issue on May 4," said Forsberg.

The Elitloppet weekend will be broadcast on television and at atg.se. In addition, the race card on Sunday will broadcast in 15 other countries.

"Our entire society is currently undergoing a very tough period and we are humble and realize that Elitloppet can't change that situation. But we hope to be able to offer world class harness racing sports and fulfill everyone's needs for entertainment, in an otherwise difficult time. It's positive that Sweden's harness racing enthusiasts will be able to watch the nice races on television if the opportunity to visit the arena is not given," said Forsberg.

Sweden Cup, the big heat race over the mile on Saturday's race card, will be deleted and some of the other big races will have decreased purses.

Solvalla will not set its own rules for those who may compete. The racetrack will follow applicable laws and regulations as well as any directives from Swedish Harness Racing head organisation.

The winner of Paralympiatriavet at Åby on April 25 will receive a ticket for Elitloppet, and in addition, the winner of Meadow Roads race at Solvalla on May13 and the winner of Prins Daniels race in Gävle on May 23 will get their spot in Elitloppet.



Dave Briggs

Solvalla on Elitloppet Day 2019. The plan is to go ahead with the race this year, but likely without a crowd.

And speaking of Paralympiatriavet, last Sunday, the third elimination for the big race was held at Romme racetrack and stormy weather with heavy rain changed the conditions dramatically during the afternoon at Romme. Talented front runner Elian Web (Like A Prayer) opened quickly for the lead for driver Jorma Kontio and first choice Sorbet was parked outside. Far back in the field, Milliondollarrhyme started his attack three wide with a half mile to go and the son of Ready Cash held strongly for third place. Sorbet couldn't challenge the leader seriously and Elian Web won in mile rate 1:57.3 in tough conditions.

Eight-year-old Elian Web is the brightest star in Finland and he competed in the Elitloppet two years ago. Most probably, the Katja Melkko trained gelding will get a ticket to Solvalla this year.

Propulsion, who won Olympiatriavet (Paralympiatriavet) last year will not participate in the final at Åby this year. Instead, trainer Daniel Redén got a wild card for his Sorbet and before the last elimination, the field is set, except for one final trotter.

The following horses will contest the Paralympiatriavet 2020:

Billie de Montfort (France)
Cyber Lane (elimination winner) (Sweden)
Disco Volante (elimination winner) (Sweden)
Elian Web (elimination winner) (Finland)
Gareth Boko (Sweden)
Looking Superb (Norway)
Velvet Gio (Sweden)
Milliondollarrhyme (Sweden)
Sorbet (Sweden)

(The winner of the last elimination at Umåker racetrack on Saturday)

Eleven trotters chase the last ticket to Paralympiatriavet at Umåker Saturday afternoon. Hambletonian winner Perfect Spirit (Andover Hall) is one of the contenders, but post position 12 is a tough case for the 6-year-old Andover Hall son.

2.140 meters (1.3 miles) is the distance and the purse is \$40,000.

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Enterprise

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Enterprise won half of his 12 starts in 2017, including an elimination of the Hambletonian, and finished fourth, placed third in the \$1,000,000 final at the Meadowlands.

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The book on race secretaries

Plus, thoughts on horses that toe out compared to those that toe in and whether trainers can see instant talent in young drivers.

by Ron Gurfein

Tidbits: I personally am not a supporter of the use of Clenbuterol. In fact, I think we would be a lot better off if we banned the drug altogether, as the quarter horse industry has.

That said, I truly feel the new Ontario rule regarding the time frame for use of the drug is fine for the thoroughbred horses, but, in effect, bans the drug from the standardbreds. Twenty-eight days out as a rule is okay if you race every 40-60 days, but how can it be applied to a sport where the horses run every seven days?

This is without question one of the least thought out decisions I have ever heard.

Billy Bigler asks: You have trained for six decades can you tell us about the race secretaries that you have raced for pros and cons?

I have been very lucky. With all the racing I have done in my lifetime I only had one race secretary that I found fault with and he was a total Neanderthal. He had no redeeming qualities and if someone discovered he was a clone of Adolph Hitler it would have been no surprise to me. He will however remain nameless, although the lack of his name in my discourse will give the old timers a good hint.

Larry Mallar at Roosevelt Raceway was the first of my experiences. I was young and dumb and he looked at me like I was young and dumb. I asked stupid questions and he made sure I understood they were stupid. But that said, Larry was fair and very businesslike the way he ran his office. He was truly one of the most laid back of all the men that I have encountered. He did warm up to me as years went by and we

ended on a good note.

Phillip Tully at Monticello Raceway was, not only a genius but basically the inventor of my career. He was my best friend, biggest fan, oft times major mentor as well as biggest critic. The spring and summer racing in the Catskills provided a setting that would put a smile on any race secretary's face as the atmosphere is filled with fun and excitement. Not only for the racing but also because it is a very long holiday with restaurants, hotels and all sorts of entertainment.

Phil was just the first of a long line of great guys, the things that he did for me would fill a novel and I will save that story for another day.

He was followed by his assistant **Ralph Swalsky** who was a great friend and a meticulous race secretary, but could easily get to yelling even with little or no provocation. Those outbursts unfortunately were more often than not aimed at another dear friend and his assistant **Jerry Glantz** who was bright and very much the opposite of Ralphie. That trio was followed by a true Mr. Nice Guy – probably too nice – **Bruce Munn**. He always had a smile on his face. He was a family man that didn't know how to lose his temper. He was fair and understanding and provided the horsemen with the least volatile race office we had had in many years.

I liked Munn a lot mainly because he was very much like **Mark Lydon** who I raced for in Philadelphia. Mark began his racing career as assistant to the famed Pope of Liberty Bell Park. Jim Lynch a soft spoken senior fellow that represented the epitome of class.

Mark and Bruce would always greet you the same way and never went off course.

Some race secretaries will work with you others will want you to work with them and then there was **Eliot "Doc" Narotsky**, at Sportsman's Park, Maywood, Balmoral, Springfield and DuQuoin. Actually the director of standardbred racing for the state of Illinois, dear friend and a long-time traveling mate. I am not sure of how it happened but somehow I became a part of the Narotsky family for a quarter of a century. People would question our relationship as if I was getting favorable treatment. We were racing stakes not overnights for God's sake. I will not get into how great the race offices function with Doc at the helm because I am biased, but I will tell you that wherever he was, the other tracks he was running were in constant contact and he was on the phone in the middle of every draw at every track

whenever he was forced to be racing at a different venue. This was a constant, even in the middle of dinner.

The odd thing is that the race office in Sportsman's did throw me a bone but it wasn't Doc Narotsky it was **Phil Langley**, a wonderful friend in his own right (who unfortunately passed away last week, he will truly be missed). It was the night of the aged American National and Imperfection got in tight quarters at the top of the stretch and made what I think was her only break. Phil called me to his office that was indeed one of the most elegant in our sport, and informed me his entrees for the open trot at Balmoral had been light and if I left the mare in Illinois the track was very fast and she would likely break the world record that Worldly Woman had set two weeks previous. I listened, and so did Imperfection, who with Dave Magee aboard set the world record the following weekend.

That brings me to the king of the race secretaries along with the most formidable race office in the history of the sport. **Joe DeFrank**, son Doug, Dandy Don, Warren, Phil and the ladies of team DeFrank including wife Beryl and Lee and all who ran the well-oiled piece of machinery called The Meadowlands Race Office.

If you didn't commit murder or similar felony and were breathing you could get stalls at the Meadowlands. Being accustomed to the ever frightening stall application syndrome, it was a breath of fresh air when my awful barn of miscreants was accepted to attempt to compete in the colosseum of harness racing. That was the good news. The bad news was the 0 for 56 startling realization. I think Joe's theory was that you will learn fast enough if you belong. That old system of the dictator in the race office has suddenly disappeared.

I will be honest, the first 10 years I raced at the Meadowlands I was petrified to go in the race office. Then when my daughter's godfather Warren DeSantis became one of Joe's assistants I slowly but surely gained the courage to visit.

I don't want you to think DeFrank and company were severe, they were really all wonderful people. It was more like I was a kid from the minor leagues coming to the Yankees. It could be quite intimidating.

The PS is I had a wonderful run at the Meadowlands for almost 40 years and today we are all friends and are on a first name basis.

It would terribly remiss of me to mention a dear friend and at many times savior, who although she has never gotten the major title has been a major factor guiding The Meadows race office for way longer than she would like me to discuss. **Cricket Colbert** – sweet, adorable and smart as a whip. In 60 years of racing way before cell phones existed I missed the box once in my life. It was at The Meadows a long time ago when I was trying to enter a horse for an hour and a half in between trips at the Meadowlands and got busy signal after busy signal.

I called Cricket to cry on her shoulder and she assured me it would never happen again. I love her and I miss her. She is one of the silent bright lights in our sport.

I must go north of the border for another favorite of mine, **Scott McKelvie**, and his lovely wife Lori. Although I only raced in stakes at Woodbine and Mohawk, Scott, in the race office and Lori in the commission office always made my dealings simple and enjoyable. They provided us with the easy way, all ran smoothly, no bumps in the road. It's simple to enter, easy to get the results of the draw and a pleasure to get licensed. There are plenty of venues that Scott and Lori could give lessons in cordial 101.

Last but not least, **Steve Starr**. Most likely the longest tenure of any race secretary in the sport's history. We were never close friends as I hardly ever raced in Yonkers with the exception of sires stakes or the Yonkers Trot. I will become closer as we are both retired and Steve's sister Robin is my friend and neighbor.

His race office seems to have been smooth as silk also. I know that he was the type of guy that would give anyone a chance. As for stalls he didn't have a whole lot of space to give away. I wish him well in his retirement.

To **Connie and Dill** of Red Mile fame you both know I love you but this column has become out of touch with space and reality.

Peter Larkin asked on Facebook: There is some prejudice against pigeon-toed horses because they are prone to dish out and therefore waste action, yet there have been some great ones. Have you ever been associated with any?

I have been associated with many as I consider it a non-negative attribute. I also believe that toeing out and paddling wastes far more action.

This will show what a totally non exact science horse training is, and here's why.

Two Hall of Fame trainers myself and Chuck Sylvester are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Chuck loves toed out horses I hate them, I love toed in horses he hates them. Chuck has won four Hambletonians I have won three. Maybe he is right.

That said, Continentalvictory and Self Possessed were both toed in. Admittedly I do not know of Chuck's four winners, but I think my two of three makes a positive statement.

Tom Santoro asks: Many young drivers come up and are floundering for a few years. Yet some burst on the scene with exceptional talent like Walter Case, Matt Kakaley Yannick Gingras, John Campbell and Mike Lachance. Can you as a trainer see their talent immediately?

To begin with, none of the above with the possible exception of Matt Kakaley was anything like an overnight wonder. Michel started as a kid in Quebec actually driving as a child and had been driving for many years in New York after Canada before he ever hit the Grand Circuit. John raced in Ontario and then Monticello for a few years before the Meadowlands. Casey raced in Maine and Monticello for many years and never really caught on in the big time for any length of time, although he certainly had the talent. He was a wonderful kid but his own worst enemy. Yannick had been driving for quite some time and I remember Myron Bell telling me he was going to be a great one and that I should

put him down on some of Brittany's horses. He was very smart and very likeable. He came to the Red Mile when few trainers knew him and created a business for himself. My personal opinion is that his intelligence has made him the best driver in the world. As for Matt, I remember at qualifiers his first year at Pocono after racing mostly at Pompano Park and Northfield, Erv Miller pointed a finger at him and said to me "that is the next John Campbell." Still a youngster, he is well on his way.

Of course, when you are in the bush leagues, as I was for most of my career, you can tell the drivers with rare talent right away. But many chose to remain out of the limelight, as did Billy Parker Jr., and Marvin Maker. So you really don't know how they would be on the big stage.

Thanks again to all of you for your kind words. Please keep the questions coming in and have a wonderful week. STAY SAFE....

Have a question for The Guru?

Email him at GurfTrot@aol.com.

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Hanover Shoe Farms establishes \$250,000 grant to support integrity in harness racing

The following letter from Hanover Shoe Farms executive vice-president Dr. Bridgette Jablonsky announces the establishment of a \$250,000 matching fund grant to support the work of restoring full integrity to the harness racing industry.

To all industry participants:

I hope this letter finds you well and withstanding the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. I know that you all join me in eagerly waiting for racing to resume and life to return to some semblance of normal. I have used some of the time normally spent watching races and following entries and results to reflect on the criminal proceedings revealed to us on March 9, 2020. My initial reaction was, "What a terrible day for this business." Upon further reflection, however, I find that my initial reaction was completely off base. This was a good day for our business. We will not survive unless the cheaters and wrongdoers are identified and exiled.

I will footnote this by saying that the defendants in these proceedings are presumed innocent until they either admit their guilt or are found guilty in a court of law. If any are innocent, I hope their names are cleared with no lasting ill effects, but all of those who are found guilty of the heinous acts depicted in the indictments should be punished and never allowed to touch a horse again. This brings me to the point of this letter, which is meant to be a hopeful and positive one in these times of darkness.

One useful thing we have learned from the criminal indictments is that high-powered investigative services appear to be necessary to aid the racing commissions in investigating wrongdoing by (1) gathering evidence in a timely and efficient manner, and (2) presenting that evidence in a form that will fully support the authorities that have the power to exile the cheaters. Other new approaches may be needed to make our industry more responsive to and supportive of the racing commissions. I have discussed this with Russell (Williams), and Hanover Shoe Farms pledges \$250,000 as a matching grant to support the work of restoring full integrity to our sport. The term of this pledge is 12 months, beginning on the day Standardbred racing resumes in 2020.



Triscari Video Web and Marketing

Dr. Bridgette Jablonsky (right, being interviewed by Heather Wilder) has outlined a \$250,000 matching fund grant to support the work of restoring full integrity to the harness racing industry.

Hanover Shoe Farms is a nursery. We raise our babies with love and dedication to their well-being. When we sell them, it's as if we are sending them off to college, releasing them out into the world to hopefully make us and their new owners proud. Above all, however, I hope that they enjoy doing what they were born to do and are being treated well. Reading the indictments grieved me deeply, because it was so plainly obvious that some horses are not treated well, nor even humanely. We hope that major financial support will stimulate better practices within the industry and go a long way toward procuring a brighter and safer future for our horses.

Our approach will only work if it earns broad industry participation, and if we come up with effective new approaches to ensuring integrity. Please join us in this fight against cheating and abuse. It will save our industry, it will save lives and eliminate suffering, and it will stop the ill-gotten gains of a select few who think the rules don't apply to them.

For further information, contact Russell Williams at rcwilliams@hanoverpa.com.

I hope everybody stays safe and healthy, and I can't wait to see you at the tracks and the sales this fall.

Best regards,
Dr. J

Fontaine: USTA chairman needs to be recalled, new election held; Faraldo responds

Former USTA chairman Paul Fontaine writes to HRU with some major concerns... and the current USTA chairman responds.

by Paul A. Fontaine

And so it was that our industry, led by the president and the Board of Directors of USTA, did it again. During its last meeting, just concluded, they stuck their collective heads in the sand and ignored taking a significant and strong stand, regarding acknowledging and severely punishing our cheaters. No proposals, no serious discussions, nothing, to lead our industry in the direction of severe punishment/banishment of these cheaters, and their complicit owners who supply them with the horses which are then abused with illicit drugging.

There would be no crooked trainers if owners who seek the easy and ill-gotten purse money would be suspended and or banned from the sport. There is no owner in this tough business today who can claim ignorance of what their trainers are doing. There is no one in this industry that is unaware of the reputation of crooked trainers. Does anyone really think that the likes of Banca, Oakes and Allard were just the greatest trainers on this earth? Absolutely not, yet they keep getting fed with horses by whom? The owners!

But when these cheaters get their just reward – Andrew Adams, Asst. U.S. Attorney stated there is “voluminous” evidence from one (1) years’ worth of wiretaps – the only people who will walk away from all this unscathed will be the owners who gave them horses to race.

The U.S.T.A. president writes a nice speech, example: “The U.S.T.A. Board of Directors – have conducted themselves with courage, with wisdom” etc., etc. Excuse me but I see no courage and no wisdom in side stepping the biggest problem our industry has faced for many years and that is our complete lack of integrity which has driven away our core supporters to the detriment of all those who participate in racing with honesty and hard work.

And what about Yonkers Raceway? Its top two trainers have been cheating their way to huge purse checks for themselves and their owners. Where is management in this

debacle? Where is the vaunted and renowned horsemen’s association in all this? Oh, and by the way, the long standing president of this auspicious horsemen’s association is one of these owners who was choosing to have horses owned by him to be trained by the leading trainer at Yonkers, none other than Richard Banca.

And to compound this disgrace, that same owner was just elected chairman of the Board of U.S.T.A.! And some of the owners that fed Chris Oakes with horses are the so-called bright lights of our industry, high profile participants who cared less about his reputation as a cheater than they did about the purse money they pocketed.

I’ve owned race horses for over 50 years and none of the trainers I have used in all those years ever had a blemish on their record. I take no particular credit for that because it is simply as it should be for all of us. Furthermore, I spent 30 years as a U.S.T.A. director and served seven years as its chairman. Throughout all my years of service, I struggled to put integrity at the forefront of every meeting in every year. I was proud of attempting to champion that cause. Now, I’m ashamed of our leaders, who when faced with an opportunity to make a strong statement, to be brave and resolute showed us nothing but cowardice and disgrace.

[Now, allegedly] Richard Banca and Rene Allard have hired counsel to represent them in their criminal issues. Are they entitled to legal representation? Absolutely. The bigger question is should the newly minted chairman of the Board of Directors of USTA or his law firm be representing them?

What we have here is the clear perception that this industry is now being led by a horse owner who gave horses to Banca to train and who (or his firm) may now be representing the accused Banca. What kind of message does this send to USTA members and participants who wish for nothing more than a fair shot and a level playing field? Were the directors aware of this when they voted?

I call upon the USTA president to act immediately to recall the new chairman and call for a new election during which all directors will be made fully aware of the facts so that clear transparency will rule and the industry will then be assured that there is no conflict of interest between the chairman of the Board, his responsibility to USTA members and our industry.

Otherwise, the message will be clear: SORDID PERCEPTION AND INTEGRITY BE DAMNED.



Have a great photo you would like to share?
editor@harnessracingupdate.com



Faraldo: Let's set the record straight, Counselor

The following is a letter of response from USTA Chairman and SOA of NY President Joe Faraldo to the submission from horse owner Paul Fontaine in Harness Racing Update.

by Joe Faraldo

Mr. Fontaine:

First, let's close down the nonsense about me and any invented conflict of interest involved in my recent election as USTA chairman that would affect my "responsibility to USTA members and our industry."

What's a "disgrace" is your implication and attempt to smear my reputation by suggesting that my "law firm" is representing one of the trainers recently "indicted." Let's be clear; my "firm" consists of me and only me as the sole practitioner. Further, my practice is exclusively limited to civil matters.

I'm not representing any of the accused, which as an attorney you could have easily ascertained with a little due diligence rather than making your reprehensible accusation against me.

And while we're setting the record straight, the "voluminous" evidence stated by the Assistant U.S. Attorney refers to those indicted. The trainer associated with me that you cited was not included in the indictment.

Clearly, any owner who is an accomplice in any wrongdoing in this sport by his trainer or anyone else should be penalized.

But let us not forget the solution you advocated during your "30 years as a USTA director and seven years as its chairman," when you proposed an owners' responsibility rule that would have placed responsibility and penalties upon an owner whose trainer cheated regardless of any knowledge of or complicity on the owner's part. That was wisely rejected.

Imagine a horse owner with a professional license as an attorney or a certified public accountant who would be penalized due to the actions of a trainer without any wrongdoing on his/her part. When reported to the administrative agency that administers his/her professional license, it could result in further disciplinary action significantly impacting that person's ability to make a living in their profession. That risk would have driven owners out of our sport.

Additionally, your assertion that, "there would be no crooked trainers if owners who seek the easy and ill-gotten purse money would be suspended and or banned from the

sport," could easily lead to unfounded suspicions of cheating about any rule-abiding trainer who consistently performs better than his competitors. Without any evidence or validity, the risk of the owners' responsibility rule penalties would cause them concern over their trainer's success because of the underlying assumption that they might be doing something wrong.

And I'd like to refresh your memory of some serious trouble that one of your former trainers had in the past, yet I don't recall you calling for any penalties under the provisions of an owners' responsibility rule at the time.

I have horses with a variety of trainers ranked in the top 10 in the country. One of my trainers that you referenced was training two horses for me when the complaint against him was filed. And similar to the action you took with your trainer that got into trouble years ago, I've reconsidered the relationship with my trainer as a result of action taken against him. In both cases, our trainers were in good stead with all the various regulatory bodies. With my trainer, there was one suspension of seven days within the last nine years that involved a therapeutic medication.

Although the Assistant U.S. Attorney has stated that there is "voluminous" evidence in the indictments, as an attorney, you should recognize that all accused are entitled to a defense with the presumption of innocence and that total condemnation of the owners of all of the horses involved with the trainers indicted is a cheap shot at those owners.

For your information, the USTA was closely involved with the investigations leading to the indictments by providing requested documentation as well as significant background, operational and logistical information that assisted investigators.

As a former director, you should know that USTA has no regulatory, legal or enforcement authority in these matters so that your attack against the organization is as much nonsense as your accusations about me and your call for a new election.

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In Memoriam

F. PHILLIP LANGLEY
1937 - 2020



*A great leader, horseman and friend.
You will be greatly missed.*



GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE



with CHRIS LOMON

Hannah Miller loving being back in the barn full-time

The first woman to be named National Amateur Driver of the Year is now a trainer, driver, groom, trucker and much more.

by Chris Lomon

Even when she went the “wrong way,” Hannah Miller still managed to make a trip to the winner’s circle.

Family ties in the standardbred world are unavoidable, but the 28-year-old amateur driver – and just about any other harness racing job you could think of – has worked hard to make a name for herself.

Just like she did four years ago.

Miller, daughter of standardbred trainer Erv Miller, and brother of fellow driver, Marcus Miller, caught the horse racing world’s attention at the 2016 World Cup of Amateur Racing in Budapest, Hungary.

“Going to different countries and competing is something that stands out as one of the biggest career highlights for me,” she said. “Depending on where you are, racing can be completely different than what we’re used to in North America. One of the standout trips for amateur driving championships definitely had to be in Budapest. That was amazing. It was the first time I ever went to represent the United States – I was actually the first female to go – and it was awesome.”

While plenty got lost in translation, literally, Miller, although admittedly nervous, had her game face on the moment she sat in the sulky.

“The first race I won – we raced clockwise in Hungary compared to counter-clockwise here – there were 12 horses in it. There’s definitely not enough room for that many on the gate, so there was a second tier. You have to take all of that in very quickly. And understanding the language... it’s tough, even with a translator. You have to take all of that in stride. The start is different, and the post parade is different. You have to take in all of that information and process it quickly.



Raymond Lance

Hannah Miller is back in the horse racing game full time.

You aren’t able to read the program, so you have to rely on instinct and trust yourself when you are on the racetrack.”

That approach proved to be a winning one for Miller, who was joined by her father on the Budapest trip.

Although she was told by the Hungarian trainer, who happened to have two horses in the race, that her chances at hitting the line first was a legitimate longshot, Miller (who would eventually finished second in the overall competition, missing top spot by one point) went into the race convincing herself she was partnered with the prohibitive favorite.

“The trainer, she came up to me and said, ‘of my two horses, this one isn’t as talented as the other one.’ She explained the horse hadn’t been racing well. My dad told me, ‘this is the first time you’ve driven the horse, so regardless of what everyone else tells you, go out there and do it your way.’

“I got a feel for the horse, warming up, and we went out there and won it. I think we dropped the lifetime mark by about three seconds. I didn’t know much about the horse, so judging by how he felt, I was aggressive with him at the start and it paid off. I ended up being Facebook friends with the trainer and she let me know he went on to win two or three more races in a row after that.”

Miller’s magic touch was evident early on in her career, one that was sparked by her father’s suggestion to give it a shot.

After one win and a second in two starts in 2012 (her first drive came at the Illinois State Fairgrounds), she went 2-1-1 in six races the following year, and then posted a 6-2-2 mark from 12 drives in 2014.

It was 2015 when Miller stamped herself as one of standardbred racing’s top amateur stars.

Having raced at nearly 30 racetracks since she began her life in the race bike, the Illinois-born driver, who has also competed in amateur events in Australia and Spain, is looking to add more venues to her impressive list.

“Everywhere you go, there are differences, big or small, in the way they race compared to here. It’s an excellent way to learn more about the sport, and to also help expand your own skill-set”

Miller, who first owned a racehorse at 15 when her father bought her a standardbred, is also well versed in other areas of the industry.

That affinity for all things racing recently brought her back into the fold after she took on a job outside the sport.

“I was working for a company as a sales rep, and I quit just before the coronavirus pandemic hit. I was missing being at the barn every day, and being around the horses. I’m now back training, full time. So, I’m a driver, and I’ve also owned several horses over the years, including (multiple stakes champion, Canada’s 2018 Horse of the Year and recent Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame inductee) McWicked. I co-owned him in his first year and we ended up selling him. It’s nice to say that you were a part of his life.

"I also drive the truck and trailer, I go to the paddock and groom, I groom in the barn, I'll clean stalls – whatever needs to be done, I'm happy to do it. I actually got into photography, so I bought a camera and started taking pictures of horses. I

do some videography as well. My fiancé and I have done some video of when we are actually out on the racetrack during training.”

Although having a myriad of roles might seem like Miller's biggest challenge, that's not what first comes to her mind.

Rather, it's the obstacles associated with being a female driver in a male-dominated sport.

“At first it was hard, but I’ve trained a lot of horses, and working with my dad, he’s always taught me how to be safe. I just learned how to stick up for myself out there. Having success, that definitely helps, and when you win races, people will back off. When people see you can handle yourself on the racetrack, you earn that respect.

“Being a woman on the racetrack, you also get a lot of advice. A lot of the time, you have to weed through it and see what works for you and what doesn’t. My dad has always taught me to be patient in anything I’m doing, driving included. Be patient training horses and be patient racing horses – he told me that will always pay off in the long run.”

For now, Miller, who has an “A” Full Driver License, will continue on in the amateur driving ranks.

There is, however, always a chance she'll one day test her talents on a different playing field, so to speak.

“Now that I’m back at the barn, who knows? For now, I’ll just keep my amateur status. It’s fun to drive... I love driving. I never want to get far away from it. I’m just glad I’m back in the barn now. I feel like myself again.”

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**TWOS IN
TRAINING**

Marcus Melander



Marcus Melander in the HRU Twos in Training spotlight

The reigning Trainer of the Year discussed his sensational 2019 campaign with Greenshoe, Gimpanzee and Green Manalishi, talked about his next group of stars, the differences between European and North American training and answered viewer questions.

by Dave Briggs

HRU's Twos in Training videos has returned with a new segment featuring reigning Trainer of the Year Marcus Melander in the first of a series of live virtual interviews with Heather Vitale.

Viewers interested in viewing the interview – which was originally broadcast live – can do so on our [Facebook page here](#) and on our [YouTube page here](#).

The trainer discussed his sensational 2019 campaign with Greenshoe, Gimpanzee and Green Manalishi, talked about his next group of stars, the differences between European and North American training and answered some viewer questions.

Thank you to [Blue Chip Farms](#) for sponsoring the Melander video.

The next Virtual Twos in Training video will feature Heather Vitale interviewing Carter Pinske. It will be broadcast live on Saturday, April 18, beginning at 7 pm EDT.

To submit a question in advance to ask Carter, email them before 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 18 to: editor@harnessracingupdate.com. Please make the subject line: Questions for Carter Pinkse and please include your full name.

HRU intends to feature a new live interview with a trainer every Thursday, Saturday and Monday evening beginning at 7 pm EDT.

To make sure you don't miss a video, subscribe to HRU – for free – today.

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Racing reflections with Matt Kakaley

by Ken Weingartner / USTA media relations manager

Matt Kakaley was 16 when Rickards Ed arrived in the stable run by his parents, Linda and John, at Pompano Park. Matt was just starting to work in the barn more frequently and quickly formed a bond with the then 7-year-old pacer.

Looking back, it was a time and relationship that helped propel Matt into his career in harness racing. In fact, such was his connection with Rickards Ed that four years later he and his mom bought the horse and still own the 22-year-old gelding in his retirement.

"That horse was special to me," Matt said. "He came in the barn and he was the best horse my parents had. He was an open pacer at the time. I started working with him all the time and that was the turning point for me. He was just a great horse around the barn, great to work with. He was fun.

"When I was a kid, that horse helped me make the decision, I'd say. That's when I felt like this is what I wanted to do."

Rickards Ed won 14 races at Pompano Park that season, all with John in the sulky. The following year, Matt drove the horse to two of his seven victories.

"He was just a really tough, tough horse on the racetrack," Matt said. "He was a Camluck (sired horse) and he had that toughness to him."

A third-generation horseman, Matt follows in the footsteps of his grandfather, Joe, who owned horses and spurred the family's interest in harness racing, and his parents. He lived in Michigan until he was 12 and spent his teen years around Pompano Park.

Matt has won 4,743 races in his career and was the youngest driver, at the time, to reach the 1,000 and 2,000-victory levels. But early on, Matt wasn't focused on becoming a driver. In fact, he only got his qualifying license because a friend was doing it.

"It was weird, it wasn't something I was really pushing to do, to be a driver," Matt said. "Not at that age, anyway. But once I started qualifying horses, it was something I wanted to do."

Matt mostly worked with his parents, but remembers getting to do interval training for Tom Audley, who was stabled next to his family's barn.

"When I was a kid, Tom would have me go in the bike and I would be out there for a half hour or 40 minutes just going trips," Matt said. "I thought that was the greatest thing ever, to go speed in the race bike with those horses. And he paid me for it, so it was a win-win.

"When I did get my qualifying license, there were a lot of people down there that helped me out and gave me chances in the qualifiers. Whatever anybody wanted me to do, I would do."

Working with the horses gave Matt his greatest joy.

"I just really loved being around the horses and taking care of them," Matt said. "The horses my parents had were older horses that had their issues. I would work on them. I would soak their feet, I would rub their legs, work hard on them. I just took pride in it. I took pride when they would race good.

"Just working with them every day was a lot of learning. I really cared. I think I got that from my mom. She puts her heart and soul into her horses too."



Dave Landry

Matt Kakaley.

When he was 19, Matt accepted an offer from trainer Mickey Burke to move to Ohio and work for the Burke Stable. Soon, he was driving regularly at Northfield Park, although it did not begin smoothly. Enter another pivotal horse in teenage Matt's life, this one also with the name Matt — Matt Hershey.

"Going to Northfield, I didn't know anybody; it was tough," Matt said. "I never raced on a half-mile track before and the first month or two was a little rough. I did win a few races, but there were a lot of bad mistakes and a lot of nights when I was thinking maybe it wasn't going to work out. I'm sure Ronnie (Burke) felt the same thing. He stuck with me and I stuck it out. I kept working hard and it got better.

"A couple horses raced big for me. Matt Hershey, he was an open horse at Northfield, went on a really good run (with six wins and two seconds in a nine-race span) and I started picking up some live drives for other people. It just kind of turned the corner. He got good and then I started driving more and I started doing really good. It snowballed."

In 2010, Matt received the Rising Star Award from the U.S. Harness Writers Association.

Last summer, while in the car on his way to Buffalo Raceway for New York Sire Stakes action, Matt's thoughts returned to his early days as a driver when in a week he would travel back and forth between Northfield and Buffalo (roughly seven hours round trip) while also hitting Tioga Downs on Sundays.

"When I think back, I don't know how I did that," Matt said with a laugh. "Just young, I guess. I was just excited to drive anything, anywhere, so I did it."

And whenever he thinks back to Rickards Ed, he can thank him for driving him in that direction.

HRU NEWS



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New June Midwest Mixed Sale planned, online bidding will be available

The Midwest Auction Company is pleased to announce the addition of a new standardbred mixed sale date. In addition to the company's November sale, the June Midwest Mixed Sale will be held on Monday, June 22, 2020. The sale will be held at the auction company's normal venue, the Michiana Event Center in Shipshewana, IN.

Citing demand for the mixed sale created by other sales scheduled for April and May being cancelled, the sale company was able to secure a late June date to meet that need. "We certainly understand how fragile of a time we are in right now, not just for our industry but for the world," said sale manager Jeff Fought. "Our goal was to find a date that we felt would be late enough that we could make it work, while still early enough to fit the needs of both buyers and sellers of all classes of racehorses. We will take every precaution possible to have this be a safe environment, and we are optimistic about getting back to racing and back to business."

In addition to all the amenities normally provided at the fall Midwest Mixed Sale, including 50 per cent payment of proceeds paid the day of the sale, the June 22 sale will offer live stream online bidding.

Entries are now being accepted and will close on May 11th or earlier if full. Entries will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. For information please go to the [Midwest Auction Company website](http://MidwestAuctionCompany.com), email jeff.fought@midwestauctionco.com or call 260-463-1649.

Update on Yonkers Raceway stakes races

With the disruption in racing at Yonkers Raceway, some adjustments have been made to upcoming stakes payments and scheduling.

The MGM Springfield Stakes will now have nominations and first payment fee of \$250 closing on May 15, 2020. The sustaining payment will now be due June 15, 2020. The race is hoped to be contested with eliminations on July 4 and a final on July 11.

Divisions of the Reynolds for 3yo colt and filly pacers originally scheduled for May 2 have been canceled. The Hambletonian Society will refund all eligible horses that have made payments for the Reynolds.

There were two New York Sire Stakes legs scheduled at Yonkers Raceway in May, a 3yo filly trot event May 5 and a 3yo filly pace event May 12. Information on those events will be coming directly from the New York Sire Stakes Program.

Decisions on placement of Stakes that were disrupted in March will be made once more clarity emerges on when racing can return at Yonkers Raceway. Those disrupted Stakes were the M life Rewards Series for colts and fillies, the Blue Chip Matchmaker Series, the Borgata Pacing Series, and the Yonkers/SOA of NY Bonus Trotting Series.

—Alex Dadoyan / director of racing MGM Yonkers, Inc.

\$200,000 Prix d'été race canceled for 2020

Since the arrival of COVID-19, we, the Board of Directors of the Quebec Jockey Club, have made every effort to ensure the health of everyone by complying with the confinement and gathering prohibition issued by the government.

We are working on acceptable solutions to meet the needs of the industry. A request to hold closed-door races at the Hippodrome 3R was made today to the Ministry of Public Security. We are therefore awaiting their response.

However, we are announcing today our decision to cancel the 2020 Prix d'été race. The travel of horses coming mainly from the United States and the fact that the event attracts a large number of spectators makes it a crowd gathering event which is prohibited.

All horses nominated in the Prix d'été will be reimbursed shortly. As for Quebec stakes payments, we will keep the schedule intact as we are hopeful that these events will take place in 2020. The race dates will be revised as needed.

Thank you for your understanding.

—Quebec Jockey Club, Board of Directors

Waterstone named to USHWA's Hall of Fame Screening

Committee

Gordon Waterstone, a 42-year veteran of harness racing journalism who has worked at *The Horseman and Fair World* for over two decades and is a member of harness racing's Communications Hall of Fame, has been appointed to the Hall Of Fame Screening Committee of the United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA) by Kim Rinker, president of the sport's leading media organization.

The HOF Screening Committee considers the nominees submitted by the various chapters of USHWA, talks with a select group of present members of the Hall Of Fame, and then announces the candidates for the summer HOF ballot, on which a nominee requires 75 per cent of the yes-no vote to receive the sport's highest honor, election to the Hall Of Fame.

Waterstone started his career working in publicity at Detroit's Hazel Park, and also worked at other tracks at other points of the season, including helping with Breeders Crown publicity in that series' early days. In 1998 he joined the *Horseman and Fair World* as associate editor, and during his time with the Kentucky-based company he has received two John Hervey Writing Awards, one in the feature category and one in the news/commentary division, making him one of the

few people to have been honored in both sections. His popular "Backstretch With Gordon" column during the prime of The Red Mile's racing season keeps him in close contact with many of the sport's leading horsepeople.

A former national president of USHWA and a Life member of the organization, Waterstone is currently the president and secretary of the organization's Kentucky Chapter. He received the USHWA President's award in 2001.

Waterstone has also been honored by the North American Harness Publicists Association, Harness Horsemen International, and the Michigan Harness Horsemen's Association. The ultimate honor for a harness journalist, entrance into the Communicators Hall of Fame, came with his induction ceremony in 2017 at the Harness Racing Museum in Goshen NY.

The first Sunday in July at Goshen, if the world is back in normal order, will find Waterstone discussing the merits of this year's candidates with his fellow committee members: committee chair Judy Davis-Wilson, Tim Bojarski, Bob Heyden, Jason Settlemaier, and Steve Wolf; president Rinker also serves on this committee as an ex officio voting member.

—USHWA

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