

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2025

BROADENING THE WAGERING MODEL FOR RACING



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [X BergmanJay](#)

It's been said by some that horseplayers are a dying breed. That people die every day shouldn't come as a surprise, but successful industries throughout the world do their best not to market for the past and focus on the future when planning the next chapter. Technology changes more rapidly than generations, forcing all successful companies to pivot or be caught out in the cold.

Harness racing and for that matter Thoroughbred racing have remained loyal to a pari-mutuel system that has become archaic. In doing so the system that built the business has helped to destroy it in many ways. High takeouts contribute to the demise but limited selection and the very fact that pool sizes have cratered have created a whirlwind of bad batting scenarios that have pretty much wiped out the small player. Computer generated options have made the pickings slimmer and the returns less enticing.

Just ask one question in any marketing survey: Would you risk \$2 to get \$2.40 back on a winning bet?

Somehow, we've forgotten to poll the bettors that are still alive and the ones eligible to play every day on sporting events where the actual outcome of the game is less important than the collective of in-game player statistical parlays. While racing has stuck rigidly to a script that propelled them in the 1950's, sports wagering collectives have remade that wagering market. Sports betting no longer comes close to resembling the days when your dad had to place a

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

	SPREAD	MONEY	TOTAL
Buffalo Bills	+1.5 -105	+108	O 47.5 -110
@ Kansas City Chiefs	-1.5 -115	-126	U 47.5 -110
Touchdown Scorers			SGP ↓
Game Specials - Popular			↓
Alternate Spread			SGP ↓
Alternate Total Points			SGP ↓
To Score 2+ Touchdowns			SGP ↓
To Score 3+ Touchdowns			SGP ↓
Patrick Mahomes - Alt Passing Yds			SGP ↓
Josh Allen - Alt Passing Yds			SGP ↓
Patrick Mahomes - Alt Passing TDs			SGP ↓
Josh Allen - Alt Rushing Yds			SGP ↓
Patrick Mahomes - Alt Rushing Yds			SGP ↓
James Cook - Alt Rushing Yds			SGP ↓
Travis Kelce - Alt Receiving Yds			SGP ↓
Xavier Worthy - Alt Receiving Yds			SGP ↓
Khalil Shakir - Alt Receiving Yds			SGP ↓
Marquise Brown - Alt Receiving Yds			SGP ↓
KC Chiefs Total Points			SGP ↓
BUF Bills Total Points			SGP ↓
KC Chiefs Alternate Total			SGP ↓
BUF Bills Alternate Total			SGP ↓

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Today's online sports betting menu pales in comparison to the past and markets itself to those who want plenty of action as well as the chance to hit it big. The reality of sports betting in an earlier day is that it essentially was an even-money game with the takeout removed. Today the odds have increased, and the options have exploded with companies taking advantage of changes in the banking and retail business. Interactivity with players has become essential to help spur more wagers.

Racing, due to constrictions of the pari-mutuel system, has been unable to find a path to this side of the gambling business that has exploded with other sports utilizing statistics more than relying on the specific winners and losers in a game.

The reality today is that for any horse racing to be around in the future it will need to meet the demands of today's sports bettors as well as hold their attention long enough to bring them into the future with us. Racing has plenty of statistics and there are enough variables within a given race to offer multiple outcome wagers with far better logical returns than \$2.40 to \$2 wagered.

Pari-mutuel wagering may be necessary for the purists, but the reality is that bets can be made without requiring a mastery of the past performance program and we are not doing anything to expand the options to attract a new group of players. Statistics such as which horses will be leading or in the top three positions at the quarter pole, half-mile pole, three-quarter pole and finish wire could be a starting point to a multi-event (same game in sports jargon) parlay. Add to that whether fractions will be faster or slower than say 28 3/5 seconds to the quarter, 57 3/5 at the half, 1:25 3/5 at the three quarters and 1:54 at the finish. The variables can be expanded where races might be combined with individual data from each in order to provide a 10-option wager offering bigger returns on a small investment.

One of the biggest dilemmas our sport has not conquered is the past performance program and its intricacies. The reality of the program is that when used simply to break down statistical outcomes, such as which horses might be leading at certain points in the mile and how fast they might travel, the numbers are simple to digest. Predicting the winner of a race could be more difficult, but new players would not need to be experts at that to win these in-race parlays.

Whether we want to believe it or not harness racing has fallen behind the curve in wagering and needs to come up to speed. Losing generations of potential bettors is at stake and racing has plenty of dynamics that still could make it more entertaining to watch while at the same time worth wagering on.

What has escaped me is exactly why no tracks have partnered with software companies to engineer such wagers while multiple companies have advanced these efforts across a broad range of sports. Harness racing is a sport and there should be no reason it is prohibited from being wagered upon as other sports are in North America.

While takeout and lack of handle have collectively run racing and its players into the ground, sports wagering has grown and there is still plenty of money being taken out by the house. Racing conducted at a faster clip with more betting options available to players and higher returns promised should be the focus for the future. Banking on players coming back from the dead is essentially what we have been asking to happen, and the results have been obvious.

As someone that's been around long enough to know what racing looked like a half-century ago, we seem more than overdue to put the wooden sulky and the days of 30,000 people in the grandstand behind us. The dynamics of the current generation expect everything to be at one's fingertips. Whether using a phone or computer, it's easier to shop online than in person. It's easier to wager online than in person. It's easier to bank online than in person. For harness racing, the only thing that's missing is our ability to connect to potential players online. For my money, it's long past time to follow the leaders in the sports wagering field and ramp up the betting menus so that players can have a chance to win and get a decent return on their investment.

As a cautionary tale, those concerned with whether this style of wagering will be an automatic money maker should be more focused on garnering attention from a younger demographic. Even if this is in its infancy a loss-leader, it could still be effective in exposing the sport to a new and younger audience. Over time, with software improvements, a model could be in place for the next generation of horse racing players.



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NUTCRACKER SWEET

p, 2, 1:50.2; 1:50.1f (\$520,015)

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- Half-brother to 2023 Pacing Sire of the Year, Sweet Lou, p, 1:47f (\$3,478,070)
- Full-brother to Bettor Sweet, p, 1:47.2 (\$2,779,678)
- At 2, Winner of Bluegrass Stakes in 1:50.3 & International Stallion Stakes in 1:50.2

Standing for \$3,000 in 2025!



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p, 2, 1:52.1s; 3, 1:50.1s; 1:49.1s (\$550,644)

Sportswriter-Lady Leslie-Walton Hanover

- Winner of 19 races
- At 2, Showed half-mile speed winning the Battle Of Waterloo elimination (1:54.2) & \$159,500 Final (1:55.4)
- Winner of multiple ONSS Gold legs at 2 & 3
- Fast Winner on: 1/2-mile, 5/8ths, 7/8ths & Mile
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\$275,000 Sam McKee Memorial Pace	\$150,000 Dr John R Steele Memorial Mare Trot
\$175,000 Dorothy Haughton Memorial Mare Pace	\$150,000 Perfect Sting Mare Pace
\$175,000 Lady Liberty Mare Pace	\$150,000 Six Pack Mare Trot
\$175,000 Arthur Cutler Memorial Trot	\$100,000 Miss Versatility Mare Trotting Series

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Putting the Dexter Cup back on the Grand Circuit stakes map



EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner ✉ [@harnessveguy](mailto:derick@harnessveguy.com)

Back in the early 1990s when I started following harness racing the Dexter Cup at Freehold Raceway was considered the first step on the Road to the Hambletonian. That track is of course off the schedule now and the Dexter Cup has moved on to The Meadowlands, but it is worth pondering the race's place in history and where it fits in the future.

By all accounts the Dexter Cup began in 1960. You'd think information like that would be readily available on the web with a quick search but alas it is the now defunct *Trotting and Pacing Guide* that comes to the rescue to provide much of the historic facts to follow.

When Quick Song won the initial edition back in 1960, the race went in 2:10 4/5 and the purse was \$73,129. At its zenith the Dexter Cup went for \$388,341 in 1984 and most recently in 2024 the purse was \$134,900. Using an online inflation calculator, \$73,129 in 1960 would be worth \$779,725 today, so clearly purses have tailed off, but that is a story for another day.



HAMBLETONIAN SOCIETY PHOTO

American Winner in 1993 was the last horse to pull off the Dexter Cup/Hambletonian daily double.

Three times in the initial decade of the Dexter Cup the winner went on to capture the prestigious Hambletonian, thus proving that it was truly the official starting point on the road to that trotting classic. Since 1970 only two Dexter Cup winners – Armbro Goal (1988) and American Winner (1993) – have been able to go on to Hambletonian glory. For those that don't want to do the math, that is twice in 54 years (there was no Dexter Cup in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Digging deeper, since the turn of the century only three Dexter Cup winners – Armbro Trick (2000), Habitat (2015) and Osterc (2019) – have been able to reach the Hambletonian final and none of the last four winners elected to even enter the eliminations.

At this point it is safe to say that the Road to the Hambletonian hasn't really started with the Dexter Cup for at least a quarter century. The question to ponder is the main reason why the Dexter Cup isn't truly the first stop on the Hambletonian trail. Could it be the fact that it was raced on a half-mile track? Is it the placement on the calendar on the first Saturday in May? Was it that eliminations occurred on the last Saturday in April, more than three months before the Hambletonian on the first Saturday in August?

"It is very early in the year and was on a half-mile track, so unless you had a horse that was a really good half-mile horse it was hard to justify putting them on a small track that early in the season. Too many things can go wrong on a half-mile track," said trainer Nancy Takter, who has won the Hambletonian in consecutive years with Karl (2024) and Tactical Approach (2023).

Much will be learned in 2025 with the switch of the race to The Meadowlands. The Dexter will now be contested on a mile track, removing the "small track" deterrent. Eliminations won't be required, meaning that horses won't have to get a pari-mutuel start in April to compete. That said, it also means the purse could decrease since it could be split into divisions if too many horses enter.

"I think it being on a mile track is a huge difference maker going forward," said Takter.

According to Meadowlands officials, how or if the Dexter Cup splits into divisions will be dependent on the number of entrants and with consideration given to the fact that the race could be the first start of the year for many of the 3-year-old trotters in the race. Logic would state that 11 is probably the magic number for a one-race affair, with a single horse starting as a trailer in that scenario.

In theory the purse of the race will be similar to 2024 unless the race splits into divisions. The Dexter Cup will again have a minimum of \$50,000 in sponsor money added into the purse on top of any payments. The cost of remaining eligible to the race is \$4,350 from birth through day of entry. There is also an unsightly \$25,000 supplement fee which can be ponied up for an ineligible horse when they are entered. That amount is about 20% of the estimated total purse, making it far from a great investment, especially if the race is split into divisions.

A total of eight horses entered the 2024 Dexter Cup and the race went straight to the final. When you realize that only 18 horses were even eligible to enter the elimination round, the number for the final isn't very surprising.

Digging deeper, 70 horses made all payments through their 2-year-old season in 2023, so the drop off to 18 is a steep 75% reduction. In 2024, a total of 53 colts made payments for the 2025 Dexter Cup. It will be interesting to see if the number falls by the same rate or it is reduced greatly when the February 15 payment is made this year. If the mile track makes a signifi-

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 7](#)

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cant impact, one would expect a sharp increase to near 30 eligibles.

“They should consider doing a supplemental nomination due February 15,” said Takter about potentially adding a new payment so 3-year-olds can jump in now that the venue has changed. “I would probably have a few to add that could then race in the 2025 edition.”



KEN WEINGARTNER PHOTO

Osterc was the last Dexter Cup winner (2019) to make the Hambletonian final.

just 25% of the 765 eligible yearlings (191 horses) make the \$400 2-year-old payment before March 15, there would be an additional \$55,200 up for grabs in the 2026 Dexter Cup. If half the 191 horses (95) pay the \$800 sustaining fee at age 3 next year and 20 enter the race in early May, each of the two divisions would go for a healthy \$163,575 if my math is correct.

Assuming the Dexter Cup is eventually moved, with state Sire Stakes taking center stage over some Grand Circuit events, finding a more appropriate date on the calendar for the race may not be so easy. But I have an idea, one that goes perhaps against the grain while at the same time making some sense. Put the Dexter Cup at The Meadowlands on the day before the Goodtimes final at Woodbine Mohawk Park, typically

The true test of the impact of having the Dexter Cup at The Meadowlands will be clear after the March 15 payments for 2-year-olds. Currently 765 yearlings are eligible to the race. Should the stake lure a paltry number like the 53 from 2024, perhaps that is a clear sign that the race is compromised by date and not venue.

Getting back to the purse for a second, if

the second or third Friday of June. Before you complain about these two 3-year-old Grand Circuit stakes going head to head, hear me out.

The Goodtimes simply isn't luring the best U.S. horses north of the border like it did a decade or more ago. Sure, stables that race regularly in Canada show up, but few come from out of town as they prefer to race locally or at The Meadowlands to prepare for the Hambletonian. Only 13 horses entered the Goodtimes eliminations in 2024 and all but three were racing in Canada regularly. The year prior, 16 horses entered and only two shipped up from south of the border. At this point the Goodtimes is a great Hambletonian prep for Canadian-based horses, and with that said, doesn't having the Dexter Cup the day before make sense for many reasons?

First, the top drivers would be able to compete on the Friday card because Woodbine Mohawk Park's big card is the following night, and the drivers need to be in New Jersey Saturday morning anyway for baby races and qualifiers. Second, a horse could in theory enter the Goodtimes elimination the week before with the hope of making the final but switch to the Dexter Cup if they don't qualify for some reason. Third, trainers on the east coast, especially those with New Jersey-sired horses, would have a perfect prep between the Sire Stakes final and the Dancer on the second Saturday in July.

Think back to 2024 when eventual Hambletonian winner Karl won the New Jersey Sire Stakes final on May 31 and had to take four weeks off because he didn't have another stakes engagement until the June 29 Reynolds at The Meadowlands. Having the Dexter Cup in between would create the perfect positioning with great spacing between races.

“Having it on the second or third week of June would've worked for Hambo-preparing horses. The Historic used to be around then before they canceled it,” said Takter. “Karl probably would've at least been nominated in 2024 if it had fallen on the schedule [in June]. I think many of the NJSS horses would've gone as well.”

Change for the sake of change makes no sense. In the case of the Dexter Cup a venue change was made out of necessity. Perhaps if the current situation doesn't produce a greater turnout, consideration can now be given to moving it to a better position on the calendar. A date change could breathe new life into the Dexter Cup and once again make it a prominent stop on the Road to the Hambletonian.



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2025 STALLIONS
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TRIXTON

(Muscle Hill - Emilie Cas El - Garland Lobell) • 2,1:54.4s; 3,1:50.3 (\$968,696)



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SIX PACK

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



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PERFECT STING

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



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Idao De Tillard goes for back-to-back Prix d’Amerique wins

By Greg Reinhart

Eighteen of the world’s finest older trotters are set to clash in Sunday’s (1/26) Group 1 Prix d’Amerique at Vincennes Racecourse in Paris. The Prix d’Amerique, which carries a purse of 1,000,000 Euros, goes from a standing start and is 2,700 meters (a mile and two-thirds) in distance.

The horse to beat according to the market is defending champion Idao De Tillard. A 7-year-old stallion by Severino, Idao De Tillard didn’t have a smooth lead-up to the race, though, as in three outings from September 21 to December 8 he suffered defeats in the Group 1 Grand Prix de Wallonie in Belgium, the Group 1 U.E.T. Elite Circuit Finale and the Group 2 Prix du Bourbonnais, with the last one being an especially dull eighth-place finish. However, he rebounded to capture the Group 2 Prix de Bourgogne on December 29 at Vincennes, which seems to have him back on track heading into Sunday.

“Idao was ill in November. He had leptospirosis (a disease transmitted by rodents). I didn’t notice it immediately. The horse lost weight,” said trainer Thierry Duvaldestin.

“Over the last month and a half he’s been getting better, even though he’s lost a bit of muscle mass. I think it still needs to be digested.

“He’s doing well. He worked mainly in the afternoon because in the morning it was too cold and the track was often frozen. He works when the temperatures are milder and there’s a bit of sunshine. I think he’s in good spirits now. I think that’s behind us now.”

Idao De Tillard, who will be driven by Thierry’s son Clément and is owned by Cyril Sevestre, will race barefoot on Sunday, which he did not do when he took last year’s edition.

“We believe in him, but my horse isn’t as strong as last year,” Thierry Duvaldestin remarked. “The observers have seen that because he’s been beaten several times this year. But the horse is still good. We should be fine.”

Thierry Duvaldestin has won back-to-back Prix d’Ameriques before as he took the race in 2011 and 2012 with Ready Cash, but other than hoping lightning can strike twice, he said the horses and circumstances are not the same.

“It’s never easy to compare horses. That was 13 years ago. It’s both a long time ago and still recent,” he quipped. “The horses are really different, they have opposite characters. I’d rather not compare. I’d like to do the double, but the Prix d’Amérique is so difficult that you have to be careful.”

Go On Boy, a 9-year-old Password stallion who will be piloted by trainer Romain Derieux, is one of the main threats to Idao De Tillard and came out on top when they met in both the Grand Prix de Wallonie and the U.E.T. Elite Circuit Finale. They locked horns again in the Prix de Bourgogne, but Go On Boy, who is owned by Ecurie Nixon, had to settle for second that time as Idao De Tillard tracked his cover and then out-kicked him down the stretch.

“So far so good for Go On Boy. He worked this morning (Tuesday) and everything was fine,” Derieux said. “I’m pretty confident. I think he’s got what it takes to win this race. It’s how the race goes that will make the difference. Several horses can win and he’s one of them.”

Like Idao De Tillard, Go On Boy is also taking the shoes off for Sunday, and that has already proven to be a big move for him.

“That’s the little extra compared to usual. It will be like his last victory in the final of the U.E.T. Elite Circuit,” Derieux stated. “As far as race tactics are concerned, he can do anything. All we know is that he starts off slower than the others.”

Other horses in with a chance on Sunday are 2023 champion Hooker Berry for trainer/driver Nicolas Bazire and San Moteur, who will be sent out by trainer/driver Björn Goop.

The Prix d’Amerique is race six on Sunday’s program at Vincennes with local post time at 4:20 p.m. (10:20 a.m. EST).



BRUNO VANDELDELDE PHOTO

Idao de Tillard winning the 2024 Prix d’Amerique with Clément Duvaldestin in the bike.

2025 PRIX D’AMERIQUE FIELD

Head Number-Horse	Driver	Trainer
1-Iroise De La Noe	Thomas Levesque	(same as driver)
2-Keep Going	Mathieu Mottier	(same as driver)
3-Justin Bold-Pierre	Yves Verva	Jean-Rémi Delliaux
4-Fakir De Mahey	David Bekaert	Mathieu Mottier
5-Ideal Ligneries	Benjamin Rochard	Jean-Philippe Monclin
6-It’s A Dollarmaker	Matthieu Abrivard	Sébastien Guarato
7-Josh Power	Eric Raffin	Sébastien Ernault
8-Just Love You	Alexandre Abrivard	Laurent-Claude Abrivard
9-Inmarosa	Leo Abrivard-Laurent	Claude Abrivard
10-Dimitri Ferm	Gabriele Gelormini	Marco Azzaroni
11-Hussard Du Landret	Yoann Lebourgeois	Benoit Robin
12-Emeraude De Bais	Franck Nivard	Benjamin Goetz
13-San Moteur	Björn Goop	(same as driver)
14-Don Fanucci Zet	Paul-Philippe Ploquin	Daniel Reden
15-Ampia Mede Sm	Vincenzo d’Alessandro Jr.	Erik Bondo
16-Go On Boy	Romain Derieux	(same as driver)
17-Hooker Berry	Nicolas Bazire	(same as driver)
18-Idao de Tillard	Clément Duvaldestin	Thierry Duvaldestin

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CONFESSIONS

By Keith Gisser

Meetings and Awards

It's banquet season! All over the country various horsemen's groups – the OHHA, the MHHA, the MSOA, and others in the alphabet soup – are celebrating their top people and horses of 2024. Some do this late in the year. Minnesota, with its short racing season for example, waits until spring when most of its horse people are back from wherever they race the rest of the year. It's a time for celebration and good spirits.

But for some members of these organizations, it is not just a party weekend. There is work to be done and while these groups do have staff, a lot of it falls on Directors and other volunteers.

Ohio had its blast the weekend of January 17 and 18, but some Directors had to show up for a meeting on the night before on Thursday. As an OHHA Director, my Friday started at 7AM as I stopped for lox and bagel (everything, of course) and a coffee as I started the two-and-a-half hour drive to Columbus.

First up for me was a meeting of the Industry Enhancement Committee. What's that, you ask? We budget a pot of about \$1.5 million dollars for things like our live stream county fair broadcasts, advertising, participation in the Future Farmers of America Convention, the Ohio Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, and more. We determine if and how much to donate to various equine non-profits, including New Vocations, the Harness Horse Youth Foundation, the Standardbred Transition Alliance, and the Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame. And while budgeting took up the bulk of this meeting, we also are responsible for administering the OHHA Scholarship program, which awards close to \$20,000 in scholarships annually.

After a buffet lunch we had our full Directors meeting. A lot of this is boilerplate – financial reports, approval of minutes and so on – but over the course of nearly five hours we also discussed a number of new initiatives, including changes in the Ohio Sires Stakes and the idea of splitting Aged pacer and trotting awards by gender.

Most notably, past OHHA President Steve Bateson proposed establishing an owner's award, similar to the currently existing breeder awards Ohio offers. If a mare meets the criteria and is registered, her offspring are eligible for awards based on money earned. In each of the last two years that total has been about \$1.35 million dollars! The new program, tentatively titled the Buckeye Bonus, would reward the owner of the horse at the end of his season. In 2025 it will just be for 2-year-olds and in 2026 both freshman and sophomores will be eligible. It will be funded at one-half the level of the breeder awards. The hope is to generate even more interest among buyers of Ohio yearlings going forward. This proposal was approved at the general membership meeting the next day.

We also received a preview of two new websites, one for the Ohio Hall of Fame and a job site for trainers and farms seeking employees.

Saturday, I was up early for the Ohio chapter meeting of the U.S. Harness Writers Association (USHWA). USHWA National President Michael Carter (who had been tapped to emcee our awards banquet that night) was our special guest, although as much time as he spends in the Buckeye State, we can't quite figure out why he is a member of the Upstate New York chapter. Must be that East Coast bias some of our members complain about.

We established a scholarship for someone going into the equine field and continued our scholarship to provide transport for one student to the Clyde Hirt Journalism Workshop on Hambletonian weekend. And,

in a historic display of bad judgement, my fellow harness writers elected me chapter President (I last served about 20 years ago). It was time for lunch!

The OHHA membership meeting lasted a brief 45 minutes and the USTA District 1 meeting started shortly after. Both of these meetings are open to all membership but were sparsely attended, which both groups are trying to address.

The USTA meeting had us voting on 41 rule change proposals. The membership vote is not binding on the District's directors, who cast their final votes at the USTA annual meeting in March. It's an unfortunate circumstance, as many Directors ignore the votes of their constituents and vote however they please. But the USTA has its By-laws and that's that. Maybe it's time for a rule change proposal requiring Directors to vote the will of their district.

That meeting lasted about 90 minutes, giving me just 30 minutes to change clothes and get ready for cocktail hour and the awards banquet. But first, there was one more issue to deal with.

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The OHHA sponsors PACER –the Political Action Committee for Equine Racing – and its primary fundraiser is a stallion auction. Having a mare to breed for the first time in my life, I had to carefully balance my Bourbon and hors d'oeuvres while checking my phone for auction updates. I was the winning bidder on one of the stallions I wanted, so it was a successful weekend and I got a chance to support the PAC. We saw how important that lobbying is when state officials rushed to the aid of the Warren County horsemen, who were threatened with eviction from their training center at what used to be Lebanon Raceway. Even if you are just a racing fan, send a deuce to your local horsemen's PAC and help support the sport you love.

Of course, the banquet was great as the Volstead trotting filly Sugar Instead was deservedly named Ohio Horse of the Year, much to the consternation of some of my tablemates. We inducted KF Pro Sam (equine), Donald 'Skip' Hoovler and Laverne Hille (immortal) into our Hall of Fame. The highlight of the evening was probably Amy Hollar winning the Rambling Willie Award for prolonged service to our sport. But as much fun as the evening was, it was the work we put in the rest of the weekend that was the most important.

That's all for this column. Stay warm and go cash!

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Tritton barn gets underway at The Meadowlands Saturday

By Jay Bergman

Trainer Shane Tritton will send out five horses this Saturday night at The Meadowlands hoping to ease his stable into the new year while at the same time getting the necessary racing experience.

"They've been off for a bit," said Tritton of the group that have missed three weeks or more heading into this weekend's races.

Tritton had some good draws and bad ones on Saturday, with Bookem Danno, a lightly-raced maiden drawing the rail in the first race on the card. Bookem Danno has drawn the rail in all four of his lifetime starts here at The Meadowlands and that's not exactly been to his advantage thus far.

"He's a maiden drawing in with non-winners," said Tritton, recognizing the luck has not helped Bookem Danno win a race yet. "He's got plenty of ability, but he got taken out of the race badly last time."

A 4-year-old gelding by Huntsville, Bookem Danno paced in 1:51 3/5 in his first career start in December at The Meadowlands and faces a solid field in the \$15,500 non-winners of 2 class that may keep him a maiden for just a little longer.

"He needs to get dragged into the race, but I think he's a [1]:50 pacer," said Tritton.

Nandolo N has been the most consistent of all the horses Tritton has had since arriving in North America. The now 11-year-old son of Betterthancheddar has maintained his edge while racing at the top level over the last four years.

"I don't know if there are that many horses racing that have raced first-up as many times as he has," said Tritton, paying homage to the warrior Nandolo N has been whether racing at The Meadowlands or Yonkers. "I put him in the series at the end of the year at Yonkers for a lark and then he went out and actually won a leg and made it to the final."

Nandolo N's last start came in that \$250,000 MGM Grand Prix final at Yonkers on December 16 and thus the trainer wasn't overly optimistic about Saturday's return.

"He's been off for a while but he's racing at a lower level than he has in quite some time," said Tritton.

Nandolo N drew post 2 in Saturday's ninth race, a non-winners of \$12,500 in last four starts event with a \$17,500 purse. Tritton thinks he fits well with this group but doesn't think he can beat one horse.

"My dad's (Peter Tritton) horse is a real nice one," said Tritton of Sherlock N (post 5). "That horse was one of the best 3-year-olds in Australia and New Zealand."

That was a few years ago, with the 6-year-old Sherlock N having raced just once since October 2023 prior to Saturday's contest. Sherlock N qualified in 1:52 4/5 last Saturday (January 18) with a 25 4/5 final quarter.

Tritton believes his best chance of victory on Saturday will likely come from Muscle Factory N in race 13. Like Nandolo N, Muscle Factory N is a horse that joined Tritton's stable shortly after his move to North America.

"I had him as a 2-year-old in Australia," said Tritton of the 10-year-old son of Roll With Joe.

Muscle Factory N has not raced since December 14 and has been riddled with outside draws.

"He's had zero luck and has been racing great," said Tritton of Muscle Factory A, who landed post six against non-winners of \$3,000 company.

Both Springsteen and Hypebeast drew post 10 in races four and 12 respectively for the Tritton stable and the feeling is that though both come into the race ready for action the draw is likely to make things difficult.

With 24 horses in training, Tritton's philosophy racing in North America has evolved over time while his patience has been his greatest asset. It's A Me Mario is perhaps the best example of the benefits of giving a horse time to mature.

"I decided that we weren't going to push him hard as a 4-year-old," said Tritton. "He did end up racing in the Open a lot and won 11 races at Yonkers, which is pretty good considering he's not the kind of horse that can dominate others." It's A Me Mario has gotten better each year under Tritton's care, with his 4-year-old season proving his best to date with \$233K banked.

"We'll stake him a little more this season and start early in the Borgata," said Tritton of It's A Me Mario, a son of American Ideal.

Another potential top-class horse Tritton is hoping to see bounce back in 2025 is Chimichurri N.

"He finished third behind Ruthless Hanover in a [1]:47 mile behind Mirage Hanover right before that one became the best 3-year-old," said Tritton. "He suffered a P1 fracture and may have raced a couple of times with it."

Chimichurri N is on the comeback trail and Tritton is happy with his progress thus far.

Tritton has looked for younger horses to fill out his stable and is more cautious than ever when it comes to importing horses. "I'm much more selective now than I was when I first came over," said Tritton, recognizing from experience that not all horses make a favorable transition to racing in North America. There has been a shift with the stable looking for younger horses to take advantage of the money for 2 and 3-year-olds in stakes races.

"I've got a very nice 3-year-old pacing filly that raced just once last year," said Tritton, referring to All Hail The Queen. "She finished fourth in her only race, a New York Sire Stakes at Monticello, and she actually suffered two fractures in the race."

The filly by Courtly Choice had won a pair of qualifiers at Monticello prior to that July 1 debut including a 24-length romp in 1:57 2/5.



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Winning is always a thrill for driver/trainer Steve Reisenweaver

By Ken Weingartner

From his earliest days sitting behind a racehorse, Steve Reisenweaver displayed a bit of a competitive spirit. Reisenweaver followed his father, Roy, into harness racing and was jogging horses by the time he was 7 or 8 years old.

"When me and my dad went out and trained, I looked forward to that every day," said Reisenweaver, adding with a laugh, "We'd go out and train together, and I would beat him, and he would always get mad. He'd say, 'We've got to finish together! We've got to finish together!'"

"I've just always enjoyed being with the horses. Sitting behind them, the driving, racing them — the competition."

Reisenweaver has been racing horses for the better part of four decades. His father was born in northeast Pennsylvania, where he began his career as a trainer-driver, and later moved to southern New Jersey, where Reisenweaver still resides. Reisenweaver has never had a large stable (only twice has he started more than 100 races as either a trainer or driver, and never more than 109) and currently has two active horses that he drives in amateur races.

"I used to do it full time; I used to run a seven- or eight-horse stable," the 69-year-old Reisenweaver said. "Then I just kind of got out of it for a couple years. My son (Steve Jr.) has got a tree business, and I work for him. But I got bored and I saw these amateurs and decided to get a horse. I got lucky, I got a nice horse, and I really enjoy it."

Reisenweaver's first horse upon his return to action in 2023 was Awol Hanover, who has won nine races for him since he acquired the trotter in the middle of that year. On Thursday, Awol Hanover will make his first start of the year in a division of the first leg of the North American Amateur Drivers Association Winter Fun Series at MGM Yonkers Raceway. The gelding will leave from post four with Reisenweaver in the sulky and is 6-1 on the morning line.

"He's a little bit of a handful on the racetrack, but he knows me, and we get along good," said Reisenweaver, who has driven Awol Hanover to eight of his nine wins since buying him. "We're doing OK. We're not setting the world on fire, but he pays his way and that's all I expect him to do."

Reisenweaver's other horse is Gatsby, a trotter he purchased this past summer. His first victory with Gatsby came in an amateur race at Harrah's Philadelphia, and was memorable for more than paying \$56 to win.



VICKI WRIGHT/WORLD WIDE RACING PHOTOS

Steve Reisenweaver has won over 160 races as a driver and another 100 as a trainer during his career.

"My son and wife and my grandchildren all were there," Reisenweaver said. "So, they got their picture taken, which was nice. It wasn't a real fast win, but it was a win."

In December, Gatsby gave Reisenweaver the 100th training victory of his career, as well as his 166th as a driver.

Among Reisenweaver's top horses from earlier in his career were multiple New York Sire Stakes winners Newyorkjoyants and South Jersey Flash (a homebred). Reisenweaver still owns Newyorkjoyants, now 22, as well as one of her offspring, Terri's Surprise.

"She wasn't my best horse, but she was my favorite," Reisenweaver said about Newyorkjoyants. "She was one of the horses that really loved to race. She would get all excited when her race came up and she was fun to drive. She would do anything you wanted her to do."

Since making his return to racing, Reisenweaver has won 11 of 82 races as a driver, plus six of 47 as a trainer. He hopes to continue competing in amateur races on a schedule similar to last year, which saw him start 61 times.

"I do it for fun," Reisenweaver said. "And winning is always a thrill."

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MLK race set for Meadowlands

Friday (Jan. 24) night's fifth race might look ordinary to those who follow racing at The Meadowlands on a regular basis, but the man it honors was anything but ordinary.

The \$10,000 claiming pace pays tribute to slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who undoubtedly would have loved the fact that the mile dash in his honor is a mixed-race event that will feature five African-American drivers. The MLK Day holiday was Jan. 20, five days after what would have been King's 96th birthday.

King wanted a world where people of all races would get along, and one of the many of his quotes that carried enormous impact was: "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will die together as fools."

The African-American quintet of Jim King Solomon, DeShawn Sample, Yogi Sheridan, William Carter and Brandon Cruse will take on Bradley Chisholm, Justin Irvine, Justin Huckabone, Tyler Miller and Braxton Boyd in the \$11,000 race that has been dubbed the "Martin Luther King Remembrance Race".

"All of us at The Meadowlands are so pleased to be having this event that recognizes one of the most important figures in American history," said Big M Chief Operating Officer and General Manager Jason Settlemoir. "Dr. King's beliefs, along with his ability to motivate people to protest peacefully, went a long way toward advancing the rights of African-Americans both back in the 1960s, as well as today, when his legacy continues to live on."

-edited release (Meadowlands)

BREEDINGS STILL NEEDED FOR NEW VOCATIONS STALLION AUCTION

New Vocations' 27th Annual stallion auction will be held via ongait.com Feb. 4-6. This important fundraiser is crucial to the charity's ability to rehabilitate, train and rehome nearly 100 retired Standardbred racehorses and broodmares each year. Breedings to King of the North, Bettor's Wish, Greenshoe, JK Endofanera, Rebuff, Six Pack, Cattlewash, Courtly Choice, and Trixton are among the 60+ seasons that have already been donated.

"We greatly appreciate the many individuals and farms for their generosity in supporting our efforts," said Executive Director Dot Morgan. "Rehabilitating sore racehorses, transitioning them along with retired broodmares to pleasure riding, and then adopting them to carefully screened and monitored homes is a serious investment of time and money. The stallion auction helps give us the resources to fulfill this mission."

Breedings are still needed to optimize this important funding opportunity. Contact Dot Morgan dot@horseadoption.com or (937) 205-4667 to participate. Breedings for the auction are needed by Feb. 3, but are welcomed all season to be offered privately. View current list at https://newvocations.org/event_detail/49

-release (New Vocations)

2025 STALLION BREEDING FUNDRAISER TO BENEFIT HALL OF FAME

The Harness Racing Museum & Hall of Fame has an outstanding list of stallions for the 2025 breeding auction. The complete list of 2025 stallions, conditions and bidding form have been posted at www.harnessmuseum.com under the Fundraising tab. The list will be updated as additional breedings are donated.

As of this press release the pacing stallions are Best In Show, Courtly Choice, Fear The Dragon, Gulf Shores, Heston Blue Chip, JK Endofanera, Loubet, Neptune, Racing Hill, So Surreal, Stockade Seelster and Well Said.

Trotting stallions are Better Caviar, Greenshoe, Helpisontheway, International Moni, Kings County, Rattle My Cage, Rebuff, Six Pack, Trixton and Volume Eight.

If you have a breeding, or know someone not using a breeding, and want to donate to this important fundraiser please contact Joanne Young as soon as possible.

Bids must be called in (Joanne at 845-294-6330), emailed (development@harnessmuseum.com) or mailed and postmarked by Saturday, February 8th, 2025 (Harness Racing Museum, 240 Main St., Goshen NY 10924). Any breedings not receiving successful bids may be available after that date.

-release (Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame)

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 23

RACE 4

(5) CENTURY JAZZ was the first leader in the Pop Up final then he took a big shuffle, ran into traffic in the lane, and finished willingly in the race for place. He has a big shot tonight starting from the middle of the gate.

-Garnet Barnsdale



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

RACE 1

(6) FERDINAND A took five weeks off and came back a sharper horse. Veteran faces a weak group and should be able to go down the road.

-Derick Giwner



RACE 3

Trainer Doug Dilloian Jr. has been on fire to start the 2024 season so that makes this veteran mare (2) VILLAGE JADE routine selecting, especially from the good post.

-Matt Rose



SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

RACE 5

(5) TOUGH MUSCLE took a year off and was pretty bad upon his return in November of 2024 but was like a new horse after two more months on the sidelines. Notice that he was a pretty good 4-year-old and maybe he's finally coming around.

-Giwner



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

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NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

GALLO BLUE CHIP, 28, DIES

Gallo Blue Chip, 2000 Dan Patch Horse of the Year and 2011 Harness Racing Hall of Fame inductee, died Wednesday (Jan. 22) at the age of 28.

"He was the horse of a lifetime," said Gallo Blue Chip's trainer, Mark Ford. "He'll never know how many lives he changed, his many kids he put through college, how many careers he's responsible for."

Martin Scharf purchased Gallo Blue Chip for \$100,000 after his very first start, and the Magical Mike-Camatross gelding went on to win 53 of his 133 starts through his seven-year career while driven primarily by Daniel Dube. His \$4,260,959 in career earnings made him the richest pacer in history until Foiled Again overtook him in 2011, and he currently stands as the third richest pacer in all-time North American harness racing history.

After going undefeated through eight starts as a rookie, Gallo Blue Chip made major headlines in his 3-year-old season, winning 19 of 29 starts and banking a then single-season record \$2,428,816 (bettered only by Somebeach-somewhere in 2008). Among his wins as a sophomore were a pair of million-dollar races: the Pepsi North America Cup and the Meadowlands Pace.

He took his mark of 1:48 4/5 at the Meadowlands as a 4-year-old in a season that saw him exceed seven figures again with the help of wins in the Canadian Pacing Derby and Graduate, and he took divisional Dan Patch and O'Brien honors that year. He was retired in March 2005 after making seven starts as an 8-year-old.

-By James Witherite (Hoof Beats)

HALLETT JOINS HARNESS HORSE YOUTH FOUNDATION BOARD

Award-winning Jessica Hallett has been recently elected to the Harness Horse Youth Foundation Board of Trustees.

"Jessica's creative, youthful approach is an immediate win for HHYF," said HHYF President Allison Conte. "Then add in her hard-working attitude and photography skills, plus her familiarity with the industry - she will be a wonderful addition to HHYF activities!"

Jessica will join other HHYF trustees including Ron Battoni, Corey Callahan, Karen Craft, Suzanne D'Ambrose, Tabatha DeLong, Katie Eick, James Marshall IV, Ryan Miller, and Emily Ratcliff at the upcoming HHYF annual meeting scheduled for January 27, 2025. The meeting will be both in person and via Zoom for those who cannot attend live.

"Weather permitting, this should be a productive and well-attended event with lots on the agenda. We are in the midst of planning our 2025 itinerary as well as discussing some exciting new endeavors for the near future," added Conte.

Upon notification of her election, Jessica commented, "I am greatly honored to join in the efforts put forth by HHYF. I believe that education and experience are first and foremost the key to the success of harness racing. To be able to give the next generation these hands-on experiences will have an impact not only on the participants, but the sport itself."

-edited release (HHYF)

ARTSPEAK WILL STAND ON PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Winbak Farm has announced that Artspeak p, 2, 1:50 2/5; 3, 1:47 4/5 (\$1,625,869), will stand at Kingsmen Equine in Milton, Prince Edward Island.

"We believe that Artspeak should be a great option for maritime breeders," said Pat Woods, Winbak Farm of Canada Manager. "We are excited to work with Kingsmen Equine, by having them stand Artspeak, and wish them the best of luck as they develop their breeding operation."

Artspeak sold for \$100,000 as a yearling at Lexington. He was the O'Brien and USHWA Dan Patch 2-Year-Old Colt Pacer of the Year Award Winner.

"Artspeak was a stand-out racehorse who won 14 races which included multiple Grade 1 and 2 stakes with wealthy purses," said Jack Burke, Winbak Farm General Manager. "He was the richest performer in his freshman division."

At 2, Artspeak won the Bluegrass Stakes at The Red Mile, \$502,850 Governors Cup Final at Woodbine-Mohawk (1:50 4/5), Metro Pace elimination and \$613,640 Final at Woodbine-Mohawk (2-year-old record of 1:50 2/5), New Jersey Sire Stakes leg and \$100,000 Final at The Meadowlands, and Nassagaweya Stakes division at Woodbine-Mohawk. He was third in the Governors Cup elimination at Mohawk-Woodbine and International

Stallion Stakes division at The Red Mile.

"Artspeak is still to date the best two-year-old, I've sat behind," said Scott Zeron, Driver. "He was easy to drive and very versatile."

At 3, Artspeak won the Breeders Crown elimination at Woodbine-Mohawk (second in the \$531,250 Final), Max Hempt Memorial elimination at Pocono Downs (second in the \$500,000 Final), New Jersey Sire Stakes leg and \$100,000 Final at The Meadowlands, \$168,680 Simcoe Stakes division at Woodbine-Mohawk and \$450,000 Tattersalls Stakes at The Red Mile (lifetime record of 1:47 4/5). He was second in the \$319,400 Cane Pace Final at The Meadowlands, Little Brown Jug heat at Delaware County Fair and North America Cup elimination at Woodbine-Mohawk. He was third in the New Jersey Classic Final at The Meadowlands.

"Artspeak is the sire of 213 race Winners, including 56 in 1:53 or faster," said Woods. "He is the sire of 63 Winners of \$100,000+ and averages \$69,000 per starter."

Artspeak is the sire of Pennsylvania Stakes Winner, Seth Hanover, p, 1:52h (\$463,987), Ontario Sires Stakes Gold Winner, Magical Arthur, p, 3, 1:50 3/5s (\$432,960), Blue Chip Matchmaker leg Winner, Intothemysticmoon, p, 1:50 3/5s -'23 (\$388,102), and Pennsylvania Stakes Winner, Bibbopnallie, p, 1:51f (\$354,560).

"Artspeak is the perfect missing piece for the maritime provinces," said Ashley MacDonald, Kingsmen Equine Manager. "Not only does he have beautiful conformation and rocket-like acceleration; he has proven that his offspring can handle any size track."

Artspeak will stand for \$2,000 CAD at Kingsmen Equine in Milton, Prince Edward Island. The farm's location is the former Meridian Farms. Please call 613.581.72929 or visit www.kingsmenequine.com for more information.

-edited release (Winbak Farm)

SUMMER FUN AT TIOGA DOWNS RACETRACK & RESORT

Tioga Downs is something of a departure from the current norm in harness racing. The fact of the matter is that the facility itself is rather unique, a casino resort that features horse racing as the centerpiece of the experience.

The track is a five eighths mile oval with a safe and kind surface, highly regarded by trainer and drivers alike. The barns are in good condition and several are currently undergoing a remodeling that includes new roofs.

The casino main building is a warm, comfortable setting where during the summer months the open air grandstand is a welcoming destination for many locals, providing the excitement of racing before a raucous crowd.

Coasters sports bar is a popular place for horse people to gather after the live races to enjoy some tasty beverages along with bar food while watching the simulcasts from other tracks and live entertainment.

Sandwiching Coasters in the state of the art FanDuel sports book and the recently renovated simulcast room where action on both breeds is raging 24/7.

The Tioga hotel is a modern and comforting facility which offers horsepersons a discount on rooms that makes staying over affordable. Several of the area's finest restaurants are within the facility or you may also enjoy the popular lunch buffet for a mere \$5 with you NY license.

A round of golf at the nearby track-owned Tioga Golf Club is available to horsemen for just \$22.

Beyond the above, stabling at Tioga affords comforts and benefits like free tickets to several concerts each summer and the use of the hotel pool, the backside laundry, free WiFi throughout the barn area and an exercise wheel as an alternative on the rainy, muddy days, all compliments of an arrangement between management and the Southern Tier Harness Horseperson's Association (STHHA).

You'll race for the highest purses in the Central New York region with an incentive-based bonus program to those who stable on the grounds for all starts made at Tioga.

Call Racing Manager Andrew Demsky at (607) 699-7646 or download and submit a [Racing Application](#).

-release (Tioga Downs)

ROSECROFT TRACK ANNOUNCER PETE MEDHURST, 55, DIES

Pete Medhurst passed away on January 24 after losing a battle with an aggressive form of brain cancer. The track announcer at Rosecroft and the voice of Navy Athletics, Medhurst was a friend to all who knew him and loved harness racing. He will be greatly missed.