

Friday, June 5, 2020

Swedish trotting association's mistakes could cost Redén his career

Svensk Travsport (ST) is investigating whether to strip Daniel Redén's trainee Propulsion of his Elitloppet victory – and, perhaps more than \$3.6 million (U.S.) in European earnings – after ST failed to notice the horse had undergone a fully disclosed nerve procedure in the United States five years ago under previous connections.

by Dave Briggs

**WIRE
TO
WIRE**



with **DAVE BRIGGS**

Before Svensk Travsport (ST, the Swedish Trotting Association) destroys the career of one of its most promising young trainers, I hope it holds itself to the same high standards it holds the industry it governs.

This week, days after Daniel Redén's star pupil Propulsion won the Elitloppet on Sunday at Solvalla, word began circulating out of Sweden that the U.S.-bred son of Muscle Hill—Danae might be stripped of that victory – or worse: ALL European victories – because he underwent a lower nerve procedure on both front legs in the United States while under U.S. ownership.

Horses that undergo nerve procedures – regardless of how long ago that procedure was done – are not allowed to race by Sweden's strict rules.

Fair enough.

Sweden should be admired for its strict stance on integrity, so long as Svensk Travsport's own integrity is beyond reproach. Sadly, that does not appear to be the case here.

In today's HRU

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Dave Landry

Trainer Daniel Redén in Lexington last fall after paying \$1 million for the yearling brother to Propulsion.

(Before we go any further, full disclosure: HRU's European Report columnist Thomas Hedlund works for Redén, which is why I am writing about this case, not Hedlund. This is my opinion, not Hedlund's or Redén's).

An investigation is underway and Swedish authorities had yet to rule on the case by press time Thursday night. That did not stop Maria Croon, the CEO of ST, from saying on Swedish television this week that the trainer responsibility rule places all the blame on Redén, regardless of the circumstances in the case.

Many will likely agree with her, but the circumstances are worth hearing because they appear to point strongly to ST's incompetence and culpability in the mistakes made. That Croon would make such a public statement before the investigation is complete is highly questionable and certainly appears to be an attempt for the notoriously strict association to throw blame elsewhere despite its obvious failings in the case.

Dig into the details and, clearly, this one smacks of a clerical error on ST's part and not a case of a trainer trying to cheat.

Yes, Redén, 40, is aware that horses that have undergone a nerve procedure – something that is legal and relatively common in American racing when down on the lower part of



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legs – cannot race in Sweden. But, Redén said he was not aware Propulsion underwent the procedure before he purchased the trotter for \$210,000 at the 2015 Tattersalls Summer Mixed Sale on Aug. 2 at The Meadowlands (Redén and Brixton Medical AB are officially listed as the buyers in the sales results, though it was Marcus Melander that was physically at the sale and made the purchase on Redén's behalf).

Redén told HRU that had he been aware of the nerve procedure, he never would have purchased the horse in the first place.

"Of course not," Redén said. "It wouldn't make any sense at all to try to buy and bring a horse to Sweden that wasn't allowed to race."

United States Trotting Association (USTA) chief operating officer and registrar TC Lane appears to back up Redén's story that the trainer did not know about the nerve procedure before buying the horse. The timeline is very important here. Stick with me.

Documents HRU has received show the nerve procedure was done in April of 2015.

Tony Alagna, the horse's trainer at that time, told HRU this week that Propulsion was racing at the Meadowlands when the procedure was done and he informed the track, as required.

Lane said the USTA was not officially informed that Propulsion had undergone the nerve procedure until "on or around August 18th, 2015" – some two weeks after he was sold to Redén and Brixton Medical AB of Sweden.

Don't ask me why it took so long for the USTA to be told in this case, but that's irrelevant since the procedure is not an illegal one in the United States where the horse was racing at the time.

(Side note: Why is it so difficult in the digital age for standardbred associations to share information? In the name of transparency, integrity and all things that are good and holy, it should be possible to instantly share information around the world when it is updated.)

Lane said when the USTA learned the procedure had been done it contacted the horse's previous owner Brittany Farms – which shared the horse with Joe Sbrocco, Little E LLC and a stable comprised of Marvin Katz, Al Libfeld and Sam Goldband – and asked Brittany to return the original registration in order to update its documents. Subsequently, both the USTA electronic eligibility documents and its Pathway system were updated to disclose the nerve procedure.

By then, Propulsion was long gone from North America.

The trotter left for Sweden on Aug. 20, 2015. He landed in Belgium and Redén said the official certificate he came with made no mention of the nerve procedure – which is a

further indication the trainer did not know, at that time, that the procedure had been done. It would have been difficult for Redén to have known since the USTA records were not updated before the horse arrived in Europe.

Lane said the USTA received an application for export for Propulsion on Sept. 10, 2015.

"Upon the receipt of the referenced application, the export certificate was issued by the USTA on Sept. 14, 2015, and forwarded directly to Svensk Travsport," Lane wrote. "Propulsion was also examined prior to export by a veterinarian on August 7th with references to both front limbs with freeze fire marks being present. A new registration certificate with updated information indicating the new information and the notation that the horse had been nerved, was mailed to Brixton Medical in Sweden."

Redén insisted he never received the updated export certificate in the mail, but we do strongly believe that Svensk Travsport received Propulsion's updated export certificate – and this part of the story is important.

Before Propulsion first raced in Europe on Oct. 7, 2015 at Solvalla, Svensk Travsport was, allegedly, in possession of a document ([available here](#)) that clearly states the horse had undergone the nerve procedure in the United States, making the horse ineligible to race in Sweden by ST rules.

This is not a document akin to a pedigree page thick with black type. It's clear and simple and the procedure is noted near the top of the page under markings, which should be hard to miss for an association that is so strict about rules.



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Clearly, Svensk Travsport, as the sport's governing body in Sweden, is at some fault here for failing to read the document properly and take appropriate action.

ST might be forgiven for its error if only a month or two had passed, but Propulsion has raced in Sweden for FIVE YEARS at the sport's highest level.

Surely, Svensk Travsport — which is not above issuing major fines and suspensions for the slightest infractions — should hold itself accountable for not doing its due diligence in the clerical department year after year. Surely, ST has rules it must follow to ensure the eligibility of horses. After all, Propulsion raced in Sweden's biggest race, the Elitloppet, five straight times and not once did Svensk Travsport look back at his records thoroughly enough to catch this.

That is particularly strange and a notable failure on Svensk Travsport's part to uphold its own rules considering Propulsion is an American-bred that raced in the United States. Swedish authorities typically view U.S. rules with disdain for a perceived lack of integrity. Surely, one would expect a U.S. horse to be under even more scrutiny when racing in Sweden.

Also, Svensk Travsport falls under the country's agriculture ministry and is tasked with retaining the integrity of the Swedish stud book — a matter officials do not take lightly.

Further, Redén said that in June of 2019, “Swedish officials had heard rumors that Propulsion had the nerve issue in the USA, so two veterinarians came to my farm and examined the horse, along with the official from the association.”

The trainer said both veterinarians cleared the horse and both determined he had feeling in his feet.

That is not surprising since nerve block procedures are, “a relatively temporary surgical treatment (in the United States) for a racehorse dealing with chronic foot lameness,” said renowned equine surgeon Dr. Patty Hogan of New Jersey when asked about the procedure in general terms. “A nerving lasts an average of one-two years and in all cases the nerves will grow back. That is a medical fact. I have had to redo some nerving in horses that end up having longer careers and are still plagued by foot soreness.”

Thursday morning, ST ruled that, despite the controversy and what may be decided in the Propulsion case, the stallion's certificate to breed mares in Sweden still is valid and his progeny born in 2019, 2020 and 2021 will be eligible to race in Sweden. That suggests the broken rule wasn't enough to punish Propulsion's offspring. Let's hope that is also a sign of some leniency to come.

Not only did Svensk Travsport fail to properly follow its own rules before allowing Propulsion to race, two veterinarians and an association official cleared the trotter to continue racing after an inspection, which came almost a year before Sunday's Elitloppet victory.

To now say Propulsion should be stripped of everything he has earned in Sweden seems particularly punitive.

Let me stress that none of this fully excuses or absolves Redén. The trainer's responsibility rule — as flawed as it sometimes is — is an important one that must be upheld to protect animal welfare, which is an important pillar of our sport. To disregard it would set a dangerous precedent. Though the nerve procedure was done by others, it is Redén's responsibility to know, and be vigilant about, what has been done to a horse in his care, especially if a procedure contravenes Swedish rules.

Likely a year ago, when vets and an association official came to investigate the rumors of the nerve procedure, instead of dismissing them as a rumor and moving on with Propulsion's training after being cleared to do so, Redén should have done his own due diligence and checked with U.S. authorities — or even Alagna — to see if the procedure had been done and then acted accordingly.

That said, to suggest Redén has been trying to cheat is absurd given the facts.

To suggest he is solely to blame is overly harsh and myopic.

To point solely at Redén for breaking rules when Svensk Travsport didn't follow its own, exposes ST as hypocrites.

Now some rumors suggest Redén — a winner of more than \$13 million between 2015 and 2019 and the man that purchased Propulsion's full-brother for \$1 million at last fall's Lexington Selected Yearling Sale — will not only be handed a severe fine and suspension, he might also be forced to return all \$3.6 million (approx. in U.S. currency) that Propulsion has earned in Europe.

That, Redén said, would be his worst nightmare and likely mark the end of his career. As it is, he said the world is falling apart around him this week.

“I feel so sorry for the horse who has fought so hard so many times against some of the best horses in the world. He's a champion to me and certainly also to many fans,” the trainer said.

Some punishment should be expected, but a punitive one will be both a travesty and a double standard.

With one hand, Svensk Travsport would be covering up the fact it did not follow its own rules. With the other, it would be issuing a death sentence to Redén's career.

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BETWEEN THE LINES



with BRETT STURMAN

Meadowlands and Manchego are back, plus thoughts on Woodbine Hi-5

by Brett Sturman

Officially, harness racing resumed live racing with Scioto Downs kicking things off exactly two weeks ago. The string of \$1 million handles coming out of that track as well as a \$2 million handle coming out of their northern Ohio counterpart Northfield Park has been a feel-good story. With total respect to those and other tracks now resuming, it's the return of the Meadowlands that completes the feeling that harness racing is "back."

The Meadowlands' Championship Meet is normally underway by this point, and as racing returns for the first weekend in June there's obviously a different feel from when racing ceased in the middle of March. Not because of new protocols in place, but with Brian Sears and other top drivers returning in action as well as some of the sport's best horses, it won't take long to recognize summer racing at the Meadowlands as it should be.

You don't have to look long to find the headliner in all the entries this weekend. It comes tonight (June 5) at 7:15 p.m. with the first horse in the first race on the first night back, in the form of Manchego. Now 5, the Muscle Hill mare made some late noise in last year's Horse of the Year discussions as she was unquestionably the best horse in training throughout the second half of last year.

Making her first appearance since a gutsy try in last November's TVG Open, she qualified last Saturday impressively and was well within herself in a 1:53 mile. In that race, she distanced herself for new Swedish import Felicityshagwell S, as well as beating top trotting mare Phaetosive by over eight lengths.

Racing tonight against some top males, who like everyone else has been absent in recent months, what can we expect from now Manchego since last season?



Dave Landry

Star trotting mare Manchego will kick off the Meadowlands' return to racing tonight in the first race.

"We actually never turned her out this year," said trainer Nancy Takter. "We just kept training her all through the winter on the straight track, and she filled out quite a bit. Her hind end and everything is a little bigger than it was last year, but she's also put on a lot of muscle."

With not having formally been turned out, the delay in racing did present some challenges for the trainer. "We were actually going to have her qualify the beginning of April, and we were getting ready to do that when all of this happened. So, we kind of had to pull an audible and just keep training. But she's been great; she's got a lot of training miles under her and she should be just fine," Takter said.

Manchego will get tested early against some of the best older male trotters. Horses such as Crystal Fashion and Lindy The Great are legitimate free-for-all trotters, but from the sound of it, racing against the boys will be consistent this year for Manchego.

"We don't have a lot of options right now to get her raced," said Takter. "I wanted to get her started before the Miss

Versatility which is June 19 at the Meadowlands. So, it was either race her or qualify her again, so you might as well put her in a race if you're going to go that type of same mile in a qualifier anyway."

Takter said there are a number of free-for-all stakes against male rivals that could be on Manchego's schedule this year. Some of those races may potentially include the Arthur Cutler, the John Steele on Hambletonian Day, the Maple Leaf Trot and the Yonkers International, though the latter remains in question along with Yonkers, which as a whole is still in flux.

In addition to Manchego, Takter has been hard at work to get other horses from her barn qualified and back in-to-go. Last Saturday she qualified 17 at the Meadowlands and for the most part there hasn't been much deviation on how different horses have been impacted by the delay.

"The horses that were stakes horses last year – they haven't really been affected; it's just that they're getting started a little bit later in the season by a couple of weeks," said Takter. The trainer added that the ones most impacted were horses that didn't have the same foundation and otherwise would have gained some experience earlier in the year through non-winners of 1 and non-winners of 2 races.

"I feel that my horses have a really good foundation on them, have lots of training miles in them and I think we should be in pretty good shape overall. It's just a matter of getting going and getting to the races at this point," said Takter.

In Jackpot Hi-5, Woodbine is making the wrong call

Standardbred racing at Woodbine Mohawk Park gets many things right, but the track couldn't be any more wrong in its handling of horses returning from the interruption.

As bad a decision to allow horses to race without having to qualify is, it's been compounded by the fact that the track is having a mandatory payout on its pre-COVID-19 Jackpot Hi-5 wager. I don't agree with it, but I see the argument from the horsemen's side of wanting to get horses racing again and thus bypass qualifying even if it means some horses don't show a racing line for close to 90 days. But, what is the point of having the mandatory payout in that same circumstance?

The mandatory payout consists of a carryover amount of \$236,338. This amount was accumulated on the backs of nightly horseplayers who at the time had current information at their disposal as they played the wager. Now, the track is giving its customer the poor option of either not betting because there is no up-to-date information on horses, or coax them into betting nonetheless as to not miss

out on a wager with a potentially life-changing payout.

It really makes no sense, and it's clearly not the right thing to do. The track could have easily moved the mandatory payout to next week, giving handicappers at least one new line on a horse. For a track that usually gets it, this is a bad look.

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Thoughts on Propulsion, whether a mile in 1:45 is possible and how to compete against dishonest trainers

by Ron Gurfein

Tidbits: Since the 1996 Hambletonian, I developed a theory that most trainers are wrong in their approach to heat racing.

"We have a bad post, let's race him easy and try to get in the final so he has something left in the tank." This was normal procedure.

Then in the first heat of the Hambletonian the pull-down blinds fell down behind the gate on Continentalvictory and she was a loose horse trotting the mile in 1:52. I remember Gary Siebel saying, "I hope she has something left in the tank for the final."

Well, you know the rest of the story.

Then again in the World Trotting Derby, Billy O'Donnell and Lindy Lane parked her to the half in :53. She made the final and romped.

* * *

Last weekend in Sweden's Elitloppet, we witnessed an even more impressive feat. Propulsion after a magical mystery tour, three deep for the entire mile (the announcer said a



well-beaten Propulsion at the top of the stretch) made the final and came back to sweep the field in the stretch for the easiest of victories.

I really think these tough first journeys stretch a horse out and, given enough time between heats to recover his wind, actually makes him stronger.

Unfortunately, there are few heat races left to concern us.

Congratulations to the breeders, Fredericka Caldwell and Bluestone Farms and Zet Stable and Daniel Redén the owner and trainer, respectively.

Per Henriksen emailed me to point out what an amazing job Daniel Redén did with Propulsion. The horse is nine years old, had not raced since January and did not have a qualifier. Really amazing.

Yet, that wasn't the end of the story.

Scandal shook Swedish racing as it became known that Propulsion was nerved five years ago, as a 4-year-old in the United States.

I had gotten numerous emails from Swedish writers asking about the nerving.

I made some calls to confirm it before I went any further.

Nerving low is permitted in the states but not high. I know little of the laws on the continent but it is my understanding that they were quite upset with this finding.

To my knowledge, when a horse is nerved low there's an excellent possibility that the nerves will regenerate and actually grow back.

It has been five years since the original surgery. Dr Rick Balmer suggested that if this indeed became a major case it would behove the ownership to have a group of veterinarians at a university test the feeling in the feet to determine whether or not they had in fact regenerated. From what has been repeated to me by some of the Swedish journalists they will attempt to get all \$3 million in earnings and DQ the Elitloppet.

Hopefully this recklessness disappears quickly.

No matter what the outcome is in Sweden, there are many stud barns outside that country, especially in America that would welcome him for stallion duty.

The most mystifying part of this story is that it is listed on the ownership papers that the horse is nerved. Why would this arise five years and millions of dollars later? It reminds me of American political timing i.e.: Hillary's emails.

* * *

Great follow up story sent to me by Mel Owens in regard to

the Wild Bill story of last week. The \$300,000 colt was Touchdown Town purchased by Greg Peck for Patricia Bolt, Bill Perretti et al. Mel worked for Peck that winter for a while and it was the same year Greg had Muscle Hill. Even though TT had a preference to pace and was a bit slow to boot, Peck was always trying to convince Mel that come race time he would be the better of the two colts. Great story. We all know how that went.

* * *

Thanks to Bob Heyden for the fabulous analogy in last Sunday's HRU edition ([full story here](#)) in this writer's opinion, it was award worthy.

* * *

My sincerest apology to Sonny Patterson for my omission of his name in my list of the best drivers at Monticello in my time there. Not only was he one of the best reinsman but also a very talented horseman. I knew I would forget someone, but never thought I could forget a man that was so important in my life. Not only did Sonny drive my first Hambletonian horse MB Felty (finished second in 1991) his dad "Big John" (John Patterson Sr.) drove some horses for me earlier.

My sincerest thanks to Mickey Burke for the wonderful phone call.

* * *

A few comments on the Meadowland qualifiers. If I may take the liberty of considering Nancy Takter a Swedish Connection, although I realize that she born there and came to America when she was a 1-year-old, every one of the top three finishers in the 3- and 4-year-old trotters (seven races) had a Scandavian trainer. Manchego was without a doubt the most impressive. I must however mention the :25.2 final quarter into the wind for Bettors Wish in a losing effort.

* * *

Congratulations to Fred Hertrick and John Fielding for selling their interests in the talented thoroughbred 3-year-old Authentic to Spendthrift Farm. The colt will surely be favored in tomorrow's Santa Anita Derby and if successful in that endeavor be chalk or near to chalk in the Triple Crown races to follow.

Bill Bigler asks: The thoroughbred seems to have hit bottom on the speed scale a while ago. Where do you think our bottom is going? Is 1:45 a possibility?

There are so many variable factors that the thoroughbred is not involved with that keep them stagnant. Their tracks are always deep, they have a hub rail, they have bred the

same style horse for generations, they don't have any equipment advantages because there are no race bikes. One more thing that is never discussed is the flying start vs. the standing start. Records cannot be broken without a fast start.

We on the other hand can have an exceptionally fast track, amazing new bikes, no hubrail and we are breeding a sleeker style horse.

The 1:45 target to me will not only be a reality but be realized in the next few years. Interestingly, 2020 will provide a logical opportunity because for the first year in the modern era, horses will be fresh and lightly raced when the brutal hot days of August and September arrive at the Meadowlands and the Red Mile, the logical format for records to fall.

Secretariat set stakes records for all three Triple Crown races in 1973 and most of the traditional distance world records were recorded in the early 1980s.

How about a crazy Guru prediction: A pacer will beat the 1:46 mile but a trotter will beat 1:48 before a pacer beats 145.

Joel Kravet asks (another novelette that I shortened) I walk through the stables today and see horses getting jugs of liquid to treat their blood and hydration etc. There is no question there are many still using blood doping agents. How can I remain in the game and compete with an honest trainer?

The answer is very simple: Look at the list of horseman that are under indictment.

What do they all have in common? They rarely have horses that compete on the Grand Circuit. There have been a few, but percentage wise they are non-existent on the big stage. Aged horses? Yes; Claimers? For sure. These people churn money and like instant gratification.

Buying a colt is nowhere near as risky as it was 30 years ago. Look at the top sires. Eighty per cent or better get to the races. You have the opportunity to hit a home run.

I am not saying racing overnight horses is bad, I did it myself for 30 years but the second 30 on the Grand Circuit was a different world. You don't have to spend a million dollars either, to achieve success. You can still but a nice colt between 20k and 60k dollars. My suggestion is to get a group of friends together and buy as a partnership. Ten per cent of Captaintreacherous is a lot of money.

In today's world, the most important step is finding a trainer that is also a businessman or woman. As I said last week, daily charges are unimportant, barns with \$4,000 a month vet bills are good to stay away from no matter how good the trainer, the overhead will get you in the long run.

There are lots of excellent trainers out there without the big name at 60 per cent of the yearly cost of some barns. And don't get me wrong there are some top barns that are surprisingly inexpensive. You must do your homework.

As far as racing claimers, don't delude yourself that because a few bad seeds were caught that it will be any easier. There are many still out there and new desperados join the ranks every day. We will never rid ourselves of the problem but we may have some success weakening their ranks.

Joel Kravet asks: (not a misprint, he asked two questions). Watching racing from Solvalla and France. How do the owners pay bills racing 15 horses where 10 get nothing?

You hit the nail on the head. It is very difficult to make ends meet racing in France. There can be an inordinate amount of entries in each race with the smallest possible number at 9 and many with 15 and more. The sport has many owners and trainers struggling. When Michel Lachance, Ron Burke and Ray Schnittker went to Paris to buy horses they witnessed first-hand the plight of the French horseman. The barns were old and unkempt and the equipment was worn and old. Michel related that he was afraid the equipment would break it was so old. Marie Ortolan (the great French horseman Jean Pierre DuBois' long-time partner) told me that what keeps the French going was the dream.

"You could buy a horse for 2,000 euros that could win the Prix d'Amerique. It happened before it can happen again." She was referring to General du Pommeau who she says was bought for nothing and won the Prix as well as the Cornulier under saddle.

Swedish Racing is another story. Solvalla doesn't race more than 10 horses in the average race and the program is supported by a national lottery that supplements the purse structure. Lots of working class people in Sweden own race horses in partnerships that I have seen could have as many as 50 partners in the group. Harness racing in Scandinavia is like baseball in America.

In my own experience, the owners, trainers and drivers in the Western Hemisphere are nowhere nearly as revered as they are on the Continent. Drivers and trainers in Europe are like Rock Stars.

Just the pomp and circumstance displayed at the Elitloppet or the Prix d'Amerique are something to behold. We have nothing even close in America. I think the closest I have seen on our shores were the International in the '60s and the Little Brown Jug, however both were bland in comparison.

Thanks to all of you for the kind words. Please keep the questions coming in. Racing is almost back in full force so support your local racetrack with a few wagers now and then. Remember, the slots are not yet up and running. Qualifying pacers and trotters have been split at the Meadowlands Friday and Saturday morning, and believe it or not there were only four babies entered at the Big M for the first scheduled races this weekend. There will however be 2-year-old races at Gaitway on Monday morning.

Lots going on.

Have a wonderful week.

Have a question for The Guru?

Email him at GurfTrot@aol.com.

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HARNESS RACING UPDATE

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

Results & Stats Editor: Lisa Duong

Founder: Bill Finley

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

Get in touch with HRU

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

Editor/News Stories: editor@harnessracingupdate.com

Advertising: advertising@harnessracingupdate.com

Customer Service: customerservice@harnessracingupdate.com

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Preferred to offer online auctions

Preferred Equine Marketing announced Thursday that it will soon be offering online sales through a new division of the company, to be called "Preferred Equine Online."

The sales platform, nearing completion, will be available at preferredequineonline.com.

"Preferred Equine Online is the latest product in our business model," said Preferred owner David Reid.

"I've toyed with the idea of an online auction for years, and we're not the first on the block to have one. But our experience, along with our strong base of customers, gives us the resources and the quality of horses that no other online sale has at its disposal."

In addition to running Preferred Equine Marketing – the world's largest standardbred sales agency – Reid is manager of the Tattersalls Mixed Sales at the Meadowlands and co-manager of the Lexington Selected Yearling Sale.

With that in mind, he says there will be no live "in person" sale conflicts, as Preferred's online sales will be integrated with the traditional sales calendar. Their first online sale date will be in the near future.

The Preferred Equine Online auctions will include the full spectrum of the marketplace – racehorses, broodmares, stallion shares, yearlings and weanlings. The listings will include "live" pedigrees and past performances, photos and walking videos.

Preferred Equine Online will also have a marketplace featuring horses for sale. "This will maximize our client's ability to strike while the iron is hot... a racehorse coming off a lifetime best win or a mare whose pedigree got ramped up with an important stakes winner."

Reid said there should be further opportunities with Preferred Equine Online as new technology and applications are developed.

"First off, we'll weave these sales into our existing social media platforms for expanded reach and promotion that will result in an increase in bloodstock trade across the industry.

"In-person mixed sales like Tattersalls at the Meadowlands aren't going to be displaced. As a sales agency, we're just trying to look ahead and make it easy to move horses and create commerce throughout the year. Preferred Equine Online will accomplish that."

– *Preferred Equine Marketing*

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Hawthorne reopening with cards Saturday and Sunday

by Neil Milbert

A torrent of 450 horses flooded the entry box Wednesday in preparation for the resumption of racing on Saturday and Sunday nights at Hawthorne Race Course in Chicago.

The longest meeting in the track's 50-year history of harness racing began on Feb. 15, but the meeting scheduled to continue through Sept. 20 was halted after 12 programs on March 15 because of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.

A total of 33 racing nights were lost.

In reopening, racing secretary Robin Schadt has scheduled 13 races for both Saturday and Sunday.

Spectators will be conspicuous by their absence.

According to Jim Miller, the track's director of publicity and horsemen's relations, no spectators will be the norm until Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzger decides otherwise.

"We'll have racing two nights this weekend and then next week we will go back to our traditional (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) schedule," Miller said.

The races will be shown on TVG and simulcast to the state's off-track betting parlors and to the usual out-of-state wagering outlets.

"We want people to wager through our Club Hawthorne app because that provides the most purse money for horsemen," Miller said. "All replays will be posted for free on our website. Since last weekend we've also been offering 'Bet-and-Go' services at the track and some suburban off-track locations. You can go up and place your wager and then head out. And OTB locations that have restaurants can provide outdoor seating.

"For Hawthorne, it may be nothing more than a break-even. The reason we're doing it is for the horsemen. We're doing everything we can for them after they've had to sit out for 2 ½ months. We're trying to keep the industry alive because we know there are big things ahead."

The "big things ahead" Miller was referring to is the planned opening of a casino at the racetrack that was made possible by legislation last spring and is expected to provide a bountiful new source of money for purses.

If spectators had been permitted this weekend, crowds undoubtedly would have been sparse because of COVID-19 fears compounded by an outbreak of violence that began on Sunday and Monday in Cicero, the Chicago suburb located a block away from Hawthorne in Stickney. Two men were shot



dead, stores were vandalized and 60 people were arrested as looters clashed with police officers and residents with clubs and guns.

About 30 peaceful protesters who stood outside Cicero Town Hall to express their indignation over the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police also were targeted by some of the resident vigilantes.

The episodes took place a few miles from Hawthorne where horses have continued to be stabled on the backstretch and train during the 2 1/2 -month racing hiatus but preparations for reopening weren't affected.

After the resumption of racing was announced, qualifiers galore were held at both Hawthorne and the State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Hawthorne had 22 qualifiers on Monday and seven on Wednesday.

At Springfield on Tuesday 17 non-betting Spring Preview races and six qualifiers were held.

Schadt said the preliminary races leading up to Hawthorne's main event, the Night of Champions consisting of 11 stakes for Illinois-breds on the final Saturday of the meeting haven't been disrupted.

"They were supposed to begin in May and now we'll fit them in the June schedule," she explained.

Hawthorne's studio racing protocols have been developed in accordance with minimum guidelines issued by the Department of Agriculture and approved by the state and county health departments and the village of Stickney.

Track officials anticipate that no more than 25 additional people will be required to be at the track when it transitions to racing.

The extensive restrictions are so stringent that horse owners will not be allowed on the racetrack unless they are approved licensed caretakers.

Included among the protocols are:

Mandatory temperature checks and facial coverings for all stable area workers and residents;

Pre-race paddocks in open-air barns with additional spacing between stalls;

Paddock access restricted to licensed essential racing personnel;

Expanded quarters for harness drivers to maintain social distancing;

Plexiglass protection to separate individuals whenever social distancing is not ensured;

Nightly spray disinfecting of the paddock and ship-in barns.

Tony Somone, executive director of the Illinois Harness Horsemen's Association (IHHA), doesn't envision any problems in adhering to the regulations.

"Horsemen are very resilient by nature," he said. "This comes just in time for our members. On average it costs \$1,500 per month to take care of a horse whether it's racing and earning money or not. More than half of the trainers who will be racing at Hawthorne have between five and 10 horses and we haven't be racing for nearly three months. Some have between 10 and 20. A few have more than 20."

Hawthorne president Tim Carey expressed his thanks to Governor Pritzger and the Illinois Department of Agriculture "for working with us to create a solution that recognizes the unique needs and challenges of horse racing.

"There are hundreds of small businesses across the state that rely on racing at Hawthorne.

"This will be a boost for the Illinois economy that will not impede efforts to flatten the curve of the spread of COVID-19."

The cessation of racing on March 15 didn't halt the preparations to convert Hawthorne into a racino.

"We've kept on as many of our staff as we could and they've been able to do a lot of internal work," Miller said. "When you talk about a building that's 40-years-old (after being rebuilt following a 1978 fire that destroyed the grandstand) there are a lot of wires, fixtures, ceiling tiles and that kind of stuff that needs to be done before we get into the construction part. We've been able to do that.

"We've completed everything with regard to paperwork and interviews so when the Gaming Board meets in June we believe we'll be issued a license. Once that license is issued construction can begin very quickly and very easily.

"The hope is we're only a year to 16 months away from being able to reopen."

The standardbreds and thoroughbreds have been time-sharing at Hawthorne since the state's oldest track introduced harness racing in 1970 and from 2003 through 2019 there was a spring thoroughbred meeting. But this year, with the support of the Illinois Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, that meeting wasn't held to put the racino

conversion project on the fast track and have Hawthorne be casino ready in time for the fall thoroughbred meeting.

Although the meeting remains the longest in Hawthorne history calendar wise, the loss of the live racing dates and the revenue they would have produced to fund the project has delayed the long-awaited start of casino wagering until next year.

Hawthorne also runs the pari-mutuel State Fair meetings at Springfield and DuQuoin for the Department of Agriculture.

According to Tim Norman, the department's Bureau Chief for horse racing and county fairs, the meetings at Springfield on Aug. 14, 15, 19 and 20 and DuQuoin on Aug. 28 and 29 will be held as scheduled but they too are expected to be conducted under a studio racing format.

All of the Illinois county fairs scheduled for June have been cancelled but, starting next week, the races scheduled at those sites and also those scheduled at other county fairs will be transplanted to Springfield and held on Tuesday.

"We'll race every Tuesday in June and then see what happens in July," Norman said. "I believe a lot more fairs will be cancelled."

"These will be non-betting races and there will be no spectators. I'm working with Jim Miller to see if we can get some equipment from Hawthorne so we can simulcast."

Somone praised Norman's concept. "This is a terrific way to get money into the pockets of horsemen," the IHHA's executive director said.

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GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE



with **CHRIS LOMON**

Driver Billy Mann on going from horses to cars and back again

by Chris Lomon

Other than horsepower, what could driving standardbreds and selling cars possibly have in common? More than you might think, according to Billy Mann.

It was in the late 2000s when the horseman from Martinsburg, WV decided to take a break from the standardbred world.

Instead of being in the driver's seat, Mann's new career as a car salesman had him putting other people in the driver's

seat.

"It was definitely a good experience, to an extent. I sold cars for a year. It was definitely different because outside of the horses, I really hadn't done anything else. It was nice to see a different side of the working world. Ultimately, it wasn't really what I wanted to do. Getting back into the horse business is what I wanted to do."

So, that's precisely what he did.

Mann, who returned to the standardbred scene in 2010, found a couple of parallels between the two careers.

"Oddly enough, and people might not realize it, but I think it all comes down to work ethic. Even with selling cars – although it's not nearly as physical as driving and training a horse – you definitely have to work hard to make it a success. With selling cars, you have to put in a lot of hours so that you can capitalize on every opportunity. I'd say it's about as close to the horse business in that particular way."

By 2011, Mann, who has also raced at Freehold Raceway, Pocono Downs and Harrah's Philadelphia, had reestablished himself as a capable driver and trainer.

Six years later, he enjoyed his best season as a driver since 2008, with more than \$300,000 in purse earnings.



Michael Lisa

Billy Man winning with his trainee Mr Big Load in April of 2017 at The Meadowlands.

He also became more of a regular presence at The Meadowlands.

Mann took advantage of his connection with trainer Al Annunziata, piloting New Zealand imports such as Tullow N, Iammrbrightside N, Betabcool N and Texas Terror N. He also recorded wins with Annunziata's IYQ YQR and his former trainee, Mr Big Load.

A son of Yankee Skyscraper [IL], Mr Big Load, now 9, has 31 career wins from 220 starts.

Mann first partnered the bay in November, 2016.

One of their most memorable scores came one June 21, 2017, at Harrah's Philadelphia. Sent off at 27-1, Mr Big Load went gate-to-wire for a one-length score in 1:52.

"Any time you cross the wire first, whether it's by a nose or open lengths, it's a great feeling. It never gets old."

As of June 3, Mann has notched 819 driving victories, tacking on 368 more wins as a trainer, to go along with over \$8.3 million in career earnings. His best season to date was in 2000, when he set a slew of personal-best marks, including 156 driving wins and 77 training victories.

Not bad for someone who initially thought of pursuing a life in thoroughbred racing.

"Growing up, I was always around show horses," said Mann, who began working around the horses at the age of 13 and after graduating from high school began driving at Rosecroft Raceway in Maryland. "With harness racing, it's more where I can do things with myself. When I was younger, I was a little bit more looking into thoroughbreds, but you have to be a certain size to be a jockey.

"When I was a kid, the guy who moved into a farm near our house trained standardbreds. I kind of got into that. The first couple of times I went training miles, I was hooked from that."

As for what brought him to this point in his horse racing life, Mann offered up a pair of reasons.

He's also honest when it comes to assessing some of the missteps he's made along the way.

"Basically, a lot of hard work and a lot of luck. I've had quite a few opportunities, some that I should have capitalized on a lot better than others. Some of those I

probably squandered a little bit. There have been some opportunities that I've been very fortunate to come across, and there are others where, to be honest, I've screwed it up. I've had good ideas and intentions, but bad results, where things don't always work out. But ever since I started, I try to learn from basically everyone I come in contact with. Whether it's a right idea or a wrong one, you have to learn one way or another."

One thing Mann has endeavored to learn over the years is finding a game plan on how to unwind away from the racetrack.

Easier said than done, he inferred, followed by a chuckle.

"There's plenty I'd probably like to do, but it's tough to find time to do anything. I like doing things outdoors when I get the chance. Even just relaxing at home is nice, too. I have a small stable [three he trains, one he owns], so I do a few other things to earn extra income, shoeing and shipping, things like that. Sometimes, being at home is a nice change."

The most fulfilling part of his life is where he's always felt most at home.

Open-length win or off-the-board finish, Mann is happiest when he's around the horses.

Especially ones like Kellie Cameleon.

Owned by Warren Racing Stable [Scott Warren] the son of Cameleon, bred by Mac Lilley Stable, won 60 of his 243 career starts, finishing in the top three 123 times.

Mann had plenty of experience both driving and training the pacer.

"He was great. Scott, who is the race secretary at the Meadowlands, he owned her. He was a pretty good horse for me. That is definitely one of the highlights for me. Horses that are consistent, who show up to race every week — they are a little hard to come by. But when you do find the right one, it's a big thrill. You really enjoy it when you have that kind of horsepower in your hands."

Something that Mann knows all about.

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Donut Dynasty

To celebrate National Donut Day, here's a look at William Rosenberg's dunk into harness racing.

by Melissa Keith

Today (June 5) is National Donut Day 2020. On the surface, this has little to do with harness racing, beyond picking up treats on the way to the barn or at the track canteen. Underneath the icing, though, there's a donut dynasty that was part of the sport for much of the 20th century.

William Rosenberg delivered milk via horse-drawn cart as a teenager, one of several early jobs held by the Boston native in the 1920s. The natural entrepreneur explored a variety of food and beverage business concepts, then went to work building warships in Massachusetts as part of American World War II efforts. After the war, he developed the first "canteen truck" to deliver mobile meal options to worksites. Coffee and donuts were the most profitable items sold by Rosenberg's Industrial Luncheon Service. The astute businessman took note, starting his first coffee and donut shop in 1948. Then named The Open Kettle, the Quincy, MA snack counter was renamed in 1950.

You may have heard of Rosenberg's business, which he franchised to great effect beginning in 1955. In 2000, Dunkin Donuts opened its 5,000th outlet, in Malaysia. Two years later, the man who started it all passed away at home in Mashpee, MA at age 86.

Later in life, the donut dynasty founder had established a standardbred nursery that became the largest in New England. In 1963, Rosenberg handed operational control of his successful company to his son, Robert. While still involved in Dunkin Donuts at the board level until the company was sold in 1990, the elder Rosenberg was now free to explore racehorse ownership; starting with no previous expertise or experience, he sought out advice from the likes of Del Miller and Norman Woolworth, then founded Wilrose Farms in East Kingston, NH. In 1968, he purchased his first standardbred, a homebred pacer named Papa, for a price of \$15,000 from Josephine Dadie Jordan. Soon Wilrose Farms branched from racing into breeding as well.

Despite his health issues, Rosenberg was able to enjoy standardbred ownership. He devoted more time to racing and breeding after being diagnosed with lung cancer in 1971. In 1976, the donut magnate was struck by another cancer, lymphoma. Dunkin Donuts was battling for survival at the time, after expanding overzealously into unreceptive markets and facing a class action lawsuit from disillusioned Philadelphia-area franchisees. But like its founder, the



Dunkin Donuts founder and standardbred enthusiast William Rosenberg.

company proved resilient: The introduction of bite-sized "Munchkins" donut holes returned Dunkin Donuts to profitability.

Wilrose Farms — a contraction of "William" and "Rosenberg" — was home to 200 standardbreds at its peak, including 30 racehorses. James "Roach" MacGregor trained for Rosenberg in 1968-69, recalled Prince Edward Island racing historian Jerry McCabe.

"[MacGregor] did purchase Ideal Donut at a yearling sale for Rosenberg in 1968, and he became Meadow Skipper's first stake winner before dying during his 2-year-old season from colic," McCabe said.

Ideal Donut (p, 2, 2:00.3m; \$26,499) won his division of the Review Stake at Springfield, IL and set a 2-year-old male pacing record at Goshen.

"Queen's Donut was another stakes winner they had. I believe he also had both Coral Ridge and Miami Beach for Wilrose Farms," said McCabe.

After MacGregor had parted ways with Rosenberg and returned to his native PEI in 1970, the deep-pocketed owner bought double-gaited Down Under star Mount Eden for \$300,000 — an Australian record for any breed of racehorse. Trained by Stanley Dancer, Mount Eden A bowed a tendon

before his North American debut at Yonkers and never raced for Rosenberg.

From 1971 onward, most of Rosenberg's racing stock was trained by Jim Doherty, the Hall of Fame horseman who made the move from New Brunswick to New England's Foxboro Raceway and Rockingham Park in 1969-70. The last broodmares of Wilrose Farms, some owned in partnership with Lana Lobell Farms, were dispersed at public auction in 1985-86. Speedy Somolli was the last horse owned by Rosenberg; the stallion was sold to Swedish interests for \$3.6 million in 1985, with his former owner declaring "That's how I got out of the horse racing business."

His wife, Ann, owned 1984/985 Dan Patch Pacing Mare of the Year Green With Envy, however.

Much of Rosenberg's 2001 autobiography *Time to Make the Donuts* (written with Jessica Brilliant Keener; Lebhar-Friedman Books) is dedicated to his harness racing pursuits. "My farm was a showplace. People from Kentucky — home of the great horse farms — raved when they visited Wilrose Farms," he noted in the book, showing his promotional mindset in vivid detail: "Our grooms wore white T-shirts that said WILROSE FARMS. They wore black jeans and dark red shirts with our motto: WILROSE FARMS—DEDICATED TO BREEDING EXCELLENCE. Everybody from our farm wore this uniform. We had carpets rolled out so that when our grooms walked the yearlings, they walked them on the carpets."

In keeping with cross-promoting his business ventures, many of the yearlings Rosenberg purchased were renamed to include the farm name "Donut": "We had Ideal Donut, I'm a Donut, King Donut, Cinnamon Donut, Steady Donut, and many others."

Three horses co-owned by Rosenberg became Goshen Hall of Fame Immortals. The first was the ill-fated 1977 Dan Patch Pacing Mare of the Year Tarport Hap (p, 4, 1:56.3f; \$688,664), whom he owned with Hall of Famer Alan Leavitt. Then came 1978 Dan Patch Trotter of the Year Speedy Somolli (3,1:55m; \$427,550), co-owned with Leavitt's Lana Lobell Farms of New Jersey, and original owners Ann Beissinger and Barbara Mumma after the colt's 1977 divisional Dan Patch-winning two-year-old season. Rosenberg also shared ownership of 2014 Hall of Fame Immortal Green Speed (3,1:55.3; \$953,013), 1977 Dan Patch Horse of the Year.

Rosenberg tried to bring to his chosen sport to the level of popularity enjoyed by the coffee and donut chain he founded, attempting to combat declining public interest and the erosion of corporate sponsorship in harness racing. The 1978

USHWA Good Guy Award winner established the North American Harness Racing and Marketing Association in 1983 by reaching out to his many connections, but the organization was ultimately unable to overcome rampant racetrack closures, damage to the sport's public image, and industry infighting.

The philanthropic Rosenberg donated his namesake property, valued at \$2 million, to the University of New Hampshire in 1980. Inducted to the New England USHWA Chapter's Hall of Fame in 1979, the lifelong innovator was named the inaugural recipient of Harness Horsemen International's Achievement Award in 1988. In 1994, Wilrose Farms was sold by the University of New Hampshire to establish its pioneering William Rosenberg Chair in Franchising and Entrepreneurship.

Wilrose Farms is gone, while Dunkin Donuts lives on, rebranded as "Dunkin" in 2019. Food for thought while browsing the free donut possibilities at Dunkin (and some prominent rivals) today for National Donut Day.

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HRU FOAL OF THE WEEK

Al Libfeld

This Walner filly that arrived May 5 in Kentucky is out of Cantab It All. That makes the youngster a half-sister to stakes stars All The Time and Ariana G (both sired by Muscle Hill) that won back-to-back Hambletonian Oaks titles in 2016 and 2017, respectively, for owner/breeders Marvin Katz and Al Libfeld and trainer Jimmy Takter. All The Time earned \$931,366 on the track and Ariana G earned nearly \$2.5

million. The Walner filly, also bred by Katz and Libfeld, is the seventh foal out of Cantab It All, herself a winner of nearly \$300,000.

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Ponying up for record comeback card at Red Shores Charlottetown

Feature to Dreamfair Zenfire and Marc Campbell.

by Melissa Keith

A sense of normalcy began returning to Canadian harness racing Thursday night when Red Shores Charlottetown staged the country's first pari-mutuel card of the post-COVID-19 era. The half-mile landmark had previously played host to four qualifying dates (May 23, 28, 30, and 31) without spectators in attendance, as anti-virus protocols were put into place.

June 4 would be a test to see whether standardbred-starved horseplayers would pony up remotely on Horseplayer Interactive (Canada's lone legal AWD site) and the 23 American ADW sites carrying the PEI track's signal. The harness wagering landscape was no longer completely lacking in North American product: Ohio's Scioto Downs led the comeback May 22, bringing in million-dollar handle after million-dollar handle on successive nights. It was joined by Northfield Park May 26.

Thursday, Red Shores would go head-to-head with sole North American counterpart Scioto Downs as the evening progressed.

The Prince Edward Island track's first pari-mutuel card since February 1 was a "historic night", remarked track announcer Vance Cameron. "There's been one word missing from Canadian harness racing and that word is... POSTTIME!" he declared as the first of 10 races went behind the gate. The winner of the Canadian comeback card was Jays Little Spark. The 8-year-old pacing mare, owned by Chris MacInnis of Hampshire, PEI, trained by Gregory MacInnis, and driven by Dale Spence Jr., upset at 9-1 odds in a three-mare, 1:59.3h photo finish. The race 1 pools totalled \$7,992 (Cdn.).

Bettors sent just three races (races 4, 7, and 9) into five-digit territory, indicating that the Canadian season opener's handle would not near the "Fonner North" heights enjoyed by Manitoba's Assiniboia Downs on May 25. Canada's first thoroughbred track to reopen post-COVID-19 doubled its typical handle when it drew \$1.067-Million (Cdn.) over a six-race card.

Charlottetown's featured \$2,900 Filly and Mare Open, race 9, attracted a field of seven quality distaff pacers and \$22,974 (Cdn.) in dollars wagered. Classy veterans #2 Berazzled (p, 4, 1:50.2h; \$466,246) and #7 Much Adoo (p, 4, 1:49.4s; \$401,347) made Maritime debuts for new owners, but neither could ultimately match strides with #6 Dreamfair Zenfire, who drafted behind Berazzled for most of the mile and took command in the stretch for the 1:56.0h victory.

Prince Edward Island



Berazzled (Mike McGuigan) was second; Island-bred #4 Woodmere Chella (Dave Dowling) closed for show.

Dreamfair Zenfire (p, 3, 1:53.0s; \$79,981) is a 4-year-old Sunfire Blue Chip-Dreamfair Zenyatta (Rocknroll Hanover) mare bred by John Lamers of Ingersoll, ON. The 5-2 second choice among bettors, she is owned by Ryan and Everett MacLeod of Souris, PEI. Her trainer, Marc Campbell, recorded a natural driving hat trick in the night's last three races, winning behind Howmac Blaze (race 7), Dreamfair Zenfire (race 8), and Arc Light (race 9).

Fans of Vance Cameron's "BOOM—Just like that!" call were treated to the popular catchphrase as Arc Light and Campbell hit the wire all alone in the final race. The 3-5 favourite paced a final quarter of :27.4 for the 1:58.2h victory.

Official handle for the night was \$102,308 (Cdn.), a June record for the track, which opened in 1888. It's a respectable figure, given the popularity of on-track wagering at the racino. The empty grandstand would normally be a hive of activity on a perfect June evening, complete with line-ups of tourists and regulars ready to bet. On the 2017 World Driving Championship final/Gold Cup and Saucer Consolation night when Red Shores CDP brought in its all-time record handle (\$391,031 Cdn.), "standing room only" was a major understatement.

Red Shores CDP has weathered a past pandemic. Charlottetown Driving Park opened 40 years before Spanish flu claimed tens of millions of lives worldwide (1918-20). Because Prince Edward Island closed its borders to out-of-province visitors and restricted public gatherings, it was able to reduce the impact of the deadly flu outbreak. One track, near Kensington, PEI, was even opened by horseman Tyndall Semple in 1918; the matinee racing site remains in use today.

The Charlottetown races are back Saturday, June 6, with a post time of 6 pm. In neighbouring provinces, Nova Scotia's Truro Raceway returns to action at 6:30 pm Friday, June 5, and New Brunswick's Exhibition Park Raceway debuts at 1 pm on Saturday, June 6. All times are Atlantic, and all three tracks are available for online watching and wagering only, until further notice.

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Vernon Downs horsepeople and management successfully negotiate two-year contract extension with a 2020 one-time waiver of the 10 per cent stakes cap

As an update to an HRU story published on May 31 ([full story here](#)), the Harness Horse Association of Central New York (HHACNY), the Gaming Commission-recognized representative horseperson's association at Vernon Downs Racetrack, is pleased to announce that it has secured a two-year extension of its horsemen's agreement with Vernon Down's management and agreed to a waiver of the 10 per cent cap on the two important 2020 Vernon stakes in this difficult year. A formal agreement is to be executed.

As part of the negotiation to achieve this agreement favorable to both parties, which ensures that the horsepeople will receive all of the beneficial terms and conditions guaranteed under the present contract through the two-year extension of the base agreement (now extended through December 31, 2023), the horsepeople have agreed to a one-time waiver of the 10 per cent cap on stakes allocation from the purse account, permitting the full funding of the 2020 renewals of The Zweig and Empire Breeders Classic.

HHACNY president Rick Papa said, "As we both have worked towards the restoration of harness racing to central New York in the aftermath of the most destructive period of the viral pandemic, it was important to make sure that our owners, trainers and drivers could rely on long-term continued operations of the raceway. The financial devastation that has impacted our members cannot be recouped by us or management without some give and take on each side. That's why it was so important to obtain this extension from management. While the horsemen were concerned about the uncertainty of whether or when the current season would commence, the HHACNY membership has again reached a successful resolution of this issue

working with Management to obtain a clear and concise deal removing any ambiguity."

Vernon Downs president Jeff Gural said, "I am glad we were able to resolve this and credit Rick for coming up with a compromise that makes sense for all concerned. As a horseman, I recognize how important it is to get racing up and running and come up with a plan for the sire stakes as well."

—*HHACNY and Vernon Downs*

Mohawk Park set for action-packed opening weekend

Woodbine Mohawk Park is set to resume live racing, without spectators, this weekend beginning with a 10-race card tonight (June 5).

Racing was suspended at the Campbellville oval following a card on March 19. After a 78-day hiatus, Mohawk Park will get back down to business with strict COVID-19 protocols in place to ensure the health and safety of participants, officials and staff. Spectators will not be permitted until further notice.

The opening-weekend will feature back-to-back 10-race cards (tonight and Saturday), highlighted by a Jackpot Hi-5 mandatory payout on Saturday's final-race. The feature race on each card will be a Preferred Pace with the ladies in the spotlight tonight and boys on Saturday.

Full fields are the story of the weekend, as the entry box was flooded with eager horsepeople ready to get back to racing. Woodbine will immediately launch into a 5-nights-a-week schedule following opening weekend with live racing every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Here is a breakdown of what to watch for this weekend at Mohawk Park.

Woodbine Mohawk Park will offer a mandatory payout on the Jackpot Hi-5 during opening-weekend. The carryover sits at \$236,338.67 following the last Jackpot Hi-5 on March 19.

The wager will be suspended tonight in preparation for Saturday's mandatory payout.

The Jackpot Hi-5 mandatory payout race will be Race 10 on Saturday with an overflow field of 11 pacers. The most recent Jackpot Hi-5 mandatory payouts on February 15, 2020 and December 21, 2019 each saw the 'new money' wagered more than double the amount of the carryover. This Saturday's carryover is the highest for a mandatory payout in more than a year.

For more Jackpot Hi-5 information, [click here](#).

Tonight's card will be headlined by a \$32,000 mares preferred pace and last season's Ontario Sires Stakes stars Boadicea (trained by Bill Budd) and Sunny Dee (trained by Bob McIntosh) are in the mix. The now 4-year-olds clashed many times last season with Boadicea (PP2) capturing the OSS Super Final and Sunny Dee (PP7) being named O'Brien Award champion. The OSS grads met up in a qualifier last Friday with Sunny Dee prevailing by a nose.

Another 4-year-old that was making a name for herself prior to the shutdown is So Much More. The Don Beatson trainee has won six of her last 11 starts with four of those coming at the Preferred level. Her last start came against the boys in the Preferred. She is the 3-1 morning-line choice.

June would normally be Pepsi North America Cup month, but with Canada's most prestigious harness race pushed back to Aug. 29, several eligibles will start their journey on Saturday night. The evening's 7th race will feature Ontario's champion 2-year-old versus one of New York's finest.

Dr. Ian Moore trainee Tattoo Artist (PP1) captured last year's OSS Super Final as part of a five for eight season with \$240,405 earned. The son of Hes Watching qualified on April 17 at Moore's winter-base Southern Oaks Training Centre in Florida, pacing a mile in 1:52.4 (last-quarter :28).

Blake MacIntosh trainee Groovy Joe (PP6) was a winner during last Thursday's qualifiers at Mohawk Park, stopping the clock in 1:53 (last-quarter :26.2). The son of Roll With Joe won seven of 10 starts as a rookie and never finished outside of the top-two. He dominated in New York, ultimately finishing second in the NYSS Championship to finish with \$230,845 in earnings.

Here are the other Pepsi North America Cup eligible horses racing Saturday:

Race 2: Ys Mathis (PP7, Richard Moreau)

Race 7: Sports Obsession (PP1, Carl Jamieson)

Race 7: Beach Blanket Book (PP4, Blake MacIntosh)

Race 7: Denali Seelster (PP9, Dr. Ian Moore)

Preferred Pace mainstay Easy Lover Hanover (PP1) is one of seven older pacers that will line up in Saturday's \$36,000 feature. The Ben Wallace trained 7-year-old has earned more than \$1.1 million in his career and for another winter was a major player in the Preferred. Although he didn't rack up as many wins this winter, Easy Lover Hanover has been right there, finishing second in each of his last four starts.

The new face to Preferred action is Century Farroh (PP4), who makes his 4-year-old debut. The Moore trainee had a tremendous sophomore season, winning 12 of 16 and

banking over \$700,000. He posted multiple Grand Circuit victories with scores in the Somebeachsomewhere, Simcoe and Jenna's Beach Boy highlighted his campaign.

— *Mark McKelvie / Woodbine communications*

Important stakes scheduling information for Tioga - Meadowlands - Vernon

The Meadowlands, Tioga and Vernon Downs are announcing several date changes for the 2020 stakes schedule. The recent cancellation of the Sun Stakes at Pocono removed a few potential conflicts and left two prime Saturdays without any stakes which led to several of the following adjustments.

First, Tioga Downs is announcing that the New York Sires Stakes (NYSS) 3-year-old Colt Pace scheduled for Sunday, June 14 has been delayed one week to June 21 due to NY Agricultural Fund concerns over horses getting qualified in time for the race.

Also moving to June 21 at Tioga are the Roll With Joe and the first leg of the Graduate Series for Pacers.

The first leg of the Graduate Series for trotters will remain on Sunday, June 14 at Tioga as originally scheduled.

Leg #2 of the Graduate Series trot has moved one day from Friday, June 26 to Saturday, June 27 and the second leg for pacers will now be raced on Saturday, July 4. Both are at The Meadowlands.

The Graduate Series has been reduced from four legs to two due to scheduling constraints and the Finals will remain on Saturday, July 11 as part of the Meadowlands Pace elimination card.

Also being raced on the July 4 card at The Meadowlands will be the Arthur Cutler Memorial trotting stake.

All of the 2-year-old stakes at The Meadowlands remain on the 2020 schedule but the order has been rearranged to avoid as much conflict as possible. The Kindergarten Series dropped one leg, down to four and the finals.

The entire revised 2020 Meadowlands stakes list is posted on the track [website](#).

There are two important changes to the 2020 Empire Breeders Classic (EBC) for 3-year-old trotters. Originally scheduled with elimination races and a Final on Memorial Day, the EBC Trots will be raced as a single stake on Saturday, July 4 at Vernon Downs.

The conditions state that "if more than 11 declare to start

the Host Track may adopt any of the methods of dividing the race then current in the rules and regulations". With the season shortened and dates at a premium the elimination will be discarded and if more than 11 declare for the colt or filly EBC it will go in divisions with the purse divided.

—*Nick Salvi*

New York Sire Stakes working with tracks to finalize schedule

The New York Sire Stakes is monitoring the reopening plans of the state's racetracks and is tentatively planning to begin Sire Stakes and Excelsior Series events the week of June 21 at Tioga and Vernon Downs. We hope to finalize first race dates in the coming days. The program is currently working with pari-mutuel tracks to finalize a new schedule which will be provided to participants as soon as possible.

"We know what a hardship this uncertainty is and that horsemen are eager for dates. We are hammering out several details now and will provide a revised schedule as quickly as we can. We thank all of our participants for their continued patience," said Kelly Young, executive director of the Agriculture & New York State Horse Breeding Development Fund. "In the meantime, we are excited to see qualifiers this week at Tioga Downs, Vernon Downs and Historic Track in Goshen, and plans developing for qualifying at other locations. Thank you to the tracks and officials who have made this possible and worked hard to bring these to fruition. The challenge of qualifying horses is being addressed and we feel comfortable that we are getting over this hurdle to the start of the stakes season."

As previously released, 3-year-old racing will begin first, followed by 2-year-olds in July. No racing dates have yet been finalized. The revised calendar will feature an equal number of legs for all ages and divisions.

Please call or email Kelly Young with any questions. She can be reached at kelly.young@gaming.ny.gov or at 518-388-0224.

—*Jason Politi for NYSS*

Taps ceremony tonight at the Meadowlands

While there is excitement at the Meadowlands Racetrack for the return of live harness racing tonight (June 5), there is also a sense of loss due to the passing of a number of horsemen and women from COVID-19.

To honor the lives lost, 13-year-old Boy Scout, Alex Saldana will play Taps from the Meadowlands Racetrack's back paddock following Race 2. All drivers in attendance will be asked to form a horseshoe behind Saldana, with proper social distancing, for the 38-second ceremony.

"When we learned of Alex Saldana's story we wanted to invite him out to the track," said Jason Settlemoir, COO & GM of the Meadowlands Racetrack. "He is an extraordinary young man and his playing is a fitting tribute to those we have lost within the industry and our country."

Alex, an 8th grader from Oradell, NJ, has been in the news lately for playing Taps outside the Paramus Veterans Memorial Home every night to honor those veterans that have died amid the COVID pandemic. Alex's story has been featured on [NJ.com](https://www.nj.com), WABC, and USA Today among others.

Alex has been playing the trumpet since fourth grade and serves as the bugler for Boy Scout Troop 36, playing Taps at every meeting. Alex's father, David, is a detective in the Bergen County Sheriff's Office and a veteran of the Marine Corps. He will also be joined by his mother Melissa Saldana.

—*Rachel Ryan / Meadowlands*

Tioga Downs live racing set to open Sunday

Tioga Downs will begin their 15th season of live harness racing with a 12 race card without fans on Sunday (June 7), with a post time of 4:00 p.m.

The five-eighths mile track from Nichols, NY will race on Sundays and Mondays at 4 p.m. in June. They will also race on Tuesday (June 23) and Tuesday (June 30) with a 4 p.m. post time as well. In July and August they will be racing every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Post time for Friday and Saturday will be at 6:15 p.m. with a 1 p.m. starting time for Sundays. In September, Tioga Downs will race Fridays and Saturdays using a 6:15 p.m. post time with the exception of closing night Saturday (Sept. 19) starting at 4 p.m. There will be a special Labor Day performance on Monday (Sept. 7) starting at 1 p.m.

Tioga Downs will once again be the home to some of the best harness horses in the country.

Tioga will feature the Roll With Joe Open Pace, the Artiscap Open Mare Pace, Joie De Vie Open Mare Trot, Crawford Farms Open Trot, the Empire Breeders Classic for pacers as well as a leg of The Graduate Series for 4-year-old pacers.

2019 leading driver Wally Hennessey and leading trainer

Mike Deters return to defend their titles.

For more information go to www.tiogadowns.com.

—John Horne for Tioga Downs

Anthony Haughan wins Barncat Trivia tournament

Anthony Haughan triumphed as the tournament champion during the fourth and final edition of Barncat Trivia on May 29.

Since its launch on May 8, more than 650 players have competed against fellow harness racing enthusiasts in free, live virtual contests where 60 all-original multiple-choice questions are presented over three games (rounds).

Haughan won the first three legs of Barncat Trivia and entered the final week with 13,239 points. He finished second to Jason McGinnis in the final week, but maintained enough points to take the tournament crown.

The Cambridge, ON trainer/driver and partner Meg Crone operate an 11-horse barn at Classy Lane Stables in Puslinch, ON. Haughan joined the [Barncat Trivia halftime show](#) to chat about his boundless appetite for racing and how Irish

winters in the '80s stocked his memory bank with harness racing history and factoids.

Overall Tournament Top 3:

1st place - Anthony Haughan (17,782 points)

2nd place - Justin Fisher (16,474 points)

3rd place - Jim Gillespie (16,426 points)

Week 4 Top 3:

1st place - Jason McGinnis (4571) points)

2nd place - Anthony Haughan (4543 points)

3rd place - Dan Fisher (4367 points)

Top standings for all four weeks are available at www.barncattrivia.com.

This week's top scorer Jason McGinnis wins \$25.99 in game play for the mobile apps Catch Driver or Off And Pacing. As the top overall scorer of the tournament, Haughan won a \$100 gift card.

—True Nature Communications



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