

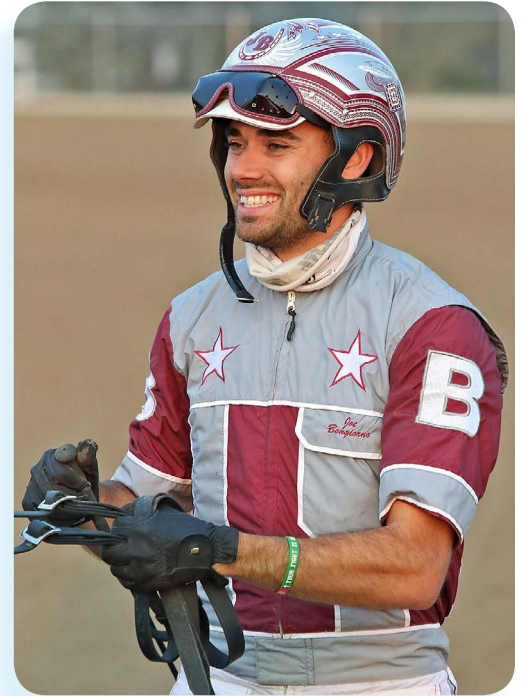
THURSDAY, JANUARY 16, 2025

BRIGHT SKIES AHEAD FOR BONGIORNO



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [X BergmanJay](#)



CONRAD PHOTO

Joe Bongiorno, who drove his 3,000th winner early in 2024, won 149 races in 694 starts in his first year as a listed trainer.

About a year ago Joe Bongiorno and the New Zealand import Typhoon Banner appeared ready to go in separate directions. Bongiorno seemed frustrated with his career in New Jersey and for a moment pondered a move out west to Ohio to explore a catch-driving career in a new location with a smaller stable to build on. Typhoon Banner, a son of Bettor's Delight, was also grappling to find direction at the time. An expensive purchase in 2023, the gelding had struggled to gain traction at Yonkers and seemed destined for lower classes well below all expectations.

Much has changed in less than a year for both Bongiorno and Typhoon Banner, and perhaps the thrill of winning some big races combined with a stable with high potential has spurred Bongiorno into a much more positive position as the 2025 season gets underway.

Bongiorno, who stayed put in New Jersey, became the listed trainer for the Bongiorno stable in 2024 and recently returned to the sulky after a brief injury that kept him from driving. Time changes all and Bongiorno's prospects now look great. He was more than excited about what has

been accomplished and what could come ahead in 2025.

"I'm very grateful to the owners for letting me do what I did with Typhoon Banner," said Bongiorno when asked about the impressive change in the horse's performance in the second half of the season. "He wasn't doing what we had expected of him, and he started to lose weight," said Bongiorno of the early troubles Typhoon Banner suffered through in the beginning of 2024.

"I was able to back off with him and give him some time," said Bongiorno. "He had some bad draws and got some money off his card and was able to drop in class when we took him to Pocono."

No longer concerned with the price tag but more worried that the Typhoon Banner they

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purchased was not the one that had been racing in mid-conditioned levels at Yonkers, Bongiorno was hopeful that a move to the five-eighths track combined with plenty of class relief would help turn Typhoon Banner's season around.

For the stable and the horse, Bongiorno's decision was the turning point for Typhoon Banner and the results were more than impressive. After losing his first five races of the year and spending time on the shelf a few times with minor ailments, Typhoon Banner regained winning form in May with an easy wire-to-wire win for catch-driver Matt Kakaley in 1:51 against non-winners of \$4,800, a class well below the non-winners of \$30,000 he had raced with upon arrival in North America.

By late June, Typhoon Banner had become competitive with higher classes at Pocono and when Bongiorno returned to the sulky to drive him in late June he was a different horse. The result was a wire-to-wire win in 1:50 1/5 that earned him a trip to the top class a week later.

Bongiorno had been cautious about leaving the gate early with Typhoon Banner but by summer of 2024 had the confidence in him.

"I like to be cautious with horses coming over because sometimes they can get too hot," Bongiorno said, revealing a strategy that certainly has paid off nicely for Typhoon Banner.

With Bongiorno unavailable, Ridge Warren guided Typhoon Banner to a career-best 1:48 4/5 performance on July 6 at Pocono. The victory signaled a return to top form and a reemergence at Yonkers.

With newfound confidence Typhoon Banner won two of his next three races over the half-mile track, including a 1:50 3/5 win in a \$39,000 Invitational that got noticed by a few different race secretaries.

Typhoon Banner was invited by Rick Kane to a \$100,000 Invitational at Pocono on Sun Stakes day but the prospects were bleak once he drew post eight in a field that included world champions Ruthless Hanover and Allywag Hanover.

"I was really impressed with him that day," said Bongiorno of the sixth-place finish behind Ruthless Hanover in the 1:48 mile. "We were stuck behind horses with no place to go but in the stretch he had plenty of pace."

That race likely turned the switch on for Bongiorno and gave him the confidence that would lead to a dramatic late-season run for Typhoon Banner. Invited on August 24 to the \$100,000 Kane Invitational at Batavia against another stellar field, Bongiorno did what he's been known to do best and that is leave explosively and circle horses. Typhoon Banner had not shown that kind of early foot since his arrival stateside but on that night quickly got a spot in front before allowing Coaches Corner and Jason Bartlett to regain. Inevitably the trip didn't work out as Typhoon Banner encountered traffic problems, but a third-place finish was more than could have been expected racing some of the best horses in North America.

Another Invitational win at Yonkers put Bongiorno in a situation he would have to navigate. "After the win at Yonkers I knew he was going to get invited to the MGM Grand Prix series, so I decided to give him some time off," Bongiorno said.

Perhaps it was a sign of maturity, not just for the horse but for the trainer-driver to be patient and not overwork the horse despite being in top form. That decision was critical since Typhoon Banner would face a host of time-tested warhorses in the Grand Prix and somehow emerge as the champion.

With Bongiorno sidelined with a minor injury, Matt Kakaley, who had driven the horse successfully at Pocono earlier in the year, picked up where he left off engineering consecutive wins in the mile and a sixteenth final preliminary and then the \$250,000 finale in December.

Typhoon Banner finished the season with nine wins and \$276K in earnings, numbers that seemed inconceivable last March.

"We're giving him some time off now and getting him ready," said Bongiorno. "I think we'll stake him up a bit."

More than likely the veteran pacer will be nominated to the Borgata Series that starts in March at Yonkers.

With a stable of 65 under his authority, Bongiorno has been filling the entry box at The Meadowlands as he awaits the re-opening of Yonkers on January 20. He's got a solid group of 2-year-olds in training and while it's still a bit early is happy with the core group.

He seemed excited about the prospects of a returning 3-year-old to action by the name of Gogo Grasshopper.

"He just got beaten in the Pennsylvania Sire Stakes final by Papis



MIKE LIZZI PHOTO

Joe Bongiorno trainee Typhoon Banner won the MGM Grand Prix at Yonkers Raceway on December 16.

Rocket, one of Ronnie's (Burke) horses," said Bongiorno. "I had to race him pretty hard that day and then we found out he scoped really bad afterwards.

"We quit with him after the race because he wasn't staked to anything else but we're going to stake him heavily this year," said Bongiorno of the son of Sweet Lou who captured two of his four Pennsylvania Sire Stakes preliminaries and was second to eventual Breeders Crown champion Louprint in their only encounter.

"We gave him three months off and he's back in training now," said Bongiorno of Gogo Grasshopper.

As excited as Bongiorno is about the future of his stable, he was bubbling over about his first child, a 3-month-old boy named Parker Joseph.

From the uncertainty of a future just 11 months ago, Bongiorno now appears on course for a big year in 2025 both personally and professionally.

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Meadowlands absence could've made the heart grow fonder



AT THE TRACK

By Darin Zoccali [X AtTheTrack7](#)

When The Meadowlands initially announced its live racing calendar for the 2025 season, I admit, I was pleased to see what appeared to be some changes.

The racing dates seemed to indicate a 12 week gap between the end of the “Championship Meet” and beginning of the “Winter Meet,” with harness racing being conducted through September 13 and returning on December 11.

I was pleased because I am of the opinion that The Meadowlands operating harness racing nearly year-round at this point can make the product a bit stale.

That is not a slight at the quality of racing at The Meadowlands, but just an observation based on scheduling. Saratoga is special because they race exclusively in the summer. The Kentucky Downs meet does extremely well contested over a brief period of time. The Meadowlands, which is without question the premier Standardbred signal in the country, was racing nearly every weekend in 2024. I think many in Thoroughbred racing would agree this has taken away from Gulfstream Park, which now races all year-round as well.

Years ago, The Meadowlands used to conduct a harness racing meet that would last from just after Christmas through Hambletonian Day. Then there would be a near five month gap between Hambletonian Day and the return of harness racing at the end of December. Of course during that gap, there would be a full-fledged thoroughbred meet at The Meadowlands, which for many years was the premier evening thoroughbred signal in the country.



NIKKI SHERMAN/DRF HARNESS

The Meadowlands will race on Friday and Saturday every weekend until September 13.

I was pleased when the 2025 schedule was released for two reasons.

First, a three month gap between the end of harness racing in mid-September and the return of harness racing in mid-December appeared. While not the five months off that it used to be, I believed this gap in harness racing would enable players to hit the reset button. Time would pass where players would look forward to the return of harness racing at The Meadowlands.

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Years ago, in the two to three weeks leading up to return of harness racing, qualifiers would be contested. Dave Brower, Sam McKee and myself would work on video segment called the "Qualifier Report" where we would talk about the horses getting ready for Big M winter racing. We would look through the Late Closer nominations and highlight some of those horses as well. There was anticipation that would build up for the return of harness racing. Those weeks leading up to it were a lot of fun. Then would come draw day and seeing full fields, quality racing. It all just worked very well.

Second, I thought the three month gap could mean the return of a full-fledged thoroughbred meet at The Meadowlands. With the exception of Turfway Park in the winter, thoroughbred racing has been missing a quality evening signal for some time. The thoroughbred racetracks in Texas such as Sam Houston, Retama and Lone Star are prohibited from sending out their signal due to not operating in compliance with HISA. While there are good tracks offered at night at various times of the year, it's not what it once was and I thought the Meadowlands could once again fill that void.

But, shortly after the schedule was released, it was also revealed that The Meadowlands would be hosting the Fanduel Championships and Fall Final Four on November 15 (<https://www.drf.com/news/meadowlands-2025-stakes-schedule-announced>). This threw a curveball at my excitement and also brought about confusion. Would The Meadowlands race a thoroughbred meet in October only? How does a planned card on November 15 fit into the schedule they already released?

Amazingly as I was submitting this column to the editor, the schedule changed. Without exaggeration, I checked the calendar the morning of Tuesday, January 14 and the schedule was the same as the one initially released. Much to my chagrin, as I was submitting the column, the schedule was updated and returned to two days a week for the vast majority of the year, with a brief respite from September 13 through October 24, likely paving the way for another brief turf-only thoroughbred meet at The Meadowlands.

Currently The Meadowlands is racing at a time where they have a surplus of entries. A trainer recently told Derick Giwner for a column that he was writing that The Meadowlands had over 500 horses in the entry box one week ago. That number of entries can support three days of racing right now and I am admittedly a bit surprised The Meadowlands has not added a third day of racing in January and even more surprised by the removal of Sundays from February 2 through March 30. I understand the purse implications of that third day and the impact that has on The Meadowlands, but in looking through the race programs for the last month, there are races being run on the weekends, mainly the lower-level claiming races and non-winners of \$2,000 and \$3,000 that could be contested on a Thursday night or a Sunday afternoon.

Speaking for myself, I would prefer two 12-race cards on Friday and Saturday with the best racing possible across those two programs and relegate the lower-level claiming and money-condition races to a third day of racing.

I was also surprised to see that when the calendar that included Sunday racing was announced, The Meadowlands was not racing on Super Bowl Sunday. I suppose it is possible they have an agreement with Fanduel, who operates their sportsbook, which prevents that. But, it feels like a missed opportunity. You have in your building by all accounts one of the most popular sportsbooks in the country. On the biggest day of sports betting of the year, why not leverage that to put eyes on harness racing? Prop bets between the Super Bowl and Meadowlands harness racing could have been a part of that equation as well. They did that for a few years on Hambletonian Day. It seems like a moot point now given the reversion back to a near year-round two-days-per-week schedule, but again, I believe there was an opportunity there.

At a time when The Meadowlands is sending out press releases highlighting its revenue declines, there seem to be opportunities available for them to take advantage of. Again, I am on the outside looking in, so there could be issues preventing some of my suggestions. But I do believe The Meadowlands needs to get back to a schedule that leaves harness fans counting down the days to when its racing returns again, and also maximizing the racing calendar for when they have the most horses. Maybe 2026 will bring about some of these changes.



EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner

✉ @harnesseveguy

*More
Big M
Thoughts*

The topic of Meadowlands racing dates wasn't on my radar to opine on this week until reading Darin's column. I 100% agree with him that an extended break in racing builds a certain anticipation for the return to action.

In my younger days I would always count down the days until The Meadowlands opened in late December and plan a trip to the track. The question is whether I would still feel the same way if that schedule existed and I have to be honest and say no. The main reason is that the landscape has changed. Part of the excitement back then was seeing which horses might be in the Invitational and the upper classes. That simply doesn't exist anymore. The best horses race through November and hang it up for the winter for the most part and those that hang around have so many more options with Yonkers and Ohio offering big-money purses for the class.

January racing at The Meadowlands also brought the hope of seeing some top horses compete in winter series races. While the days of watching top horses in the Presidential and other series are long gone, I'd make a strong argument that there is room for a January into February series for late-developing horses, whether it is for non-winners of 2 races or some predetermined money amount lifetime. This could provide a trainer the possibility of testing a 3-year-old for a couple of starts in January and a final in February just before stakes payments are due on the 15th to see if they have something worthwhile. If they are stakes caliber then they can back off a bit and bring them back in April.

Thinking outside the box, maybe there can be another series with the identical conditions in early April. All horses then would compete for seven spots in a final against the top three from the February final. There could even be a bonus if a horse wins both finals.

As far as the current Meadowlands schedule goes as it exists, there is an interesting change in that the track will race past Hambletonian Day and throughout August instead of Thursdays or Sundays in other months. I'm not sure how I feel about it as my attention tends to shift to other tracks during that time of year. Will I split my attention between Meadowlands and Northfield on August 9 during the Milstein, for example?

Looking back on the last couple of years, The Meadowlands has raced three Thursday cards with an average handle per race of about \$115K, and twice on Sundays with an average per race of about \$150K. Last year they had two cards in late August (certainly a rarity) and the average was \$181K. Assuming similar results for eight extra weekend cards in August this year, the decision would net the track almost \$3.5 million in additional handle over the previously proposed Sunday cards in February and March.

Of course the late-August cards from 2024 featured New Jersey Classic elimination races and the one Friday card had most of the top drivers in attendance. That probably won't be the case on most August weekends in 2025 with many stakes carded out of town during the month, so it will be interesting to see the actual results play out. My fingers will be crossed for positive results.

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Stratton looks to get into the win column at The Meadowlands

By Jay Bergman

Following a career-best in wins and earnings in 2024, trainer Cory Stratton is hoping for even better results in 2025. With Yonkers Raceway set to open next week, Stratton continues to try to keep his stable active racing weekends at The Meadowlands.

Last year Stratton's stable earned more than \$2.2 million with 126 wins but things have gotten off to a slow start to date, with a limited number from Stratton's 50-horse stable in action. To make matters more difficult this weekend at The Meadowlands, Stratton was only able to get in about half the horses he entered on the Friday and Saturday race cards, and most of his horses drew post 10.

"It wasn't the best," said Stratton about the coming weekend. "I still think a few have chances."

The confidence Stratton has despite the hard-luck draws is built on his stable's capacity to go the distance. With 900 starts last year, Stratton is in for the long game and the first few weeks of the year are hardly a measure of what could be down the road with a stable that has improved its quality and should compete at a high level at both Yonkers and The Meadowlands.

"I will definitely be racing at The Meadowlands," Stratton said. "For Once Inmy Life and Stellar Yankee are both better on the mile track."

Stratton was referring to the pair entered in Saturday's tenth race, the co-featured non-winners of \$12,500 class with a purse of \$17,500.

"I think For Once Inmy Life still has a good chance despite the post," said Stratton.

The now 5-year-old son of Downbytheseaside exudes class, with Stratton picking up the training duties last September. For Once Inmy Life hasn't missed the board for Stratton while racing both at Yonkers and The Meadowlands, and was a solid second in last Saturday's (January 11) Big M feature.

Stellar Yankee got the best draw of all of Stratton's horses entered this weekend, landing post three in the same race. While Stratton would prefer not to have to race two of his own horses in a single contest, he understands the benefits of at least racing. Stellar Yankee also had a second-place finish in last week's Meadowlands action but was racing in a lower class than his stablemate.

Stratton also singled out Illustriousarden N, a pacing mare entered in Friday's 13th race, a \$12,500 claiming event.

"She's finished with a lot of pace last week and she found a good spot," said Stratton of the import that has won twice in her last four starts.

Looking at the big picture with a diverse stable that will see more starters in the coming weeks, Stratton is hoping to see continued progress from a horse he claimed towards the end of the Yonkers 2024 meet. Stormont Divide was claimed for \$75,000 in November at Yonkers by Stratton and the gelding had a win and a pair of seconds in the four \$35,000 Invitationals he competed in at the close of the meet.

"We'll see how he comes back but I'm hoping he continues to race at this level. If he does, I'll probably nominate him to some of the races over the five-eighths tracks," Stratton said about the horse he claimed off leading trainer Ron Burke.

"Ronnie has a large stable and he can't race all of his horses at the highest level," said Stratton of his thought process in claiming off the sport's winningest trainer. "He's claimed horses from me and done well and I've claimed horses from him and done well."

In addition to Stormont Divide, Stratton has some high-classed pacers looking to do damage once again at Yonkers with Idealsomemagic A and Whats Stanley Got A perhaps competing at the top level.



JESSICA HALLETT

Cory Stratton (left), pictured with wife Vicki and 2023 standout Idealsomemagic A, has started 0-for-15 in 2025 but had a career year with 126 training wins and \$2.2 million in earnings in 2024.

"We're going to race Idealsomemagic A and see how he does," said Stratton with a bit of caution on the horse that earned \$412K under his care in 2023 but started just nine times last year. Now an 11-year-old, Idealsomemagic A won his final start of 2024 but that was against non-winners of \$10,000 company.

Stratton was more certain that Whats Stanley Got A would be nominated to the Borgata series later this season following a career year in 2024. The now 9-year-old son of Heston Blue Chip started 37 times and made \$237K in his second full year since joining Stratton's stable.

Stratton has six 2-year-olds in training and is also bringing back five 3-year-olds with a larger group of claimers dominating the stable. Though he has had success bringing horses to the U.S. from Down Under, Stratton has remained resolved to spend carefully.

"The most we've spent for any horse is \$75,000," said Stratton of his stable's limitations.

Sweethomealabama N is a promising son of Sweet Lou that won his last two starts in 2024 at Yonkers and could be heading up the class ladder in 2025. Chanceoflightning, an \$18,000 yearling purchase at the Goshen Sale in 2023, made \$84K in her first year of racing without winning a race. The daughter of Courtly Choice finished fourth in the New York Sire Stakes final.

"I think Courtly Choice is a solid sire and is great value," said Stratton. "He didn't get to breed to the best mares."

It's way too early to look at Stratton's 2-year-olds in training but the group are all New York-breds.

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BY DERICK GIWNER

Lauren Tritton was an accomplished Australian driver with 920 wins when she came to the United States back in March 2020 with her husband Shane. Despite her countless successes in stakes races in her homeland, she decided to hang up her colors to concentrate on building a stable and expanding her family. After making just seven trips behind the gate in her first two years stateside, she got the “itch” again and has since won 65 of 284 starts (22.8%) of her races.

The 31-year-old, who became the first woman to start in the Meadowlands Pace and won the Battle of Lake Erie at Northfield Park, found some time in her schedule between training horses and picking up her kids from school to discuss her path in the sport, her possible position as a role model for females interested in driving, and much more. Enjoy!

DRIVER LAUREN TRITTON

How did you get started in harness racing?

School holidays started early for me because I went to a private school and there was a fellow who lived behind me that had Standardbreds, so I would help out during the holidays.

How old were you when you started?

I was 14.

Did you and your family have any previous ties to harness racing?

No. We were into equestrians and had Show Horses.

I read that you were the youngest driver – male or female – to win 500 races in Australia. At your peak, where did you rank among all drivers in that region?

I was top 10 in Australia for a while. I was the first female to win the State Premiership, which includes five tracks.

If you win the Premiership you are the best driver. If you win that you are staying in the top five drivers year-round. You can't win the Premiership without being in the top five because we don't race that often and have to travel around from track to track.

You and your husband Shane have now been in the United States for five full years. What made you make the move?

Shane was the leading trainer and I won the driver's Premiership. We couldn't do more than what we were doing and we were chasing our tails for money. We thought 'what are we doing wrong?' We looked at our situation and the prize money in America and thought we would be in a better position financially if we tried to compete here.

Have things worked out as you expected in North America?

It's tough and it was never going to be easy, but we've accomplished things we never thought we would accomplish. We are doing things we dreamt of doing but we work our butts off for it.

How many horses are in your barn?

We currently have 28.

Here or in Australia what is your favorite track to race at? Why?

In Australia it would be Menangle. You race against the best drivers and the best horses every week there. It was also where I was based. Here I



JESSICA HALLETT PHOTO

Lauren Tritton helps train a stable of 28 horses as well as drives at tracks like Yonkers Raceway and The Meadowlands.

would have to say The Meadowlands. You get to drive against the best drivers in the world there. It is genuine racing. It is clean racing, and it is a beautiful track.

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

Take my kids places and make memories.

How old are your kids?

7 and 4.

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

I'm a mother of two beautiful kids and I would give the shirt off my back if you needed it.

What is one word that describes harness racing for you?

Adrenaline.

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

In harness racing it has been really tough for me, so I always got advice to be a thick-skinned, tough person because it has been difficult for me to earn respect. So it is hard for me to give advice to people because I don't want to scare them away with how tough it was for me to get to where I am. My advice would be that success comes from hard work and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something.

What was your best moment in harness racing?

Definitely Arty [Lochinvar Art] winning the Battle of Lake Erie in 2023 was one of my biggest highlights in North America. To win that was pretty cool. In Australia it was winning my first stakes final with a horse who is a claimer out here, Marty Monkhouse. I beat Bit Of A Legend out there in the Breeders Crown with him.

Incidentally, Bit Of A Legend ended up becoming your father-in-law's horse here in the U.S., right?

He ended up being able to buy Bit Of A Legend because he got beat in that race. They became a little discouraged with him and decided to sell him.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 10](#)

Which is the best horse you've ever driven?

Lochinvar Art.

Your driving has taken a bit of a back seat to working with your husband as trainer and family life. Is that by design?

Yes. I hung my boots up when I left [Australia] and said I wasn't driving anymore. I was going to focus on training but the bug really bit me when I got back here. I had to buy new boots and a suit again. I drive now when I'm needed.

Do you miss being a regular catch driver?

No, because it was so different back home. It's not late nights like it is here and you don't race as often. I wouldn't enjoy it as much. I drove a lot back home. I would do 20 training trips in the morning, then I'd go to the races and we'd have 25 horses in at one meeting and four or five in each race. I had my shot and I don't want my kids to miss out because of the races.

As someone who competed against the McCarthy's and Dexter Dunn overseas, how do you think you'd stack up here versus them if given the opportunity?

They are great, safe drivers. They have a lot of respect for me and I've got a lot of respect for them. I'm sure we'd have a good time. Todd [McCarthy] and I are very competitive against each other and have been for our whole careers, basically. I enjoyed driving against all of them and hopefully they think the same about me. They don't intimidate me at all and they are great people as well.

Regardless of sex, it can be difficult for any driver to break in with the top ones, no?

It took a long time for me to earn the respect in the ranks . . . If you are safe and make good decisions most of the time, the drivers will respect you. We are all just out there to earn money.

You recently took a trip to across the Atlantic to compete in a women's race during the Vincent Delaney Memorial weekend. What was that like?

It was really cool. I can't wait to go back again this year, though I'm not sure if they have a race for the ladies. Shane and I actually bought a share in two yearlings that will hopefully race in the VDM this year. It was a really great experience and I'm very thankful for it. We raced on a sand thoroughbred track with a high running rail on the inside. We raced against girls from all different countries and I also picked up a drive in the final of the 3-year-old VDM and finished third, which is really cool.

You became the first woman to compete in the Meadowlands Pace and became the first woman to win the Battle of Lake Erie. Do you place importance on those types of sex barrier achievements?

I didn't until I moved here. I didn't realize it was so foreign and maybe frowned upon; not in a bad way but just that it was different and I didn't realize how different things were here. I had a lot of women reach out to me when I won the Battle of Lake Erie and some still do. They said 'thank you' and I wasn't aware what those thank yous meant at first but some of the messages I was receiving were incredible. They basically said thank you for doing that because there really have been no women to be game enough to do it. A lot of women reached out to me and said that they felt if they made a bad decision in a race they'd have to hear that it was because they are a woman and I kind of helped them get over that fear. They are the people that make me want to keep driving at The Meadowlands and Yonkers every week. I was also the only woman to compete throughout the Borgata series. It's crazy. There is absolutely no reason why that is a thing. Like I'm the only woman who drives at Yonkers every week. Why is that? It's just weird. Me, Todd [McCarthy] and Amanda Turnbull, she's

an amazing female driver, fought out the Premiership every year for like four or five years. She actually won it the year before I did. Female drivers would be in the top five every year back at home, so it was a big eye-opener for me coming here.

When you first started driving here in 2020, considering that many people likely didn't know you, what was that experience like?

When I won my first race I had people coming up to me congratulating me on the win and telling me how it was just the start of my driving career and I was like offended. I was a top driver in Australia. Did people not watch the races? After everything that I did, all the Premierships that I won and I go to Monticello and people are congratulating me on my first win. I was shattered [laughing].



ANGELA CASALINOVA PHOTO

Lauren Tritton winning the Battle of Lake Erie with Lochinvar Art.

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

Being better at providing a stepping stone into the sport for the next generation. In Australia for the first five years or 250 winners, I think, of your career you are a claim driver. That means as a young driver you can drop a horse down in grade. So I could put a horse that was non-winners of seven races into a non-winners of five if I use one of these drivers. It's basically an apprenticeship and gives young drivers the opportunity to get work. In the U.S. it is more of the same 10 drivers at every track and it is hard for young guys to get an opportunity and work their way up through the rankings.

If you are any good at it you never last the five years. It starts where you can get a horse down two grades and then it goes down to one. It is a good opportunity for a driver because they get into easier spots and win races which makes people want to list them. That's how I started my career off.

What does a day in the life of Lauren Tritton look like?

We get up, get both kids off to school, start training the horses – that takes all freaking day [laughing], then I ride my riding horse. After that I pick my kids up from school. If I don't have racing it is sporting events with the kids, dinner and bed. If I do have races, I get the kids from school, the babysitter comes, we go to the track and get home at 2 in the morning.

Time for the stretch drive.

Best Horse you ever saw in person: Lochinvar Art in Australia and Karl here.

Lasix – Yes or No: Yes.

Favorite TV Show: Peaky Blinders.

Trotters or Pacers: Pacers.

Award-winning duo lifted Daley to Trainer of the Year honors

By Ken Weingartner

Noel Daley entered 2024 believing he had two of harness racing's top 3-year-old colts, pacer Captain Albano and trotter Sig Sauer, in his stable.

Exiting the season, those horses were named Dan Patch Award winners and helped propel Daley to his first Trainer of the Year honor.

With Captain Albano's victory in September's Little Brown Jug and Sig Sauer's triumph in October's Kentucky Futurity, Daley became only the fourth trainer since 1986 to win a Triple Crown race with each a pacer and trotter in the same year. Daley joined Tony Alagna (2020), Ron Burke (2017), and Jimmy Takter (2009, 2014) on the list of trainers to pull off that double in the past 38 years.

But Daley's successes went beyond his award-winning duo. The conditioner picked up Grand Circuit wins with seven other horses, totaling 19 victories on the circuit, and notched state-bred stakes victories with an additional 10.

Among his other stakes-winners last year were Buy A Round (who earned \$390,182), Miss I La (\$337,420), Onajetplane (\$234,380), and Paulina Hanover (\$184,501). Buy A Round finished second in the Hambletonian Oaks and Miss I La was second in the Kentucky Filly Futurity. He also trained Miss Belmar, a Breeders Crown runner-up.

All totaled, Daley's stable banked \$4.87 million in purses — a career high. His stable's earnings ranked 11th among all trainers in North America, with Daley's 603 starts being at least 299 fewer than seven of the trainers ahead of him.

"We had a bit of depth. That's probably what got it for us," Daley said, referring to his Trainer of the Year Award. "Obviously, we had the pacer and the trotter in the colts, but we had a few others that were able to have their moments in the sun. That all helped, I think.

"To be honest, I thought I'd have a shot in there, but I didn't think I would get it. That was a little bit of a surprise. I was just hoping the two 3-year-olds got their divisional honors, so I was pretty happy we got the lot. The ball landed in our court this year; we'll take it."

Sig Sauer hit the board in six of 10 races, winning five and earning \$871,812 for driver Andy McCarthy. In addition to the Kentucky Futurity, the colt's triumphs included a Breeders Crown, the Earl Beal Jr. Memorial, and a division of the Stanley Dancer.

He was the season's fastest 3-year-old trotter, with a mark of 1:49 3/5, which he set in the Kentucky Futurity despite a parked-out trip. Only one 3-year-old trotter in history has gone faster, Six Pack with a 1:49 1/5 mile in the 2018 Kentucky Futurity.

"Sig Sauer winning the Kentucky Futurity was about the most satisfying moment I've ever had as a trainer," Daley said. "Just getting him there. It was a balance between having him sound enough and fit enough. We just had to manage him.

"He was coming off a break five weeks earlier, and didn't have a start in between. It was a little bit of a battle having him fit enough. We went in not really knowing where we were going to be. He warmed up good that day and Andy asked what I thought. I had pulled his shoes, and I said, 'I'm not going to look for the first couple of hundred yards, just head on out of there (from post eight) and see what happens.'

"Andy basically left out of there, dropped in for about five steps, and then was parked every step. But (Sig Sauer) showed him who he was that day. He was just the best of them. A good Sig Sauer, a sound Sig Sauer, I think on his day was just better than them. He wanted to do it, so that was a big help. He was a pretty determined horse."

Sig Sauer was retired following his win in the Breeders Crown. The stallion is at Hanover Shoe Farms in Pennsylvania for the 2025 breeding season. The son of Muscle Hill-Sigilwig was owned during his racing career by Patricia Stable, Joe Sbrocco & JAF Racing, Allister Stables, and Caviart Farms.



MARK HALL/USTA PHOTO

Noel Daley with his Dan Patch-winning trainee Sig Sauer.

"In the Breeders Crown, Andy just gave him a great trip. That was a good way to end out for him," Daley said. "His book was full in no time with a book of good mares. He's going to have every chance. With his personality, his determination, I'll be shocked if he doesn't get the job done there. He's got breeding and he was a real looker, that horse."

Captain Albano was a repeat Dan Patch Award winner. He hit the board in 16 of 18 races last year, winning 12 and earning \$1.1 million for driver Todd McCarthy. In addition to the Little Brown Jug, the colt's victories included the Adios, Max C. Hempt Memorial, Progress Pace, and Matron Stakes. He is owned by Patricia Stable, LA Express & Sjoblom Inc., Sjoblom Racing, and Michael Dolan.

He joined Perfect Sting, Tall Dark Stranger, Somebeachsomewhere, Captaintreacherous, and Bettor's Delight as male pacers to be Dan Patch Award winners at both 2 and 3 this century.

"Albano was just so honest," Daley said. "He sort of just was unlucky in the big ones, but he showed in the other races that he could do it.

"He was so good Jug Day. He came out of the first heat and couldn't blow a match out. I thought that if they couldn't beat him in the first heat, there's no shot they're going to beat him in the second heat. I was super confident he would win that. All his owners were there, they all made the trip. That was really good for them. It was a lot of fun."

Captain Albano was expected to retire to stallion duty this year, but after fertility testing, the decision was made to return to the races.

"That wasn't planned," Daley said. "I raced him so long, we basically two days later (after the Progress Pace in late November) had to test him. They thought he was just having a blockage. It went on for a week, 10 days, and then it got too late that you had to let people know. He was going to have a full book, but we couldn't hold people to him while we waited.

"If I had to bring one back, I don't mind bringing him back at all. I'm going to test him again in the next couple of weeks and if he's OK, we might breed maybe 20 mares here in New Jersey and race him as well. He's been back (in Daley's barn) a week now. I don't think he has to step up much to be competitive with those open horses. We'll just see how it works out. He's very easy to be around. I'm looking forward to racing him."

Daley, Sig Sauer, and Captain Albano will be among the honorees at the Dan Patch Awards banquet, presented by Caesars Entertainment, Feb. 23 at Rosen Centre in Orlando, Fla.

STANDARD BRED PICK 6 **WOODBINE STANDARD BRED RACING** **THURSDAYS**
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Meadowlands releases declining revenue numbers for 2024

It is well known that The Meadowlands has for many years been the undisputed leader among Standardbred tracks in both quality of product and handle on the races, averaging just over \$3 million per card again in 2024.

Unfortunately, operating without ancillary revenue from an alternate form of gaming and left to depend on money bet on the races as the main stream of revenue doesn't pay the bills, jeopardizing the industry leader's future.

The revenue being generated by the sources available can not sustain purses at the current level, nor does it cover the cost of operations. That problem is compounded by the fact that handle on horse racing and in turn, the revenue derived from it, declines every year.

Handle on Standardbred racing in 2024 was down more than 7% from 2023 levels (USTA figures), while Equibase figures show Thoroughbred racing handle declining by 3.35% year over year and a shocking 14% in December.

Despite the best efforts of Meadowlands management to stem the tide by offering a popular betting menu on full and competitive fields, guaranteed pools to enhance the most popular of those, the grandest stakes program in North America and a plethora of both racing and non-racing promotions, the declines in revenue continue and are taking their toll.

Those financial woes are complicated by the proliferation of sport betting options since FanDuel at The Meadowlands was the first to implement it in 2017. Sports betting took a 30% hit when neighboring New York came online in 2022, and continues to face greater competition every year.

While the sports betting is indeed a separate entity from Meadowlands Racing, the agreement with the SBOA of NJ dictates that a percentage of the revenue be used for purses.

In 2024, The Meadowlands added \$2.5 million in sports betting revenue directly to the purse account and another \$11.5 million of that revenue was used to cover the losses accumulated operating the racetrack for the year.

To educate those involved in racing and illuminate the reality of race-track operations, you'll find below the numbers to support the issues mentioned above:

Year-end summaries for Pari-Mutuel and FanDuel handle at The Meadowlands and Bayonne OTW for 2024:

2024 combined pari-mutuel handle is down compared to 2023 by \$18.8M or 5%. 2024 had the same number of dates as 2023 and included the Breeders Crown Series in October. Live is down \$930K (8%), Import is down \$8.5M (10%) and Export is down \$9.4M (4%) for the year.

For the last four months, combined pari-mutuel handle is down \$4.75M or 5%, with live being down \$54K (2%), Import down \$3.3M (12%) and Export down \$1.4M (2%).

Pari-mutuel - \$1.3M net loss from racing revenues less statutory and purse related expenses.

Purse - \$789K loss to the purses of Meadowlands and Monmouth combined.

For FanDuel sports betting the 2024, combined handle is down \$206M (4%) from 2023. This consists of \$33.5M (12%) in retail and down \$172.5M (4%) in on-line.

Broken out are figures September through December 2024, football season. Historically, since sports betting became legal, wagering on football results in a redistribution of wagering dollars from racing to sports but has been a boon for FanDuel. (Please note, December is still being audited and has not been released publicly by FD at this time.)

At FanDuel over the last 4 months, combined handle is down from September through December 2023 \$462M (20%) and consists of retail being down \$6.7M (7%) and on-line being down \$455M (21%).

The Meadowlands had two other online skins that stopped operating during 2024. Pointsbet was acquired by Fanatics and stopped operating its online platform at the Meadowlands in May 2024 and Superbook stopped operations in July 2024. Both of these significantly impacted the cash flow of Meadowlands negatively compared to 2023.

Bayonne Off Track Wagering outlet is down year over year \$5.1M (19%) in handle for the year and down \$1.2M (15%) for September through December.

Bayonne's impact is about a \$500K negative impact for year over year.

Meadowlands President Jeff Gural spoke to the problem, "Even though we spent over \$100 million to build a beautiful new facility which caters to owners, it has not resulted in drawing people, even horse people, to come to the track.

"The reality is that for us to continue to conduct a 90-day harness racing meet, The Meadowlands, like all the other harness tracks in the Northeast, needs the revenue a casino generates to help fund purses and operating costs.

"Every year our main competitor, Yonkers, receives \$50 Million for purses while Pocono and Harrah's Philly each get around \$30 Million in ancillary revenue from gaming. Without casino revenue, we receive only a \$6 Million grant from the state and unlike the other tracks, we share our sports betting revenue with the horsemen.

"The truth is harness racing only exists in NJ because we have good lobbyists and provide thousands of jobs and green space, but our customers are continuing to die off which weakens our case each year.

"Making it worse, unlike here at the Meadowlands the owners at all of the other racetracks are casino companies who would prefer to see horse racing disappear."

-release (Meadowlands)

2025 Mohawk Million details announced

Woodbine Entertainment is now accepting entries to purchase a slot in the 2025 Mohawk Million (G1).

Following significant interest in 2024, Woodbine has kept the price of purchasing a slot in the Mohawk Million at \$50,000. A total of 10 slots will again be available and Woodbine will add \$500,000 to maintain the \$1 million purse.

The Mohawk Million for two-year-old trotters is scheduled for Saturday, September 20 at Woodbine Mohawk Park.

The deadline to purchase a slot for the Mohawk Million is Tuesday, February 18. The interested parties must submit \$25,000 by that date. The remaining \$25,000 of the slot fee is then due by June 2.

Should more than 10 parties submit to purchase a slot, a draw will be held to determine the 10 slot owners. Each slot is an entity that may be sold, traded or leased. Slot owners must declare a horse to race in their slot by Monday, September 15 at Noon.

The lone change to conditions for 2025 is limiting owners & trainers to declaring a maximum of the 3 horses to the Mohawk Million race.

Any interested parties or those seeking more information on the Mohawk Million can contact Bill McLinchey, Vice-President of Standardbred Racing, at bmclinchey@woodbine.com.

-release (Woodbine)

Yonkers switches post time to 6:45 PM

The 2025 meet at MGM Yonkers Raceway begins on Monday (January 20) with a 10-race program, and there is a new post time at Yonkers this year, as the action will kick off at 6:45 p.m. (EST).

On the wagering front, management has applied for Pick 4 carryovers in 2025, and are awaiting approval from the New York Gaming Commission. If approved, both the early and late Pick 4s will offer 100% carryovers if there are no winning tickets. More information will be provided when available. Also, the early Pick 4 in races one through four will be a \$1 minimum wager and the late Pick 4, which encompasses the last four races on the program, will have a \$2 minimum.

In addition, the Pick 5 (races five through nine) now has a \$1 minimum. The \$10,000 guaranteed pool on Mondays, in conjunction with the United States Trotting Association's Strategic Wagering Program, remains in place.

Yonkers will be racing Monday through Friday nights through April, then Saturday racing will return in May to replace Wednesday.

-release (Yonkers Raceway Media)

USHWA announces media awards

Andrew Cohen and Keith McCalmont were named winners of the 2024 John Hervey Awards for excellence in harness racing journalism while Clive Cohen and Walter Wlodarczyk were named recipients of the George Smallsreed Awards for photography and Horse Racing Alberta and Shine Light Entertainment was selected winner of the Sam McKee Award for broadcasting, the U.S. Harness Writers Association announced Tuesday.

The winners will be recognized at the Dan Patch Awards banquet, presented by Caesars Entertainment, on Feb. 23 at Rosen Centre in Orlando, Fla. Meadowlands Racetrack Chairman Jeffrey Gural is continuing his longstanding sponsorship of the awards by providing banquet tickets for the winners.

Andrew Cohen won in the news/commentary category for his column, "Keeping Pace: The Life and Death of Alan Leavitt," which was first published May 13 on the Paulick Report website. To read the story, click here. This is Cohen's third Hervey Award, all in the news/commentary category.

McCalmont won in the feature division for his story, "Love is Blind," which appeared in the September issue of Trot magazine. To read the feature, which highlights the story behind filly pacer Its A Love Thing, click here. This is McCalmont's second Hervey Award. His previous award was also in the feature category.

Honorable mentions in the news/commentary category went to Dave Briggs for "Sport's lack of reciprocity and unity truly shows in the tragic death of Finish Line," which appeared Feb. 18 in Harness Racing Update and Bob Heyden for "Happy 100th Birthday Stan Bergstein," which appeared June 21 in Harness Racing Update.

In feature writing, honorable mentions went to Evan Pattak for "The Jewel of the Isle" in the November issue of Hoof Beats magazine, Natalie Voss for "Former Indiana Commission Employee Blows the Whistle on What He Says Was Lax Enforcement" on the Paulick Report on April 18, and James Witherite for "Grand Ambassador" in the July issue of Hoof Beats.

The writing categories were judged by a panel consisting of retired long-time sportswriter and two-time Hervey Award winner Brad Schmaltz, former Philadelphia Inquirer Sports Editor John Quinn, and Delaware State News Editor-in-Chief and former harness writer Andrew West.

In the Smallsreed competitions, Clive Cohen won in the feature category for his photograph "Fiery Sunset," which was taken June 29 at Woodbine Mohawk Park and appeared that day on the Woodbine Mohawk Park Facebook, Instagram and X feeds. Cohen is a five-time Smallsreed winner.

Wlodarczyk won in the action category for his photograph of driver Yannick Gingras celebrating Karl's win in the Hambletonian Stakes as they reached the finish line in a torrential downpour at The Meadowlands on Aug. 3. The photograph appeared on the Hambletonian Society website the week of Aug. 4 and remains in the website's gallery of champions. This is Wlodarczyk's second Smallsreed honor.

Honorable mention in the feature category went to Jenny Leslie for "Purple, With a Splash of Mud," which appeared Nov. 21 on the Kentucky Harness Horsemen's Association Facebook page. Honorable mention in the action category went to Mark Hall for his photograph "Shadow Racing," which appeared in the November issue of Hoof Beats.

The Smallsreed categories were judged by racetrack and newspaper photographer Bill Denver.

In the McKee competition, Horse Racing Alberta and Shine Light Entertainment, was honored for their video, "Women in Standardbred Racing," which appeared Oct. 25 on the HRA website and social media channels. The feature, which can be watched here, was produced by Jeff Robillard of Horse Racing Alberta and Mike Little of Shine Light Entertainment. This is Horse Racing Alberta's third award in the broadcast division and Shine Light Entertainment's first.

Honorable mention went to Cujo Entertainment's CBS Hambletonian Show, which aired on CBS Sports Network on Aug. 4. The production team included Producer Curtis MacDonald, Technical Producer Cameron Chick, and Director Luke Van Belkom. The show was hosted by Greg Blanchard, Emily Gaskin, and Michael Carter.

Entries for the Sam McKee Award were judged by former horseracing producer Liane Davis, a past winner in this category.

Dan Patch Awards banquet information links:

Sponsorship: Shawn Wiles / Dinner tickets: Judy Davis-Wilson or 302.359.3630 or **Liz Cheesman**. For a dinner ticket form please click [here](#).

Advertising in the souvenir Journal (deadline 1/31): Kim Rinker.

Room reservations at Rosen Centre: [Click link](#).

-edited release (U.S. Harness Writers)

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 16

RACE 10

(7) WIFEY SAID SO hinted two starts back that she was coming into peak form and then she jogged last week. I'll call her to repeat off that big score.

-Garnet Barnsdale



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17

RACE 4

(3) CHASIN' SUNSHINE has been brought along very patiently with just six starts prior to his 4-year-old debut. That last qualifier was everything you could ask for as he was a willing second behind a much better foe while dropping three seconds off his first qualifier.

-Derick Gwerner



RACE 5

(8) PHONE NINE ONE ONE raced well in defeat in his local debut despite missing more than a month and he is sent out by hot connections; top call.

-Barnsdale



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18

RACE 5

(5) APERTIF takes a step up in claiming price off a loss, which is a good show of confidence in the horse. Making his first start since June last time he had to wait for clearance in the three hole and finished willingly when finally catching daylight.

-Gwerner



FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

[Mohawk Park Analysis](#)

[Thursday](#)

[Friday](#)

[Saturday](#)

[Meadowlands Analysis](#)

[Friday](#)

[Saturday](#)

[DHP PPS](#)

[HARNESS EYE PPS](#)

[TRACKMASTER PPS](#)

[FREE PPS](#)

[INSTANT RACING UPDATES VIA TWITTER: @DRFHARNES](#)

NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

MOHAWK PARK OFFERS \$42,062 PICK 6 CARRYOVER THURSDAY

The new Pick 6 at Woodbine Mohawk Park went unsolved for the second straight night on Monday and bumped the carryover amount for Thursday up to \$42,062. The wager, which begins in race four nightly, debuted a few weeks ago and has already produced multiple carryover opportunities.

Free full-card Harness Eye past performances for Thursday's card, which begins at 6:30 p.m. (EST) can be found [here](#).

BRITTANY FARMS RECEIVES USHWA'S PRESIDENT'S AWARD

One of harness racing's storied and most prestigious breeding farms, Brittany Farms, has been selected by the President of the United States Harness Writers Association (USHWA), Michael Carter, to receive a President's Award.

Brittany Farms, located in Kentucky, ceased operations as a premier breeding facility at the end of 2024 following the sale of its final crop of yearlings, but it will continue to use the "Brittany Farms" name on any horses with which owner and Hall of Famer George Segal stays involved (Segal acquired the Clermont Farms property of Bill Shehan in 1985 and has operated it as Brittany since). It also will be associated with the farm's final few crops of racehorses, continuing its longstanding tradition of quality.

[READ MORE](#)

MONTHLY HANDICAPPING CONTESTS START FRIDAY AT MEADOWLANDS

For 2025, the Meadowlands Racetrack is hosting monthly handicapping contests, with the winners entered into an invite-only \$10,000 tournament in December.

The first contest of the year is set for this Friday, January 17. The \$1,000 prize pool will be split amongst the top four finishers.

2025 Contest Schedule:

Friday, January 17 / Friday, February 14 / Friday, March 14

Saturday, April 19 / Friday, May 16 / Friday, June 20

Friday, July 18 / Saturday, August 30 / Saturday, October 25

Friday, November 21 / Invite Only \$10K Contest - Saturday, December 13

[READ MORE](#)

OHHA AWARDS BANQUET AND ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR JAN. 18

The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association Awards Banquet and Annual Meeting will be held on January 18, 2025, at the Columbus Marriott Airport, 1375 N. Cassady Ave, Columbus, Ohio.

Eleven divisional horse winners will be honored at the banquet as well as the naming of the 2024 Ohio Horse of the Year. The OHHA will present the Dick Brandt Sr. Extra Effort Award, Terry Holton Youth Award, Outstanding Groom Award, Maynard & Stella Hagemeyer Significant Contribution Award, Dr. John P. Stevens Humanitarian Award, and the OHHA Special Recognition Awards. In addition, the United States Harness Writers Association - Ohio Chapter annual awards will also be presented as will the Ohio State Racing Commission's Kaltenbach Awards.

OHHA Banquet Agenda: Saturday, Jan. 18, 2025

11:30 a.m.-- Charity Luncheon

1:00 p.m.-- OHHA Annual Membership Meeting

2:00 p.m. -- USTA District 1 Annual Meeting

4:00 p.m.-- Cocktail Hour- Sponsored by Captain Kirk

5:00 p.m.—P.A.C.E.R. Stallion Auction closes

5:00 p.m.-- Dinner Seating

5:30 p.m.-- OHHA Awards Banquet

9:00 p.m.-- Awards Banquet After Party

Seats are sold out.

Dr. John P. Stevens Humanitarian Award to Governor Mike DeWine

The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association has awarded Governor Mike DeWine the Association's exclusive Dr. John P. Stevens Humanitarian Award.

Governor DeWine began his term as the 70th governor of Ohio in 2019. Throughout his tenure, he has been a champion of Ohio's agriculture and harness racing industries, understanding their importance in the state's heritage and economy.

Governor DeWine has shown unwavering support for county fair racing, specifically at the Delaware County Fair and Little Brown Jug. He has faithfully attended the Grand Circuit race, using the event to showcase the best of the Buckeye State. Governor DeWine has supported legislation that increased Jug purses and bettered fair-ground facilities.

The Dr. John P. Stevens Humanitarian Award is presented to an individual involved with the Standardbred and agricultural industries who exhibits exceptional compassion and dedicated service to mankind. Governor DeWine and his wife, Fran, embody kindness, which is evident in their everyday lives and service to Ohioans.

The Dr. John P. Stevens Humanitarian Award is exclusive, having been awarded only 21 times since its inception. R. Kevin Greenfield was the most recent recipient in 2018.

-edited releases (OHHA)

CELLMATE LOOKS TO ESCAPE WITH 5TH STRAIGHT WIN AT BIG M

Winter racing at The Meadowlands has featured competitive, full fields, and while 10 starters behind the gate is supposed to be a hindrance to horses looking to compile long winning streaks, such is not the case for Cellmate.

He's popular with his fans - not to mention owners and trainers at the claiming box - having gone unbeaten in his last four starts, and the 5-year-old gelded son of Huntsville-Twin B Bikini will ramp up his drive for five Saturday (Jan. 18) in the sixth race at The Big M. He'll leave from post two with Jason Bartlett in the bike as the 5-2 morning-line favorite.

"I didn't notice the horse," said Frank Calcagni, who became Cellmate's trainer at the conclusion of his win last week. "My owners picked up on him. They kind of pick out their own horses. Cellmate slipped through the cracks on me, but he seems to be running on all cylinders right now. I like the lines on him and he's nice to be around."

Cellmate's streak started on Dec. 7 in a \$20,000 claimer with a victory for trainer Tom Fanning at the mile oval as the 4-5 favorite, which was followed by a win at 10-1 from post eight at Yonkers 12 days later in another \$20,000 claiming event. After that race, trainer Mark Ford took Cellmate home on his trailer.

The next two starts - both in East Rutherford - brought more visits to the winner's circle. A Dec. 28 score as the 9-5 public choice in a \$25,000 claimer was followed by the last of Cellmate's "Fab Four", another victory at the \$25,000 claiming level, this time as the 2-1 favorite. That's when Calcagni and his owners claimed the lifetime winner of 14 of 58 starts, who has earnings of \$115,561.

"I'm just going to give him a light week," said Calcagni. "Cellmate was pressed in his win last week. I like that Hunt For Cash [who was second in that race], too. I had him in my barn a few weeks ago.

"I go by the horse's form [when considering claims]. I look back four, five, 10 lines and try to pick a horse that's in form or getting in form."

For Calcagni, the objective is to not have trainees in his barn for an extended period of time.

"I don't like keeping horses very long," said the 43-year-old conditioner. "Not more than a year. I want to see how they pan out, then I like to move them. I like fresh faces. I'm starting to get into the claiming game a little bit more. Horses can stay sharp when they move around from barn to barn."

So, what's the hope with Cellmate?

"I wouldn't mind if he won this week and got claimed right back," said Calcagni. "He's in the right [\$25,000] class. I would expect someone to put in a claim on him, but sometimes people are a little shy the first time in a new barn."

Maybe that means Cellmate will get a stay from the Governor and get to be in Calcagni's barn for another week or two.

THE SCHEDULE: During the month of January, live racing will be conducted every Friday and Saturday with a first-race post-time of 6:20 p.m.

-edited release (Meadowlands)