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# Conversation with owner Howard Taylor



## ON THE BACKSTRETCH

By Derick Giwner

@harnesseveguy

Howard Taylor's lifelong love affair with Harness Racing has made him one of the leading owners in the sport for years. The longtime owner has more than 170 horses and employs upwards of 40 trainers, which certainly has to rank him at or near the top in both categories.

An attorney by trade, Taylor took time to discuss his role defending horsepeople, the indictments from March 2020 and everything Harness Racing in a detailed interview that everyone should enjoy.



## OWNER HOWARD TAYLOR

### How did you get started in harness racing?

My dad bought horses when I was young and I went to the track to work with them. Like a lot of young kids in the business, I dreamed of being a driver/trainer. I did it for a little while before I got stupid [said tongue-in-cheek] and went to law school.

### Did you have any shared experience owning horses with your father?

We didn't own too many together. We had absolutely different philosophies. I liked racehorses and he liked stakes horses and babies. I owned some with my mother because my father had



NIKKI SHERMAN

Howard Taylor lifts the Hambletonian trophy after a win by Atlanta in 2018.

passed and she wanted to stay in it and didn't know enough. I'm sure there was one or two that I owned with him but I can't remember any.

### Your philosophy has done a 180 to be more in sync with your dad, no?

I've been trying for the last year to get rid of a lot of the racehorses and stay with just 2- and 3-year-olds. It has done a 180. I've had some success and

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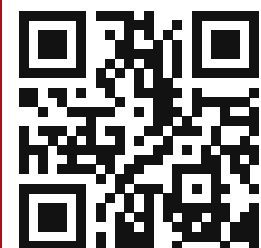
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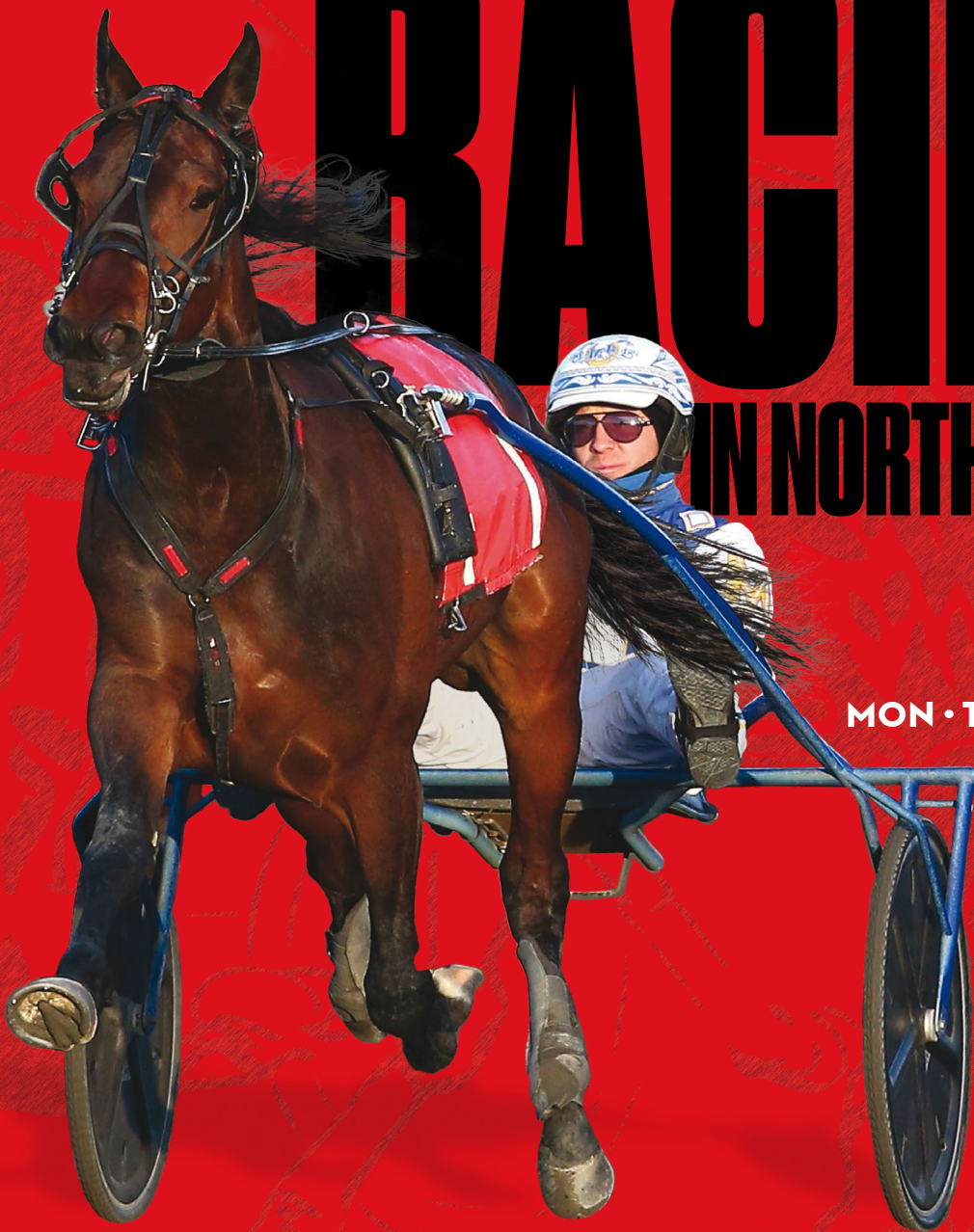


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been lucky, so I buy more yearlings. There is a limit to how many you can own and you really can't sell the 2- and 3-year-olds, so I've been selling the older ones.

### **Most people know you as one of the most active owners in the sport but you actually have 55 driving wins and a few as a trainer. Why did you give it up?**

I dabbled in driving up until about eight years ago. I actually won four of my last five drives. I went to law school and didn't have the time to commit to the horses. My dad was a lawyer and my mother's father was a lawyer, so that was pretty much what I was going to do.

My last drive was at Pocono Downs and my wife and mother came down to watch. The horse I had ran off the track and almost went full speed right into a trailer. He stopped maybe 10 feet from the trailer. I just thought I was going to be dead. He was so close to the trailer that I had to get off the bike and back him out. They asked me if I wanted to scratch him and I said that I drove two hours to get there and it didn't hurt the horse, so let's go. I went wire to wire and won. When I got back to the winner's circle my wife (Marlene) said to me, I hope you had fun out there because you are never driving another horse as long as you live.

### **Do you miss driving?**

I do. She's gone and I lost a little weight partly because of it. I went down to the farm with Dylan Davis and I was training a couple just to see. In the back of my mind, maybe I will get back into it.

### **So we might see you in the GSY amateur series?**

I'm eligible now. I had an 'A' license. I won at The Meadowlands and everywhere, but now I'm eligible again. I'm thinking about it.

### **Does your past experience as a driver provide you a different perspective than some owners?**

I'd like to think so. I have a more realistic approach and the philosophy that if something isn't doing what I think it will do, it is easier to get rid of quicker. I think I have a good eye and a good understanding of what may have gone wrong and why. The trainers have told me that they are a lot more tolerant with me because I understand more.

### **You've been one of the leading owners in the sport for at least the last decade. What does it take to stay on top?**

A lot of luck, and that is basically all it is because it doesn't seem to matter how much you spend on these things. You just have to get lucky. I don't think I have a better eye than anybody, but some of the horses who have become my top horses, it is just dumb luck. With Atlanta, Rick Zeron was talking to a friend of mine and asked if he bought a couple if I would take a piece. I said ok and ended up with two horses, Courtney Hanover (\$229,971) and Atlanta (\$3,131,727). Tall Dark Stranger, I had a trainer come up to me and tell me he was the greatest yearling he ever saw. He said that he was going to be very expensive and he needed me to take at least a quarter. I said, let's see what it brings. He calls me up the next day and said that the vet looked at him and didn't like what he saw and for the money he brought he didn't think it was worth the risk. The next day Jimmy Takter, who had just done a great job with Tactical Landing, he called and said, 'Every year I pick out one horse I have to own and I found the horse and will give it to Nancy [Takter], but I need you to take a quarter.' So I said ok. He was leading trainer and just did a great job with Tactical Landing. Frankly I was honored that he called me up to offer a piece of a yearling. I realized after I hung up I never asked him what horse. It turned out to be the same horse [Tall Dark Stranger] the other guy passed on.



USTA PHOTO

**Howard Taylor named Tall Dark Stranger as the best horse he has ever owned.**

### **What kind of car do you drive?**

BMW 6-Series convertible.

### **Favorite dinner meal? Snack?**

Lobster; Popcorn.

### **What is your favorite track to visit? Why?**

It was Brandywine. Now I guess Pocono Downs. They are very friendly. I like the way they treat you. The casino is very nice and I think it is the greatest racing surface. That's where I loved to drive when I did it. I just love watching races there.

### **What is your favorite big event in racing? Why?**

Probably the Hambletonian. It is just the most exciting. I just got back from the Elitlopp because I was stupid and forgot to buy trip insurance. The ultimate irony is that I went all the way to see Back Of The Neck in Sweden and he raced at Chester [Harrah's Philadelphia], which is 20 minutes from my house, on the same day. It was still a great experience. If you asked me for the best one-time experience of going to the track, it would be the Elitlopp. The way the people love racing and the way they treat the trainers, drivers and owners, it is unparalleled.

### **How often are horses or racing on your mind?**

24/7. Everyone says that but you can ask anyone that knows me. My daughter, she's a third-year law student who worked with me over the summer, will tell me that I have to stop it and concentrate on law. She tells me I have to put the phone down and stop talking horses 24/7.

### **What is your favorite thing to do outside of harness racing?**

I don't do too much outside of harness racing but I guess going to restaurants. I'm a big foodie. I used to own three restaurants.

### **What is your favorite restaurant?**

My favorite of all-time, there was a place across the street from Pocono called the Chicken Coop. They had the best wings and I love chicken wings. Super Bowl Sunday was their last day. I never went to Pocono without stopping there.

## What is your favorite sport to watch? Team?

Anyone that knows me is aware that I bleed green, the Philadelphia Eagles.

## What is one thing about you most fans/bettors don't know?

A lot of the fans don't know I was a driver/trainer. Most of them only know me as an attorney or owner.

## What is one word that describes harness racing for you?

My life.

## What has kept you in the sport as an owner?

It is in my blood and I can't get it out. There have been times when I thought about it when it's been frustrating, but not seriously. I had one guy tell me that he figured out why I had so many horses and it is because I love the action, and he's right. There have been Saturdays where I have 25 horses in on a day and I just go from the computer screen to the TV watching all day. It is my life.

## How many horses do you currently own?

I would guesstimate it is in the 175 range.

## You've taken some flak over the years for some of the people you've defended as an attorney in the sport. What do you say about that?

People think that I'm trying to get people off on technicalities but I am selective. I do turn down people, a lot of people. First, I try to help someone that needs help that couldn't do it without me. Second, I do turn down people that I don't believe in. Third, there are a lot of times where I believe someone deserves to get a suspension but not to the degree that has been given, so I try to help them get it reduced rather than get them off.

Another thing that people don't know about me is that I have a great relationship with every state racing commission, outside of New Jersey. They know me and respect me, so I can get deals done where other people couldn't because they know I'm honest.

## I didn't see your name connected to any of the people who were indicted back in March 2020. Was that by design?

Most of the people, I think they did something wrong and deserve a penalty. I don't like some of the way some of the stuff was handled. Quite frankly, I did talk to Rene [Allard]. Forget about what you read or what people are saying he admitted to, if you read what he agreed to plead guilty to, it is nothing that you would think someone would be in trouble for. It is basically buying in bulk instead of having a bottle of medication targeted for a specific horse after talking to the vet about a specific problem. But in reality, most people do that. I told Rene that he should fight and he wanted to fight, but it just got to the point where it didn't make economic sense in light of what they've agreed to accept as far as the charges. So I was involved a little bit, only to advise him because I don't do criminal work. Honestly, five or six of them did call me first when they got into trouble, but I don't represent everyone that calls me and I don't do criminal work. I don't want to be responsible for someone going to jail.

## What is the best advice you've ever gotten or given about harness racing?

The best advice I got was from my father, who told me I was crazy and had too many horses.



WORLD WIDE RACING PHOTOS

Howard Taylor (left) with Buck I St Pat after she won the Maxie Lee in 2008 at Chester.

## It doesn't seem like you listened to your dad, does it?

No. I have 40 trainers; I don't just have a lot of horses. I try to spread them around, help people, maybe a guy who only has one or two horses.

## Isn't it hard to manage that?

Yeah, that's why I miss my wife more than anything. I had like 30 or 40 horses at one time and was way over my head. She told me she could put it on the computer and help me. She was a whiz at it. She said to me: 'When I did this I thought it was because it would make life easier for you and we'd have more time to do things like travelling. I didn't think it was so you'd have more time to buy horses.'

## Which is the best horse you've ever owned?

I'd have to say it was Tall Dark Stranger. He did things that no horse could do and he obviously liked doing it. I really do believe he would tease other horses, let them get close and pull away. It's tough because I had Atlanta and I'll always have a soft spot for Buck I St Pat.

## Which was the most disappointing horse you've ever owned?

In The Arsenal. He was a great horse, then I bought him and he never came back to his 2-year-old form.

## What was your best moment in harness racing?

Obviously the Hambletonian win [Atlanta]. I would've loved to have been there to win the Jug [Lou's Pearlman] last year and obviously I couldn't. That's a dream and is something special. I would've loved to have been there when he won the North America Cup [Tall Dark Stranger], but again, with COVID I couldn't get there. But the Hambletonian was special and I had my family with me so that means a lot too.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following question was asked before Atlanta's win in the Armbro Flight on June 18.]

## Buck I St Pat raced for you at the top level until she was 8 years old. Now 7, how much more do you think Atlanta has in the tank?

I talked to Ronnie [Burke] coming into this year and he thought she was going to be better than she's ever been and I'd have to say she's been a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5





[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4](#)

little disappointing. If she doesn't turn it around, I only have a one-third vote, but I won say it is time [to retire her]. She will race until she shows she is not the best because I don't believe in cheapening her reputation. If she is top 10 instead of top 5, I would strongly urge to retire her and I don't think I'd have any pull-back from my partners.

### **Is Atlanta the best trotting mare in North American history?**

Well, there was Moni Maker, so if she isn't one she's in the top two. She's done everything; she's beaten the boys and won the Hambletonian.

### **In 2021 you partnered with Brad Grant on Atlanta's full sister In Italian at Harrisburg. Having now seen her baby race, what are your expectations?**

Ronnie [Burke] loves her. She didn't do a lot [in her first qualifying start] but what she did was handy. I don't know what her bottom is. It is certainly more than she did. I'm cautiously optimistic. She was a safe buy because she's worth a ton as a broodmare. I wasn't there when they bought her because that was towards the end when my wife was sick, but they said she is one of the most magnificent-looking fillies; like a stud colt. My hope is that she is Atlanta.

### **Is it possible to curtail expectations on such a high-priced yearling (\$750,000)?**

When you spend that much money you better have big expectations. One of the best buys I ever made dollars and cents wise was Tactical Landing. I was the first one asked and the last one in to buy him. He was a disaster as a 2-year-old but when he was syndicated it was a major profit. Jimmy Takter performed the greatest job of training a horse under pressure in a short time in history.

### **You own some of your horses in partnership and some solo. What goes into that decision?**

If somebody asks me I buy in with them. I like the comradery of having partners, like Abe Bassen and Ed Gold. We had a lot of fun and success with 'Buck I', Schnitzledosomthin, his sister and Economy Terror. I like calling them up and talking about it or going to the track with them. Brad Grant might be the greatest guy in the sport and I love owning horses with him. It's funny, I was one of his first partners and he always had horses by himself. I'm going the other way. I've had some minor problems with some of my partners and I've been leaning more and more on buying them with myself.

### **Outside of In Italian, can you give me one 2-year-old you are most looking forward to watch?**

There are a bunch but I bought a yearling maybe five or six years ago from an Amish guy. She was a trotting filly and I renamed her Queen Marlene after my wife. She was ok but nothing special and the guy told me if I ever wanted to sell her back he would buy her as a broodmare. She got done racing and I sold her back to him. Two years later he called me up and told me he had a magnificent-looking Father Patrick colt out of that mare and he'd rather sell him to me than put him in the sale. I told him I wasn't interested. It was early to buy a horse as it was only July. Then he said I named him Prince Howard and I said, ok, I'll buy him. Nancy [Takter] has him.

### **What about 4-year-old Carbine. How much did he impress you in his June 4 gutsy comeback win in the Graduate series?**

There was a horse that truth be told I was wondering why we were bringing him back from 2 to 3 because he didn't do much and I like to call out horses if they don't live up to expectations. Then Eric Cherry said they were

telling him that the horse just keeps growing and growing and he would be a better 3-year-old and probably better 4-year-old. He was a good 3-year-old but he wasn't anything great to watch. Tony brought him back this year and qualified him while I was there and he's just been unbelievable every start.

Todd McCarthy told Eric [Cherry] that [Carbine's] last quarter in his first start this year was the fastest last quarter of any horse he has sat behind in his life. He was just awesome.

### **How would you rate yourself as an owner? Are you laid back or more hands-on?**

Depends on who I'm dealing with. I don't mess with Ron Burke or Nancy Takter, although I'll talk to them and suggest stuff. I'm not a novice and I think they'll tell you that my opinion is a bit better than most, but most of them I'm hands-on and I always put my two cents in. I'm hands-on in terms of managing and watching but I'm laid back in that I realize things happen and horses break down, so I'm more accepting of bad news. It is a lot easier to be accepting when if one goes down you still have 170.



KEN WEINGARTNER

### **In Italian hopes to live up to full-sister Atlanta's reputation in 2022.**

### **If you had the power to change one thing in the sport, what would it be?**

It is not the deepest concern but it is a major concern in the sport, and I'm as guilty as anyone, an inordinate percentage of the good horses are owned by an inordinately small percentage of the owners. I think that is a recipe for disaster when you have six or seven people owning 90% of the top horses. It's bad. I don't know what you can do about it and I'm right in the middle of it. Desperate Man, who won the North America Cup last year and was family owned, that was a feel-good story. The guy bought the horse as a cheap yearling and gave it to them as a wedding present. We need more of that, the little guy winning races.

### **How do you view the future of harness racing?**

The near future is very strong and hopefully we can do something to convince others and keep it strong.

### **Time for the stretch drive:**

**Best Horse you ever saw?:** The best race I ever saw and one of the best horses was Dragon's Lair winning the Breeders Crown. The best horse would have to be Niatross.

**Best Driver Ever?:** Toss-up between John Campbell and Herve Filion.

**Best Trainer?:** Jimmy Takter. When the money is down there is no one better.

**Lasix – Yes or No?:** Yes. I'm a bigger fan of Amicar. It is Lasix but doesn't dehydrate them. I'm for anything that helps the horse but doesn't enhance performance.

**Favorite TV Show?:** The Wire is my favorite of all-time but right now it is Better Call Saul.

**Trotters or Pacers?:** I guess right now it has to be trotters but it was always pacers. My father hated trotters and would never own them so I grew up with all pacers.

# Pebble Beach persona non grata in Meadowlands Pace



## JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [@BergmanJay](#)

Rules have consequences and sometimes it takes years to find out what they are. For those who witnessed Pebble Beach dominate in the C\$1 million North America Cup on June 18 at Woodbine Mohawk Park, there is the natural feeling that the next big race for the son of Downbytheseaside would be The Meadowlands Pace. Historically that has been the case for most North American pacers based in the United States that ventured north for the biggest 3-year-old payday in advance of returning stateside for this country's most consequential sophomore pacing prize.

Pebble Beach isn't eligible for The Meadowlands Pace, something his trainer Noel Daley, a New Jersey-based horseman, regretted.

"Pity he's not Pace-eligible," said Daley in a text earlier this week, suggesting instead that Pebble Beach will aim for the Adios at The Meadows (eliminations July 23, final July 30). "Then he'll spend a lot of time in Kentucky."

Pebble Beach, nor any son or daughter of Downbytheseaside, is eligible to race in 3-year-old stakes events held at The Meadowlands because the sire was retired to stud duty as a 4-year-old and thus was in violation of Meadowlands rules.

Looking back, the "Gural" rules were intended to keep as many of the sport's best 3-year-olds in training and having them return to race at least through their 4-year-old season. Champion Captaintreacherous was a sure-fire bet to be a highly-sought stallion after a brilliant 2 and 3-year-old campaign on the racetrack but his connections did not want to risk that future sons and daughters would be ineligible to race in premier events at The Meadowlands and campaigned him as a 4-year-old in 2014, where he made just \$175K on the racetrack. From a dollars-and-cents standpoint, 2014 was a bitter disappointment to the Captaintreacherous ownership, something they can now look back on eight years later and swallow a whole lot easier than they could then.

Downbytheseaside didn't have the same racing career as Captaintreacherous did and it's impossible to forecast what a 4-year-old season on the racetrack would have been worth to his connections if they opted to race instead of breed. Perhaps a bigger motivator at the time was the idea of bringing a son of Somebeachsomewhere to the state of Ohio to breed. The Ohio breeding program was ready to bloom and having a horse with the talent and male-blood line of Downbytheseaside was pretty much a guarantee of a full book from within the state and interest from mare owners outside "Buckeye" land. In essence it may have been much more difficult for Downbytheseaside's connections to lose a year in the stallion barn as opposed to potentially offspring being banned at The Meadowlands.

Fast forward to 2022 and it's somewhat ironic that a rule put in place with the idea of keeping talented horses on the racetrack now finds itself doing the exact opposite. While the rule was meant as a requirement that would spur interest in longevity and name recognition, the names missing from The Meadowlands Pace are now the subject of conversation.

Pebble Beach is the best 3-year-old pacer in training right now, something Daley alluded to in our conversation. The right now part of it is what matters in that it would mean his presence at any racetrack is significant. That he won't be in East Rutherford, NJ for The Meadowlands Pace hurts horse racing fans in a greater way than it penalizes the owners of Downbytheseaside, or for that matters those who paid to purchase them at sales arenas.

What's different in 2022 than perhaps 2014 when Captaintreacherous raced as a 4-year-old is quite clear. Daley will have the luxury of racing Pebble Beach in Kentucky for months. As a dual-eligible in both Ohio and Kentucky, Pebble Beach's owners can earn significantly without having to ship cross country to do so. So lucrative is the money in Kentucky that Pebble Beach's connections ceded the opportunity to enter the \$500,000 Messenger at Yonkers with eliminations on June 24. Had the connections made their intention to race in the July 1 final known in advance, it's more than likely a few of the dozen entries wouldn't have paid the \$5,000 fee to race against him.

The absence of Pebble Beach obviously hurt the Messenger as well but with no restrictions Gulf Shores, another from the phenomenal first crop of



NEW IMAGE MEDIA

**Trainer Noel Daley and driver Todd McCarthy won't get a chance to win another stakes race with Pebble Beach until the Adios.**

Downbytheseaside, will add luster to the Triple Crown event. Should Gulf Shores go on to capture the final he would be another prime attraction in any major sophomore contest. He proved that in a major way at The Meadowlands last year finishing just a nose behind Monte Miki in the Breeders Crown. Striking as it might seem, the first three finishers in last year's 2-year-old colt and gelding Breeders Crown at The Meadowlands will all be absent from this year's Meadowlands Pace. Race-winner Monte Miki was injured in his return to race as a 3-year-old and retired and Gulf Shores and Pebble Beach, the second and third finishers respectively, were prohibited by a rule in place well before they took their first baby steps on the racetrack.

Hindsight is 20-20 and by no means can anyone suggest the desired outcome of rules restricting early retirement weren't intended to have a positive overall impact on the sport's future. The unpredictability of what the future holds for horses on the racetrack and in the stud barn is really the story here. No set of rules, whether well-intended or not, can guarantee horses will go along with the programs. Captaintreacherous was a great 2 and 3-year-old but not a great 4-year-old. For years Ohio-sired horses had limited success racing outside of the Buckeye State in Grand Circuit action. It was impossible to know that a single stallion would literally change that dynamic virtually overnight.

Though The Meadowlands Pace will have some major stars absent this year, history suggests it will bounce back bigger and better in the years ahead.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: When reached for comment about the possibility of eliminating the rules prohibiting the progeny of 2- and 3-year-olds of stallions who retired after their 3-year-old season, Jeff Gural said that "It will never be removed" and added if he received more support for it from certainly industry partners that it would have been more successful. "[The rule] still may impact some owners if they like to race and care about the sport."]



# Alexander seeks Messenger upsets, spots in the \$500K final

By Jay Bergman

Travis Alexander was frank when asked about Pleaseletmeknow, one of 12 horses entered in a pair of \$40,000 eliminations for the MGM Grand Messenger Stakes Friday (June 24) at Yonkers Raceway.

"He was the worst colt I had training down," said Alexander. "It all changed for him once he got behind the starting gate."

Pleaseletmeknow, a son of American Ideal, landed post four in Friday's ninth race, one of two Alexander trainees hoping to qualify for the July 1 \$500,000 final in the first jewel of the pacing Triple Crown.

Pleaseletmeknow has won three of five starts this year after an abbreviated 2-year-old campaign. "He got sick after the New York Sire Stakes final last year and we shut him down," said Alexander of the homebred.

Pleaseletmeknow enters the Messenger trials off a second-place finish in a New York Sire Stakes division at Vernon Downs last Sunday (June 19) and the loss left his trainer puzzled to some degree.

"I thought he should have won," said Alexander. "He's a small horse and it was extremely windy at Vernon. Matt [Kakaley] knew that and was trying to save him as much as possible on the turn, but it didn't work out."

With six horses in the field all Pleaseletmeknow needs to do is finish fourth, but Alexander is hoping the horse will regain his winning form over the half-mile track.

"He's the kind of horse that only does what he has to do," said Alexander. "You could train him a trip in 3:00 or 1:52 and he'll do just as much as he has to."

Alexander is thrilled to have this type of horse in his stable. "He's the type that takes care of himself and should be great to race in the years ahead, especially over the half-mile track at Yonkers."

As for this Friday, Pleaseletmeknow will be right next to Hammering Hank (post three) on the starting gate and that is something concerning to Alexander.

"I'd say Hammering Hank is the horse to beat in the Messenger. You look at what Brett Pelling's horses did at Woodbine Mohawk Park last Saturday [June 18] and you see how he gets them to perform at a high level in major races."

Hammering Hank has the connections necessary to capture the Messenger but not the half-mile track experience. That will be tested to some degree this Friday. Hammering Hank was a solid third in his lone 3-year-old start at Harrah's Philadelphia on June 8.

"I think he raced very well," said Pelling about the effort. "It wasn't easy to make up ground from where he was coming from."

Hammering Hank finished third behind Alexander's other entry in the Messenger, namely Layton Hanover.

"I bought Layton Hanover off of Chris Ryder in the January sale," said Alexander. "He'd been racing into January, I just thought he needed a



BILL BURKE

**Pleaseletmeknow is a NY Sire Stakes winner who takes on Grand Circuit foes in the MGM Messenger.**

break and sent him to Florida to freshen up for the 3-year-old season. We just jogged him every other day for a while."

Layton Hanover had a \$65,000 price tag in January and in five starts this year has already paid for himself with earnings of \$74K and the lone win at Harrah's Philadelphia.

"I brought him up here [Yonkers] last Friday [June 17] to train over the track," said Alexander. "It was the first time over a half-mile track and he was very good. He buzzed a last quarter in 26 and change and paced strongly into the turn."

Layton Hanover was able to go wire-to-wire in his Pennsylvania Sire Stakes victory for driver Matt Kakaley in a career-best 1:50 1/5 clocking on June 8. The Captaintreacherous-sired gelding has finished on the board in 12 of his 15 lifetime starts.

Trainer Brian Brown skipped the North America Cup with Gulf Shores but he's bringing the son of Downbytheseaside to Yonkers for Friday's Messenger trials. One of last year's best 2-year-olds, Gulf Shores captured the Ohio Sire Stakes final at Northfield in September and then went on to a pair of impressive miles in the Breeders Crown elimination and final at The Meadowlands in October. Gulf Shores had the misfortune of finishing second in both events by just inches to Pebble Beach and then Crown champion Monte Miki.

Following a slower than expected start this year, Gulf Shores reached the winner's circle for the first time capturing a division of the Ohio Sire Stakes at Northfield Park on June 11 in a career-best 1:51 clocking. Yannick Gingras reunites with Gulf Shores (post three) in the seventh race \$40,000 elimination.

Friday's 11-race Yonkers program will also feature two \$40,000 elimination races for the MGM Yonkers Trot, with the filly Joviality S among 13 looking for a spot in the \$500,000 final. Yonkers will host both the \$500,000 Messenger and Yonkers Trot on July 1 along with the companion filly events that did not require eliminations this week.

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# Rekindling the family connection to harness racing



## AT THE TRACK

By Darin Zoccali [@AtTheTrack7](#)

Each year at this time, I reflect on what brought me to the sport of horse racing. Like many people my age in the industry, I was introduced to horse racing by my father. So each Father's Day, I think about all those experiences we shared and how it led me to where I am today. This time of year actually hits a bit harder as we lost my father three years ago this June 22. As I reflected upon all the times we shared going to the races, I realized that for the younger generations, times have changed.

Horse racing is different than other sports in that you can't fall in love with the sport by playing it unless you actually become a professional driver, jockey or trainer. While many of us may have been drawn to other sports by attending them with our parents, similar to my experience in racing, there was also the opportunity to play those sports with friends.

Whether it was Little League Baseball, CYO Basketball, any other organized league, or just playing in the street with friends, those sports became a real part of our lives whereas horse racing, for myself at least, became something I shared as a bond with my father. That bond was centered on going to the racetrack with my dad and while there still may be 40,000 people going to Yankee Stadium routinely, due to advance deposit wagering and the era of simulcasting, horse racing certainly does not see the same crowds it did when I was growing up. The opportunity to grow up loving horse racing by frequently going to the races with a person in your life around to introduce the sport to you seems to have diminished.

Fast forward to the younger generation of 2022, one which is all about speed, getting information and doing things quickly. Taking a day to travel to a racetrack and wait 25 minutes for each race to begin just doesn't have the same appeal. There are too many options available to keep a 9-year-old entertained. There are plenty of activities and sports to participate in if a child enjoys it. On a rainy day, kids can jump on their iPad and literally have video calls with groups of friends who are all playing a game together.

My son enjoys horse racing. He'll watch it with me at home from time to time. He asks questions about it and every so often we will spend a day at the races. But it's not the same as when I was a kid. By the time I was 9-years-old, I could read a racing program or a Daily Racing Form better than any book in school. I knew what every number represented, I knew what every symbol meant. I knew all the different bet types that were available and I knew how to form a wager. At the age of nine I understood what a trifecta part-wheel was.

When my son comes to the racetrack, he picks out names, he likes to look at the horses in the paddock and head to the rail to watch the race. But he isn't opening a program and asking me questions about what he is looking at and when his sister or cousins who are with him want to walk around, play at the playground or do other things, I certainly am not going to make him remained glued to his seat so I can explain it all to him.

I was the exact opposite. I wanted to learn about it, stay glued in my seat and handicapped the races. I didn't care if the other children I was with were off in the playground having fun. Sitting next to my dad looking at the races was where I wanted to be. I can't force that on my son, or my daughter for that matter. All I can do is expose them to racing and allow them to enjoy it however they choose. Just last month on a trip to

Monmouth Park, my son hit a win bet on a horse that was 20-1. Of course I made the bet for him and cashed the ticket. But had my father handed me \$40 after winning a race, I would have been hooked. I would have wanted to know when we were coming back. My son was thinking about if he wanted to save the money or if there was something that he really wanted to buy.

It really hasn't been until recently that all of this registered with me. A lot of us as horseplayers, we aren't physically going to the racetrack nearly as much as we used to. We are happy to wager with our Advance Deposit Wagering site of choice and watch the races at home. By doing so, we aren't having as many days at the races with our children and you can see it when you go to the racetrack.

In the summer, when I used to go to Monmouth Park, we would have to get to the track an hour before the gates opened, line up with our chairs and coolers and take off running from the gate to get the picnic table we wanted. Last month I walked into Monmouth Park 15 minutes before the first race and had my choice of where I wanted to sit.

When we went to The Meadowlands, especially on the big days, we would have to run up the old ramps that lead to The Meadowlands grandstand, run up the moving escalators and head to the Clubhouse theater just to make sure we got a seat.

I don't have a grand solution other than to say, we should make an effort to get to the races more often, myself included. We need younger people to be exposed to it and to give them an opportunity to fall in love with it. Not only to ensure that we continue to have horseplayers, but people who want to pursue a career in racing. I am a horseplayer, sure, but I can tell you my dad was very proud that all the times he brought me to the track led to a career in horse racing for his son.

## *Treacherous Dragon, Wickedly Innocent now with trainer Nancy Takter*

By Greg Reinhart

Treacherous Dragon and Wickedly Innocent, the top two finishers in last Saturday's Fan Hanover Stakes final for 3-year-old pacing fillies at Woodbine Mohawk Park, are now in the barn of trainer Nancy Takter. Owned by Hot Lead Farm LLC., both horses had been trained by Brett Pelling until the transfer.

"I've known for four weeks I was getting them after the Fan Hanover," said Takter. "It's a great honor to have these fillies join my barn. They are both very professional and have a good foundation on them, so I expect them to continue to race well."

A daughter of Captaintreacherous, Treacherous Dragon is undefeated in five starts this year, having won a division of the Pennsylvania All-Stars and Pennsylvania Sire Stakes prior to her tallies in her Fan Hanover elimination and the final. She'll make her first start for Takter in a PaSS division on Sunday at The Downs at Mohegan Sun Pocono.

Wickedly Innocent, by American Ideal, came into the Fan Hanover with a five-for-five record in 2022 and was second in both her elimination and the final. She was entered in the Park MGM Pace at Yonkers Raceway and advanced straight to the final on July 1 after no eliminations were needed for that event.



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# McCarthy getting acquainted with Cuatro De Julio in Graduate

By Ken Weingartner

Andy McCarthy is still getting to know Cuatro De Julio, but after two starts behind the 4-year-old trotting stallion, he knows he likes him.

"I really like him," McCarthy said. "He can go fast; he's got a really big set of lungs. He's a big, strong, good-looking horse. He's definitely a top horse, for sure."

So far, McCarthy has driven Cuatro De Julio to a second-place finish behind Ecurie D DK in the Arthur J. Cutler Memorial at The Meadowlands, which went in a world-record 1:49 1/5, and to a win in the first round of the inaugural 4-year-old Kentucky-bred Series at Oak Grove in 1:51 1/5, a track record.

Cuatro De Julio and McCarthy make start No. 3 together in Saturday's first of two \$50,000 Graduate Series divisions for 4-year-old trotters at The Meadowlands.

"I thought his performance the first time I raced him at The Meadowlands was incredible," McCarthy said. "He raced down at Oak Grove and went around there in (1):51 pretty easy. He got a little fired up at The Meadowlands, but at Oak Grove he was much more relaxed for me. I'm kind of learning as we go, as well."

"I think I can kind of do whatever I want with him now hopefully. It's just a matter of figuring out where you need to be and your timing with him."

Trained by Marie Ortolan Bar and owned by Bar and D Farm, the homebred son of Trixton-Clarabelle has won 13 of 29 career races and earned \$586,711. Last year, Cuatro De Julio hit the board in nine of 12 starts, winning three – a division of the New Jersey Sire Stakes, a division of the Kentucky Championship Series, and a Breeders Crown elimination.

His five second-place finishes in 2021 included the Kentucky Futurity,

New Jersey Sire Stakes final, and Kentucky Championship Series final.

In his career, Cuatro De Julio has finished second in three races that were won with times of 1:49.3 or faster, with the Futurity and Kentucky Championship final, which he lost by a nose, joining the Cutler Memorial in that a category.

"He's very talented," McCarthy said. "I'm still kind of yet to drive him out of a hole, but I raced against him in the past, and he's raced out of a hole really well, so I know he can do it both ways."

Cuatro De Julio's division of the Graduate also includes Rattle My Cage, fresh off a 1:50.2 victory at The Big M on June 11; Storm Is Raging, who has won four consecutive races since joining trainer Ron Burke; and Venerate, a Dan Patch Award winner in 2020 at age 2.

"It's going to be an interesting race, that's for sure," McCarthy said.

The second Graduate division includes Logan Park and Sonofamistery, who have each won a previous leg of the series.

Saturday's card also has one \$40,000 Graduate division for 4-year-old female trotters, which includes Dan Patch Award-winner Bella Bellini, as well as one \$40,000 division for 4-year-old female pacers and two \$50,000 splits for 4-year-old male pacers.

Test Of Faith, the 2021 Horse of the Year in the U.S. who won a Graduate division in the opening round of the series and captured the Roses Are Red Stakes this past weekend, faces six mares Saturday including previous Graduate leg winners Mikala and Oakwoodanabella IR.

Carbine, a two-time Graduate division winner, is in the first group for the male pacers along with millionaire Charlie May. The second includes Graduate division winners Abuckabett Hanover and Bulldog Hanover as well as Charles Juravinski Memorial Cup champion Line-drive Hanover.

Racing begins at 6:20 p.m. EDT at The Meadowlands with a strong 14-race card.



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# Joviality S set for Yonkers Trot

By Ken Weingartner

It has been 25 years since Continentalvictory became the last filly to defeat the boys in the Yonkers Trot. Joviality S will try to be the next.

Joviality S will take her first step toward attempting to duplicate Continentalvictory's accomplishment on Friday (June 24) when she meets six male rivals in the first of two \$40,000 eliminations of the MGM Yonkers Trot for 3-year-olds at Yonkers Raceway. The top-four finishers from each elim advance to the Yonkers Trot final on July 1.

The Yonkers Trot is this year's first jewel in the Trotting Triple Crown, followed by the Hambletonian on Aug. 6 at the Meadowlands and Kentucky Futurity on Oct. 9 at the Red Mile. Joviality S, undefeated in three races this year, is the 8-5 morning-line favorite in her Yonkers Trot elimination, starting from post five with Brian Sears driving for trainer Marcus Melander and owner Courant Inc.

Joviality S has won her three starts in 2022 — two divisions of the New York Sire Stakes and the Empire Breeders Classic for 3-year-old filly trotters — by a total of more than 20 lengths. She captured her seasonal debut in 1:53.2 at Yonkers, just one-fifth of a second off the track record established by Plunge Blue Chip in 2018, and won the EBC in 1:51 at Vernon Downs, only two-fifths of a second off the track record set by Atlanta, also in 2018.

Prior to this year, the last time a filly was entered in the Yonkers Trot came in 2009, when Celebrity Athena challenged the boys. She finished fourth in her elimination and eighth in the final. The decision to enter Joviality S in the race rather than the companion New York New York Mile filly trot was made after seeing how she came out of last Friday's EBC race.

"Everything felt good on Sunday when we jogged her, so in that case it was an easy decision to put her in there," Melander said. "Obviously, everyone has seen she's been very good this year. She's done everything right so far. The first race at Yonkers when she just jogged in (1:53.2) after only one qualifier, I wasn't expecting that. And she's been getting better and better for every start. I just have a lot of confidence in that horse."

Joviality S, a homebred daughter of Chapter Seven-Pasithea Face S, is undefeated in three lifetime starts around the half-mile oval at Yonkers, where she won last year's New York Sire Stakes championship. Other triumphs in 2021 for Joviality S included the Breeders Crown and Goldsmith Maid.

For her career, she has won 12 of 15 races, finished second twice, and earned \$1.04 million.

"She grew a little bit (from last year) but she's a very feminine-looking horse," Melander said. "What she developed most is probably her speed. Even though she was fast last year, I think she found another gear this winter. It really feels like that. She's always been good, she's always been strong and tough, but she's stepped up her game even more."

"She's a very laidback horse at home. She does her work but not more than that. But when she comes to the racetrack, she knows what it's all about. She just gets her game face on. That's how she works. That's probably why she's so good, too, because as soon as she steps off the track, she takes care of herself. That's important."


After winning the Yonkers Trot in 1996, Continentalvictory captured the Hambletonian a month later as part of a Horse of the Year campaign and Hall of Fame career. Melander, though, is focused only on Friday.

"We'll take one race at a time," Melander said. "I'm excited to race her there and we'll see how she does."

Dover In Motion, an Indiana Sire Stakes champion last year and winner of nine of 11 career races, is the 4-1 second choice in the first Yonkers Trot elimination. Jordan Stratton will drive the gelding for trainer Jamie Macomber.


The morning-line choice in the second elimination, at 2-1, is Empire Breeders Classic male champion Justice. The colt has won five of seven lifetime races for trainer-driver Ake Svanstedt. Double Deceiver, a Kentucky Sire Stakes champ last year, is the 7-2 second choice. David Miller will drive the gelding for trainer Carter Pinske.

Friday's card at Yonkers, which begins at 6:55 p.m. (EDT), also includes two eliminations of the Messenger Stakes for 3-year-old male pacers.



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**THURSDAY, JUNE 23**

## RACE 11

(5) IMPRINCESSGEMMA A delivered in pretty handy fashion against NW10000L5's last Thursday and now switches barn to Dowse and drivers to Bartlett.

-Greg Reinhart



## RACE 7

(7) CHEETO was interfered with and thrown off stride is his debut race then he proceeded to pace the fastest final 1/8th of a mile that these eyes have seen at Hanover Raceway. He followed that up with a predictable win at Grand River now he faces tougher which will help his pace.

-Garnet Barnsdale



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

**FRIDAY, JUNE 24**

## RACE 7

This is a good spot for (4) SO FRISKY, who exits some tough 'B' track races. Filion will likely get aggressive with her vs these.

-Barnsdale



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

## RACE 5

(6) SIX DAY WARS debuts for trainer Izzy Estrada in this race. That angle doesn't offer the value it used to, but it's still pretty reliable, and I'd expect a strong effort.

-Reinhart



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