

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024



Dave Palone (above) elected to stay in Pennsylvania during his career while David Miller left Ohio for New Jersey



(TOP) CHRIS GOODEN PHOTO / (ABOVE) DERICK GIWNER



EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner
 X @harnesseveguy

Regardless of what industry you work in, life-altering decisions will arise that could result in the difference between happiness and discontent or survival and prosperity. When choosing where you will ply your trade, one must weigh the aspiration for greater recognition versus earnings potential and of course consider which location will keep you close to family or provide the best environment for your kids to flourish.

When it comes to Standardbred racing, catch drivers must consider all of the above before choosing tracks to compete at and ultimately determining their career trajectory. Some of them choose to stay at home and are quite content. Others choose to venture out into the world, seeking new opportunities either because there are few at home or simply better ones elsewhere. Some try to get the

best of both worlds and travel as needed to dabble in the Grand Circuit while keeping a firm footing at one location.

It is certainly no easy decision to leave home and start fresh, as so many natives of Illinois and Ohio have done over the last 30 years before casino-fueled purses began to inject life into the latter's product about a dozen years ago. David Miller was the top driver in Ohio in the mid and late 1990s before he made the switch full-time in 1999 to New Jersey (The Meadowlands), and the rest is history for the now Hall of Fame driver with over 14,000 career wins and north of \$282 million in career earnings (second all-time).

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Jay Bergman: Wallin embracing a more patient approach in 2024

Darin Zoccali: Current trends could lead to disappearing stakes in the future

Stratton trio seeks Yonkers success in leg three of stakes action

New Holland finals top Saturday spectacular at Mohawk Park

Thayer setting up Kentucky for Breeders Crown bid

Best Bets & Analysis

Lucky 7 goes on brief hiatus at The Meadows; Pick 5 carryover at Northfield

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“At the time it wasn’t a tough decision,” said Miller. “I came out with a guy and we only planned on staying a few months. It pretty much worked out and I decided to stay.

“I was married at the time and my wife [Misty] and daughter came with me. Misty was all for it. She was right behind me.”

The fork in the road certainly worked out for the better monetarily for Miller, but perhaps his win total would’ve been much higher had he remained in the Buckeye State. Miller hit a high of 733 wins in 1998 and averaged 582 victories during the five-year period leading up to and through that year. The following handful of years after the move he averaged just 395 wins and never won more than 457 in a single season.

“I probably would’ve had more [wins]. It really dropped off considerably but it was the best move I ever made,” said the now 59-year-old Miller, who added that he always wanted to be a Grand Circuit driver and still loves competing.

The other end of the spectrum is the path of Dave Palone. The all-time leader in wins with 20,748 as of March 25, he decided long ago that The Meadows was going to be his home and he would simply moonlight as a Grand Circuit driver when it made sense.

“Even when I go on vacation I get homesick after five or six days,” said Palone, who was returning from the golf course and getting ready to go to a softball game involving a family member when we spoke on his off day. “I’ve got daughters and I wanted to see everything. I could’ve made more money on the Grand Circuit but it was a decision I would never second guess. I give those guys all the credit in the world. I’ve been on those flights. It is extremely stressful.



“What really solidified my decision was when Pennsylvania got the slots. I had gone to The Meadowlands as a trainer and made some good connections, did well driving, and made some great friendships. I probably would’ve given it a go, I’m not saying I would’ve been successful or not, and maybe it would’ve come back to bite me in the butt. I’m just thankful it worked out the way it did.”

Despite keeping his home base at The Meadows and away from the limelight of some of the east coast tracks, Palone was still able to win Grand Circuit races, including the Little Brown Jug and Breeders Crown races when the opportunity arose. He was the regular driver behind Crown winner Sweet Lou at age 2 and continued to drive him as a 3-year-old. He has also won over 1,000 stakes while avoiding the grind of a true Grand Circuit driver.

“You watch sometimes and think ‘boy would I like to be in that race’ but also it is kind of nice to call it a day at 5:00 PM,” said Palone. “I don’t regret staying home, getting to see my kids’ events and having my farm to piddle around on. [Catch-drivers] are kind of as envious of my situation as anyone would be of theirs. I’ll run into those guys in September or October and they just look beat up. People don’t understand how hard they work. The racing is the easy part. Anyone can drive a great horse. It is the getting there; letting people down when you have to go with another horse. Decisions like whether to go to The Meadowlands or Woodbine, and of course the travel. It is not easy. It is a job where you wake up every morning and you piss someone off.”

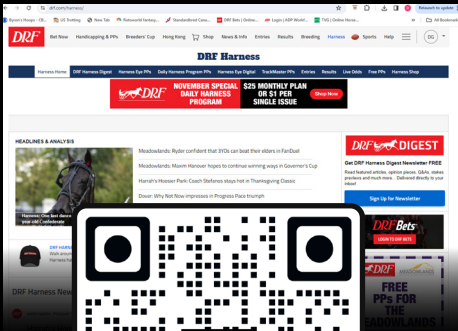
Palone clearly made the correct decision as his spot in the harness racing history books is secure with his lofty win total. The only driver with any chance of catching him is Aaron Merriman. He is 17 years younger, 5,000 wins behind and gaining 400 wins per year currently. If Palone, who guaranteed us he wouldn’t be driving in his 70s, keeps up his current pace for five more years, Merriman would be 50 and have a deficit of 3,000 wins to make up. That is assuming Merriman can keep up the breakneck pace of driving over 4,000 horses a year at two separate tracks.


CONTINUED ON PAGE 5


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TATTOO ARTIST

(Hes Watching - Stylish Artist - Artsplace)
p,2,1:52s; 1:47.1s (\$3,245,658)



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Aaron Merriman has led the sport in driving starts for more than a decade.

“I give Aaron credit. He’s up and down the road. Nobody works harder than him,” said Palone. “It isn’t just the racing. It is the driving between. It is a torturous two hours [between The Meadows and Northfield Park]. He’s tougher than me. I start thinking about race 10, ‘Where can I play golf tomorrow? What is the weather like? What are the pin placements?’”

Merriman has been able to keep up a schedule typically only reserved for younger drivers in their 20s and perhaps early 30s. It’s almost a rite of passage for a catch-driver to prove themselves with a heavy workload at multiple tracks before they can move on to the next stage.

At just 21, Brett Beckwith is a young driver currently heading from track to track putting in the miles to hopefully advance to stardom at some point. He trails only Merriman in starts (812 to 698) and wins (171 to 145) in 2024. While he is getting in his on-track miles, the goal remains a spot on the Grand Circuit.

“There is no real feeling like driving young horses. I get a lot of enjoyment out of watching them progress. I also think it would be fun to travel around and drive different horses on the Grand Circuit, but it takes the right opportunity to come your way to do something like that,” said Beckwith in a recent DRF Harness interview.

Tyler Miller (26) is also working hard to move up the ladder and has big aspirations as well.

“The goal for my career is to be one of those top Hall of Famers who travel on the Grand Circuit and drive the best horses in the country. I’d love to be a part of that and hopefully win some of those big races along

the way. That would be pretty cool in my book,” said Miller in another DRF Harness interview.

A few years older at 34, Ridge Warren seemed more content to accept a simpler fate rather than chase a dream of stardom. Perhaps that comes with more age and experience, or maybe that is a decision which will work better for him.

“I’m not saying no to Grand Circuit drives, but that is probably not in the near future for me. My goal is to keep getting better each year and see my numbers grow,” said Warren in late 2023.

It isn’t an easy decision to give up guaranteed revenue at your home track to venture to new surroundings. William Parker Jr., 13th all-time in career wins with 11,315, spent much of his career as the King of Monticello Raceway. He did venture to Yonkers Raceway at times but never fully experimented on the stakes scene nationally.

“Sometimes being a big fish in a small pond keeps the pockets a little fuller than being in a big pond and scrapping along. It is a lot easier to keep your head above water in a small pond,” said Parker Jr. in a 2018 DRF Harness interview.

Just as any person pondering a job change must carefully consider many variables before potentially making the dive into new waters, catch-drivers each year have the same difficult choices. They may not be as split-second as whether to move to the outside and make a bid for the lead during a race but they are certainly as determining of whether the end result will be positive or negative.

Beckwith’s impressive driving feat

Being the leading driver at any track is impressive but the aforementioned Brett Beckwith has taken things to new heights in 2024. If my research is correct he currently ranks as a top 10 driver in terms of wins at four different tracks in 2024. That’s amazing!

As of March 25, Beckwith is dominating at his home track in Saratoga with a 26.7 win percentage and 31-win lead over Billy Dobson in second. He closed out the Batavia winter meet in third, trailing Jim Morrill Jr by 13 wins. At Freehold, with 40 percent fewer drives than those in front of him, Beckwith sits fifth in the standings with 26 wins and a 23.9 percent win rate. Finally, at The Meadowlands he has won a respectable 12.7 percent of his races and sits seventh on the leaderboard.

For the year, Beckwith has 143 wins in 685 starts (20.8 percent) and is inching in on \$1 million in earnings. That’s quite an accomplishment for a 21-year-old with a limitless future ahead.

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Lucas Wallin embracing a more patient approach in 2024



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [✕ BergmanJay](#)

For trainer Lucas Wallin 2023 was the most successful year of his career conditioning a stable of trotters. The 31-year-old's barn earned more than \$1.7 million with 44 trips to the winner's circle. The trajectory of Wallin's career has been on the upswing but that doesn't mean he expects to follow the same program going forward.

"We're about five seconds behind where we were last year with the babies," said Wallin discussing the 24 juveniles he's training among a stable of 38. "I've decided to go more slower miles with them but just not as fast to this point."

It's a minor tweak to the operation but one Wallin hopes will have a major impact as he focuses on the stakes season to come.

"I was very happy with the performance of my 2-year-olds last year. They started out well but didn't finish the season as I had hoped," said Wallin. "I want them to be good all the way through to the end."

Wallin does not believe that the change in strategy will change when his juveniles hit the track this season.

"They will be ready when they are ready," said Wallin, with no specific timetable but an understanding that each horse is different with its own specific clock.

The broad success last year for Wallin in the 2-year-old ranks has him feeling more than optimistic that there will be a big victory or two this year in major stakes races. The trotting filly Soiree Hanover is a prime example, and though she's still a few months from racing as a sophomore, Wallin had glowing reviews.

"She's been good from the first time we trained her last year," said Wallin of Soiree Hanover, a daughter of Walner that was among the tops in the 2-year-old division, with Grand Circuit victories in the Jim Doherty Memorial and International Stallion Stakes to go along with a close second-place finish in the Breeders Crown. Soiree Hanover earned \$607K in her first season.

Soiree Hanover would break stride in the Goldsmith Maid final at The Meadowlands in November, the final start of her season. Wallin suspects that maybe a few less starts could have made the difference for the filly, but it's easy to conclude the change in his program this year could be a result of the less-than-satisfying ending to her campaign.

Another filly that Wallin believes has the talent of Soiree Hanover but not the bank account is Dolce Amara.

"She won a Sire Stakes at The Red Mile but then got very sick on us," said Wallin of Dolce Amara, a daughter of Muscle Hill that made but five starts as a freshman.

Dolce Amara earned nearly six-figures, with her biggest payday coming in the \$400,000 Kentucky Championships where she finished third behind Date Night Hanover. It's easy to understand why Wallin might have high expectations for Dolce Amara since the filly is bred almost identically to the \$2.1 million winner Bella Bellini.

On the male side of the ledger, Duke Of Walner is returning for Wallin

and he too could be an example of a horse that started the year with lofty expectations but didn't finish it as planned.

"He's more powerful this year," said Wallin of Duke Of Walner, a colt that had talent last year but couldn't carry it through the entire season.

Another of Wallin's dual-eligibles, Duke Of Walner campaigned both in New Jersey and Kentucky last year and notably finished third to Karl in the \$400,000 Kentucky Sire Stakes final at The Red Mile in September. Beaten less than two lengths in that affair, Duke Of Walner lacked the finishing kick in his last three starts. Wallin's optimism about Duke Of Walner suggests the colt has matured and will be both mentally and physically ready when Grand Circuit racing commences for him in a few months' time.

There may be a few sleepers in the group of sophomores and Wallin does not like to over-promote what hasn't happened yet. The colt For July is a prime example of Wallin's reserved nature as though the Greenshoe-sired half-brother to Cuatro De Julio has shown talent training and on occasion in a race, Wallin feels that the jury is out until he can do it consistently on the racetrack. Nevertheless, For July was able to break his maiden with a 1:58 1/5 score at Harrah's Philadelphia in November, cause for just a bit of optimism.

"His stamina is better. He needed to get stronger in his mind and body," said Wallin of For July.



AMANDA STEPHENS

Soiree Hanover won multiple Grand Circuit races in 2023 including at The Red Mile.

Mosquito was a multiple Kindergarten leg winner for Wallin last year. Though a touch on the small side, Wallin feels he's coming back well this year with more maturity and likely will find his way onto the Grand Circuit at some point.

"This is definitely the best group of horses I've had since I began training," said Wallin of the entire stable. "The owners have been great. The stable is larger, and we have more quality on paper and how they look on the racetrack."

Wallin anticipates taking a few of his returning sophomores

to The Meadowlands this weekend for training over the mile surface.

"I'll probably come back the following week and qualify them," said Wallin.

The expectation is for some of Wallin's 3-year-olds that didn't race as 2-year-olds to get some experience this spring.

With a wide-breadth of talented freshman working their way slowly towards their first season on the racetrack, Wallin did manage to single out a couple that could be at the head of the class, though each is at a different point in training.

"We've got a Chapter Seven colt that I really like," said Wallin. "He's Swedish-bred out of Darling Mearas S, the mare that Ake [Svandstedt] raced here a few years ago."

Darling Mearas S took a sub-1:50 mark racing in an overnight race in between starts against Manchego and Hannelore Hanover. The Cantab Hall-sired mare has license to produce a champion or two.

The Rogue Prince, the first full brother to Breeders Crown champion King Of The North, is another high on Wallin's list of 2-year-olds in training. He's a few weeks behind the others due to some minor issues but Wallin feels confident that the \$375,000 Lexington Selected purchase will emerge later this year.

With a goal of having his horses strong towards the end of the season Wallin's stable could be poised for their best year yet in 2024.

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Current trends could lead to disappearing stakes in the future



AT THE TRACK

By Darin Zoccali [X](#) [AtTheTrack7](#)

The stakes season is underway in harness racing with the Borgata Pacing Series kicking off on March 18 at MGM Yonkers Raceway. In the not-so-distant past, the Borgata Pacing Series (formerly the George Morton Levy Memorial) had over 40 or even 50 horses made eligible for the series. In fact, just three years ago, 47 horses were nominated. But just this past Monday (March 25), only 26 horses participated in the second leg of the series.

The Borgata Pacing Series is just a microcosm of something that has been taking place in harness racing for the past few years and is becoming more and more apparent as we march onward. Fewer horses are being nominated to and participating in these stakes events.

The obvious question to ask is why? Admittedly, that is a complicated question as it pertains to this topic and the answer is even more complicated. In addition, much of the answer is opinion and conjecture.

One part of the answer that is likely not guesswork is related to horse population. There was a long period of decline in terms of the number of foals being born and while that decline has stabilized over the last four years, the impact such a decline has in racing is long-lasting and we have not seen the number of horses racing reap the benefits of the breeding stabilization just yet.

I can tell you firsthand from my days at The Meadowlands, looking at the number of horses nominated to the major stake events in 2024 at the New Jersey oval, the numbers don't stack up to what we saw 10 years ago.

The Crawford Farms Trot, a \$40,000 added event scheduled for June 29 that is estimated to offer a \$175,000 purse, has 13 horses eligible as of February 15. If all 13 that are nominated make every remaining payment and 10 horses enter the race, it would equate to \$82,000 in payments added to the \$40,000 supplied by The Meadowlands, and the race would be offered with a purse of \$122,000 (unless the track added further funds).

The Arthur J. Cutler Memorial, a staple at The Meadowlands for a generation, has 18 horses eligible as of February 15. Using a similar projection to the Crawford Farms Trot above, the Cutler would not reach \$160,000 for its final purse.

The Dorothy Haughton Memorial and Lady Liberty, which are two of the more prominent races for the older pacing mares each year, have 14 and 15 mares eligible, which makes their final purses based on the conditions and added money at roughly \$150,000 each.

The FanDuel Pacing and Trotting Championships have 23 and 24 horses eligible. If you go back 10 years, there were twice as many horses paid into those events at this time of the year.

What has happened? In part, there are fewer horses. But in addition to there being fewer horses, these stakes races are beginning later and later each year. If you have a pacer that is stakes caliber but he is not good on a half-mile track, where is the incentive to start back racing before June? The elimination of the winter and spring late closer and early closer program at The Meadowlands has played a part in this. There is no more Aquarius or Presidential series. The Graduate is now a race-restricted to 4-year-olds and that doesn't begin until June. There is simply no reason to bring a horse back in February or March any longer.

The result of that is a compacted stakes calendar where most divisions have a stakes race nearly every week. We aren't getting the horses that are doing well in a series like the Clyde Hirt or Exit 16W that connections are wondering if they can take the next step up. Thus we are getting fewer horses nominated and we get a logjammed stakes calendar.

While thoroughbred racing certainly doesn't get everything right and they have population problems of their own which leads to short fields in stakes races, the options to run the best horses at all points of the year are at least there. The Pegasus Word Cup in January, the Saudi Cup in February and the Dubai World Cup in March incentivize the best older horses to stay in training and keep running. That doesn't exist in harness racing and what we have is the best horses coming back later and racing less. Horses like Golden Receiver and Foiled Again would rack up money in the winter time. On the trotting side there were races like the Hiram Woodruff and Horse and Groom which would lead into the Titan Cup and then into the major stakes season. That is gone as well.

I don't have a great answer unfortunately. The enhanced purses at other racetracks makes paying into a late closer series that offers the same amount of purse money unappealing. We have gone from one extreme where many of the best Standardbreds race virtually all year, to the other extreme where they race for five months. Harness racing needs to find a middle ground here, because these stakes races are going to start to disappear due to lack of interest/nominations.

Pretty soon, the best Standardbreds are going to be racing 10 times a year and harness racing would have given up one of its biggest marketing advantages over thoroughbred racing when it comes to its stars – you don't have to wait two months to see them race again and they race constantly. I don't think harness racing will ever become a sport with a horse like Flightline, who runs six times in two years. But I don't think it will ever be the sport we knew 20 years ago either, and the latter is certainly better than the former.



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Cory Stratton trio seeks Yonkers success in leg-three stakes

By Jay Bergman

Heading into the third round of the Blue Chip Matchmaker series, trainer Cory Stratton has a pair of mares with ambitions of qualifying for the final, with leg winner Incaseyou didnt know and stable favorite Easy To Please showing positive signs. Those two will be in action in two of three \$40,000 divisions this Friday night at Yonkers.

Stratton also has one of his two Borgata campaigners – Whats Stanley Got A – entered on Monday as he looks for a spot in the lucrative final.

Incasyoudidntknow was a finalist in last year's Blue Chip Matchmaker and Stratton hopes the results will be better this year for the daughter of Always B Miki after last year's sixth-place finish in the final.

"She drew post seven and never had a chance," Stratton said looking back.

In the 2024 series, Incaseyou didnt know captured the opening leg despite lagging cover much of the way and then finished third after racing without cover a long way in round two.

The lack of early speed has compromised Stratton's mare over the last few weeks and he's hoping things can change a bit going forward.

"It's tough leaving from the rail here unless you can really sprint out quickly," said Stratton. "Andy [McCarthy] called Jim Morand, who drove her down at Dover, to ask if there's a way to get her to leave."

Morand's advice was to get her on the gate. Stratton is not certain leaving will be in the cards this week in that 11th race contest. Incaseyou didnt know finds herself with post four in a solid field that includes speedster Delitfulcatherin N (post 1) and Racine Bell (post 2) to her inside and second-leg winner Mikala (post 6) on the outside.

"She was out early last week and just kept coming," said Stratton with admiration for the 31-race career winner who he expects will keep racing in each leg of the series.

Easy To Please (post 6, race 10) is a horse that put Stratton on the map and he's happy to see her returning to form.

"She had an off year last year and I really don't know why," said Stratton of the daughter of Roll With Joe. "This year she's racing closer to top form."

Easy To Please has finished fifth and third in the two series legs thus far and Stratton is hopeful the trip will work out for her in Friday's tenth race.

"She's a much better horse coming first- or second-over than she is on the front end," said Stratton, with recognition that Easy To Please will have to compete with Tony's Mom (post 1) and Lit De Rose (post 5) to her inside on Friday.

Friday's first Blue Chip Matchmaker division (race 4) finds Jive Dancing A (post 1) heading a group of five mares that include a pair of solid veterans in Karma Seelster (post 2) and Dougs Babe A (post 5).

Whats Stanley Got A has been solid in two legs of the Borgata Series and Stratton hopes he continues to race as well on Monday (April 1) in one of three \$50,000 Borgata divisions on Monday night. Whats Stanley Got A (post 4) goes in race nine against three other leg winners. Desperate Man (post 3) is likely the public choice off consecutive dominating performances, with Covered Bridge (post 6) and Rocknroll Runa A (post 7) razor sharp but likely compromised by post position.

"I have to give all the credit for his success here to my wife [Victoria]. She takes care of him every day," said Stratton. "I've had a lot of success with horses I've bought from Down Under. I thought he would be a good overnight horse, but he's turned out to be a lot more."

Whats Stanley Got A made \$109,050 last year in just 18 starts and appears on his way to another strong campaign with a first and second in the opening legs of the Borgata.



JESSICA HALLETT PHOTO

Cory and Vicki Stratton.

"I knew he was a pretty good horse when he finished second behind Abuckabett Hanover in his first qualifier," said Stratton of the qualifier last June. "After that I raced him from post nine and he won for me right out of the box."

Whats Stanley Got A just kept improving following the 1:50 2/5 victory and is now racing against the premier aged horses, far exceeding Stratton's expectations along the way.

In Monday's other \$50,000 divisions of the Borgata, Linedrive Hanover looks to regain winning form from post six in the fifth race and first leg on the card. He'll meet a rejuvenated Funatthebeach N (post 4) and six others.

Veterans Backstreet Shadow (post 6) and Hellabalou (post 7) do battle in the eighth race division, each looking to gain a victory and valuable points to reach the final. The field of seven has only one leg winner, with Dunkin' (post 1) looking for his second straight following an impressive 1:51 4/5 mile for trainer Scott DiDomenico on March 25.

Stratton is hoping Idealsomemagic A will be ready to return for the fourth leg of the series.

"He choked in the first leg," Stratton said. "Last week he scoped sick so we're giving him the week off and will start him next week."

Stratton is aiming for Whats Stanley Got A to race well this week so he can give him next week off.

"Last year I started Idealsomemagic A in all the legs and he wasn't himself in the final, then needed time to regain form," said Stratton.

Both Friday's and Monday's card at Yonkers Raceway begin at 7:00 PM (EDT).

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New Holland Finals top 15-race Saturday spectacular at Mohawk

By Derick Gwerner

Woodbine Mohawk Park returns from a few days of inactivity with an overstuffed 15-race card highlighted by a pair of New Holland finals featuring older trotters and pacers on Saturday night. Both series for Non-winners of \$150,000 in 2023 contain a number of accomplished campaigners with upper six-figure earnings and some with past stakes experience.

Pemberton, the 2020 Ontario Sire Stakes Gold Final winner for 3-year-old male trotters, never quite translated that success into further stakes victories but has turned into a Preferred-level trotter on the Mohawk circuit. After missing all of 2021 and making just 12 starts in 2022, the now 7-year-old was able to win five times in 18 tries last year good for \$102,120.

With her parents, who bred and raised Pemberton, wintering in Hawkinsville, Georgia and the New Holland series a good target race, Julie Walker has been handling the training of the gelding since late November. She admits that there was never a conclusive answer as to why he had to miss his 4-year-old season but attributes the lighter schedule in recent years to making sure he's at his best when he's on the track.

"My mom and dad have been really patient with him," said Walker, who sends out Pemberton from post two with James Macdonald in the bike. "I think a lot of his 4-year-old year was just learning how to go with the little aches and pains he had. They brought him down to Georgia that year and he came around."

Pemberton has been to the track three times thus far in 2024 and come home with a pair of victories and one second, all while sent off as the favorite, a status he'll likely hold during post time for the C\$70,000 New Holland final slated as race nine. The son of Wheeling N Dealin easily dispatched his foes in the second leg of the series in 1:55 2/5 after nabbing a second in leg one.

"They are all tough horses but him, on his own, he's a very good animal. He's got the lungs and he's got the heart," said Walker when asked about Pemberton's chances in the final. "I was able to take the corks [metal pegs that are screwed into a horse's shoe to provide more traction] off and the track has been really good, so that is big. I raced him a few times in the winter with the corks on and the track was hard and the wind was terrible. He's such a closer that when there is a headwind it is tough on him. The last few times the track was beautiful and I had the corks off. He's really coming into his own now."

Pemberton was second behind Southwind Oncore when the 5-year-old went down the road from post seven in a career best 1:53 for driver Travis Cullen and trainer Jodie Cullen. Things didn't go quite as planned in the



NEW IMAGE MEDIA

Pemberton is the 2-1 morning-line favorite in Saturday's \$70,000 New Holland Trotting final at Woodbine Mohawk Park.

second round of the New Holland when the son of Muscle Hill made a costly break from post one, a position he'll have to deal with again this week. Still, the pole-sitter looks like the main threat to Pemberton despite his status as just the 5-1 fourth choice on the morning-line.

"We are hoping for better results this week. It was just bad luck in his last start," said Travis Cullen. "It's not an ideal post for trotters but that's ok; makes it more of a challenge."

While Pemberton has earned a healthy \$543,179 in his career, the class of the nine-horse field remains the 9-year-old Perfetto, a winner of over \$850,000. The classy son of Majestic Son is winless on the year in five starts, but he has been finishing his miles with good trot and could be a threat with a better pace scenario for driver/trainer Dagfin Henriksen.

Whichwaytothebeach is a multiple stakes winner that has earned \$820,753 during his career and could be the horse to beat in the \$71,000 pacing split of the New Holland series carded as race six. The 6-year-old romped to a 1:50 3/5 victory last week as the second choice behind Jilliby Dynamite A, who won the opening leg with a 1:53 1/5 score over a track rated good.

Whichwaytothebeach and driver Sylvain Filion start from post three just to the inside of Jilliby Dynamite A and Louis Philippe Roy.

A potential upsetter in the field is Gias Surreal from post two with Jody Jamieson picking up the drive. Just a third-place finish from reaching millionaire status in Canada, the 8-year-old skipped leg two of the series and sharpened up with a placing in an overnight event.

The action at Woodbine Mohawk Park kicks off earlier than normal with a 6:10 PM (EDT) post time.

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Thayer seeks return of Breeders Crown to Kentucky

By Ken Weingartner

Kentucky State Sen. Damon Thayer hopes an amendment to state legislation could help pave the way for a return of the Breeders Crown to the Bluegrass State.

Sen. Thayer, a Republican who serves as the Senate Majority Floor Leader, introduced an amendment that would create an international harness racing event reserve account of up to \$900,000 for a Kentucky track that hosts an international harness racing event that distributes at least \$5 million in purses and awards.

Beginning on July 31, 2024, the account would receive \$300,000 annually until it reached the \$900,000 threshold.

“My goal is to see Kentucky part of the Breeders Crown rotation,” said Sen. Thayer, a longtime horse racing advocate who is completing his 22nd and final year in the Senate. “That’s the language we came up with to try to get us in the running. The licensing fee to host the Breeders Crown is \$900,000. So, I wanted to set up a perpetual fund that would give a Kentucky track the impetus to make a bid for the Breeders Crown.”

Lexington’s Red Mile has hosted Breeders Crown races on two occasions, including the championship’s inaugural event, the 2-year-old colt-and-gelding trot won by Workaholic, on Oct. 5, 1984. Three years later, the track was the location for the Breeders Crown Mare Pace, which was won by Follow My Star.

Since 2010, all 12 Breeders Crown races have been held at a single track.

“Getting Kentucky in the rotation for the Breeders Crown is a strong economic driver,” Sen. Thayer said. “The Red Mile is the obvious spot and Lexington would be a great host city, but that certainly wouldn’t preclude our two newer tracks, Cumberland Run and Oak Grove, from bidding on it if they want to. But clearly the Red Mile has the facilities, the history, the racing surface, and a big-time city like Lexington that would make it a prime host.

“This would be a great opportunity to show off the horse capital of the world.”

Sen. Thayer, whose prior experience in horse racing included working for the Breeders’ Cup, played an instrumental role in advancing the 2021 legislation that brought historical horse racing to Kentucky. The pari-mutuel gaming machines have generated billions of dollars in wagering and fueled the growth of the industry and purses in the state.

“We’ve got a lot of Standardbred farms here and more and more are being added every year,” Sen. Thayer said. “People are buying the dual-eligible Kentucky-breds at the Lexington Selected Sale here in the fall. The Standardbred industry is really on a very positive trajectory.”

In addition to the amendment for the event reserve account, Sen. Thayer introduced an amendment to provide up to \$250,000 annually for Standardbred, Thoroughbred, and Quarter Horse aftercare facilities in Kentucky that have achieved and maintained levels of service and operation that resulted in national accreditation.

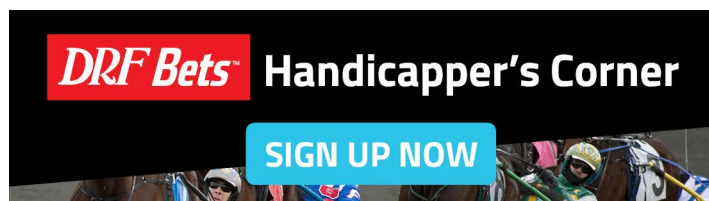
“I just feel with the success of historical horse racing here in Kentucky that we should peel off some of the proceeds each year to support aftercare efforts here,” Sen. Thayer said. “I think this is the best way to do it.

“Before I leave at the end of the year, I wanted to make sure that aftercare was included in that amendment. We incentivize the breeding of racehorses through our breeders’ incentives program — Thoroughbred, Standardbred, and Quarter Horse — and I felt we should have something on the backend to show our support for these aftercare efforts.”

The bill containing the equine-related amendments advanced from committee last week and will be voted upon this week.

Sen. Thayer represents Kentucky’s 17th Senate District, which includes southern Kenton County, and all of Grant and Scott counties. He announced this past December that he would not seek re-election in 2024.

“I made my decision not to run again with a clear mind and a happy heart,” Sen. Thayer said. “I’m enjoying my last session but looking forward to the next chapter of my life. It will probably be heavily involved in horse racing and bourbon making, my two favorite things.”



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THURSDAY, MARCH 28

RACE 11

(5) PAT STANLEY N had to settle for fifth as the favorite in his last race on 3-18 but won in this class in February and gets reunited with Matt Kakaley tonight. I think he could also offer a better price here after the dull-ish effort most recently.

-Greg Reinhart



FRIDAY, MARCH 29

RACE 7

(7) URNTRUBLE HANOVER had plenty of stretch traffic and never got a chance to stretch his legs last time in his first start for this barn. Perhaps he offers some value here in what looks like a close-knit group.

-Derick Gwerner



RACE 9

(1) LUCKY ARTIST A seemed to have found the winning spot last week and the classy mare responded with a sharp front-end score; looks to repeat.

-Matt Rose



SATURDAY, MARCH 30

RACE 4

(5) WHATCHULOOKIN AT was much better in his return qualifier than it appears on paper. He wasn’t being asked late and finished well within himself with Lasix added.

-Gwerner



FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Mohawk Park Analysis [Saturday](#)

Meadowlands Analysis [Friday](#) [Saturday](#)

Yonkers Analysis [Thursday](#) [Friday](#)

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INSTANT RACING UPDATES VIA TWITTER: @DRFHARNES

NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

NOMINATIONS CLOSE APRIL 1 FOR ONTARIO-BASED STAKES

The Woodbine Mohawk Park race office would like to remind racing participants that nominations are due on April 1 for the following: ON Sired Spring Series, City of London Series, and Mark Austin Memorial Pacing Series.

To make payments online, click [here](#). If sending payments by mail, envelopes must be clearly post marked no later than April 1, 2024 or payment will not be accepted. Registered mail is recommended.

Information on each series can be found [here](#).

-release (Woodbine)

\$5,837 PICK 5 CARRYOVER SATURDAY AT MGM NORTHFIELD PARK

Upsets were the theme of the night on Wednesday evening (Mar. 27) causing a Pick 5 carryover of \$5,837. It creates an enticing wagering opportunity on the monthly wrap-up card Saturday night (Mar. 30). The \$1 wager beginning in race six will feature an estimated pool of \$40,000 as well as the player friendly 14% takeout.

Post time for the 15-race program on Saturday is 6 p.m. MGM Northfield Park races four evenings this coming week on Saturday (Mar. 30), Monday (Apr. 1), Tuesday (Apr. 2) and Wednesday (Apr. 3).

-edited release (Northfield)

LUCKY 7 UPDATE FROM THE MEADOWS

On Wednesday (March 27), one lucky winner took home \$2,550 for a \$1 ticket by hitting the Lucky7 at Hollywood Casino at The Meadows. With just two days of racing remaining prior to a one-week break in our schedule for track maintenance, we have decided not to offer the Lucky7 wager today or tomorrow (March 28-29).

A new, updated version of the Lucky7 will return when we resume live racing on Wednesday, April 10, with changes based on the feedback we have received from our customers. These include a .50 minimum bet amount and a 20% consolation payout if there are no winners.

-release (The Meadows)

DESPERATE MAN, ROCKNROLL RUN A SCORE AGAIN IN MGM BORGATA

Desperate Man and Rocknroll Runa A improved to two-for-two in this year's MGM Borgata Pacing Series by taking their respective \$50,000 divisions of the second leg on Monday night (March 25) at MGM Yonkers Raceway. Collecting wins in the other sections were Dunkin' and Whats Stanley Got A.

The big showdown of the program came in the second section as round one victors Linedrive Hanover, Covered Bridge and Desperate Man were all entered. Covered Bridge (driven by Jordan Stratton) got to the lead on the first turn, but he was looped by Linedrive Hanover (Scott Zeron), who would then yield to sit in the pocket behind Desperate Man (Matt Kakaley) after the 27 1/5 opening quarter. Desperate Man was then able to back down the half to 56 seconds flat before Covered Bridge tried a first-over move out of third coming to the 1:23 4/5 three-quarters.

[READ MORE](#)

GAME OF CLAIMS SERIES FINALS CONCLUDE AT POCONO

The Nob Hill High gelding Nob Hill Flash completed a sweep of his Game Of Claims Series action for \$15,000 base-tagged pacers Monday at Pocono Downs at Mohegan Pennsylvania, tacking on a 1:52 victory in his \$20,000 Championship event after winning in each of his preliminaries.

Nob Hill Flash, the 50-cent favorite, moved from third from driver Anthony Napolitano nearing the 27 2/5 quarter, but Play Jet Ray pulled the pocket in front of him and went around early leader Aerosmith Hanover, with Nob Hill Flash refilling his own hole. Just past the 55 4/5 half, the "Flash" flashed out uncovered and battled with Play Jet Ray the rest of the way, past a 1:23 3/5 three-quarters and through the lane until finally gaining the advantage as he won by a neck.

[READ MORE](#)

AMATEURS AND MCCARTHY COULD SHINE AT THE MEADOWLANDS

The stars will be out on the live card Saturday at The Big M, starting with a 15-year-old wonder horse.

Mariner Seelster, permitted to race only because horses beyond the age of 14 are eligible to perform in fair or amateur dashes in New Jersey, will go for his fifth consecutive victory in the opener, a Meadowlands Amateur Driving Club 2 event on the pace.

Before the races begin, 2023 Dan Patch Amateur Driver of the Year John Calabrese will be Dave Little's guest on the track's pregame show "In the Sulky" segment, which begins shortly after the broadcast begins at 5:45 p.m.

During the card, Andy McCarthy is sure to have plenty of punters interested in how he's doing.

His dominance on Saturdays has been scintillating all year long.

McCarthy guided four winners last Saturday (March 23) at the mile oval, including the feature, with Betterinpinehurst.

There have been 11 Saturday race cards conducted during 2024 at The Meadowlands, and McCarthy has at least one win on each one. He's won at least three dashes seven times, at least four on three occasions and became just the second driver this year at The Big M to win five times, which he accomplished on Feb. 24.

-edited release (Meadowlands)

JETT PROPELLED ROCKETS TO VICTORY AT BALLY'S DOVER

Jett Propelled raced aggressively and won the DSBF Late Closer Final for 3-year-old pacing fillies at Bally's Dover on Wednesday night.

Jett Propelled left the quickest off the gate to assume the lead before the quarter pole. After that call in 27 4/5 over a sloppy race track, Small-town Bad Girl became anxious and sprinted for the lead and continued to park out Grace O'Malley. The two fillies battled past the half in 57 4/5 as Curtsyforpurrseco circled three-wide down the backstretch approaching the three-quarter call in 1:27 1/5. Then Jett Propelled and driver Barton Dalious pulled the pocket, to win by three-quarters-of-a-length in 1:57.

Jett Propelled (Roddy's Bags Again) is owned and trained by Robert R. Shahan of Harrington, Delaware.

Curtsyforpurrseco finished 2nd and Bella's Dream closed to finish 3rd.

-edited release (Dover)

MEADOWS TO SPEND ABOUT \$380,000 ON CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Hollywood Casino at The Meadows has secured the necessary permits for some capital improvements that will begin during a 10-day break in the racing schedule for its customary spring track maintenance project, a track official told the Pennsylvania Horse Racing Commission at its March 26 meeting.

There will be no live racing from March 30 to April 9. Beginning April 10, The Meadows will race four days a week (Wednesday through Saturday) after three months of racing three days a week.

Scott Lishia, director of racing at The Meadows, said the capital improvements include a new infield video board and upgrades to the sound system. The total cost, he said, is about \$380,000.

As for the racing surface, it will be reconditioned and scarified as in previous years. There will also be cleanup work done in the barn area.

Beginning in late May and running through the end of August, The Meadows will offer a 5:10 p.m. first post time on 15 Fridays and one Saturday.

In other PHRC business, Thoroughbred bureau director Tom Chuckas said the commission continues discussions with the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority on HISA assessments and the amount the PHRC would receive in financial credits for using its own staff and the Pennsylvania Equine Toxicology and Research Laboratory in West Chester. HISA regulations are in place only for Thoroughbred racing in the state.

A 2024 schedule of estimated HISA credits for Pennsylvania shows \$1.55 million for race-day sample collection, \$348,000 for sample collection on non-racing days, and about \$3 million for drug testing and related research. The estimated total is just shy of \$5 million in credits.

The three Thoroughbred tracks in the state were assessed a total of \$7 million.

-By Tom LaMarra (USTA Correspondent)