

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025

# Picking up the pieces



**Horsemen discuss the closure of Freehold and what's next**

BARBARA LIVINGSTON PHOTO

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**Comments? Questions? Email the Editor [DGiwner@DRF.com](mailto:DGiwner@DRF.com)**



## EDITOR'S EYE

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

After the last race was contested and the tears from the thousands that showed up for closing day at Freehold Raceway had dried, reality started to set in for those that competed over the historic oval.

While fans were sad to see the track close its doors after over 170 years of existence and many came out on December 28 to get one last glimpse, you have to at least consider that their lack of pari-mutuel support and on-track presence over the years played at least a small role in the shuttering of the facility.

"I was out there warming up and you could count the number of people with one or two hands," said trainer Brandon Mongiello on the normal daily turnout at the central New Jersey track.

"It was amazing," continued the trainer on the December 28 crowd. "I've been going there 15 plus years and I've never seen it like that."

Trainer John Urbanski, whose father got into the Standardbred game in 1971 and his brother in 1977, has been earning a living at Freehold Raceway for 31 years. His son John (22) and daughter Alex (24) also participate as owners, drivers and trainers. For Urbanski, it was neglect and lack of

imagination that spelled the ultimate demise of the track.

"They could've done a lot of things. You see what The Meadowlands does with the food trucks. You have to give people a reason to want to go there. Down in Maryland they do so many events to get people there; the aprons are full. There was no reason why Freehold Raceway couldn't do those things to draw people," said Urbanski, who continued with a story of his daily view at the track. "There was a guy over the summer for the last few years who used to bring his own lawn chair, take his shirt off and have a cooler of drinks alongside him. That is what we've been looking at. Security never told him to leave or put his clothes back on. That is what we had instead of food trucks or something to draw people in. We had that guy."

While bettors and fans will always have their memories as they either invest at simulcast tracks or concentrate on other entertainment outlets in their daily lives, those on the backstretch like Mongiello and Urbanski must seek new tracks to race at while incurring time and monetary costs.

Mongiello, who led all Freehold trainers in 2024 with 216 starts over the central New Jersey track, said he lightened his horse supply knowing that opportunities would decrease with Freehold closing. The time around the New Year can be a difficult one for trainers as the racing options are few and far between on the East coast. Dover Downs, Monticello and The Meadowlands are the

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

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BARBARA LIVINGSTON

A large crowd showed up on the track apron for the final race ever at Freehold Raceway on December 28.

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

only real options within a three-hour drive of Freehold. Yonkers doesn't resume racing until January 20 and other tracks like Saratoga and Pocono don't open their doors until February.

"Once Freehold closed I didn't really want to be on the road, so I sent some up to friends [at Monticello] and I sold some," said Mongiello, who has 10 horses remaining in his barn.

As a trainer who made 77.6% of his 278 starts in 2024 at Freehold, Mongiello's options are further limited by the class of the horses he has in his barn. There are a few opportunities at The Meadowlands but that's about it right now.

"I'm going to try to get the rest of my horses in at Monticello on one or two days a week," said the trainer, hoping to limit his trips to the Catskill region of New York. "The Meadowlands isn't writing cheaper classes and the races go fast. They had a Trackmaster 69 on the condition sheet last week and they didn't go with it. There were like 500 horses in the [entry] box and only 250 got in."

Mongiello added that The Meadowlands is planning to card races on Sundays in February and March which could help and Harrah's Philadelphia opening its doors in April will provide more opportunities as well.

"Travel, tolls, gas," said Mongiello on the clear downside of Freehold closing. "Freehold was five minutes from my house. It was less expensive. I'm stabled in Colts Neck and that is only 15 to 20 minutes from Freehold."

Urbanski, who built his own farm two years ago in Allentown just 20 minutes from Freehold, has an even higher percentage of starters at the now defunct raceway, 89.4% of his 228 starts. The 53-year-old isn't quite sure what to expect now. His closest option is The Meadowlands if they offer classes for his horses, but he worries that it will be tough for him to get his horses raced consistently since the track has an open door policy without restrictions like surrounding states.

"Anywhere else we would go with the kind of stock we raced [at Freehold] would be three hours away, whether it is Monticello or Rosecroft or Ocean Downs in the summer or Virginia," said Urbanski. "The Meadowlands is going to try to write Freehold classes on Sundays but that is going to invite anyone who fits those classes whether they are coming out of New York or wherever. It is going to be tough. It will be 10-horse fields instead of eight horses. At Freehold we had the half-mile track and it is a great equalizer where you could beat a good horse based on post position and the way a race develops.

"I don't know because of the expense of travelling," continued Urbanski on where he'll be racing in the immediate future. "For me to go to Rosecroft

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



COURTESY JOHN URBANSKI

The Urbanski's - (left to right) Alex, John James, John Joseph and Alisa - used to make their living at Freehold Raceway.

it is a \$250 expense. It is \$100 in gas each way plus tolls. Plus if you have to eat food along the way because it is a long day; three hours there and three hours home. And it could easily be seven or eight hours driving with Baltimore traffic. When you come home from Monticello it can be the same thing. Yeah, the races wrap up early but you can sit in traffic and a two and a half hour drive can easily become a five hour drive.”

While Mongiello and Urbanski started the most horses at Freehold in 2024, trainer Izzy Estrada by far won the most races with 61 victories, more than double Urbanski who tied for second with 26. Estrada sounded dejected about the Freehold situation despite speaking from outside the U.S. while on his yearly holiday vacation.



JAMES LISA/LISA PHOTO

Tyler Miller was the second leading driver at Freehold in 2024.

“It affects me big time. I can’t buy cheap horses anymore with Freehold gone. I used to buy a lot of horses from Canada. I can’t believe that it closed,” said Estrada, who mentioned Monticello as a short-term possibility for his stable of 15 horses. “I will race every place I can.”

A sad reality for New Jersey is the economic effect that Freehold’s closure could have on the state. While the 32-year-old Garden State-born Mongiello is reluctant to leave his home unless the perfect scenario pops up, both Estrada and Urbanski mentioned that Freehold’s closure may force their hands.

“When I get back next week I’ll see what I’m going to do because I may have to move to a different state,” said Estrada.

“This past month at Freehold Raceway I brought \$30,000 into my household. The month before I took \$22,000 out of there. That is what I’m used to living on. For us it costs \$12,000 a month just to break even; pay the bills, feed the animals and take care of what we need,” said Urbanski. “I do have an escape plan and that is to move to Maryland. They have a 40% bonus just for being a resident. If I race for \$8,000 and I win, I get \$4,000 plus \$1,600.

“My daughter now has four horses and my son has two. Their plan is to do this. This is their future. If I have to move to Maryland to preserve that for them then that is what I’ll do.”

Although Urbanski said he already has a potential buyer for his 12 acre farm if he decides to make the move, he wants to “experience” what it will be like racing off his farm in New Jersey in the post-Freehold era before making any final decisions.

“We’ll give The Meadowlands thing a shot,” said Urbanski. “I’m going to fight for it and do my darndest to give it a go.”

Urbanski said his brother is also going to do what he can to stay in the sport, but the Freehold closure may ultimately lead him into an unwanted retirement.

“My brother Ned may have to retire because of this,” said Urbanski. “He’s 65 years old and he’s not going to go to Monticello. He’ll be at The Meadowlands a little bit and will give it a shot. With the owner that he has

I don’t know if the quality of horses will compete at The Meadowlands. If that doesn’t work out he’ll probably retire, and that is unfortunate because he would like to stay in it.”

Mongiello also said he’s going to do his best to stick it out but admitted that he may end up with just a few horses racing at Yonkers.

“I’m going to try my best and if not I’ll sell most of them. It isn’t cheap between gas and tolls. Before you even start with Lasix you are already \$200 to \$300 into your pocket,” said Mongiello. “I drove to Monticello last Thursday. I was up at four in the morning; didn’t even have time to jog my horses. It’s terrible.”

The issue of how to move forward and earn a livelihood aren’t limited to Urbanski, Mongiello and Estrada. A total of 26 trainers started at least 70 horses at Freehold in 2024 and another dozen sent 50-plus horses from the paddock and over Route 9 to the track.

Fifteen drivers went behind the gate at least 100 times at Freehold last year and many of them are young men still looking to make a name for themselves in the sport. Tyler Miller, second in the standings with 116 wins, is just 26. Mark Herschberger (29) finished fifth with 76 victories, Johnathan Ahle (27) was one spot behind with 61 wins, and every driver in the top 10 at the track from 2024 is under 40 years old except two. How will they continue to learn and earn with one less track?

“It is a real shame that it had to end the way it did because it was such an opportunity for us young guys to get opportunities that are hard to come by at ‘A’ tracks like The Meadowlands,” said Tyler Miller, who mapped out his plan for the coming year. “I’m going to race at The Meadowlands right now because it is the only place it town and that is my favorite place to race. I’ve been going to Tioga the past two years so I’ll head up there when they open. I’ll also go to Chester [Harrah’s Philadelphia] and the surrounding areas trying to pick up the opportunities I lost elsewhere.

“From the drivers to the trainers and everyone involved, it is really hard to find the positive of Freehold closing.”

The closure of Freehold Raceway is undoubtedly sad if not unexpected. In the end it will force some people to leave New Jersey and some to leave the sport, but Standardbred horse people are nothing if not resilient and no doubt will find a way to survive.

“Horsemen are like cockroaches. We don’t disappear, we find another way,” concluded Urbanski.

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- Sire of 2024 KYSS Winners, **Fearless Bettor**, p, 3, 1:50.4f -'24 (\$344,290), & **Copperfield**, p, 3, 1:51.2f -'24 (\$226,308)
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# The mystery of why only female trotters can face the boys



## JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman ✕ [BergmanJay](#)

In speaking with Chris Ryder regarding the potential stakes schedule for Twin B Joe Fresh, the trainer was asked about putting the likely 2024 Horse of the Year in with male opposition in the coming year. A few years back, Ryder's Party Girl Hill pulled off a rare accomplishment when she beat the boys in the Tattersalls Pace at The Red Mile. Twin B Joe Fresh may not show the flash that Party Girl Hill displayed throughout her brief career but over time has shown the endurance and willpower to dominate those in her division.

"I might look for a spot here or there like the Potomac," Ryder said at the time, referring to the late-season invitational at Rosecroft as a possibility. Ryder's answer said a lot about the challenges facing pacing mares in current times but in some way reveals a bigger issue that seems hard to quantify. Why is it that few fillies/mares on the pacing side have competed favorably with male competition over the last 50 years while on the trotting side fillies have been able to defeat colts in classic races such as the Hambletonian?

Standardbreds are standardbreds and fillies are fillies, yet it seems that the same good fortune when a battle of the sexes ensues between trotters doesn't hold with pacers. History is also history and it's awfully hard to unearth evidence as to why pacing fillies have not attempted to battle male competition and why just in the last decade countless fillies have met the boys in the Hambletonian, with two of the last seven champions – Atlanta and Ramona Hill – accomplishing the feat. Atlanta even did so when eliminations and finals were held on the same day.

You must journey back nearly 50 years to recall a pacing mare that competed on a regular basis against males and was good enough to win consistently. Tarpport Hap was that mare, and she captured the U.S. Pacing championship as an older mare during an era when the best Free-For-Allers raced weekly. Tarpport Hap also competed against a great filly in Silk Stockings, who defeated male competition as a 3-year-old in the Monticello-OTB Classic, but to be fair beat only New York Sire Stakes competition at the time.

Hoping to find some clarity, I looked to Hall of Fame trainer Jimmy Takter, who during his brilliant and more active career had developed some of the greatest trotters the world has seen. Takter had his share of great pacing fillies as well, so the thought was if anyone could understand why pacing fillies lagged trotting fillies in open company he would.

"That's a good question," Takter said when asked to explain the disparity. "I really don't know."

"Fillies mature faster," Takter said. While that may indeed be a solid theory, the premise should include pacing fillies maturing faster as well. Takter continued, perhaps shedding some light.

"I think the trotting filly understands what to do earlier and can handle their gait while sometimes it takes longer for the colts to put it all together."

So theoretically if filly trotters are easier to teach and don't make mistakes, they could have an edge over male trotters that are still putting all the pieces together physically and mentally.

Takter trained Manchego, who he chose to keep out of the Hambletonian and tackle the girls, winning the Hambletonian Oaks in 2018 when

her rival Atlanta beat the boys in the Hambletonian.

"I thought if I raced her in the Hambletonian she wouldn't have gotten embarrassed," said Takter.

That Manchego trotted in 1:50 on that first Saturday in August and would later in her career go on to routinely defeat male competition is fitting evidence.

Trainer Nifty Norman has had enormous success with trotting fillies that could cross over and defeat male competition. In 2015 the 5-year-old Bee A Magician beat the men in the Maple Leaf Trot as well as the Arthur Cutler Memorial. More recently Norman's protégé Bella Bellini showed her enormous talent defeating males in the Hambletonian Maturity in 2022. As normal as the achievements of Bee A Magician and Bella Bellini



(ABOVE) MIKE LIZZI / (BELOW) NEW IMAGE MEDIA

Jiggy Jog (above) beat the boys in the MGM Yonkers International Trot while Twin B Joe Fresh never faced her older pacing counterparts.



have become over the years, the victory of Venerable in the inaugural Mohawk Million in 2021 opened the door on a new era of filly power on the trotting side.

"I wasn't that surprised," said Norman, talking about Venerable's Mohawk Million success. "She had already shown that she could race over that surface and to be honest the field wasn't that great."

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 7](#)

A daughter of Walner, Venerable came to her speed rather quickly and due to the way the Mohawk Million was structured had an opportunity to race for a lot of money that wasn't worth passing up just because she would be in against colts.

Norman too had a hard time coming up with any conclusive theory as to why the trotting filly/mare has excelled versus the colts, but he had an interesting perspective.

"I think it may have something to do with their gait," said Norman. "I think with trotters it's not just about strength. A horse with a great gait can compete against one that's stronger."

Norman essentially believes that those great fillies that were able to defeat male competition did so not because they outmuscled their rivals but in fact had such a flawless gait that their efficiency made up for the lack of size or power.

Yet perhaps Ryder initially had hit upon some of the reasons we hardly see pacing fillies or mares tackle male competition. In the days of Tarport Hap or the champion Handle With Care that preceded her there just were no races carved out on the schedule that were exclusive to pacing fillies or mares. If an owner wanted to race an aged pacing mare at the highest level, there was only one realistic choice and that was Open company.

Over the years, invitationals and stakes events have been added to the racing calendar and in doing so owners and trainers of both pacing fillies and mares saw no great advantage to face rivals of the opposite sex. In the case of Twin B Joe Fresh, the math just doesn't make sense since co-owner Ryder must also pay nomination and sustaining payments to become eligible to "Open" events. Why spend the money when there is an easier path to profit racing exclusively with her own sex?

Races like the Hambletonian don't force owners to double-stake for a filly to become eligible to the Open division and the fact that the Hambo goes for twice as much as the Oaks is all the inspiration connections need to cross over.

When it comes to aged events, trotting mares have some races exclusively for them but the bigger money events on the stakes calendar are generally for males.

Last year Jiggy Jog S added her name to the growing list of trotting mares with the capacity to compete on the largest stage when she captured the \$1 million MGM International Trot at Yonkers. While some of her male competition from abroad had difficulty navigating the half-mile track, the daughter of Walner exhibited her usual picture-perfect stride in a dominant performance.

Regardless of the theories mentioned here I'm certain there are countless more potential explanations for the limited number of pacing filly or mare success stories over the last 50 years when competing against males. It is only wishful thinking that Twin B Joe Fresh may attempt to erase some of that history in 2025.

# MOST READ STORIES

# 2024

## TOP CANADIAN TRAINER MOREAU SUSPENDED BY AGCO

Richard Moreau, who saw his 10-year reign as O'Brien-winning Trainer of the Year in Canada end in 2023, was "fully suspended" as of July 23 by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-top-canadian-trainer-moreau-suspended-agco>

## BREEDERS CROWN BANS FOR THOSE ON MEADOWLANDS EXCLUSION LIST

The news only got worse over the last week for those owners, trainers and drivers placed on the exclusion list by the Meadowlands, Vernon and Tioga Downs as of December 1. DRF Harness learned that the ban will extend to most Hambletonian Society administered stakes at those facilities and not just those run by the tracks.

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-breeders-crown-bans-those-meadowlands-exclusion-list>

## DRIVER JOE BONGIORNO EYEING MOVE TO THE BUCKEYE STATE

Joe Bongiorno had two major milestones at Yonkers Raceway over the last week. The 30-year-old driver captured his 3,000th career win on Thursday (February 8) guiding Emotions Riches for trainer Travis Alexander. On Monday (February 12) Bongiorno got his first training win of record when Jordan Stratton piloted the veteran import Pat Stanley N to victory in a \$30,000 claimer.

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-driver-joe-bongiorno-eyeing-move-buckeye-state>

## THE MACDONALD FAMILY STORY

If there's one thing that harness racing stands out for, it's for being a family-oriented business. Walk on any backstretch and you're bound to find stables that share the same names, drivers that match in colors, and kids playing out in the yards. Nine times out of 10, you'll hear someone entered into the business because of a family connection.

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-macdonald-family-story>

## SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

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.

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go>

## PROFILE OF TRAINER/DRIVER LARRY STALBAUM

Preconceived notions are part of life and I'll admit to perhaps being over prepared in terms of quantity of questions prior to speaking to Larry Stalbaum, as I was expecting brief answers. Ultimately I was pleasantly surprised as the 61-year-old was quite chatty, frank and thoughtful during our conversation.

<https://www.drf.com/news/harness-profile-trainerdriver-larry-stalbaum>

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# Caretakers hardly getting rich as they work for the love of horses



## HARNESS FOCUS

By Jessica Hallett [X @JHallettPhoto](#)

The racing program provides a plethora of information for the bettors, fans, and horsemen. From the names of the connections to the stats and detailed information behind those people, the tiny print features everything including an extensive report of the last five lines down to the colors the driver wears. While the program provides such a comprehensive report, it misses one key piece of information: who is the caretaker?

The grooms and caretakers of harness racing are unsung heroes, always working behind the scenes and rarely making it into the spotlight. Seldom are the names of these horsepeople announced with the exception of in the big races. Some tracks host a day out of the year dedicated to caretakers and some tracks honor one or two of them at the end of the year, but mostly these caretakers fall behind the shadows of the horses they care for and the trainers that employ them.

Working in harness racing as a caretaker is a seven-day-a-week, 24-hours-a-day job where you're always on call and aren't likely to walk away financially rich. The horses become the priority and time revolves around paddock schedules and post times as well as morning barn chores and jogging. Some jobs require feeding, jogging and training, or shipping in addition to the usual workload. Some require a set number of horses while others work in a team system in the barn. And while there are many, many caretakers behind the scenes, the number decreases greatly over time.

Shelly Grieco has been working for Linda Toscano for 21 years. She became involved in harness racing through her dad, Mike Grieco, scrubbing feed tubs and rolling bandages at his barn at Buffalo Raceway and Batavia Downs. Today, Grieco works at Gaitway Farms in Manalapan, New Jersey with a homebase of The Meadowlands in addition to shipping for stakes and Grand Circuit races.

"It's a seven-days-a-week job. I really don't have a schedule," Grieco explained. "I work until I'm done. Right now, the days are earlier because we are mainly a 2- and 3-year-old barn, so most are just jogging or jogging back with only a few racing. When we get fired up with racing stakes and traveling, there can be 20-plus-hour days a few times a week."

The Toscano Stable runs as part of the group that assigns horses to grooms.

"I am responsible for everything pertaining to the [assigned horses] and their daily care – stalls, waters, feeds, harnessing, bathing, therapies, and putting them away. I also will go on the track if needed. I travel with mine when they race and many times will be the shipper, too."

As far as making a livable wage, Grieco believes that across the board caretakers don't earn enough to match the cost of living today.

"I guess maybe because New Jersey is so expensive to live," she explained. "You can't find a studio apartment for under \$1,300 here. I guess I would say that caretakers pay hasn't increased on the same scale as the cost of living."

Despite the long hours and amount of work each day, Grieco has no plans of changing career paths. She loves each and every one of her horses and says that every year she has one in her stall that grabs a bit more of her heart than others, but her forever heart horse is Market Share.

"I went to college for elementary education, so I guess you could say I am teaching kids, just the four-legged kind. I love my horses. I just wish this business had more of a work/life balance," Grieco concluded.

Michelle Logothety has been a caretaker for Gary Messenger at Monticello Raceway for 20 years. The stable is made up of overnight horses as well as stakes horses that travel the New York Sire Stakes circuit.

"I start at or before 6 a.m. and usually go home, depending on racing, around 5:30 to 6 p.m.," Logothety said. "I do water buckets and set up feed, clean stalls and get the horses ready to jog, then put them away and everything in between, including getting the equipment ready for racing. I feel like I'm his second trainer."

Her favorites in the barn are KJ Hunter and Chip Chip Conway, and she resonates with other caretakers in the fact that the horses are the



(ABOVE) BREEDERS CROWN / (BELOW) DERICK GIWNER

**Sonja Booth (above with Dan Patch winner Sig Sauer) and Shelly Grieco (below with her beloved 2012 Hambletonian winner Market Share) are two caretakers that typically handle Grand Circuit horses for trainers Noel Daley and Linda Toscano, respectively.**

greatest reason for the job.

"I do love the horses, but a job with days off would be nice," she laughed. "I feel you do have to hustle to make a living. Doing paddocks is where the money is."

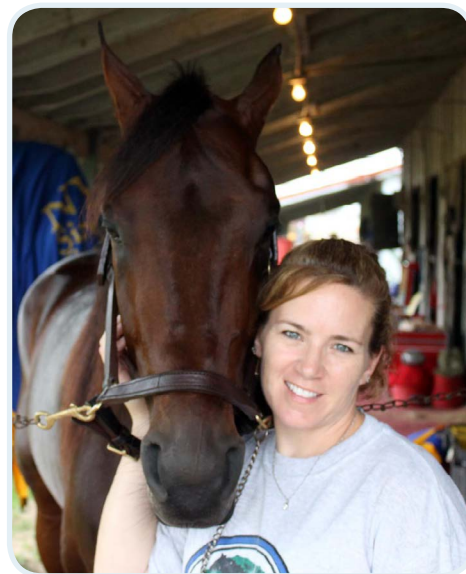
Catch paddocking is one of the most common ways a caretaker makes additional money on the side, including taking up feeding and cleaning stalls for other stables.

Sonja Booth, the 2024 USHWA Caretaker of the Year, works for the 2024 Trainer of the Year Noel Daley.

"When I was about 17 to 18 years old, I bought a ticket to Hamburg, Germany in hopes to find a job maybe cleaning horse stalls as horses had been my hobby growing up. I ended up helping a fellow Finn who had stabled there," Booth said. "I ended up traveling with his horses to Belgium. It all lasted about three months before I returned to Finland."

Sonja later returned to Germany for two years, then met trainer Stephane Bouchard who convinced her to travel stateside for work in harness racing. Her first job was with Trond Smedhammer for five years before going on to work for Daley from 2003 to 2008. After time away to run her own farm, Booth returned to work for him in 2021.

"I work anywhere from 5 to 7 a.m. to 12 to 3 p.m. In the winter we start later due to weather conditions on the track. In the summers we try to beat the heat. Noel is easy to work with as long as your job gets done," Booth explained. "We follow a training and jogging list that Noel makes usually the day before. I clean stalls, turn out in the paddock, some on the walker, get them ready for jogging and training, and put them away afterwards, including brushing, going over their legs for swelling, cuts or bruises, and some horses need wraps. I also clean the equipment, set feed, hay, water, and I think that's all just basic grooming."



CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

"I also like to do some facia work and sometimes massages and stretches," she added.

Her favorite horses include Primadonna Deo, Volume Eight, Captain Albano, and Sig Sauer. She says Captain Albano may be the winner of the group because of his funny attitude and laid-back personality.

Booth's hours extend into time spent on the road for the stakes and Grand Circuit races and this past year, she was seen everywhere from The Meadowlands to the Delaware County Fair.

"I don't think the wages are enough in New Jersey, especially if you would count hours as the cost of living in New Jersey is insane," Booth said. "No benefits, but I'm one of the lucky ones that my husband has benefits through his work."

Despite the weight of the cost of living in today's times, Sonja says horses and other animals will always be part of her life.

Wendy Petrelli first started working at Bar-Lyn Farms for Bob and Dusty Flamme in Warwick, New York at the age of 18. She started working for Tommy Merton in 2009 and today, they stable at Golden Shoe in Bullville.

"I am originally from Goshen which is how I got hooked," Petrelli said. "I used to go to the Great American Weekends to watch the races as a kid. In high school, BOCES had the Horse Care and Training Course at the Historic Track and I took it. Jimi DeLucia was my instructor."

She holds a tight schedule with early mornings that extend through the workday to afternoon racing at Monticello.

"I'm at the farm by 4:45-5:00 a.m. every day because I feed a lot of horses on the farm before I even get to my barn. On non-race days, I leave when we're done in our barn. I go back at night around 5 p.m. to feed the same barns I feed for in the morning. I'm home by 7 p.m. usually.

"My daily barn chores are feeding the horses, turning them out, stalls, making their feed, dressing them to jog or train, bathing them and putting them away," Petrelli continued. "On race days I go up to Monticello to paddock them."

Petrelli agrees that she works as a caretaker because of the horses and says her favorite horse is Wink And Nod.

"I always go for the underdogs. Winky could barely get out of his own way most of the time. I believe he only made \$130,000 lifetime, but he was priceless to me and like a big dog. He's retired to a farm upstate now and I miss him. Second favorite and honorable mention is David On Ice. I would sit in his stall and he would literally lay with his head in my lap and snore."

As a caretaker with the love and passion for horses, she said it is possible to make a livable wage with extra hard work.

"You can make a livable wage but you have to hustle. This isn't a job for people who are afraid to get dirty, or afraid of hard work.

"I enjoy the horses so much," she added. "I'm not getting any younger and someday I might have to find something a little less physical, but for now I can't imagine a day without the horses."

Cheyenne Mandy is a caretaker from Saratoga Harness, working for trainer Robyn Mangiardi since 2022. With a stable that extends to two shedrows at the Spa oval, the team behind Mangiardi has a full platter of duties.

"I work from 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. typically," Mandy said. "On race days, we sometimes get done earlier since we don't have many to jog. I personally get up earlier to feed for other barns as well. My daily jobs are to make sure the horses are fed, stalls, and get the horses ready to jog then bath them. Then put them away, feed lunch, and clean up. On race days,

I paddock as well and get the equipment washed and put the horses away after they're cooled out."

She echoes the sentiment that the love of the horses keeps her in the barn, including her favorite horse and former Mangiardi Stable resident, Miki De Vie.

"I think I make a livable wage. I do pretty well between regular hours at the barn plus paddocks," Mandy said. "I honestly love being at the barn with the horses."

Even after working a day in the barn at the track, Mandy returns home to 17 horses of her own to care for as well.

All-in-all, caretakers look after multiple horses at a time and keep the stable together in many ways. They work many jobs and act as a Jack Of All Trades when it comes to racing.

Job opportunities for caretakers are plentiful, but housing availability near tracks or farms is at a shortage. Coupled with no benefits as well as limited exposure, the career outlook of a caretaker seems less than desirable; however, the best of caretakers agree that they don't do their job for money or notoriety, but for the horses.

It truly takes a special kind of person to be a caretaker.



Cheyenne Mandy works as a caretaker at Saratoga Raceway in New York.



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(Muscle Mass - Pleasing Lady - Cantab Hall) • 3,1:49.1 (\$1,973,661)



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(Always B Miki - Shebestingin - Bettors Delight) • p,2,1:49.2; 3,1:48.1 (\$1,861,447)



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# Lambert aims for Big M success with McCarthy-owned horses

By Jay Bergman

Trainer Aaron Lambert has a stable of mostly young horses. On Saturday night at The Meadowlands, he'll be sending out three veterans with impressive backgrounds hoping to get the stable rolling while his 2-year-olds train down with hopes of arriving this summer.

"I'm training 21 right now," said Lambert on Wednesday.

The three Lambert sends out on Saturday are owned wholly or in partnership by Luke McCarthy, a driving star Down Under and older brother to both Andrew and Todd McCarthy. "Luke plans to come here this summer to drive," said Lambert of the ownership connection.

The older McCarthy will certainly add plenty of depth to the top tier of the driving colony as he battles his brothers and the other elite reinsman in North America.

It's Mahomes A drew post six for Lambert in Saturday's fifth race and the trainer is hoping for a bit more racing luck than he got last Saturday (January 4).

"He was used pretty hard that back half and held up pretty well," said Lambert.

A 6-year-old by Tintin In America (sire of Shartin N), It's Mahomes A will have to race on Saturday while his namesake gets a well-earned bye from the first round of the NFL playoffs. A winner of more than \$100K in Australia, It's Mahomes A is off to a slow start with just one win in seven North American starts.

"He got sick on us, like many of them do," said Lambert of It's Mahomes A, who raced in Australia last May and started for the first time in North America in August.

Lambert was more than happy with the performance of Bondi Lockdown A last week as the veteran son of the great Somebeachsomewhere cut fractions under tenacious pressure much of the final half only to succumb late in the mile.

"I hope he gets an easier trip this week," said Lambert.

Bondi Lockdown A drew post six in Saturday's ninth race and will be looking for his first North American victory, though he's finished second in his last four efforts and has earned a check in all his U.S. starts to date.

"I think he's a better horse coming from off the pace and he definitely prefers a big track," said Lambert of Bondi Lockdown A.

With \$350K in career earnings, Bondi Lockdown A was a class horse in his native country and Lambert is hoping that he can do well in

classes below the Open level this season.

Saturday's contest will certainly test Bondi Lockdown A's class a bit more than his prior starts with Moment Is Here (post 1) from the Ron Burke stable in the field. Moment Is Here developed into a serious sophomore in 2023 for the late-Bob McIntosh. He moved into the Burke stable at the end of his sophomore year and finished second in the \$260,000 Progress Pace at Dover Downs to close out the season.

A son of All Bets Off, Moment Is Here had issues that prevented him from making his first start as a 4-year-old until September and he earned just \$20K in 10 starts on the season.

Trainer Joe Bongiorno's J M Mandamin gets into the race as an optional \$40,000 claimer with the veteran son of Mach Three on a two-race win streak. J M Mandamin drew post nine but did win from post 10 when last at The Meadowlands in early December.

Spirit Of StLouis N earned \$91k last year, and it was a bad year for the altered son of Sweet Lou who races in Saturday's \$24,000 featured tenth race on the 14-race Meadowlands program. Spirit Of StLouis N was racing at the highest level before leaving Australia last summer. A career winner of more than \$1 million, Spirit Of StLouis N sports 28 wins and 20 second-place finishes through an illustrious 82-race career and Lambert is hopeful there is still something left in the tank for U.S. audiences.

"We tried him with Lasix and he really didn't like it," said Lambert, explaining some disappointing lines at Yonkers. Following a pair of qualifiers in December at The Meadowlands, Spirit Of StLouis N made his first Big M pari-mutuel start on December 28 and finished fifth on an off surface.

"He's fresh but I think he needs a few races," said Lambert. "He's got a tough draw on Saturday."

Spirit Of StLouis N drew post 10 and Lambert noted that he was directly outside Sport Secret, the horse that put in a monster trip overtaking Bondi Lockdown A last Saturday night.

"I don't think he can go with the Abuckabett Hanovers," said Lambert, who suggested that Spirit Of StLouis N is likely headed for the Borgata Series at Yonkers this spring.

As for the large group of 2-year-olds in training, Lambert wouldn't specify any names just yet. "They're all doing what you want them to do at this time," said Lambert, preferring to focus on the present rather than the future.

The Meadowlands kicks off its Saturday card at 6:20 PM (EST).

## Dan Patch weekend to include Saturday poolside reception & concert

The U.S. Harness Writers Association and Diamond Creek Farm would like to invite all attendees to the Dan Patch Awards weekend at Rosen Centre in Orlando, Fla., to an outdoor poolside cocktail reception on Saturday, Feb. 22.

USHWA is also excited to announce that rising star country singer Mitch Rossell will perform during the second half of the two-hour cocktail party, which will get underway poolside at Rosen Centre at 5:30 p.m.

Rossell is a singer-songwriter, penning songs for country superstar Garth Brooks, including the number-one hit "Ask Me How I Know," as well as other songs such as "Dive Bar" and "That's What Cowboys Do." When Rossell performed for the first time at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry, he was surprised when Brooks came out to do the introduction.

Rossell, who was an opening act for Brooks on his 2022 stadium tour, also performed in 2023 on America's Got Talent, with his initial audition receiving a "yes" from all four judges and his song "Son" rocketing to the top spot on the iTunes all genres chart.

"We are elated that Adam Bowden and Diamond Creek Farm will once again be sponsoring Saturday's cocktail reception, which was a big hit last year," said USHWA president Michael Carter. "As an added bonus the

attendees will be entertained by Mitch Rossell, who I saw when he was an opening act for Garth Brooks.

"We will have an open bar with a selection of light appetizers, and hope that everybody can join in on the fun. The reception is very casual and the timing still allows attendees to make dinner plans. This will be a great start to a great weekend, culminating in the Dan Patch Awards dinner, presented by Caesars Entertainment, on Sunday night."

Attendees will receive further information about the weekend's activities in a welcome envelope that will be handed out upon check-in at Rosen Centre. Any horsemen who are wintering in the area and would like to join in for the Diamond Creek reception may do so by simply showing up and receiving a wristband at the check-in table.

Tickets for the Dan Patch Awards banquet are \$200. There is also a reduced-price menu option for children 12 and under. Dinner tickets can be ordered until Feb. 17 by contacting Judy Davis-Wilson at [zoe8874@aol.com](mailto:zoe8874@aol.com) or 302.359.3630 or Liz Cheesman at [Elizabeth.Cheesman@winbak-farm.com](mailto:Elizabeth.Cheesman@winbak-farm.com). For a dinner ticket form please click [here](#).

-release (U.S. Harness Writers Association)

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# Love of racing drives Jeremy Smith to on-track success

By Ken Weingartner

Jeremy Smith in 2024 won the first Grand Circuit race of his career, set career highs for purses and driver's rating, and captured the driving title at Miami Valley Raceway. Yet for all his accomplishments, he was left to wonder what might have been.

Smith was sidelined for a total of 21 weeks last year because of injuries suffered in two accidents. The first, in mid-June, came as Smith sat atop the driver standings at Eldorado Scioto Downs after already garnering the Miami Valley title, not to mention closing out 2023 as the leading driver at Hollywood Dayton Raceway.

He was on a roll, having won 384 of 1,951 races in the previous eight months, a victory rate of just less than 20 percent. (Ironically, that stretch began after Smith returned from missing eight weeks in 2023 because of sports hernia surgery.) Among the triumphs was his win with Little Rocket Man in the \$200,000 Battle of Lake Erie at MGM Northfield Park on June 8, giving Smith his first Grand Circuit score.

Smith was out for five weeks before returning on July 19, and picked up where he left off, winning 34 races at a 21-percent clip prior to being sidelined again in early August. This time, he was out for 16 weeks, until the end of November.

"I get on these rolls and just never get to keep rolling," said Smith, a native and resident of Washington Court House, Ohio, who will turn 45 on Monday. "I just wish I could have finished out the year. It was up and down like a rollercoaster the four months I was out, but after it was all said and done, I was just glad to be back."

Smith has opened this year by hitting the board in 13 of 23 drives, winning six, as he looks to defend his crown at Miami Valley. Last year, Smith won 181 races at Miami Valley, just two shy of equaling Brett Miller's 2019 record for victories at the five-eighths-mile oval.

"That was just awesome," Smith said. "I always kind of thought I could do this, be the leading driver, I just needed to be healthy and, of course, needed the right accounts. A lot of stuff has to line up for that to happen. It just seemed like everything kept falling in line."

Smith — who in addition to his Miami Valley title has three at Dayton (2018, 2022, 2023) and had one at Lebanon Raceway (2012) — finished last year with 298 wins, \$3.88 million in purses, and a .302 driver's rating. He

ranked 31st in victories among all drivers in North America and 33rd in purses despite his extended absences.

The highlight of the season was Little Rocket Man's victory in the Battle of Lake Erie, at odds of 20-1, from post six at half-mile Northfield.

"I heard a lot of people say he didn't have a shot, but I thought he did," Smith said. "We didn't draw the best, and that on a half means a lot, but I thought if I could catch one break...and really, I didn't. I didn't get the best of trips by any means. I ended up third-over. The horse first-up didn't really advance the cover flow. But Little Rocket Man, when it came crunch time, out-dug the rest of them."

Little Rocket Man later won the Jim Ewart Memorial and Hoosier Park Pacing Derby, and was second in the Dayton Pacing Derby, all with Hall of Famer David Miller in the sulky.

"To have a horse like him and maybe win some of those races just would have been awesome," said Smith, who watched those victories while on the mend. "That would have been that little cherry on top of everything."

Smith, who has won 3,716 races and \$30 million in purses lifetime, will hope to find a few other cherries this season. But he won't get caught looking at numbers as he seeks to get on another roll in 2025.

"My focus is just on doing good," Smith said. "I just want to win races and let the numbers go where they go. Otherwise, you start pushing. If I just do what I do, it's

better. I'm just trying to put my horses in the best spot I can and get the best results I can. It doesn't matter if we're 90-1 or even money. I don't think any of the horses I drive can read the tote board. I'm trying with everything.

"I love racing. Whether it's a top trainer or a guy that has just one horse, it doesn't matter to me. I want to win for everybody. That's just how I've been my whole life. I'm a sore loser. I can take it and smile when we come off the track, but in my head, I'm a very sore loser. I'm always thinking about how I could have done better. It's always there. How could I do better. Sometimes, I even think that when we win."

Smith's appreciation of those in the sport runs deep.

"Everybody around in racing, they mean the world to me," he said. "Without them, I'm nobody. Without these trainers, grooms, owners, there is no Jeremy Smith. I always think about that. I appreciate it more than people will ever know."



CONRAD PHOTO

Jeremy Smith was sidelined for 21 weeks in 2024 due to two on-track accidents.

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# U.S. harness racing economic indicators see decreases in 2024

After significant increases in all of the key economic indicators — total wagering, purses, per race average and per betting interest for harness racing in 2023 — each of those numbers saw decreases in 2024.

According to Equibase, handle on Thoroughbred racing in North America was also down, by 3.35%, in 2024, marking the third consecutive year that wagering has declined.

Total wagering of \$1,470,658,827 during the past year was \$114,699,372 less than 2023, a 7.23% decrease. However, the 2024 total was only \$16.4 million less than two years ago in 2022.

The highest level of wagering, \$421,606,890, in the second quarter of 2024 was only 2.59% less than 2023, while the fourth quarter had the least amount of handle, \$327,435,389, a decrease of 11.28% compared to 2023.

The overall wagering was reflective of the decrease in handle at the majority of pari-mutuel tracks across the U.S. Only seven of those 33 tracks showed an increase in handle.

Purses in 2024 decreased by 1.93%. Last year, \$491,734,380 in purses were distributed over 3,149 race days compared to 2023 when \$501,391,585 in purses were earned in 3,218 race days.

The decline in wagering resulted in decreases in both per race average and per betting interest. In 2024, per race average was \$42,525 down 6.64% from \$45,552 while per betting interest decreased from \$5,823 to \$5,456 (-6.30%).

## ECONOMIC INDICATORS ON U.S. RACES – 2024 vs. 2023

2024 vs. 2023 – Annual – January 1 through December 31

	2024	2023	% Change
Total Wagered	\$1,470,658,827	\$1,585,358,199	-7.23%
Per Race avg.	\$42,525	\$45,552	-6.64%
Per Betting Interest	\$5,456	\$5,823	-6.30%
Purses	\$491,734,380	\$501,391,585	-1.93%
Race Days	3,149	3,218	-2.14%

Please note: The information above includes U.S. and Canadian common and separate pool wagers on races contested in the U.S.

-release (USTA Communications Department)

## FIRST-EVER HARNESS RACING GRADED STAKES LIST FOR 2025 ANNOUNCED

For the first time ever, harness racing in the U.S. and Canada will have a schedule of Graded and Restricted Graded Stakes races in 2025. The list of Grade 1, 2 and 3 races was announced Monday (Jan. 6).

During the inaugural year of the program, there will be a total of 171 Graded Stakes, including 47 Grade 1, 47 Grade 2 and 77 Grade 3 races.

Graded Stakes for the harness racing industry had been a topic of discussion for more than 20 years when, at the request of the major sales companies and breeders, with the U.S. Trotting Association supporting the project, a Graded Stakes Committee was created in 2023 to address it.

“It is gratifying to see the industry come together to promote and clarify the relative quality of the sport’s most visible and coveted races,” said Mike Tanner, chief executive officer of the USTA. “The program gives both horsemen and fans a standard against which comparisons can be made, which is a good thing. The Association is proud to help facilitate the Graded Stakes Committee’s important mission.”

The purpose of the committee was to provide those breeders, owners, trainers, and Standardbred horsemen a reliable guide to the relative quality of Standardbreds by identifying the U.S. and Canadian races whose recent renewals consistently attract the highest quality of competition.

The Graded Stakes Committee consists of 11 members that is comprised of eight representatives selected by the USTA, two from Standardbred Canada and one from the Hambletonian Society. Of the eight from the USTA, three will be racetrack representatives, two breeders, two from sales companies, and one at-large member.

The original committee established grades using purses and a points calculation system from the prior four years (2021-2024) and then adjusting for the 2025 races.

Three-year terms for committee members will be staggered with a limit of three terms. Terms commence on the date of the USTA Board of Directors annual meeting and expire Aug. 1 of the committee member’s third year.

The chair of the committee, currently USTA Vice Chairperson Mark Loewe, is selected by the full committee and serves a two-year term.

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### THURSDAY, JANUARY 9

#### RACE 9

(5) P L RINCHENIA was aggressively driven last week, and she rewarded her driver with a winning effort. Off that sharp performance, she gets the call to repeat.

-Garnet Barnsdale



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

### FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

#### RACE 4

(9) LYONS SURFING doesn’t look like much on paper unless you notice the trainer change back to Bongiorno and recall that the last time he was in this barn the result was a 1:51 1/5 gate to wire win from post eight at Yonkers. Note that that big Yonkers win came after missing more than five weeks.

-Derick Givner



#### RACE 3

(1) BETTERTNOTMACHME finished 2nd to two tough class droppers in each of her last two starts. She looks good in this field, and she gets top billing.

-Barnsdale



**WOODBINE**  
MOHAWK PARK

### SATURDAY, JANUARY 11

#### RACE 1

(4) REMEMBER THE ALAMO didn’t race like a horse that had missed several months when he dead-heated for second and was placed first last weekend; should be even tighter now.

-Givner



### FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Mohawk Park Analysis

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# NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

## BARTLETT'S BRUSH WITH BIG M HISTORY FALLS TWO WINS SHORT

There were just three races to go on the Saturday (Jan. 4) night card at The Meadowlands, and the red-hot Jason Bartlett had already driven six of the first 11 winners on the program.

He didn't have a drive in the 13th race, so if he were going to tie The Big M record of eight winners on a single program, he would have to be victorious in both the 12th and 14th dashes. He obviously had a shot, since both horses were morning-line second choices.

Bartlett's Sweet Jeff IR was bet down to 3-5 in the 12th – no doubt in part due to how the night was going for the 43-year-old pilot – but after making the lead early then sitting off a backstretch duel, the odds-on favorite struggled, failing to keep up in the pocket before finishing last in the field of 10.

"I knew in the post parade he would be really good or really bad," said Bartlett. "He was very keen the week before. I kind of had to walk him down the backside the other night. Something bad had to be going on with him for him to race that bad."

Bugaboo Lou was the even-money second choice to 4-5 favorite Bobcat Bay in the finale, but "Bobcat" kept "Bugaboo" safely at bay after a stretch duel to keep Bartlett's win total at a half-dozen.

"He's a good horse who hasn't been great recently," said Bartlett. "I knew with his back class, I still thought he had a decent shot. He got a good trip and raced a lot better than he has been lately."

So, the 13-time Yonkers Raceway driving champion finished with six victories.

Good stuff.

Only once during 2024 did a driver win six on a Big M card, with Dexter Dunn turning the trick on Hambletonian Day. Dunn's six-bagger came on a 16-race card, Bartlett's on a 14.

"I was aware of how many wins I had," said Bartlett, who is just 34 victories shy of 11,000 lifetime. "And I knew how many shots I had left. I didn't find out until after the races what the track record was when my wife, Kristen, told me.

"I kind of just take it race by race. When I get in the bike for the 14th race, it's about the 14th race."

Bartlett has been enjoying his Saturday soirees at the mile oval. And so have his fans.

On Dec. 7, the native of Maine won five times, becoming just the second driver during 2024 at The Big M to win five on a card twice (Yannick Gingras was the other) before taking four walks down victory lane on Dec. 28.

"I love the competition," said Bartlett, who intends to continue his Saturday visits to East Rutherford. "Saturday nights at The Meadowlands worked out pretty well for me last year. I've never won more than eight races on a card [at Yonkers]. I've done it five or six times. Maybe I can do it at The Meadowlands."

**SUPER STATS:** Last year, Bartlett finished second in North America in dash wins with 633 (Aaron Merriman led with 874, his 10th straight national crown) and third in money-earnings with \$12.6 million (Dunn, \$16.6 million; Gingras, \$14.5 million).

For three consecutive years, beginning in 2022, Bartlett won over 600 races and earned in excess of \$10 million.

**EIGHT IS ENOUGH:** The Meadowlands record of eight wins on a card is shared by Mike Lachance (July 14, 1995) and Brett Miller (Dec. 16, 2016).

**7-7-7 FOR DUNN:** The last three times a driver won seven races on a Big M card, Dexter Dunn was the man in the bike, accomplishing the feat on Jan. 11, 2020, June 18, 2021 and July 23, 2021.

**SHARPEN YOUR PENCILS:** Come on out to the track on Friday, Jan. 17, for the first of what will be a monthly handicapping contest with a prize pool of \$1,000.

Contestants must be on-site to participate and the top two finishers earn a spot in a \$10,000 invitation-only handicapping contest that takes place in December.

For complete information, and to enter, go [here](#).

**CIRCLE THE DATE:** One of The Big M's most popular giveaways takes place on Saturday, Jan. 18, with the track's 2025 Calendar Giveaway, which is chock full of photos commemorating highlights of the 2024 season.

Starting at 6 p.m., the first 1,000 guests will receive a calendar.

-edited release (Meadowlands)

## MERRIMAN, KREISER TOPPED NORTHFIELD STANDINGS IN 2024

Aaron Merriman wrapped up another stellar season at MGM Northfield Park in 2024 with 574 winner's circle trips from 2,324 starts to collect his eighth straight driving title and 13th overall at the Home of the Flying Turns. Hunter Myers (260), Kurt Sugg (257), Justin Irvine (255) and Ronnie Wrenn Jr (236) rounded out the top five.

[READ MORE](#)

## MEADOWLANDS ANNOUNCES 2025 STAKES SCHEDULE

On Saturday, the Meadowlands announced that the 2025 stakes season will offer over \$18 million in purses to the connections of competing horses in both Grand Circuit and New Jersey-restricted stakes from late April through November.

[READ MORE](#)

## 2025 STALLION BREEDING FUNDRAISER TO BENEFIT MUSEUM & HOF

Do you have a breeding that you won't be using this season? We have a home for it!

We are lining up our stallion roster for the 2025 season and invite you to put your breedings to work for the benefit of all – the breeding donor, the mare owner and the Harness Racing Museum. If you have never participated in this unique and important fundraiser by donating a breeding or placing a bid and would like more information, please contact Joanne Young at [development@harnessmuseum.com](mailto:development@harnessmuseum.com) or 845-294-6330.

There is no limit on the number of breedings we will happily accept and we promise professional, dedicated attention to making the best possible arrangements. A complete list of the stallions, conditions and bid form will be posted by Friday, January 17, at [www.harnessmuseum.com](http://www.harnessmuseum.com) under the Fundraising tab. This list will be updated as additional breedings are donated – please check the Museum website often.

We want to thank those of you who have already donated breedings, as these breedings will help further the Museum's Mission – to protect the past, support the present and promote the future of our great sport.

Bids on these breedings must be called in, emailed or postmarked by Saturday, February 8, 2025. Any breedings not receiving successful bids may still be available after that date.

We are happy to receive breedings throughout the spring and duplicate breedings are acceptable.

(USHWA Ohio Chapter)

## CHARLIE MAY, DUNKIN' NAMED OHIO'S CO-AGED PACERS OF THE YEAR

For the first time, a tie has co-named Charlie May and Dunkin' as the Ohio 2024 Aged Pacer of the Year.

Owned and bred by Don Tiger, Charlie May hit the board in 13 of 20 starts last year. The six-year-old gelding by Mcardle won the \$85,000 Ohio Sires Stakes Veterans Championship, upping his seasonal earnings to \$224,230. Charlie May claims a lifetime record of 30-22-10 in 83 starts with \$2,276,365 in the bank. Steve Carter conditions the pacer.

Charlie May received divisional honors in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Additionally, he was named Ohio Horse of the Year in 2021.

Dunkin' won the \$315,000 Dan Patch, lowering his lifetime mark to 1:49 1/5 on his way to being named Ohio's Co-Aged Pacer of the Year. The four-year-old Pet Rock gelding hit the board 20 of 35 starts in 2024, winning nine and bankrolling \$419,228. Scott DiDomenico trains for owner Betty Clegg. Stonegate Standardbred Farms bred Dunkin'.

Charlie May and Dunkin' will be honored at the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association Annual Awards Banquet on January 18, 2025, at the Marriott Columbus Airport in Columbus, Ohio. Seats are sold out.

The 2024 Ohio Horse of the Year will be announced at the awards banquet.

-edited release (OHHA)