

Sunday, May 1, 2020

New York judges need to step up; Integrity Act needs to pass

Multi-talented horseman and common-sense sage Ray Schnittker opines on why New York judges need to do their jobs, why Hanover Shoe Farms' integrity initiative is a hell of an idea and why the federal Horse Racing Integrity Act needs to pass.

by Dave Briggs

WHAT DOES RAY SAY?



with **RAY SCHNITTKER**

Trainer Ray Schnittker said federal horse doping indictments for nearly 30 people in the standardbred and thoroughbred industries ([full story here](#)) is an indication racing officials need to do their jobs. Schnittker said this is especially true in New York where three of the trainers under suspicion were among the top 10 trainers at Yonkers Raceway — the two leading trainers Richard Banca and Rene Allard and 10th ranked Nick Surick.

“In New York, it's going to be interesting to see what they're going to do when we do get back racing with all these guys that got indicted,” Schnittker said. “Brian Barry is the head of officials in New York. He needs to step up and say, ‘Okay, when some guy we've never heard of, who has never trained one horse before, all of a sudden is training 60

In today's HRU

Should horses formerly trained by indicted trainers now carry an asterisk?	page 3
Rules around qualifiers in focus as Ontario racing readies for return	page 6
Four things the industry must consider before racing returns	page 8
LeWayne Miller: from a kid dreaming by the rail, into the thick of the action at Hoosier	page 11
Jim Lawson letter points to possible return to racing in six weeks	page 13
Standardbred Canada announces Return to Racing blueprint	page 15

horses can you judges make an inquiry and actually do your jobs?’ I'm not really looking for owners anymore. I like the guys I've got. I don't want to get bigger, but I don't have anyone calling me and I'm pretty successful. How does a guy with no experience get 60 horses?”

Schnittker reiterated those thoughts during HRU's Live Twos in Training interview Thursday evening with Heather Vitale, which can be watched on [YouTube here](#) and [Facebook here](#).

Thank you to [Winbak New York stallion Courtly Choice](#) and the [New York Sires Stakes](#) for sponsoring the Schnittker video, which was pure Ray in every way... Don't say we didn't warn you....

Harness Racing Update on YouTube

/HARNESSRACINGUPDATE

*In light of the pandemic surrounding the country,
it's important to know that Indiana horse racing is*

#INthistgether.

*We implore our horsemen and women to stay safe,
stay healthy and stay patient as we work to bring
Hoosier Horsepower back to the track.*





Dave Landry

Ray Schnittker was his usual unfiltered self in his Thursday live HRU interview with Heather Vitale.

As for other burning issues Schnittker did not cover in his live interview, he told HRU prior to going on air that he thinks Hanover Shoe Farms' announcement that it is establishing a \$250,000 matching fund grant to support the work of restoring full integrity to the harness racing industry (2020-04-07 edition - pg 8), is "a hell of an idea, especially if we get these thoroughbred guys involved. If so, I think we could easily be talking \$3-4 million, maybe a little more between a bunch of breeding farms and SOAs. Jeff Gural hired 5 Stones intelligence agency to help catch the people indicted by the FBI and we need someone like that to point us in the right directions.

"Thank God for someone like Jeff Gural, who had the balls to do this."

Semi-related to that issue, Schnittker said he thinks harness racing should get on board with trying to get the Horse Racing Integrity Act passed to provide federal oversight of the sport.

"I was talking to Frank Antonacci today about the Horse Racing Integrity Act that they are trying to get through at the federal level. Frank said the train has already left. I agree with that," Schnittker said. "Just endorse it and shut up. If you

ENTER TODAY



New! JUNE MIXED SALE

Monday, June 22, 2020
Michiana Event Center, Shipshewana Indiana

**ENTRIES ARE NOW
BEING ACCEPTED AND
WILL CLOSE ON MAY 11TH**
(or earlier when full)

In addition to all the amenities normally provided at the Fall Midwest Sale, including 50% payment of proceeds paid the day of the sale, we will offer **in person bidding and online bidding.**

For more information or to enter today, please visit midwestauctionco.com, email jeff.fought@midwestauctionco.com or call 260.463.1649.



don't like something, work out those small details after it passes. They aren't changing something just for standardbreds. We're too small compared to the thoroughbred industry."

Finally, on Schnittker's list of hot button issues was the rumor that when racing returns to New Jersey that it will initially be reserved for New Jersey residents.

"I heard that and, to me, it's really kind of stupid (if it happens)," Schnittker said. "If it's true, then that's what is wrong with the game. Dover started that bulls - - 25 years ago when they got slots, 'You can't come for this, you can't come for that.' Basically, it subsidizes racing for guys that can't compete. If you can't compete, go somewhere else."

HRU is proud to present live virtual Twos in Training interviews with trainer **Casie Coleman** on Saturday, May 2 at 7 p.m. EDT, trainer **Tony Alagna** on Monday, May 4 at 7 p.m. EDT and trainer **Noel Daley** on Thursday, May 7 at EDT.

Special thanks to **Blue Chip Farms** and **Winbak Farm** for sponsoring the Coleman video, to **Winbak stallion Artspeak** and **Crawford Farms** for sponsoring the Alagna video and to **Blue Chip** for sponsoring the Daley video.

CLICK HERE
To Share This Story



Should horses formerly trained by indicted trainers now carry an asterisk?

All this and much more in harness racing's favorite advice column.

by Ron Gurfein

Tidbits: I applaud Scott Palmer and the New York Racing and Wagering board for coming up with the plan to test the hair follicles of all the horses trained by the indicted trainers and associated veterinarians for previously administered drugs. My question is what do they expect to find that they don't already know. The horses have been tested every time they race. We are back to square one. There is NO TEST that will discover the presence of EPO unless it's a test given within hours of the drugs injection in the animal.

Before going to print I contacted many of my academic friends to make sure I did not miss the boat on something new in hair discovery. I did not. The test will not have any EPO discoveries. Moving forward, let's hope the FBI continues on a vigorous course of criminal detection in our sport. Nothing is more welcome.

* * *

With little to do I watched the entire first round of the NFL draft and under the crazy circumstances provided by the virus I think ESPN did a spectacular job.

That said, it amuses me to listen to the variety of opinions put forth by underpaid sports writers who after listening to themselves for many years are convinced they are masters of the selection process.

It reminds me of going to the races in the '60s where there were 20 different tip sheets being sold where you buy your program. If you had purchased them all someone would have each and every horse in each and every race on top of his selections.

Similarly, the mock drafts run the gamut of possibilities. Don't these reporters realize that there are people making millions a year to properly dissect the probability of greatness in the draft. Unfortunately, they are rarely correct.

Then we get to the post draft comments or ratings. Three different reporters are now rating your team's selections. All three have totally different approval comments for every pick.

As a Dolphin fan I was thrilled with the selection of Tua Tagovailoa. Here are some of the ratings, leaving the writer out to protect the innocent:

A+ Best Selection in the draft.

B- Way too risky, too much injury baggage.

C- major mistake they should have selected an offensive lineman and waited to pick a quarterback.

Wait how long? Maybe 2021.

* * *

A very happy 8th anniversary to Murray Brown and "Sweet" Carol Stein. May they have many more.

After They Race, Give Them a Place



www.sjohnsonphotos.com



NEW VOCATIONS

Rehab. Retrain. Rehome.

Accepting horses from racetracks across the country.
NewVocations.org || winnie@horseadoption.com || (734) 320-7918

A 501(c)(3) Public Charity

Mr. Brown posted a quote this week on Facebook by Joe O'Brien saying: "If by May 1st you didn't have a 2-year-old that stood out over the rest, chances are you don't have a top horse."

In retrospect I couldn't agree more, especially in the trotting ranks. I may not be that positive about a pacer till he really beats someone, as there are way more good pacers around.

To young trainers that think I have lost my mind try this experiment:

Train your colts or the ones you like solo one morning and don't look at your watch. Just clock the first quarter. In your head guess how much you went. If you guess 40 seconds and you went 35 he will be a good one. If you guess 40 and he went 43 he works too hard at what he does.

I would say that never in all my years training has this conception not proven 100 per cent correct. It is a wonderful way to assess February stake payments.

* * *

FYI Neal Ehrhart sent me a nice letter last month about how troublesome cheating has gotten for the legitimate trainer and there was a quote I thought well worth printing: "The commissions never follow up on the beards. Racetrack management love the cheaters, they are high percentage winners. They conduct interviews with them, do write ups in the programs and the public loves them. YET MOHEGAN SUN WILL BAN YOU PERMANENTLY IF YOU DARE TO EVER PUT TRASH IN THE MANURE BARREL."

You have to love it....

* * *

Crawford Farms (Michelle and Albert) have announced that they have selected a new trainer for their thoroughbred speedball sprinter Shancelot. He will be trained by Steve Asmussen in the 2020 season after his rehabilitation from minor soft tissue damage is complete. After winning the Grade 2 Amsterdam he went on to be a close second in a few Grade 1 races and was thought to be headed to a race in Saudi Arabia. However, with a slight tendon problem and the indictment of their trainer Jorge Navarro, plans for the trip were scrapped. Best of luck to the Crawfords' 4-year-old son of Shanghai Bobby in the years to come.

Tom Santoro asks: When trainers are indicted for using drugs as recently happened, should the racing form have an asterisk next to the horse in question? I think the bettors need this so they can take into consideration altered performance. The horses are now in new barns with new trainers.

Your idea is a good one. It has never been done before but it would be premature unless there was actually a positive

test. In the existing indictments there was one positive and lots of phone tapping.

On the other hand, there are many tracks with a section in the program that lists previous trainers. The change from an indicted individual would be a red flag in and of itself.

While on the subject, I always wondered why some racetracks omit the section for previous trainer as to many handicappers it is of primary importance.

Too those of you that have written me to update the situation unfortunately there is a status quo. If it is of any help, the latest series of indictments are not scheduled for a first court appearance until late October. COVID-19 has taken its toll on our industry in a myriad of ways.

Jocz Stanley asks: Suppose all three of your Hambletonian winners raced against each other at three with no hub rail, modern equipment, newest race bikes and top drivers. Who do you think would win and how fast could the winner go?

I love the question as I have had it asked many times in the past.

It is very easy to answer as Self Possessed was a minimum of 10 lengths better than Continentalvictory and she was about six lengths better than Victory Dream.

Michel Lachance has told me many times that Self Possessed could easily have gone faster than 1:50 the day he won the Hambletonian by 5 plus lengths in 1:51.3.

He was literally on cruise control. He won the Kentucky Futurity in 1:52 when it was in the low thirties and in both races he raced in a wooden race bike.

I am not saying that a wooden bike is two seconds slower than the newest versions. However, it is pretty close. Add to that he was well within himself, plus the Meadowlands surface overall is, at least, one second, maybe more, faster than it was in the '90s.

On the other hand, Continentalvictory raced on sheer guts and was not an easy girl to restrain. Winning both heats in 1:52, with two recalls, truly did not help. I am not sure how much faster she could have gone. Between the wooden bike and the new track 1:50.1 was a likely number.

Victory Dream, a dream horse, was not in their speed league but certainly in their heart league. Therefore to answer the original question, Self Possessed wins by three in 1:49.2. Continentalvictory is second and Victory Dream is third.

Joel Kravet asks: I have been watching racing from Scandinavia and notice they don't use head poles. What do they do to make horses go straight? When a horse uses a head pole

does it mean they are hurting?

For part one of your question they do not permit the use of headpoles in Sweden.

Personally, not being a believer in the use of them myself, I find a Murphy Blind used properly will suffice. I find a headpole restricts the head movement of a trotter that he uses to maintain proper balance.

The tracks in Europe are mostly bigger and with wide sweeping turns. Even many of the half-milers are laid out very much like Delaware, Ohio — all turns no straightaways.

I am sure there are a few horses that trainers find it difficult to make go straight but European racing is so different than in the U.S. and you can get away with much more because of the bulky fields. When you are in mid pack, two or three wide, a headpole is not nearly as important and when you are sending a horse with the rail to the front in the first turn. All horses will have more of a tendency to go straight if following a horse, it's the front end that can be a little troublesome.

As for part two, it is this writer's opinion that 90 per cent of the horses that wear headpoles especially on the left are sore right front most likely in a knee; not always so for poles on the right. I am truly not fond of most horses that need a pole on the right because I have found that much of their problems are attitude not lameness. This may not be as evident on one mile tracks as there are more left front problems with the long straightaways. But, for sure, horses wearing a pole on the right on a half or five-eighths could well be a little mental.

Gary Kay asks: Why do you say the thought of not racing 2-year-olds is "so far out there?"

BECAUSE IT IS... Unfortunately, since I wrote that piece, I have received too many complaints: Two-year-olds are too immature to race. We are killing the babies. The bones are soft. There are no more 4-year-olds to race.

STOP. STOP. STOP.

To begin with, the overall premise of these chronic complainers is incorrect. The standardbred is a hale and hearty animal that has not only been racing at two, but somewhere in the back of my mind I owned a mare that had a yearling record, as well.

Horses are going to fall apart, no question, but to a much lesser degree than publicized by PETA and the thoroughbred mess. I have trained horses for six decades and have I had horse break down? Of course I have, but not that many in comparison to the numbers I have trained and way fewer at 2 than at 3.

The incidence of death is close to zero in comparison to our thoroughbred counterparts. Racing as a sport provides a

wonderful platform for the public's enjoyment and although diminished by the expanse of sport in general and the lack of major media attention it will remain a viable product in some form or other forever.

This is no time to change the model. Why make the hill we have to climb even steeper.

I predicted years ago standing at the Red Mile after watching Snow White's amazing 2-year-old performance that one day all the world records would be held by 2-year-olds because that is where the breed is headed.

I will not get back into the ridiculous costs involved in the elimination of the 2-year-old year as I have done that before in a recent column and it doesn't need repeating.

Our sport is in the middle of a courageous comeback against all odds. Let's try not to break the mold.

Thank you all for the kind words. Hopefully racing will return shortly and life can resume. Please keep your questions coming in. There are major thoroughbred races Saturday with two divisions of the Arkansas Derby from Oaklawn Park. Full Derby points to the first three finishers in each event. Stay safe and have a wonderful week.

Have a question for The Guru?

Email him at GurfTrot@aol.com.

CLICK HERE

To Share This Story



**HURU WANTS YOUR
BEST FOAL PHOTOS
FOR OUR NEW FEATURE**

Foal of the Week

SEND PHOTOS AND AS MUCH INFORMATION
ABOUT THE FOAL & FAMILY AS POSSIBLE TO:
DAVE BRIGGS • HRUEDITOR@GMAIL.COM

HURU
HARNESS RACING
UPDATE



Rules around qualifiers in focus as Ontario racing readies for return

by Brett Sturman

Earlier this week, Woodbine CEO Jim Lawson was quoted in the *Toronto Sun* as estimating being six weeks away to resuming live racing, as the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) is currently working through strict conditions to race under should the Provincial Declaration of Emergency soon be lifted. That article was in the context of thoroughbred racing at Woodbine Racetrack, but Lawson separately confirmed for me via email that the (optimistic) six-week estimation would apply to standardbreds, as well.

In adjusting the Rules of Racing to accommodate the new guidelines that Woodbine Mohawk would surely have to function under in order to race, one of those matters is working through the process of qualifiers on the standardbred side, said Lawson.

Earlier this week, I was fortunate enough to have been included in one of those discussions with AGCO officials and other racing experts; this meeting being primarily designed to discuss matters from a bettor's perspective in advance of getting back to racing in Ontario. The forefront of the discussions was about qualifiers.

Under the unique conditions we're currently operating in, and as a starting point, I feel that qualifiers must be a certainty. There can be different forms that these qualifiers take on, but there has to be at least a single charted line for a horse upon returning to race.

Different scenarios around qualifiers are currently being explored by various tracks based on what's in the best interest of the horses and the wagering public. One of those scenarios floats the proposal that as long as a horse shows a charted line as of a certain date from before racing was suspended, then those horses would be allowed to race without having to first qualify.

The main issue with that idea is that by the time racing finally does resume, all horses will have stale dates of, at the very least, two months since their last race. Normally, you would see horses qualify after 30 days and in some cases, you see it go longer than that and it's usually no issue. But once days between races goes over 60 – and in all likelihood it's going to go much further than that for a majority of horses – there's no way one could realistically expect bettors to bet on races having no idea of the form that horses are in. Form from February or March will mean nothing come June or July.

Though just because a qualifier is essential, I wouldn't think that it necessarily has to be on the premises of a racetrack. One possibility that was brought up in the AGCO meeting was that of accepting horses who qualify at either a farm or training center.

This seems like a completely reasonable and feasible alternative where there will be thousands of horses qualifying and it may be not be conducive for all of those to go to the tracks to qualify. Provided there are the appropriate officials in place, there wouldn't be any issue at all. Each year, for example, Gaitway Farms in New Jersey plays host to baby races and qualifiers throughout June and those races are

WOODBINE STANDARDBRED EARLY PICK

\$75,000 GUARANTEED **15% TAKEOUT**

SELECT THE WINNERS OF THE FIRST FIVE CONSECUTIVE RACES

#BetWoodbineSB
Know When To Take The Reins. ResponsibleGambling.org

 **WOODBINE**
STANDARDBRED

recorded as a qualifying line the same way it would be as if they qualified down the street at Freehold.

It's also no different than qualifiers recorded at the South Florida Trotting Center or Spring Garden Ranch in Florida. And in the cases of both those Florida training centers; videos of those qualifiers complete with announcers can be seen online – that's more than you can say for qualifiers at a lot of racetracks.

In either case – whether the qualifier takes place at a track or training center – it comes down to giving the horseplayer something to go on. It's may not be practical to get multiple qualifiers into the horses, and even if it were it still may not matter that much. Most bettors will give some credence to a qualifier and in some cases they can be useful, but in this situation there's only so much information that can be gained from a single qualifying race over the course of multiple months. Qualifying a single time, wherever it may be, will at least show that a horse can safely get around the track and may point to a certain level of fitness.

Even with a return qualifier, handle may decrease at first, as there will still be too much of an unknown when the horses first return. Harness horses are accustomed to racing nearly every week and it'll take some time to reassess form following months off. But while handle may be down a little

off a single qualifier, it would be off far more if there were no qualifiers at all.

In the spirit of arming horseplayers with as much information as possible, another topic discussed was that of trainers providing information on their horse at time of entry. This is something that the Meadowlands has implemented at times, where a trainer's comment on how its horse is training is published in the track program.

I realize this may be burdensome for trainers and even if their comments are an honest assessment the horse still may not race accordingly, but any additional piece of information would be welcomed. And it wouldn't have to be forever, either. Perhaps, it's information provided just for the first start or two as horses begin to put back together their past performance lines.

As the industry inches closer to racing again, new safety measures for all the participants will be in place when it does. This should include qualifiers, for both the safety of the horses and those who wager on them.

CLICK HERE
To Share This Story



After They Race, Give Them a Place

Accepting horses from racetracks
across the country.
NewVocations.org
winnie@horseadoption.com || (734) 320-7918
A 501(c)(3) Public Charity



www.sfjohnsonphotos.com

Four things the industry must consider before racing returns

by Jerry Connors

Most people in our sport have had more free time than usual in the last few weeks. Even those training horses still haven't had the responsibilities of taking the horses to the races and the hours that process entails. I am finding that the amount of free time that I have is inversely proportional to state of my bank account, and most of us find ourselves in a similar position.

One good use of all this "down time," besides binge-watching TV shows and improving our video game scores, might be to think ahead and anticipate what situations harness racing might face once we get closer to starting up again in some sort of widespread fashion. I have identified four concepts that probably are already being explored in one form or another in some jurisdictions, but should be in a "ready to qualify" mode as soon as the starter folds the wings of the gate (including being "ready to qualify.")

1. Each track should designate one well-informed person as the "COVID-19 expert" within their staff. This could be a job that can be divided for part-time status between two people, and it could be somebody from the racing side liaising with somebody from the casino side for racino outfits.

This "COVID-19" expert would have several tasks:

a. The expert would carefully watch and read all of the breaking information about the "curves" of the virus, on as many levels as possible – local, regional, state, national, international. While probably not a speaker for the racetrack (that's usually a higher-management function), the expert should be able to deliver up-to-date "bullet points" for management and media departments, based on the knowledge she or he is constantly gaining.

b. The best candidate for this expert position may well be someone with a thorough knowledge of backstretch and paddock operations, as they would be a major advisor to what is needed to be done to insure the health and safety of the people and animals in the racing program once restarting. (This point works on the assumption that at least in the beginning, we will be racing without spectators.)

The expert would be in contact with other racetracks to find out what "best procedures" are working at other facilities (tracks who raced for a couple of weeks before all racing was shut down would be the first people I would contact were I this expert). The expert should also be a part of the team formed with governmental health workers who will likely be inevitable in establishing whether the health of the participants can be guaranteed in the current configuration of the stable and/or paddock area.



Dave Landry

c. The expert should be quite familiar with the benefits that racing provides for the area and jurisdiction – agriculture; employment; associated products, from feed to trucks to boarding farms. They could line up a well-spoken horseperson or two to meet the media, either through a briefing conducted by a track executive, or in a story set up by the media relations office, with some specific numbers on how much the current shutdown is costing them personally, and their owners and workers. The sports pages and websites are STARVING for local stories to fill up their space. And don't overlook business pages, or even human interest stories about people, many of whom have never known anything other than the racetrack life and have had a unique situation with which to cope during the hiatus.

We had better have all the right answers in place in order to clear the hurdles and get back to racing as soon as possible. The “virus expert” should have enough knowledge to answer any objections, and be able to pass them along to those higher in the work chain.

2. Organizations responsible for distributing state funds that reward state-bred horses and “state-bred horsemen” should be investigating: what their projected cash flows are going to be this year and next; whether the money “earned” for one year's racing can be carried over to the next year; what new programs if any may have to be designed to ensure each year's “crop” is properly-rewarded; and what the county fair circuit possibilities are for the year as the months go by.

Once most jurisdictions are back “online” or rapidly approaching that point, there is likely to be some sort of regathering of track race office officials and stakes sponsors and executives, trying to get as many races – especially the “traditionally big” ones – into a tentative calendar for the rest of the year.

It is likely that some major stakes will not be conducted in their traditional spots, the North America Cup already declaring itself one. But the Woodbine Entertainment Group will want to conduct an edition of the race in 2020 if at all possible, and so are going to have to find a spot for it. (If anybody has a good, viable plan to condense two-week stakes, elims/final, into a one-week stake just for this season only, the idea would surely be welcome). And the bigger (usually = more money) the stake, the better it can “stake” out its own territory, with good but less-alluring races going to be forced to reroute their events as much as the conditions of the stakes allow.

And in the tier behind that will usually be the state-sired or bred programs. Most have already conceded that they are

going to lose one or two of their 3-year-old preliminary legs. If the shutdown lasts a long time, or if later in the year they have to compete with too many major stakes to attract quality horses, there could be reconsideration of just what the state stakes programs can accomplish in their 2020 races.

This is where it will be important for each jurisdiction to know if its laws allow for funds accumulated for 2020 racing can be “carried over” to 2021. Sophomores will likely be losing a preliminary or two unless the schedule is really crammed in, which may benefit nobody; could a carrying-over of money to 2021 and the one-year creation of a “Maturity” stake or stakes be permissible?

When I was with the Pennsylvania program as part of the Harness Racing Commission, the money we paid out in, say, 2012, was the total amount generated by our cut of the pari-mutuel and the casino betting from 2011. We knew in March what the purses would be for each of the eight divisions' four preliminaries, and their championships and consolations.

In this scenario (I don't know if it is still in effect there), the money to be paid out in 2020 would have been what was collected in 2019. But if there were fewer preliminaries in 2020 – and a likely shortfall in 2021 money because of the loss of the months of racing/casino opportunities to generate “normal” amounts in 2020 – could some of the 2020 money be carried over until 2021? It would be devoted to whatever classes lost opportunities this year – thus the idea of Maturity races for 4-year-olds that were denied full opportunities.

I know some jurisdictions get their funding for year “X” for the amount of funding *projected* from July 1 of year “X-1” to June 30 of year “X.” The switching of the normal patterns of income accumulation is going to affect these places, too – what are the possibilities available to keep the program running “normally”?

Lastly, will terms like “social distancing” be far enough in the past for there to be a fair harness racing circuit in any given jurisdiction in 2020? Talk about a crowding together of people – that's the essence of the fairs, in addition on the racing side to the likelihood of a lack of sanitary structure such as will be in place at the pari-mutuel ovals. What if fair racing is reduced or even non-existent this year – can that money be carried over to next season? People bred and bought yearlings to race at the fairs at two and three – are they going to have the chance to get a fair return on their investment?

These are all questions that can be explored right now, and then the answers can be used (or, if we're lucky, not have to be used in many cases) as soon as "the new stakes norm" for the year gets established.

3. How are we going to get all those horses qualified?

During opening week at a small eastern track in the late-'70s, the morning line favorite in the last race on a card was stepping up 50 per cent in claiming price (from \$500 to \$750) after being distanced without breaking at the lower level in his last race – *which occurred ten months previously*.

And the chances are that the bettor standing in front of the evergreen backdrop of that oval for that card was not as baffled as will our 2020 bettors be when we start racing and if the horses don't show a qualifying line. Qualifiers have been pooh-poohed in some areas, lately, including this publication, but I can't imagine a bettor, likely already financially wounded by the virus situation, who would be likely to wager much beyond a token level without some indication of form – it seems we should be up to presenting the most enticing product we can *right away* when we regain our fans' attention.

Further, I have been handicapping for 54 years now, including the last seven doing a tip sheet at Harrah's Philadelphia. I find the qualifiers very helpful in anticipating how a race is going to go, especially pointing to horses that are "faster than their form" indicates to the crowd; and I also infer that many to most trainers also consider a horse and his qualifier as a "finishing school event" in their campaigns back to weekly warriors. I think they still have a large amount of relevance.

Now consider this: if a track races four times a week, 12 races a day, and eight horses a race, that's 384 horses that will be needed *for the first week alone*. We had better start thinking about the solution to that imposing question of qualifying right now. Marathon qualifiers at the tracks, a couple times a week for a couple of weeks? Some "help" from local training centers or fair ovals? Somebody has to organize a battle plan.

And then after the first week we have:

- horses who won't race until the second week or beyond;
- 2YOs (ALL of whom will need a line, as they have none)
- stakes horses (who need a "good" 2020 line, and who often qualify twice to be tight "at the go")
- horses on "the judges' list"
- horses just coming in from "Down Under" (more and more of them every season now)
- fair horses who need a "good" charted line to start on their circuit (Pennsylvania has such a rule)

Some plan is going to have to be worked out, and now is a very good time to think out the theory and get in place what one can for when the actuality arrives upon us.

4. No claiming races for the first couple of months back at the races.

My colleague Brett Sturman tackled some of point #3 on page 7 of today's issue and mentioned point #4 in these pages last week ([full story here](#)); I have a bit of amplification on his observations, and a couple of practical guidelines that might help.

Owners have been paying for the keep of their horses for a couple of months, maybe more before the end of our current hiatus, and for those trotters and pacers who might not do in a conditioned event, we propose a type of racing that does not allow another stable to claim a fresh horse after the investment made in him.

It would be like a starter allowance in thoroughbreds: "Horses who have started for a base claiming price of \$10,000 (e.g.) or less within their last (x) starts, or since (xxx date)." This way the horses have been racing at this level, or may be joined by horses stepping up in class – the latter likely would have to be sharp or else shouldn't be in here.

Perhaps a consideration could be made for a horse who is "stuck" in a class just above his ability: "AE: starters for \$12,500 (under whatever conditions as above) who are nw\$1000L5." A horse who got a good check with the drop would have to go back up in price.

A stable couldn't "jam" a superior horse without fear of losing him via claim by adding a "penalty" condition for a horse who has done very well in this company. "Horses at this level who have two wins, or have hit the board three times, in their last three starts" – 1) "are ineligible"; 2) "are handicapped outside" and/or 3) (this is a little crafty) "*can be claimed* for the base price plus normal claiming allowances, if any." That ought to take care of most horses looking for "easy pickings."

After a designated period of time the claiming game could be picked up again, but with these conditions on "claiming races," owners who paid several months of upkeep for horses during the delay wouldn't be faced with losing them right away via the claim box. Private purchase options are of course still available, as always.

We hoped we have laid out a few challenges that may be facing the game whenever we start back up again in semi-full force, and we hope the thoughts here may spur those in charge to have definitive policies in place before the inevitable scramble just before reopening.

We hope everybody stays healthy and uses their time wisely.

CLICK HERE
To Share This Story





LeWayne Miller: from a kid dreaming by the rail, into the thick of the action at Hoosier

by Chris Lomon

LeWayne Miller knew he was destined for a life in the race bike.

Whenever he stood by the rail at Hoosier Park, the kid in his early teens from Shipshewana, IN would envision the day he could be the one holding the reins.

The odds of that happening, at least back then, was a longshot at best.

Raised in an Amish home in a town of some 700 people, Miller eventually found career opportunities, albeit limited, in Shipshewana, home to the Menno-Hof Amish & Mennonite Museum, which showcases the history of the Amish and Mennonite peoples.

But any job that wasn't horse racing just wasn't for him.

"I remember the times before I even turned 16 when we would go to Hoosier Park and I'd always watch the races, dream, and see myself out there. But I never really thought it was possible. I thought it was way out of reach."

A high-profile standardbred trainer thought it was well within Miller's grasp.

Erv Miller (no relation) saw plenty of potential in the young man who began his driving career sitting behind trottingbreds on the Indiana state fair circuit from 2003 through 2008.

"My brother and I went to Florida to drive for Erv, who ended up convincing me to stay. When I started working for him, he recommended that I get my driver license, and then start driving at fairs. That's when it hit me. I thought, 'Wow... he really thinks I can do this.' He gave me a lot of confidence."

As it turns out, the longtime conditioner was bang-on in his evaluation of the young man who chose red and blue as his driving colors.

"I guess I kind of went off (Hall of Fame reinsman) Ron Pierce's colors. I mixed it up a little bit, and switched up a few things, but I like the way his looked, and I kind of went from there."

In 2009, Miller, in his first pari-mutuel appearances, drove in 25 races. He won seven of those starts, accompanied by 17 top-three finishes.

After six wins the following year, the number jumped to 40 in 2011.

Fast forward to present day, and Miller has posted 1,096 career wins, along with 149 more victories as a trainer. He's also enjoyed success as an owner.

On June 20, 2019, he had an evening to remember, a five-win performance at the racetrack he often frequented as a teenager.

Three of the five triumphs came with horses also trained by Miller, including Gotwuteverittakes in the second division of the \$48,000 Indiana Sires Stakes for three-year-old trotting colts.

The card also delivered him his 1,000th win in the sulky.

Miller hit the coveted four-figure mark in the fourth race with Madeline's Cray Cray, another horse from his stable.

He would drive 158 winners in 2019, which yielded \$2.7 million in purse earnings.

"When I first started out in 2009, I wanted to have a very competitive barn and be able to drive very good horses, stakes-caliber horses. As far as where I'm at now, I just want to continue to grow and get better horses, branch out, and be able to race on the Grand Circuit as well."

Success hasn't gone to Miller's head.

Small-town values, a quiet resolve and competitive edge continue to serve him well.

So, too, does a particular piece of advice he received over 10 years ago, something that still resonates with him to this day.

"Back when I was racing ponies, I had a lot of people tell me to remain patient, especially with young horses. Patience and dedication – those are the two things that so many people would share with me. And I haven't forgotten that."

The words have taken on a different meaning in current times.

With live racing on pause at racetracks across North America due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, horsepeople, Miller included, have had to contend with a loss of income, the absence of doing what they love, and question



LeWayne Miller in action at Harrah's Hoosier Park.

marks about unraced horses.

“Not being able to drive is tough. I’m very anxious to see what kind of horses I’ll get to sit behind. Some of the horses are in the barn – I’d like to see what they really are. They can train down, but you never really know what they are until you put them behind the gate. I’m training a couple times a week and that helps a little bit. Other than that, we haven’t been doing too much.”

When he does get the call that racing is back on, Miller, admittedly, will have a new appreciation for the sport, and for the Indiana standardbred scene.

Competing in the Hoosier State continues to be a source of pride for the horseman who notched a career-best 188 wins in 2015.

“I love racing in Indiana because it’s where I grew up, and I really enjoy the stakes program. They go for pretty good money. What I would like to see is the overnight races being a little higher. It’s tough to race overnight horses here and make money. But you can make pretty good money with stakes horses.”

Miller, whose favorite racing memory to date is winning his first sire stake with Andi’s Alana in 2013, also acknowledged the challenges that come with a life in standardbred racing.

Finding consistent quality time to spend with his girlfriend and son can sometimes be an issue.

“I would say one of the toughest things is making time for yourself and your family. I like playing basketball during the summertime. After work and before racing, we’ll go out and play a bit. Other than that, I like swimming with my son and girlfriend, just spending time together. As far as with the horses, the biggest challenge is staying patient, and let time do the telling. But that’s the approach you need.”

It’s an approach that has served Miller well from the moment he tracked down the career he had long dreamt of.

While plenty has changed since those childhood days as a racing spectator, his affinity for all things standardbred has not.

“I recall those days at Hoosier Park, standing as close as I could to watch the drivers and horses flying down the stretch, hoping that I could be out there one day. Now that I am, I couldn’t be more grateful.”

CLICK HERE
To Share This Story



Jim Lawson letter points to possible return to racing in six weeks

The CEO of the Woodbine Entertainment Group addresses the racing industry in this open letter.

To all Ontario horsepeople,

I hope you and your loved ones are all doing well. Before providing a couple of important updates, I would like to take a moment to sincerely thank you for your steady patience, cooperation and understanding while we navigate through these difficult times together. I remain very optimistic and confident regarding the future of the horse racing industry in Ontario. As you will see in this week's update, we are taking nothing for granted and working very hard to do everything we can to re-start the industry with the resumption of live racing (safely and following government and health officials' directions) in the near-term and sustain the industry for the long-term.

For this week's update here are a couple of key points I'd like to highlight:

The Resumption of Live Racing: As you are aware, I have been very reluctant to speculate when we might be able to return to live racing (without spectators). While I remain consistent with this approach, we are working very hard behind the scenes to prepare for it.

We are distinct from other sports and entertainment properties as we can conduct our live races without the public and with strict physical distancing protocols in place. Many of you in standardbred racing experienced this when we conducted safe live racing cards at Mohawk on March 16th and 19th without spectators and respecting the government guidelines on physical distancing.

Over the past few weeks, we have spent considerable time developing safety and physical distancing protocols that would be implemented in the event the government guidelines permit the resumption of live racing. Our Provincial Regulator, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) has participated in this detailed planning and is supportive of adjusting the Rules of Racing to accommodate our newly developed protocols.

With the optimism that we all need to share, we anticipate that we are approximately six weeks away from resuming live racing (under the strict conditions being developed with the AGCO) if the Provincial Declaration of Emergency is lifted and parts of the economy are permitted to gradually re-open following government and health officials' guidelines. I will continue to provide updates in the coming weeks on how we



are progressing towards this optimistic target.

Qualifiers for Standardbred Racing: As part of our ongoing discussions and planning with the AGCO on the resumption of live racing, we are also working with them on a plan for qualifying requirements. We are working towards a solution that would be consistent with our efforts to resume live racing as early as possible.

Training Horses at Woodbine: Currently, there are approximately 1,100 thoroughbreds stabled on the Woodbine backstretch. We are operating with only essential staff and have strict protocols in place to help protect everyone. In an effort to keep more people safe at home during this period of lockdown, we have not offered timed workouts, or starting gate work. However, as we prepare for the above optimistic timelines to return to live Thoroughbred racing sometime in June, we appreciate that horses need to be worked to be ready to race. To that end, starting on Friday, May 1, we are allowing trainers to breeze horses. Within a couple of weeks, we hope to add staff for timed workouts and starting gate operations.

It's important to understand that we are operating the backstretch to provide stabling and care for the livestock which is deemed an essential business under the Provincial Government's Declaration of Emergency. We have essential Woodbine Entertainment staff working to operate the backstretch under these conditions. We are doing our very best to advance our training facilities, operations and personnel as we all prepare for the resumption of live racing. However, we need to be respectful of the government's protocol as it relates to the operation of essential businesses at this time.

We will continue to provide updates on this matter and adhere to the government phasing of businesses gradually re-opening.

New Initiatives: As you have learned over the past year or so, we have been developing an innovative mobile betting app for horse racing called 'Dark Horse'. This product simplifies betting on horse racing, both in its user experience design and by using artificial intelligence, which levels the playing field for new and novice players. 'Dark Horse' was originally developed with the sports bettor as a prime target. Given the current circumstances with horse racing being the

only sport operating in North America, it is the perfect time to introduce 'Dark Horse' to those sports bettors who may be looking to be engaged and would welcome a user-friendly horse race betting app.

We are anticipating that we will launch 'Dark Horse' in the coming weeks, hopefully coinciding with some good news and clarity on the resumption of our own live racing.

Earlier this week, we had a very positive discussion with the federal government regarding how the legalization of Historical Horse Racing could provide additional financial relief to the horse racing industry while not costing the government any additional money. Furthermore, HHR would also protect the industry from any future closure of non-essential businesses should the COVID-19 pandemic return.

It's too early to know if we will be successful, but we are confident and remain highly focused on this opportunity.

Ontario Racing Purse Allocation Program: Ontario Racing continues to process thousands of applications for the Purse Allocation program. They expect to start mailing checks for the month of April to eligible applicants in early May once the funds are received from the OLG.

Cheques for standardbred horsepeople who were qualified to race during the week of March 25 -31 have been mailed and should be in the hands of those eligible to receive them shortly.

Stronger Together: As mentioned last week, we are planning to host another live video conference on Tuesday, May 12 at 2 p.m. I look forward to speaking to you all then and hopefully we can share some positive news on the return of live racing.

Thank you and be safe,

Jim Lawson



HRU EDITIONS FROM THE PAST



Previous HRU editions are available any time for FREE on the HRU website

www.harnessracingupdate.com/archives

HOME SUBSCRIBE PAST EDITIONS ADVERTISING ABOUT US

January							February						
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
1	2	3	4	5	6	7				1	2	3	4
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
29	30	31					26	27	28				

March							April						
Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
			1	2	3	4	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
26	27	28	29	30	31		30						

Standardbred Canada announces Return to Racing blueprint

by Standardbred Canada

In early April, Standardbred Canada's Board of Directors appointed a "Return To Racing" Task Force to develop a blueprint for the return of standardbred racing.

Recently, SC's Board has approved the plan and will be releasing **"The Return to Standardbred Horse Racing in Canada Blueprint"** to industry stakeholders to assist them in the planning and preparation of racing resuming at racetracks across the country.

The goal of the blueprint is to provide guidelines for all facets of the industry to consider in the preparation of the return to racing, with minimal risk to participants, and proper internal controls. The guidelines incorporate resources and recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada and provincial health agencies. In addition, policies and procedures from racetracks that have been racing and operating successfully and spectator free during the COVID-19 crisis were also reviewed and incorporated.

This initiative was presented to the Board by Blair Corbeil, (Western Region Active Director) who chaired the Task Force consisting of fellow directors along with further consultation from others within the industry.

"I think this blueprint is timely as provinces begin discussing ways to relax restrictions to ready the country for the 'new normal'" commented Dan Gall, President and CEO of Standardbred Canada.

"We are quite clear on what we hope that this document will be to the industry and that is a resource for any and all jurisdictions in Canada who would like to reference it as they prepare for the return of horse racing in Canada.

"I would like to commend the board, the task force, Darryl Kaplan and Kathy Wade Vlaar in assisting in putting this blueprint together as it furthers Standardbred Canada's vision of being an essential support to the horse, industry and the sport. SC is of course available to help any horse association or racetrack in getting our sport up and running again as quickly as possible.

In creating the Blueprint, the Task Force identified the following priorities:

- The importance of getting the standardbred horse racing industry back in operation.
- To ensure the health and welfare of our standardbreds
- A strong focus and emphasis on risk mitigation to assure the safety of all participants



· The commitment to work with and follow government and public health direction.

The Blueprint features three main components with details and considerations in the areas of:

- Stakeholder Engagement
- COVID-19 and the Resumption of Racing
- Communication Strategy and Public Relations

The first phase of the Blueprint is for racing to resume without spectators on site. Several Canadian racetracks had operated this way for several race cards prior to closing, and many thoroughbred racetracks in the United States continue to race without spectators in attendance.

"We sincerely appreciate the hard work of the Task Force and SC Management in the creation of this plan under extremely tight timelines," stated Ann Straatman, chair of Standardbred Canada. "We are hopeful that industry associations and racetracks will work together and use this comprehensive Blueprint in whole, or in part, to facilitate the safe and successful return of standardbred racing in their jurisdictions."

Returning to standardbred racing requires a coordinated effort for all industry stakeholders with consistent accepted policies and procedures for all participants. Because of the nature of the industry, including transportation of horses to the racetracks, and overlap of horse people working at different facilities and racetracks, it is critical that the industry has a plan that all participants can follow. This plan facilitates the coordination and execution of a nationwide effort with robust monitoring systems identified that are critical to navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it evolves.

The return to racing will be on a racetrack by racetrack basis, as determined by government and health agencies, and the blueprint incorporates different steps and options available depending on the characteristics of the racetrack and the racing community.

The blueprint is now being released to industry stakeholders and will be made available on standardbredcanada.ca in the near future.

HRU NEWS



News in harness
racing, notes and
announcements

www.harnessracingupdate.com

New HHYF activity boxes available

Nothing replaces braiding a foretop or jogging a horse on the track – we know that!

However, in an effort to still provide education and a whole lot of fun, HHYF will be offering “Activity Boxes” this summer – four boxes in total, each with its own theme, for May, June, July, and August.

The Activity Boxes are stuffed full of games and projects which intertwine harness racing and general horse information with art, math, science, history, social science, language arts and even some vocabulary words.

“For many years, HHYF has stockpiled unique methods of teaching about harness racing which we usually incorporate in some way during our hands-on programs. With those programs cancelled for 2020, we have quickly adapted many of them into units similar to school subjects for individual learning. We feel confident that families and even small groups like 4-H will find value in the information until our interactive programs can be back on the road,” explained HHYF Executive Director Ellen Taylor.

The content is geared toward ages 10 - 13, but older teens will find the material entertaining as well. Because of the build-on-your-knowledge design, purchasers are encouraged to consider ordering all four boxes at once with a discount offered for doing so. “HHYF understands that many families are struggling right now so we have kept our production costs as low as possible in order to keep the boxes affordable too” added Taylor.

To order, visit <https://hhyf.org/activity-boxes/> or call 317.908.0029 for additional information. Boxes may be ordered now through Sept. 15.

The Harness Horse Youth Foundation is a charitable 501(c)3 organization dedicated to providing young people and their families educational opportunities with harness horses in order to foster the next generation of participants and fans. The Foundation has been making a difference in young people's lives since 1976; its programs include interactive learning experiences with racehorses as well as offering scholarships and creating and distributing educational materials relating to harness racing.

– HHYF

Barncat Trivia launches May 8

Question: What are harness racing fans hungry for right now?

Answer: The opportunity to play, win and compete against fellow horse racing enthusiasts.

Barncat Trivia is a scrappy game connecting harness racing fans with fun, all-original questions delivered in four exciting live virtual events.

This interactive, online game is free to play and designed to challenge players' harness racing knowledge. Each live virtual event is 60 minutes and features 60 multiple-choice questions in three rounds.

Up to 1,000 players can log into the sleek game portal each week to compete against participants from across the globe. Dynamic scoring awards the highest points to players who answer correctly in the shortest



BARNCAT TRIVIA

amount of time. Scores are tallied and stats are revealed in real time and they carry over seamlessly to the next week's game.

An online show corresponds with each trivia event featuring a game host and expert commentators.

Barncat Trivia begins at 7:00 p.m. EDT on May 8, 15, 22 and 29.

[Each game and live show can be accessed here](#)

The website also provides an email notification service to remind players of game times one day in advance and one hour in advance.

The top overall scorer of the four-week tournament wins a \$100 gift card for the vendor of their choice. Prizes of \$25 in game play will be awarded for the mobile apps Catch Driver and Off And Pacing. These prizes will be awarded on social media and during game nights.

The tournament is made possible with the generous support of sponsors, including:

- Catch Driver
- Clinton Raceway
- Central Ontario Standardbred Association
- Grand River Raceway
- Hambletonian Society
- Hanover Raceway
- MadBarn
- Meadowlands Racing & Entertainment
- Off And Pacing
- Standardbred Breeders of Ontario Association
- Tara Hills Stud
- TheStable.ca
- TROT Magazine
- Woodbine Entertainment Group

Barncat Trivia is produced by True Nature Communications Inc., a boutique marketing agency servicing several clients within the harness racing community. The agency is co-owned by Scott McNair and Kelly Spencer.

- Website: www.barncattrivia.com
- Explainer Video: <https://youtu.be/w4muFbQkTd0>
- Tournament Hashtags: #barncattrivia #playbarncat
- Facebook: @barncattrivia
- Twitter: @barncattrivia
- Contact: connect@barncattrivia.com

– True Nature Communications