

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2023

# Anxiously awaiting round two

*The first crops of Tall Dark Stranger and Papi Rob Hanover are now yearlings with many bred to be champions on the track in 2024*

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Email the Editor [DGiwner@DRF.com](mailto:DGiwner@DRF.com)



## JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [@BergmanJay](#)

Back in 2020 the promise of a major confrontation in the 3-year-old male pacing ranks was dashed early in the year when Papi Rob Hanover's racing career came to an end. The year would finish out as expected, as his rival Tall Dark Stranger dominated the rest of the sophomore class on his way to year-end honors.

In 2019 Papi Rob Hanover and Tall Dark Stranger met four times, all at Woodbine Mohawk Park, and the results were mixed to say the least. In the rich Metro pace Tall Dark Stranger captured both elimination and final races with Papi Rob Hanover close behind in second.

At season's end the pair renewed their rivalry in the Breeders Crown where Papi Rob Hanover got the best of Tall Dark Stranger in both the elimination and finals of the event. The victory in the Crown final would be short-lived as a minor contact issue between the sulkies of Papi Rob Hanover and Tall Dark Stranger in the stretch would be deemed sufficient evidence to disqualify him and give Tall Dark Stranger the title.

As 3-year-olds the pair met just twice, both at The Meadowlands, where Tall Dark Stranger won on each occasion, with the final proving an epic struggle as the pair matched strides and Tall Dark Stranger came back on towards the wire in a 1:47 2/5 mile. Perhaps lost in history-telling, if not for the benefit of the USTA's vast past performance charts, was the fact that Tall Dark Stranger drew post three in his elimination and five in the final while Papi Rob Hanover was



NIKKI SHERMAN

**Papi Rob Hanover has a registered foal by Road Bet, who has already produced Cattlewash and Niki Hill.**

saddled with post 10 in the same elimination race and post nine in the lucrative final.

Papi Rob Hanover did do something special in his abbreviated sophomore campaign when he went to The Meadows for the Adios trials a week following the Meadowlands Pace. With his only good post draw of the year, driver David Miller took no chances racing from behind and instead sent Papi Rob on a mission down the road, shattering the track mark with a 1:47 1/5 world-record performance. That would be the final race of Papi

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LISA PHOTO

**Tall Dark Stranger beat Papi Rob Hanover in the 2020 Meadowlands Pace and perhaps his progeny will have equal success in 2024 and beyond.**

#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Rob Hanover's racing career but enough to send the son of Somebeachsomewhere to Hanover Shoe Farms for the beginning of a new occupation as a stallion.

Tall Dark Stranger completed his two-year racing career with incredible numbers, winning 19 of his 22 starts and finishing second on two occasions. The Nancy Takter-trained son of Bettor's Delight continuously fought back when tested in the homestretch and earned the "heart of a champion" title with performance after performance.

Tall Dark Stranger also earned a spot at Hanover Shoe Farms as a stallion and like his adversary on the track, bred a full book of mares during his first season at stud in 2021.

The battle between these two generational stars left many in the sport, including this scribe, wondering what the final totals would have been had the two been given more chances to go eye-to-eye following the 2020 Meadowlands Pace.

As unfulfilled as their racing wars would prove to be, the battle lines will once again be drawn for Tall Dark Stranger and Papi Rob Hanover in 2023 as the pair have an ample supply of well-bred colts and fillies from their first crops, many that will show up in the fall in major yearling auctions. Some of course may not as those who bred to these standouts in 2021 may wish to retain the offspring for 2-year-old stakes events in 2024.

What's interesting about this battle is that it comes with very few past performances to work on. Racing careers and pedigrees don't always align to produce the same outcome. While Tall Dark Stranger indeed was the winner on the racetrack, it's hard to say if that will make the difference in the breeding shed. What the two offer is a stark difference when analyzing pedigree. Tall Dark Stranger is a son of the legendary stallion Bettor's Delight. As such, one might think he's got an excellent chance for success. Yet thus far in Bettor's Delight's career he has not sired a stallion that resembles him in any capacity. Papi Rob Hanover is a son of Somebeachsomewhere, a great racehorse, perhaps better sire, and most definitely sire of sires. Captaintreacherous, Somebeachsomewhere's early racing sensation, has followed in his father's footsteps. Yet it's horses like So Surreal, Downbytheseaside, Huntsville and Stay Hungry that have solidified Somebeachsomewhere's claim to being a stallion maker. Now Papi Rob Hanover appears destined to be the next in the powerful line.

Like every breeding equation, one would be wise not to forget that

broodmares play a role that's at least 50 percent of the equation if not higher. That said, it's perhaps where Tall Dark Stranger may indeed have an incalculable edge over his contemporary. Of the 99 registered foals from Tall Dark Stranger's first crop 45 are offspring of mares sired by either Somebeachsomewhere or his son Captaintreacherous.

Given his higher profile on the racetrack and his accessibility to cross with some impressive mares, Tall Dark Stranger's first crop appears to have a better chance of success, at least on paper and some 18 months before their first races. The first crop includes the first foal from one of the greatest pacing fillies of the last decade in Party Girl Hill, a filly. The yearling has an interesting racing background in that her dam and sire captured separate Tattersalls Stakes divisions at The Red Mile in October of 2020 in the exact same clocking of 1:47 2/5.

Tall Dark Stranger has a colt from the phenomenal broodmare Great Memories. Though her 13th foal, Great Memories has connected with all kinds of sires through her career, notably in recent times with world-champion Warrawee Ubeaut and the top invitational performer Warrawee Vital. That duo was sired by Sweet Lou and Captaintreacherous, respectively. The mare was bred to Cam Fella-line stallions early in her career and produced the extremely fast and talented Warrawee Needy from her third foal. Tall Dark Stranger brings the Cam Fella line back some 13 years later.

From 95 registered foals Papi Rob Hanover will have his chances as well with one filly popping out immediately on the paper. The dam is Road Bet and she has already connected with the Somebeachsomewhere line with her first foal, the world champion Cattlewash. Her third and fourth foals were no slouches as well, with the fillies Niki Hill, a standout in 2021, and Earthwindfire, a Grand Circuit winner as a 2-year-old in 2022.

On the colt side, perhaps the young Papi Rob Hanover can give a boost to a veteran mare named Shot Togo Bluechip. The dam has already produced millionaires Heston Blue Chip and Sunshine Blue Chip from her first two foals. Now with her 13th foal name Screenshot, she's bred to a Somebeachsomewhere-line stallion for just the third time. The first cross produced the late-developing 1:47 4/5 performer Carbine, who rose through the classes as a 4-year-old in 2022.

Over the last few years, the focus during many of the yearling sales has been keen among first-year trotting stallions. It appears just judging from the offspring from Tall Dark Stranger and Papi Rob Hanover that pacers will rule this fall. While buyers will be competing, the prospect of their sons and daughters racing in 2024 is something we can hardly wait to occur.



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## AT THE TRACK

By Darin Zoccali [@AtTheTrack7](#)

# U.S. harness wagering could continue to decline without change

The trend of increasing handle on Standardbred races contested in the United States came to a rather abrupt halt in 2022 as wagering declined by \$137 million or 8.44% from the previous year. The per-race average and the handle per betting interest also reflected very similar declines (-7.7% and -6.87%, respectively). Like any business, when performance declines, we have to look back and ask why. We also have to put forth a strategy to try and improve performance moving forward.

But in 2023, at least the first few months, this is going to prove to be a difficult task. In 2022, Pompano Park produced a handle of over \$36 million. Unfortunately, racing at Pompano Park is no more and while some of that handle will be redistributed amongst other racetracks, it certainly will impact numbers the first four months of the year.

Another issue we are facing is the COVID reality of the 2021-2022 holiday season. If you recall, after Thanksgiving last year, COVID cases sharply increased and throughout the holiday season, many people canceled plans. I remember that we were supposed to have two dozen people at our house for Christmas and nobody came. People canceled travel plans and remained home. What does this have to do with horse racing? Well, when a horse player is not getting on a plane for vacation or to visit family on the holidays and instead he or she is stuck at home, they are much more inclined to wager on horse racing than if they were traveling. So, in December 2021 and into January 2022, handle on horse racing saw a spike. The reality of that is hitting hard as racing is up against numbers that it simply will not reach right now for the reasons stated above.

While this doesn't necessarily mean that harness racing cannot bounce back and gain traction as the year moves on, it is quite likely that it will get off to a rocky start. It was encouraging to see Northfield post a \$2 million night on New Year's Day. They did benefit from being the only American Standardbred signal racing at that time, but still encouraging.

What is not encouraging is the impact of sports betting. It is quite real. Racing insiders have seen that on Sundays since the NFL season began, handle at racetracks, generally speaking, has been down when compared to previous years. That is not a coincidence. While the NFL season may be drawing to a close in the next six weeks, sports betting is not. It happened in Ohio on January 1 and with each passing month, quarter and year, more and more states will be legalizing sports betting. We can talk about cross-promotion and cross-selling horse racing to sports players as much as we want, but history has shown that when gambling alternatives arrive, it is not a good thing for racing handle.

For racing, one of its earliest rivals would be state lotteries that chewed into handle. Soon after that it was casinos. For proof, all you need to look at is New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In the mid to late 1970's, New Jersey racing was thriving. The Meadowlands became the mecca of harness racing and also offered an elite night-time Thoroughbred meet. Garden State Park was rolling along. Monmouth Park was truly the shore's greatest stretch. Atlantic City Racecourse was frequented by famous actors, singers and celebrities from all walks of life. In fact, Garden State, Monmouth Park and Atlantic City Racecourse were referred to as the "Golden Triangle of Racing." In Pennsylvania there was Keystone Race-track, Liberty Bell just a couple of miles from Keystone, and Brandywine was a stone's throw away in Wilmington, Delaware.

But when casinos in Atlantic City began to open, and through the early 1980's as more and more casinos appeared, horse racing had to contract. By 1986, Liberty Bell was gone. Then Brandywine would close its doors in 1989. Garden State Park held on longer, but ran its last race in May 2001. Atlantic City Racecourse began abbreviating its meets in 1998, and while the track would hold on for nearly two decades running a limited number of race days, it too would subsequently close in 2015.

## North American Standardbred handle flat year-over-year

According to statistics provided by United States Trotting Association and Standardbred Canada, adjusted (after converting Canadian dollars to U.S.) total handle on Standardbred races in 2022 declined less than one-half of one percent versus 2021, dropping from 1.946 billion to 1.936 billion.

While wagering on U.S. races decreased by 8.44% (\$137 million), Canadian handle was up 39.4% (\$127 million). The sharp increase in Canadian wagering (and seemingly the dip in handle on U.S. races) is directly related to an increase of 231 racing cards in the country as it reduced or eliminated COVID-related restrictions.

Handle on North American Standardbred racing increased modestly when comparing 2022 to 2019, the last year there were no pre-pandemic closures. The total climbed from 1.91 billion to the previously mentioned 1.93 billion. The slight rise in handle is more impressive when considering that the U.S. had 145 fewer racing dates in 2022 and Canadian contested 407 fewer races. With a conservative average handle per race of \$40,000 and an estimate of 10 races per card in the U.S., the reduction in handle comes to about \$70 million (USD).

The Meadowlands has remained the gold star of harness racing, but was nearly closed in 2010 when Governor Christie wanted to focus the state's gaming efforts on revitalizing Atlantic City and "get out of the racing business."

This column isn't meant to be doom and gloom. But harness racing needs to be cognizant of the fact that gambling competition for racing has always proved to be problematic. Sure, there are partnerships between casinos and racetracks, or sportsbooks and casinos. But on a more national scale, the fact that sports betting is now legal in approximately half the country, will prove a challenge for racing. After all, gamblers don't print money in their basements so when new opportunities arise there is more to spread around. It simply provides more options. If a bettor in Ohio can now wager on the Super Bowl, it's plausible that \$250 that was originally going to Northfield Park is now going to the AFC Championship game so he or she can bet on the Cincinnati Bengals. Over time, those changes add up and what they add up to is a decline in handle.

There are many areas in which racing can look to make improvements to combat the competition. Whether it be takeout rates, new and innovative promotional offers, more attractive wagering options, a stronger presence on national television, a harness racing application that streams all the racetracks on Apple TV, Amazon Fire, etc., or a variety of other ideas. Harness racing needs to have a game plan. Sports betting isn't going anywhere and it will only take up a larger part of the gambling pie as time moves forward. Business as usual will not work.



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# 2018 Metro winner Stag Party back on the track at The Big M

By Jay Bergman

The Meadowlands ushers in a new year of racing this weekend and with its arrival comes a horse to the track that has spent the last three years as a stallion in Ontario. Stag Party saw his number of mares bred over that time decrease with each year and finally in October his owners thought better of a fourth year in the stud barn and elected to return to the Bettor's Delight-sired horse to the racetrack.

"I got him in October," said Chris Ryder after receiving a call from co-owner Eric Cherry.

Stag Party was a sensation in 2018 when he captured the Metro Pace for 2-year-olds. While the Ontario-bred spent much of his sophomore season away from Grand Circuit action, he did manage to conclude his season with a victory over the Yonkers Raceway half-mile track in 1:51 4/5.

Ryder prepped Stag Party for action but wasn't enamored with his performance when he qualified on December 16.

"He really isn't a front-end horse,"

Ryder said in reaction to a 2:01 effort over Freehold's half-mile track.

On New Year's Eve, prior to the track being forced into cancellation due to heavy fog, Stag Party made his mile-track return in a qualifier. The results were much better with the final result a win in 1:51 1/5 over a pair of seasoned veteran upper class performers.

"That was a much better effort," Ryder said. "I think they got to the half in 57 and three quarters in 1:24."

With \$756K banked during his two seasons of racing, Stag Party should at some time be able to join the higher-level classes, though Ryder wasn't going to get ahead of himself just yet.

"He's going to need a few races for sure," Ryder said in deference to the obvious, that Stag Party has not raced competitively in more than three full years.

A positive note of course is that many from the Bettor's Delight line do improve with age and the now 7-year-old with three years away from the track likely returns a much sounder horse. Whether he'll be of the caliber necessary to go with the elite class remains to be seen.

"We definitely have in mind to take him to Yonkers," said Ryder with obvious hopes that he can rise to the level to perhaps compete in the Borgata series this March.

On Saturday Stag Party drew post six in the tenth race on the Meadowlands program and will face at least one horse that raced in last year's Borgata series, namely Covered Bridge. Also a 7-year-old, Covered Bridge had been racing competitively against Open company at Yonkers before returning to The Meadowlands in the non-winners of \$20,000 class where he finished fifth on December 17. Covered Bridge drew the pole in the 10-horse field.

My Pal Joe (post three) was a 1:48 3/5 winner at The Meadowlands in 2021 but struggled to regain that form in 2022, winning just twice in 21 starts. The Erica Chartrand-trained son of Roll With Joe finds an improved spot in this class after consecutive eight-hole draws.

Trainer Nifty Norman has had success with a minimal number of imports from Down Under and he may have found another diamond in Belmont Royale N, who captured his first two U.S. starts at The Meadowlands while pacing home in 26-second final quarters. Belmont Royale N was a non-factor racing from far back in his final 2022 start at Harrah's Philadelphia and returns to the Meadowlands from post two here.

In addition to Stag Party, Ryder has a strong group returning for 2023. "Niki Hill just arrived back from Kentucky," Ryder said. "Twin B Joe



NEW IMAGE MEDIA

Stag Party steps away from the breeding shed to make his first start since December 2019.

Fresh is returning tonight [Wednesday 1/4]."

Ryder was more than impressed with how Niki Hill closed out an abbreviated sophomore season with a solid second in the TVG Mares Pace at The Meadowlands. "We're going to point her to all of the Open races," said Ryder of Niki Hill.

Last year Twin B Joe Fresh pulled off a Sire Stakes double when she captured both Kentucky and New York championships in a manner of weeks. "She'll be staked to everything," Ryder said with anticipation that the Roll With Joe-sired sophomore filly will tackle the best in the sport's biggest events in 2023.

Ryder is also happy, though it's obviously early in the game, with the first crop of Bettor's Wish under his care. "I've got nine of them," Ryder said. "They're all doing well."

The Meadowlands' first weekend of racing in 2023 commences on Friday with 14 races and a first post time of 6:20 p.m.

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| \$300,000 John Cashman Memorial Trot          | \$175,000 Roll With Joe Pace                    |
| \$275,000 Sam McKee Memorial Pace             | \$175,000 Crawford Farms Trot                   |
| \$175,000 Dorothy Houghton Memorial Mare Pace | \$150,000 Perfect Sting Mare Pace               |
| \$175,000 Dr John R Steele Memorial Mare Trot | \$150,000 Joie De Vie Mare Trot                 |
| \$175,000 Lady Liberty Mare Pace              | \$100,000 Miss Versatility Mare Trotting Series |

EVENTS CLOSE MARCH 15



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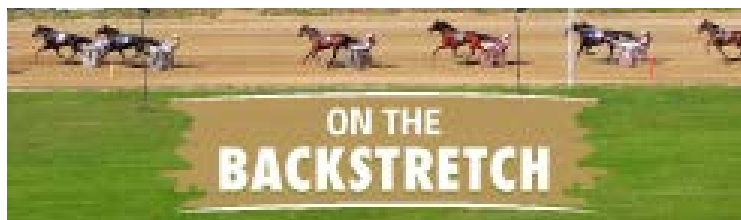
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## EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner [@harnessveguy](https://twitter.com/harnessveguy)

Back when I started the *On The Backstretch* Q&A in December 2017 I had no idea how long it would last. The weekly feature sort of took on a life of its own and grew in size as I took a deeper dive into the participants in the harness racing industry.

It all started with Corey Callahan in the December 14, 2017 issue. He got off easy with just 14 questions and nothing close to a hard-hitting inquiry. Compare that to the most recent one with Brad Grant that contained 41 questions. In some respects maybe I got carried away over the years, but you'd be surprised how many times I skipped questions because the interview was getting quite lengthy.

To do them right, these Q&A's take a lot of time as you have to conduct a 20-40 minute interview and then transcribe the entire thing. Suffice to say, it is less time-consuming to write an opinion piece or a stakes preview.

This all leads to what you probably noticed, there is no Q&A in this issue of DRF Harness Digest. The fact of the matter is that after four years our sponsor decided to use those funds for other efforts. We are certainly grateful to them for a long run. Unfortunately I have been unable to secure a new backer for the feature and have decided to reduce the schedule of these interviews to a more manageable yearly amount.

What does that mean? Well, you'll likely see one or two *On The Backstretch* interviews a month going forward unless something changes. So, not all bad news.

The initial reason for starting the feature was to break down the walls between those behind the scenes and the fans of the sport. I'd like to think we've accomplished that goal and despite 252 interviews already completed, there are certainly many more people who deserve a chance to tell their stories.

Looking back at 2022, two subjects by far led the way in terms of readership when it came to *On The Backstretch* – Sarah Svanstedt and Anthony Morgan. Of the two, Sarah led the way in terms of page views. Checking in next was Rick Plano, George Anthony and Ashley Tetrick.

Looking back through the years, the professional bettor known on Twitter as Inside The Pylons still ranks as the most-viewed profile since we started posting them online a few years back. That top five includes Svanstedt, Jennifer Bongiorno, Morgan and the late Steve Wiseman. Rounding out the top 10 all-time are Nick Clegg, the recently deceased Dave Brower, Mark Weaver, Larry Lederman and Chuck Sylvester.

The above said, the first two years' worth of Q&A's weren't posted online and there is no way to measure how many people read each PDF, so who knows which person is the "real" leader of the pack in terms of readership.

My favorites over the years have been with the people who dug deep and revealed more of themselves than perhaps they were planning to at the start of the interview. My talk with Mark Beckwith comes to mind. I can ask the best questions in the world but the person has to be willing to open up for them to be meaningful.



DERICK GIWNER

**The *On The Backstretch* feature on Sarah Svanstedt led the pack in terms of page views in 2022.**

Rest assured that this feature will continue, though the thought has crossed my mind to remove the fluff questions and focus on what is most important. I still have a long list of names to call on . . . you'll just have to wait a bit longer to find out more about these fine people.

To hold you over until the next time, you'll find a "best of" *On The Backstretch* in the following pages with some of my favorite answers from 2022.

### Something to Tweet about

The DRF Harness Twitter account, the best place to find breaking harness racing news without delay, is up to 8,450 followers, gaining just shy of 700 new people in 2022. The account, which is meant to inform and promote harness racing, totaled more than 4.5 million impressions in 2022! If you want up-to-the-minute information about the sport – from stakes entries to breaking news to industry tidbits – follow us @DRFHarness.

### DRF Harness online tops of 2022

Unfortunately the top harness story of 2022 on the DRF Harness landing pages involved a sad and somewhat tragic event. **Saying goodbye to Pompano Park** written by Jay Bergman led the way as the author wrote about the closing of the historic south Florida track. The most-read analysis was from Hambletonian Day at The Meadowlands, followed by the Meadowlands Pace and Breeders Crown cards.

I don't know about you, but I can't wait to see what will top the charts in 2023.

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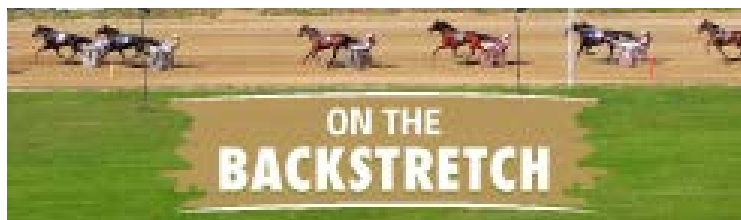
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**BY DERICK GIWNER**

Below is a “best of” edition featuring some of my favorite answers from 2022. This week we feature answers from January through June. Next time we’ll cover the second half of the year. Look for a fresh Q&A in the coming weeks.

**RYAN WILLIS**

**You are often very critical of drivers on social media. What makes you think you know more than them in the moment?**

I’m not saying driving is easy, it isn’t. In any sport the people at home or in the stands are going to criticize efforts that they think are subpar. I’m not sure I’m that critical anyways. I watch probably 10,000 races a year, which is around 75,000 drives, so I don’t think I send off that many mean tweets. And to know more than the drivers in the moment (I don’t), but mistakes happen. I think I know a lot of the horses’ intricacies and probably do more work on the race than basically anyone. So it’s not hard to send off a “where was he going?” or “what was we he thinking?” tweet.

**PAULA CAMPBELL**

**You also did a bit of driving in the early 1990s. What made you get in the bike? Why did you stop?**

I just thought it would be fun. I used to train and jog with John. I won a couple of races. I wasn’t great at it but I had fun. It got very hard to find a horse because John didn’t have a stable and he would have to go to someone to find one. The last time I drove, John told me to go up to Billy O’Donnell and ask him about this horse. His name was Iroquoindianchief. I asked O’Donnell and he said, “Ugg. He can’t leave Paula, so don’t leave with him. He can’t follow very good either. Why would John give you this horse?” I was like, “great!”

**ANTHONY MORGAN**

**Do you think you get the credit and publicity you deserve for winning over 17,000 races?**

It is not something that I aspire to. I try to have a good day every day. I race horses because it is fun, not so I can reach milestones. It is important to me only for my family. For me to have a leg up like I had, I would consider myself a failure if I didn’t make something of it.

**Statistically you are second all-time in wins and 11th in earnings. You also led North America in wins five times. Why do you think you are not in the Hall of Fame?**

I don’t know. It is a political thing. I never raced a lot of horses for the big breeders or for the people the gatekeepers to that. I just wasn’t in that circle. I had some good friends that were Grand Circuit people. Bob Glazer gave me a lot of drives and Grand Circuit wins. As far as the people on the Hall of Fame Committees, they weren’t fans of mine or people I hung around with. Stan Bergstein really had a distaste for me because I’d rather drive horses on a Saturday night rather than attend an awards banquet that he put on. That really got in his craw. He was very vocal about it and even called me up one year when I won the national driving title. He told me if I showed up, I’d get the biggest trophy I ever got and if I didn’t I’d get salt [laughing]. That was after I missed a few of them. It was always on a Saturday night and I really liked driving horses and didn’t want to miss it.

**HEATHER VITALE**

**Everyone knows you as being full of life and willing to put yourself “out there” to the world. Is it exhausting to be a high-energy person?**

It used to be because I thought that stress was good. I would sleep when I’m dead and that I was proving to be some kind of Girl Boss by working constantly. Now, I put aside time to meditate, ground and sleep. I definitely believe in a higher source that’s in us. I’ve embraced my spirituality a lot in recent years and because of that, when I start to feel out of whack and overwhelmed, I’m able to get back on track much faster and move on.

**SARAH SVANSTEDT**

**You came here in 2013 from Sweden. More than eight years later, do you feel like an American now?**

No, I’m not an American and most likely I will never be. Sweden is home. Even when we go home for Christmas it is strange because you are home in a way but you want to go back to your own bed and your daily routine. I guess I live my life in America but I’m Swedish.

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

I would start up a school program in different states that teaches about the sport, the horse, life as a caretaker, horse health, riding a horse, you name it. We need to cover everything that has to do with the care of the horse because our sport, businesses and horses are in big need of horse-educated people. In Sweden we have 15 schools that teach students these lessons as a normal part of high school. It is very popular, especially on the girl side. The program provides a short cut to work life after school to work with the horses.

**RICK PLANO**

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

I’ve been doing it since 1972 so over the years I’ve probably bored the hell out of my wife [MaryAnn] because all I talk about is what I do every day. She’s my biggest owner. I don’t deal with many partnerships anymore and I own most of the horses myself. My wife does everything on the business end, which is a lot. I tell her all the time, I make the bacon but she has to cook it and it is a lot harder to cook it than make it.

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

It used to be “great” when I was growing up, but it is more “disappointing” now. Thirty or so years ago when I got on an airplane people knew who I was and wanted my autograph. Now when I get on a plane they look at me like everybody else, I’m just a nobody.

**You’ve gotten some fines during your career for failing to pause while whipping and unsatisfactory drives. In today’s culture, is there a fine line between what you feel is necessary for the horse and what the public thinks is ok?**

The thing that has changed in my mind is that the people that run the racetracks are casino owners now and they don’t really care about the racing industry. All they know is that the casinos are going and they have to give us a certain percentage of what they make, and that is what keeps our racing going now. Back in the day I used to get fined for not whipping enough or lack of effort. The gamblers would have a table at the finish line. I was a gambler most of my life. I finally started making money about 25 years ago when I realized I wasn’t that smart as a gambler and I stopped. The reality is that when I was betting on horses or other drivers, if I saw them coming down the stretch and they weren’t whipping on that horse, I would say, “what are you doing?” Nowadays you can hit a horse three times and you have to stop or you can only lift your hand to your elbow and the whip can only be so many inches long. It has changed a lot in that respect. I don’t know if that is a good part of

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 12](#)





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it. I'm an old school guy. I always knew that a whip didn't make horses go faster. I always said it stops them from slowing down.

## CORY STRATTON

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

Create a track that races under a dome so we don't have to race in winter weather. Imagine The Meadowlands with always summer racing. They have domes in football. How much bigger would a dome over Yonkers be than a college football stadium? There would never be cancellations due to winter storms or track issues.

## NICK BOYD

**You posted a video of your 89-year-old grandma- who is a lifelong racing fan – and her choice words on post-time drag. Maybe we need her as a racing ambassador?**

I don't think that racing could handle my grandmother as an ambassador. She lives and breathes horse racing. She'll skip out early on family functions so she doesn't miss a race. I remember getting a presentation as the leading driver at Kawartha Downs – my grandmother never misses a day at the track and comes out for all my photos – and the racing manager asked her who her favorite driver was with a wink. Without skipping a beat she said Bobby McClure. She shocked everyone and they usually get a decent crowd. But it's the truth, I'm second and that is just the type of thing she would say. She doesn't split hairs and has no qualms calling it as it is. She refuses to use the internet or a smart phone but she doesn't miss a beat. I can post videos every day of her and they would be very original. That's just her . . . she says she doesn't want to learn the internet because the people in the Standardbred business wouldn't be able to handle her if she knew how to reach everyone.

## ASHLEY TETRICK

**There was some talk at the Board of Directors meeting as to what harnessracing.com would be vs. ustrotting.com. Can you speak about that?**

I don't think people recognize is how incredible ustrotting.com really is and how many niche markets it serves, and serves them really well. One of the things I feel it lacks is that it is built to be useful for the trade of harness racing, but it is too vast to be used for consumer marketing. A lot of the things within ustrotting.com that are suitable for the consumer, we can just pull out and allow it to stand alone at harnessracing.com and really draw the line in the sand by separating our trade media and consumer media so we can serve our new and green followers better.

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

I would educate. What Vince Lombardi is to football I would love to be to harness racing. I think we have to teach people how to watch harness racing and teach them how well our horses are cared for and appreciated. These horses do great things even when they are off the track and retired. We have a very bad stigma/perception and we need to be as transparent as we can to show people how awesome these horses are, because clearly telling them isn't working.

## JACK RICE

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

One of them is never miss a day jogging. If you look over the fence on the

worst weather day at who is jogging, I guarantee those are the leading horsemen at the racetrack. The other piece of advice is when you see a fool in trouble, leave them there. That is probably the best advice.

## Best Driver Ever?

Herve Filion. I was always a Walter Case fan growing up because he was aggressive. Years later when I was stabled at Yonkers and I got to drive with Walter and Herve in every race. To me it was apples and oranges. Herve never used the whip, never abused the horse. He could make the horse live on the outside and always had the horse in the right place at the right time. He was never whipping, slashing and kicking. I'm a fan of Tim Tetrick and David Miller but Herve was just a magician. My favorite horse, I broke the track record with her and after the race he told me to change a bunch of things and I went up to the owner and told him I didn't want Herve to drive my horse again. So the owner told me to do whatever Herve says, which was to let her hobbles out as far as they would go, let her head down as far as it would go and put the headpole on tight. So I did it and she broke her own track record by a second and a half. Ever since then I always listened to Herve.

## DAN DALEY

**Best Horse You Ever Saw?**

I was up in Canada one time watching the eliminations for the North America Cup and I saw a horse that I thought looked off in his left front. He then went out to win and looked unbelievable. That was Somebeach-somewhere. The sign of a great horse is when they are at 80% and still crushes his competitors.

## TREVOR HENRY

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

I'd get rid of the delaying of races. I'd love to see them [the races] go off when posted. In hockey they took the lines away and made it faster. There are no whistles and stopping the game. It's fast. In the casino everything is fast; spin the wheel and it is done. In this game they just drag it and drag it. At some point you get sick of sitting there. At a hockey game you are in and out in three hours. With this game it takes six hours.

## BILLY DAVIS JR

**You mentioned Twitter. You used to be very active but have stopped. Why?**

I started it to try to bring more people into it and make them understand what was going on in the horse's head when they were racing. I would tweet about the week before and what I thought about my chances that night. Some people took things a different way. They would think I had a good shot with a horse and maybe bet it. Then if it didn't work out right, because every race doesn't go as planned and a horse can come up sick or something, I got a lot of backlash from people. That kind of took the fun out of it for me.

## FRANK CANZONE

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

I would love to get more young people involved. I used to go to the track when I was 16 or 17 years old. Winning the first time, seeing those animals and having a good time as a youth is what made me love the game. I was a better first and it is possible to go to the track as a young person and eventually own horses. No one owned horses in my family. I just loved the game. Being around good people is huge; trustworthy people. Maybe that is the one thing I would change: getting rid of the bad trainers out there that take advantage of good owners. They see you have money and they are selfish at the time. If you have a good owner, why screw that owner? I've been burnt in the business before and I keep those memories in the back of my mind. A happy customer is a return customer.



# Father Patrick

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# Jim Slendorn is 'all in' since returning to harness racing

By Ken Weingartner

Jim Slendorn went 30 years between winning races as a driver, but ever since then, the victories have been coming with increased frequency. The 58-year-old Slendorn, a regular in the GSY Series for amateurs, has added 20 triumphs since he captured a conditioned event at Freehold Raceway in January 2021, his first win since 1991 at the same track.

"It's just crazy that I had that span," Slendorn said. "Lo and behold, here I am again. It's really amazing. I can't believe this really happened."

Slendorn was 8 years old when he began jogging horses with his father, Robert, at the family's small farm in central New Jersey. By the time he was in his late teens, he was driving horses in qualifiers and eventually won a couple races at Freehold Raceway.

Soon though, family and his job as an ironworker became Slendorn's focus, and for the most part, he stepped away from racing. But he always kept his license and after his kids graduated from high school, some friends suggested he consider driving as an amateur. In 2020, he qualified a horse he co-owned, Vergeofgreatness N, for trainer Kelvin Harrison and the rest is history.

"Once I got the taste again, and the adrenaline behind the (starting) car, that was it," Slendorn said. "It just took off from there. Now, I'm all in. I'm really all in. I think I've got nine horses now. It's crazy. I'm having a little success driving with some of these horses, so I'm going to keep doing it and see what happens."

One of Slendorn's top moments since his return came in June 2021 when he won for the first time at The Meadowlands, with his dad in attendance.

"For him to be there, watch me get a win at The Meadowlands, and be in the winner's circle with me, you can't even explain it," Slendorn said. "The Meadowlands has always been the place to be. It was absolutely incredible."

Slendorn has two drives at The Meadowlands on Friday. The first, in the GSY Series, is with Ferdinand A, a 10-year-old pacer he owns with Harrison. Slendorn has notched eight wins with the gelding over the past two years. The horse was second by a neck in his most recent start, Dec. 30, and is the 3-1 morning-line favorite.

"He's a dream horse to drive," Slendorn said. "He's got a lot of speed and gives you everything he has. He's been nothing but a pleasure."

Slendorn's remaining drive is with another horse he owns, Claytons Bettor N, in a conditioned pace. Claytons Bettor N was second in his most recent outing, a Dec. 16 start in the GSY. He is 10-1 on the morning line.

"I haven't beaten the big guys yet," Slendorn said, referring to The Big M's regular drivers. "If anybody can do it, I think Clayton can."

Slendorn, who won 15 of 116 races in 2022 and hit the board an additional 35 times, spent a lot of his time away from racing watching his sons Jimmy and Kyle compete in wrestling. Kyle was the winningest wrestler in Howell High School history and a two-time runner-up in the state tournament. Now a senior at Stevens Institute of Technology, he is a three-time All-American as well as three-time scholar All-American. He finished fourth in the NCAA Division III tournament last season.

"It's funny," Slendorn said. "I've watched my kids compete all this time, and I would be a nervous wreck in the stands watching them wrestle. Now they're coming to the track and they're nervous as heck in the stands watching me on the track. The whole thing got flipped."

Slendorn enjoys the competition in the GSY, as well as the entire experience.

"It's a great group," Slendorn said. "We're all pretty close. There is a lot of camaraderie with all the drivers. It's just really fun. I look forward to Friday night. Friday night lights."

"My wife (Maureen) is getting into it too. She has friends at the track. We have dinner. It's a whole night out for us."

As for his future in racing, Slendorn hopes to maintain his level of success.

"I'm planning on trying to do about the same as I did last year," Slendorn said. "I'm just going to try to keep on rolling."



## Handicapper's Corner

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**THURSDAY, JANUARY 5**

**RACE 3**

(1) TWO FACED impressed me rallying sharply to get up for 2nd behind a runaway winner last week and he will be a Pick 5 single here.

**-Garnet Barnsdale**



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 6**

**RACE 11**

(4) MUSCLE FASHION went a gigantic parked-the-mile effort in defeat while losing to a fresh foe who sat the three-hole last time. Anything close to a repeat performance should make him tough.

**-Derick Giwner**



**RACE 9**

(4) NEED TO BREATHE tipped her hand with an aggressive try two starts back then followed that up with a dominating win at this level over all five of tonight's rivals. She should be tough to beat here as a big chalk.

**-Barnsdale**



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 7**

**RACE 5**

(3) A BETTOR BEACH was used hard and made a break last time, which in my mind only serves to provide us a better price here. Seven-year-old is capable from on or off the pace and he draws a perfect post tonight.

**-Giwner**



**FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES**

**Mohawk Park Analysis**

[Thursday](#) [Friday](#) [Saturday](#)

**Meadowlands Analysis**

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**DHP PPS**

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# NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

## BIG FIELDS, PICK 6 CARRYOVER ON TAP THIS WEEKEND AT MEADOWLANDS

Given the fact that The Meadowlands has been carding 13 races a night for a majority of the last year or so, it's a pretty good bet that what will transpire this weekend (Jan. 6-7) hasn't happened in recent history or perhaps ever, as the mile oval will present 14 races this Friday and Saturday (post time, 6:20 p.m.), and each of those 28 dashes will feature full 10-horse fields if there are no scratches.

"We're excited that The Meadowlands will kick off the 2023 season with big fields and a [20-cent] Pick-6 carryover," said track Chief Operating Officer and General Manager Jason Settlemyer. "Our bettors crave full fields and competitive racing, and that's what we bring to the table."

Many bettors get fired up when favorites fail at The Big M, and lately they have slumped to the tune of just a 28 percent success rate over the track's last 29 races (eight winners).

If you like deep pools, then the place to take a swim is The Meadowlands.

Wagering on Friday totaled \$2,845,816, which is merely just another day at The Big M. For the calendar year 2022, there were 85 programs contested, on which a total of \$233,874,687 was pushed through the windows, for an average nightly handle of \$2,751,466, by far tops in the industry.

A dense, relentless fog provided a New Year's Eve bummer when management canceled racing after the first dash on Saturday (Dec. 31) due to safety concerns for the drivers and horses, but that means the 20-cent Pick-6 carryover that was slated to be dispersed that night will now be offered this Friday. The carryover is \$4,834, and the P6 is offered on races eight through 13.

While the carryover may not look overly impressive, it can go a long way toward peaking player interest.

In the event \$30,000 in "new money" is bet into the P6, you would deduct \$4,500 for the usual low 15 percent takeout. Since the carryover is not subject to the tariff, the total pool would be \$30,334, creating a "negative takeout", where those with winning tickets will take away more than what was put in the pot.

## Winter Survival Challenge

The Meadowlands Winter Meet Survival Challenge powered by 123Racing kicks off Friday, January 6th. Cash prizes and Meadowlands swag are up for grabs in this free online competition. The grand prize is \$750 plus a Meadowlands swag package. New this year is the monthly \$100 winner. The player with the highest bankroll for each month (January, February and March) will receive the monthly prize. To login or to register as a first time player, visit [www.survival-challenge.com](http://www.survival-challenge.com).

-edited release (Meadowlands)

## RHOADES CHECKS IN WITH 1,000 TRAINING WINS

Following three victories on Sunday night, trainer Bill Rhoades only needed one victory on Tuesday (January 3) to get his 1,000th career win, and it came in the final race with Buckeye Boy.

Following the race, Rhoades said, "My step-dad would've been super proud of me. I don't even know how to feel right now; it's on to the next thousand."

Rhoades, who began his training career in 2004, celebrated his birthday on Monday (January 2). The biggest season for Rhoades was in 2022 where he earned shy of \$1.5 million in earnings, winning 185 starts earning him a 12th place finish in the national trainer standings and third in the standings at the Flying Turns.

On a track that had not been speed-favoring most of the night, Buckeye Boy (Aaron Merriman) was sent to the lead, opening up a 3 1/2 lengths margin at the quarter in a snappy 26 2/5. His closest pursuer, Vintage Grand (Keith Kash Jr.), was able to make up ground on the leader, but Merriman didn't take his foot off the gas pedal, hitting the half in 54 3/5.

The pair would move past three-quarters together in 1:24 3/5 after Kash Jr. moved Vintage Grand outside to take a shot at the leader, but Vintage Grand had nothing left in the tank in the lane, with Buckeye Boy hitting the wire in 1:56 1/5 and winning by 1 1/2 lengths.

-edited release (Northfield)

## MITCHELL CUSHING REACHES 1,000 CAREER WINS

Just a week short of his 25th birthday, driver Mitchell Cushing reached a memorable milestone at Miami Valley Raceway on Tuesday (Jan. 3). His 1:54 1/5 triumph behind Ashley Locaz N was the 1,000th of his young career, with the last 238 coming since his relocation to Ohio just over two years ago.

[READ MORE](#)

## LONDON CLASSIC YEARLING SALE 2023 DATES ANNOUNCED

The second edition of the London Classic Yearling Sale (LCYS) is set to take place October 17 & 18 at the Western Fair District Agriplex in London, Ontario.

The Western Fair Association introduced the successful first edition of the sale this past Fall. Featuring a weekday format (Tuesday and Wednesday), a total of 186 yearlings passed through the sales ring producing gross sales of C\$6.6 million and an average of almost C\$36,000, one of the highest ever in Ontario.

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## TATTERSALLS WINTER MIXED SALE CANCELED

The Tattersalls Winter Mixed Sale, which was to be held Jan. 16 at the Meadowlands, has been canceled due to lack of sufficient entries.

"This is the company's most important sale, and it's certainly unfortunate not to have it this year," said sale manager David Reid.

He said live sales make up an extremely important part of overall industry commerce, "however, you can't hold a live sale if you don't have willing sellers."

Dates for any future Tattersalls mixed sales will be announced at a later time.

-release (Tattersalls Sales Co.)

## MAROHN, FUSCO LEADING DRIVER AND TRAINER AT FREEHOLD IN 2022

Freehold Raceway concluded the 2022 racing season last Saturday, a year which included a phenomenal stakes schedule and great betting opportunities for fans throughout the year.

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## OHHA AWARDS BANQUET AND ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR JAN. 14

The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association Awards Banquet and Annual Meeting will be held January 14, 2023, at the Hilton Columbus-Polaris, 8700 Lyra Drive, Columbus, Ohio.

Ten divisional horse winners will be honored at the banquet as well as the naming of the 2022 Ohio Horse of the Year. The OHHA will also present the Dick Brandt Sr. Extra Effort Award, the Terry Holton Youth Award, the 2021 Outstanding Groom Award, the Maynard & Stella Hagemeyer Significant Contribution Award and OHHA Special Recognition Awards. In addition, the United States Harness Writers Association - Ohio Chapter annual awards will also be presented as will the Ohio State Racing Commission's Kaltenbach Awards.

Tickets to the banquet are \$30 each and can be purchased by calling the OHHA office at 614-221-3650. Reservation forms are also available on the OHHA website at [www.ohha.com](http://www.ohha.com).

For hotel reservations, contact the Hilton Columbus-Paris at 614-885-1600.

-edited release (OHHA)

## PERSONNEL CHANGES AT THE RACEWAY AT WESTERN FAIR

The new year brings some personnel changes to The Raceway as Racing Manager Tony Elliott is departing for a new role as marketing manager of racing and wagering at the Woodbine Entertainment Group. Elliott, who has also served in management capacities at both Clinton and Hanover racetracks, helped guide The Raceway to record overall handle numbers in 2022.

[READ MORE](#)