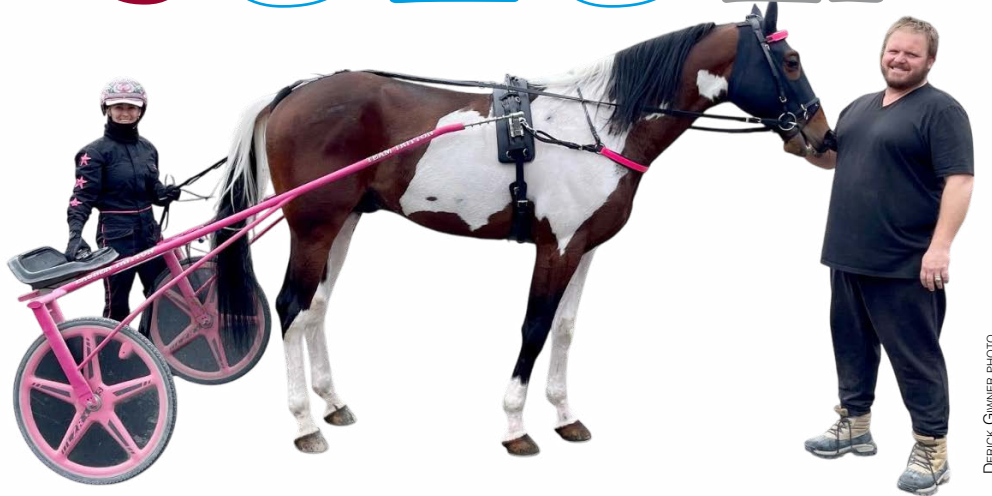


THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2025

# HORSES OF A DIFFERENT COLOR



DERICK GIWNER PHOTO

**Will Lauren (left) & Shane Tritton's horse become the fastest pinto in history or will another racing in Ohio take that title in 2025?**



## EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner

[@harnesseveguy](#)

The few faithful fans on-track at The Meadowslands for the 4 p.m. qualifying session on March 29 along with those watching via the internet from afar saw something a bit "off color" going around the track. A rare pinto raced in the sixth qualifier and finished third in his first charted line in North America.

By definition a pinto is a horse whose coat consists of large patches of white and any other color. The appropriately named Always B Colour shows white covering its shoulders, legs and tail. He arrived here via Ireland with a world-wide profile as a 4-year-old son of U.S. champion

Always B Miki out of Momma Said. At the same time that his pedigree goes back to stateside standout Meadow Skipper on one branch of his breeding, it also roots from the far side of the planet.

"He's Australian bred but born in Ireland. His great-great grandmother was a New Zealand-bred, I believe, by a sire from New Zealand," said Shane Tritton, who trains the horse for Shane R. Curtin of Ireland. "We saw this horse over at the VDM [Vincent Delaney Memorial] when we went over there and fell in love with him. The owners reached out to us to see if we would take him over. Basically he is here to prove that he is the fastest pinto in history, that's the goal."

According to Tritton and somewhat confirmed via a Google search, 1:56 4/5 appears to be the fastest-ever mile by a pinto in Europe. A story on

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**Bartlett nabs 6-bagger during Brennan Series at Yonkers; Florida decoupling bill passes Senate**

**Comments? Questions?**  
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**HarnessLink** cites a 2015 record set in Dublin by White Flame.

"As far as we can tell and we've had quite a few people interested in this, the fastest winning mile rate for a pinto is 1:56 4/5 and that was set in Ireland. Hopefully we can take care of that fairly quickly, but as a horse in general, forget his color, we are really excited about him. He's got a lot of ability and we're super pleased with him," said Tritton.

Always B Colour arrived in the United States with a record of two wins in 15 starts and just over \$9,000 in earnings. His recent lines in Great Britain have all been in the 2:00 range and he hadn't started since August 2024, so there was no reason to expect much in last Saturday's qualifier. With driver Lauren Tritton in tow, when he set fractions of 28, 57 and 1:24 3/5 while on the lead and eventually was timed in 1:52 for his mile, it was clear that there is at least some ability resting inside his multi-colored coat.

"He's got a lot of expectation on him. A lot of people haven't seen him yet but when people do they get pretty excited. I think he's going to turn a few heads because not only is he beautiful but he's pretty fast," said Shane Tritton, who refused to make a firm statement on how good his new trainee may be down the road.

"Let's just let him show that himself," said Tritton, who will send Always B Colour out in race five on Saturday (April 5) at The Meadowlands. "He gets to start in a maiden. He's got to learn to race in America like a lot of these Irish horses do. We don't want to put any pressure on him, he's got enough already."

A large contingent of about 20 people from outside the area showed up to see Always B Colour qualify, and should he start winning that fan base is only going to grow given his unique coloring.

The U.S. really hasn't seen a successful pinto in the Standardbred industry. According to United States Trotting Association (USTA) records, Extra Suds, a 3-year-old son of Lather Up, is the richest registered pinto in the last 25 years. A moderately colored colt with white mostly on his legs and belly, Extra Suds earned \$122,351 in his first



PHOTO PROVIDED

**Starblazer is a listed 2-year-old bay in the Virgil Morgan Jr. barn that clearly qualifies as a pinto.**

year of racing in 2024 for lessee owner/trainer Virgil Morgan Jr. Interestingly he has a lifetime mark of 1:53 2/5, making him at least the co-record holder in North America with Excellent Choice, a 4-year-old that took his mark in 2024 while also in the Morgan barn. A son of Courtney Choice with only a very modest amount of white on his legs

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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and belly, he now races in the Steve Carter barn and sits second in career pinto earnings over the last quarter century at just \$22,969.

“As long as I’ve been training I haven’t seen many [pintos] but it has been more common recently,” said Morgan, who likes what he has in Extra Suds. “He paced in [1:]51 a couple of times last year and he’s training down really good. He’ll qualify in a few weeks.”

The USTA lists only 10 full Standardbred pintos in its database dating back to 1999, but there have likely been more since sometimes horses just get listed as having “markings” as opposed to getting their color changed to pinto. Such seems to be the case with a Downbythe-seaside 2-year-old currently in the Morgan barn named Starblazer. He has white on his belly, shoulder and right front leg but is listed as “bay”.

“Starblazer is training as good as any of the 49 2-year-olds I have in my barn now, though it is early,” said Morgan.

There is also the issue of what constitutes a Standardbred. A few pintos raced in the last 25 years that are considered non-standard. This occurs when one parent is a Standardbred and the other is from another breed. They were allowed to race in the U.S. at the time they competed but those horses are no longer permitted to hit the track. Perhaps the most prominent of that group is Jakarta Partygirl, a 6-year-old daughter of Googoo Gaagaa who competed for Knutsson Trotting Inc. as a 2- and 3-year-old in 2021 and 2022.

“Partygirl’s dam, Fancy Starlark, is a full pinto and owned by Laura [Young] from Southwind Farms,” said Knutsson Trotting’s Tristan Sjöberg. “She knew I, or more accurately my mum, has a special penchant for white and odd colored horses. We bought her [foal] by return email and decided to rename her Jakarta Partygirl in recognition of the city we were in at the time.”

Interestingly, just as Starblazer isn’t properly listed as pinto, sometimes the opposite can happen. Sjöberg owns a 2-year-old Captain Corey-sired colt named Nebbiolo that is completely white but listed as pinto.



PHOTO PROVIDED

**Nebbiolo is a striking white colt with good ability according to owner Tristan Sjöberg.**

“He is all white. He had an Indian hat when he was born but that has disappeared,” said Sjöberg, who is excited about the colt’s prospects. “He trained in 2:22 with ease when I was there and Åke [Svanstedt, trainer] thinks it will be our best white horse and a real contender for top honors in his cohort.”

Regardless of what color you prefer, now more than ever there seems to be a Standardbred for everyone’s palate on the track. Of course, few will catch the eye quite as easily as Always B Colour, and beyond attempting to become the fastest pinto, perhaps he can serve a greater purpose for the industry as a whole by captivating a general audience with his unique coat and also bringing a few more eyes to harness racing.

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# Down Under siblings making noise in Yonkers stakes action



## JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman ✕ [BergmanJay](#)

Though breeders hope for it every time they bring two standardbreds together, it is rare that full brothers or sisters reach the same levels when put to the racetrack. So uncommon that it was somewhat shocking to witness two performances within a three-day span as Yonkers Raceway kicked off its stakes campaign last Friday (March 28) and Monday (March 31).

On the above dates the brother and sister act of Aardie B Miki N and Aardies Flash N captured divisions in the first legs of the Blue Chip Matchmaker and Borgata Series, respectively. That the two rallied from off the pace and catapulted to victory over Yonkers' short stretch suggested the pair could be poised for much more down the road with the series final just the beginning.

Trainer Per Engblom has been no stranger to the winner's circle at Yonkers over the last few years and he's overseen the pair since they arrived on the scene for owner Mike Tanev's M T Stables Ontario.

"Mike raced these horses in Australia, and it was always his intent to bring them here," said Engblom.

The move to the United States wouldn't happen until the pair had raced extensively in stakes action and proven themselves enough. Aardies Flash N, the 6-year-old by U.S. standards (foaled in late December of 2019), would arrive last summer following some stakes events for 4-year-olds and above while the mare Aardie B Miki N would complete an impressive career in Australia on November 30 against the best 3-year-old filly pacers, winning nine of her 18 starts. She arrived in the U.S. about eight weeks in advance of the opening round of the Blue Chip Matchmaker.

While Aardie B Miki's performance in the opening leg was hardly a surprise to the betting public, the 17-1 upset of Aardies Flash N caught many off guard as original listed driver Jason Bartlett opted off for a horse with an outside draw and Jordan Stratton hopped on to get the victory.

"He's shown the talent," said Engblom. "We've had some issues with sickness with him."

In Monday's opening leg Aardies Flash N followed live cover and flew home to his biggest win stateside as well as his fastest, a 1:51 2/5 effort.

Aardie B Miki N came from last in a six-horse field and despite a slow opening half had more than enough left in the tank to swallow up her rivals in a 1:53 4/5 mile.

Asked if there are similarities between the two by champion Always B Miki out of the Rocknroll Hanover mare Tatijana Bromac, that answer was surprising. "They are two different types," Engblom said. "She's a much bigger horse. They both have great attitudes."

Winning races, no matter in Australia or North America, is never easy and attitude is a major part in most quality horses, but Engblom suggests when it comes to the



DERICK GIWNER PHOTO

Trainer Per Engblom.



ENDRI PRENGA PHOTO

Aardie B Miki N won her U.S. debut in a March 28 leg of the Blue Chip Matchmaker series.

mare Aardie B Miki N there may be more. "She can go from zero to 100 in the snap of a finger," said the trainer.

Engblom had to rush Aardie B Miki N along a little bit to get her prepared for the series and qualified her at The Meadowlands just six days prior to the opening leg.

"We raced her off the pace in the qualifier and again in the first round because we really weren't sure how ready she would be," Engblom said.

With a last quarter zipped in about 27 and driver Jason Bartlett sitting chilly throughout the homestretch, it was evident that Aardie B Miki N was ready to

handle the five mares she outclassed in her division.

Engblom was with Hall of Fame trainer Jimmy Takter during the period when world champion Always B Miki raced in the stable. Now with a stakes-winning brother-sister duo in his stable the trainer was complimentary to what Always B Miki has accomplished off the track.

"He's had some very nice horses," Engblom said, "But I don't see similarities between him and these two."

Perhaps the maternal line may have something to do with that. Tatijana Bromac finished first or second 24 times in her 38-race career that concluded in 2013 before embarking on what now looks to be a sensational second career as a broodmare. Tatijana Bromac's dam Tandias Courage won 23 races in Australia and North America, and was the Australian 2-year-old Filly of the Year in 2000. In addition to the brother-sister act now playing out at Yonkers, Tatijana Bromac had previously produced the 20-time winner Aardies Express, a full sister to the pair currently racing at the top level in Australia.

Aardie B Miki N will still have a way to go to reach the earnings of her older sister, but if last Friday's North American debut was a hint of her talent, there's a solid chance her bankroll will increase substantially, not just at Yonkers but perhaps challenging the best mares in North America.

"We've staked her to everything," said Engblom.

For the moment Aardie B Miki N will likely have to race against

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 7](#)



some of the others in a strong Blue Chip Matchmaker series to prove her worthiness in an Open Mare class that will eventually include the 2024 Horse of the Year Twin B Joe Fresh. She's entered in the second round of the Blue Chip Matchmaker this Friday (April 4) and drew post five against six rivals in the last of four \$50,000 divisions (race 9). Jason Bartlett, Engblom's choice, will once again drive the mare as she meets the \$1.9 million former Breeders Crown champion Grace Hill (post 2) for the first time.

Last week Jordan Stratton subbed for Bartlett behind Aardies Flash N in the Borgata. This Monday (April 7) the tracks' leading driver returns to the bike but won't have the luck of the draw. Aardies Flash N landed post seven in the fifth and final \$50,000 Borgata division (race 9) and will be up against two other first-round winners in Verdun (post 1) and Mossdale Ben N (post 6). The latter of those two remains undefeated in five starts in North America this year.

Engblom was more than happy with the return to Yonkers of Coaches Corner, the runner-up in last year's Borgata final.

"We raced him from behind in his first start at The Meadowlands," said Engblom. "Last week he drew outside and Jason left with him. I thought he raced very well and hung in there right to the wire."

Coaches Corner earned a second in the opening leg but again finds himself outside in this Monday's draw with post seven in a solid group that features Desperate Man from the pole position.

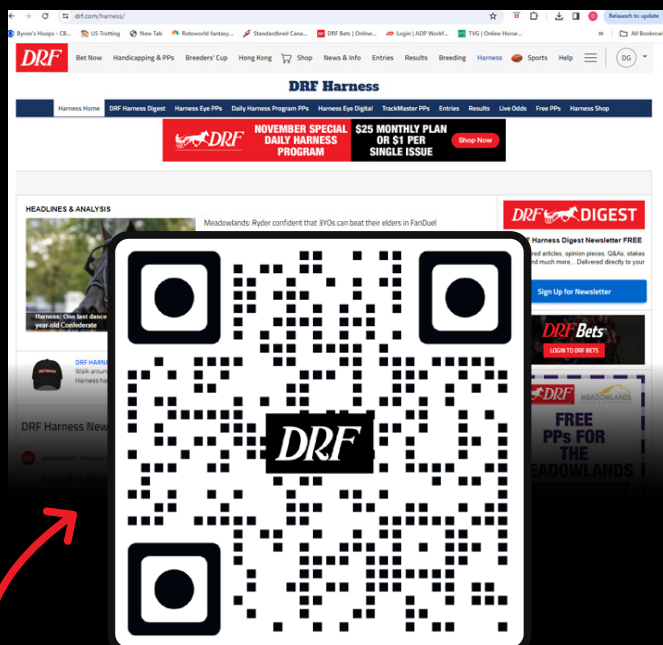


MIKE LIZZI PHOTO

Aardies Flash N rebounded from a dull effort with an opening-round win in the Borgata series at Yonkers on March 31.

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## HARNESS FOCUS

By Jessica Hallett X @JHallettPhoto

# STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Harness racing is an individual sport with anywhere from two to 12 drivers at any given time on the track competing against each other with an equal number of horses, trainers, owners and caretakers all in the mix competing against one another as well. Whether it's a match race with just two horses or a Grand Circuit race with 10 or even more horses, the goal is the win the purse money; the hard work of every day and every week culminating into an end result at the wire. All in less than two minutes!

But that's not true, right? Harness racing cannot be summed up in just two minutes. And it's hardly an individual sport when it comes to things that matter most.

If one thing remains true, it's that the harness racing community proves time and time again that there's more to the industry than just a sport, just those two minutes on the track, and just individual stables racing against each other. In a time of need, the community bounces back stronger than ever to help one another.

This was readily apparent in the Tioga Strong movement, the 2023 tragedy that caught the attention of the world as a whole. But the idea of horsemen helping horsemen dates back to the beginning of the sport.

And now, the spotlight shines once again on the horsemen with the accident on March 19 at The Meadows that claimed the life of 27-year-old driver Hunter Myers.

The news of the accident was first to reach social media as it always does, but this was not just another accident. Early reports were marred with confusion and uncertainty, but the following morning the news was confirmed that Myers had passed from his injuries during that accident.

Immediately words of support and prayers filled the social media timelines alongside a drawing I had produced in recognition of the true sorrow horsemen are experiencing with this devastating loss.

Many messages asked if I would create shirts using that drawing and use the money as a fundraiser for the family. I didn't have the intention to do so originally, but with the interest of everyone and with the intent to make sure all of the proceeds go to the family, I thought it could be a good way to raise some money. I set a goal of \$5,000 and thought I might need to raffle off some other items to get to that goal. I asked my mom if she thought 100 shirts would be too many to order and she said I should be able to get them sold eventually.

It didn't take to 'eventually'!

Within minutes, the orders flooded in. By the end of the day, 1,000 shirts had sold. Within 24 hours, \$10,000 had been raised off the profits of the sales alone. By 48 hours, the number doubled to \$20,000.

And then came the requests for hoodies and decals as well as infant and

toddler apparel. Nearly 3,000 shirts have sold with about \$4,000 worth of hoodies added to the mix.

Altogether, the number wavers around \$30,000 between all of the shirt sales, hoodie sales, donations, and more. The final total will be calculated and a certified check will be made out to Chloe – Hunter's fiancée – by the end of the month once all is finalized.

Overall, the support poured in from individuals and organizations all over the industry.

To tell you the truth, I realize now that I had a very narrow perspective of the industry itself. I had always prided myself on meeting more and more horsemen as I increased my involvement with different endeavors in racing. But those horsemen came from the same general background – tracks that I have raced at like Pompano Park, Tioga Downs, Monticello Raceway, and Saratoga Raceway, as well as those I have met through traveling on the Grand Circuit or the prolific races as The Gold Cup and Saucer in PEI, among other races.

And yet, that is only a fraction of what the industry is at its core.

With their orders, the horsemen and women sent along a little insight into their own stories and backgrounds. Some were former horsemen, now retired and moved away from the tracks while others were from tracks I've never visited. Many knew Hunter Myers and shared stories of how he drove their horses or their last win with him.

After I posted the shirts on Twitter/X, I received response from the thoroughbred community as well. The team behind Horse-shoe Indianapolis bought 50 shirts to show their support and their followers jumped on board as well.

The Indiana Standardbred Association (ISA) took another 50 and Walsh Products took 15. The United States Harness Drivers Association opted out of the shirts, but sent in a donation for \$1,000 for the cause.

Individuals and stables across the world posted orders for shirts as it spanned 29 states, 6 provinces, 3 continents and 4 countries. And these individuals came from over 40 different racetracks and training centers across the world, some places that I never even knew existed.

I created a chart on Google Sheets as the best way I could think of to keep it all organized. As I got to a comment or message, I acknowledged their order and added it to the chart. That chart just kept growing and is still growing now.

It certainly wasn't a one-woman show. While I was the only one who could field the orders and enter them into that chart, I had help from everyone, whether it was the way in which they placed their order or their help in making sure other orders weren't missed. And I had the most help from the representatives at each track who volunteered for their role as leaders.

Angie Coleman quickly took command of The Meadows orders. She has made sure I haven't missed anyone, collected orders on the ground at The Meadows, and handled anyone offering to pay by cash.

Francis Guillemette volunteered early to take the Ontario orders as well, saving on the cost of shipping across the border and instead getting the shirts from me, in Saratoga, to him, in Buffalo. He offered to drive to Buffalo and grab the shirts to bring back for all of the Ontario horsemen. And not



CONTINUED ON PAGE 9



only that, he has been instrumental in getting the currency exchange for the horsemen that don't have the same money apps as we do here in the states (i.e. the U.S. uses Zelle whereas Canada uses e-transfer).

Cam MacPhee leads the Prince Edward Island charge with horsemen from two tracks – Summerside and Charlottetown – placing their orders. He has also helped with the currency exchange issue in collecting all of the funds from everyone who ordered in PEI.

Toni Dale Hollar will handle all of Ohio's orders, making those orders much simpler as they only have to go to one person from me.

And the leaders just keep going. In addition to track reps like Cory Stratton at The Meadowlands and Renee Lynn Martin at Buffalo, I have had offers for shippers to take the shirts from me to those locations, like Heather Vanhorn to several of the northeastern tracks, Gretchen Athearn to Maine, and Ellen Taylor to the Horseshoe Indianapolis group among many, many others. Truthfully, too many to name because like the support rolled in for Hunter and his family, the support had rolled in for these shirts and my efforts to get them everywhere without needing to mail nearly 3,000 of them.

Many orders also banded together as complete stable orders or places, like the employees of the Meadows grandstand making those orders more streamlined as opposed to mailing individual orders.

As it stands, about 500 of the shirts will need to go to the post office, but advice from some of my supporters should make that a much easier process.

All-in-all, 2,500 of these shirts have become this large cross-country expedition to numerous tracks and training centers. It was a totally unexpected response that should have actually been expected given the strength of the harness racing community.

And the shirts weren't the only support going towards the family. Numerous fundraisers popped up all over selling gear in tribute to Myers in addition to a GoFundMe that has raised over \$80,000, breedings



JESSICA HALLETT PHOTO

**Angie Coleman is one of the track ambassadors that have helped coordinate shirt sales.**

auctioned off from several farms, custom equipment and race bikes/jog carts, and as well as Chloe's personal Venmo.

Whether by sharing the posts, sending in a donation, or buying a shirt, it has been clear that the harness racing community shows their strength in numbers. In a time where it's hard to decide what the best thing to do is, the horsemen always find a way to help in any way that they can. We need to remember that even though we race against each other in those two minutes on the track, we stand together and we can't do it alone.

## Humble moves to DiDomenico for round two of Borgata

By Jay Bergman

The second round of the Borgata Series at Yonkers Raceway this Monday finds five \$50,000 divisions with predominantly the same faces as round one. There was a major transaction that followed last Monday's race as owner William Hartt was able to purchase Humble A and the 5-year-old son of American Ideal, a runner-up as a betting favorite in the first leg, makes his first start for new trainer Scott DiDomenico in Monday's third division (race 7).

"It's a rare opportunity to be able to go out and buy a horse of that caliber," said DiDomenico. "I'm grateful for the opportunity to train him."

The transaction took place on the same day horses had to be entered for the second round and DiDomenico was able to enter Humble A prior to the 3:00 p.m. deadline on April 1.

"I didn't get the horse in my barn until 8:00 p.m. last night," DiDomenico said on Wednesday. "All I can say is that we had him out jogging this morning and he looked good."

Though DiDomenico was only new into his association with Humble A, he is more than aware of the horse's ability having raced against him and watched him at Yonkers over the last few months.

"Scottie Blackler and his crew did an outstanding job with him," DiDomenico said.

Humble A worked his way up the classes last fall at Yonkers for Blackler and was rather impressive winning eight straight races closing out the year, with a 1:50 3/5 score in a \$40,000 Preferred at The Meadowlands on December 28. Given time off and nominated to several stakes events for older pacers in 2025, Humble A had two qualifiers at Pocono before his season's debut in the first leg of the Borgata last week.

"I thought he raced great last week," said DiDomenico. "It was his first start of the year, and he was used a lot in a (1):51 mile."

Though last week's race was solid there are no easy assignments in the Borgata series as horses vie for spots in the lucrative final and each leg carries plenty of weight towards determining the finalists. Humble A makes his DiDomenico debut from post four in the seventh

race on Monday with Tim Tetrick picking up the driving assignment. Humble A will meet a solid group that includes first round winner For Once Inmy Life (post 1), likely to be the public choice after posting the fastest time of the five division winners with a 1:51 mile.

Last year, following a third-place finish in the opening leg, Dunkin' won the next two legs of the Borgata and that was enough to see him reach the final in 2024. Unfortunately Dunkin' drew post eight for the final and was limited to a fifth-place finish.

"He's a horse that just gives you his all every time," said DiDomenico of Dunkin'. "I love the horse."

Dunkin' drew post five in the eighth race and fourth \$50,000 Borgata division on Monday. He definitely has his work cut out in a grouping that features Desperate Man (post 1) and Coaches Corner (post 7), two of last year's finalists, as well as last year's champion Hellabalou (post 2) and first-round winner Binge On Yankee (post 4).

Janelle Granny is DiDomenico's third Borgata entry, but it was clear perhaps after seeing the draw that maybe he could be asking too much from the 4-year-old son of Fear The Dragon in race nine. "He's going to have to show more," said DiDomenico.

First-leg winners Verdun (post 1), Mossdale Ben N (post 6) and Aardies Flash N (post 7) make this race likely the most contentious of the five divisions. Adding more depth to this are Charlie May (post 2), a near \$2.3 million career earner, and Typhoon Banner N (post 4), the winner of last year's initial MGM Grand Prix final.

The first two Borgata divisions on Monday drew no first-round winners and that will afford a huge opportunity for some to gain valued points. Its A Me Mario (post 5) displayed a huge burst of speed making a move past the half mile and clearing the lead rather quickly in his opening leg division. The 5-year-old by American Ideal would tire for his efforts but was still a respectable second for trainer Shane Tritton. Its A Me Mario drew post five in the \$50,000 second race where his main competition is likely to come from two imports to his inside, with Carabao A (post 1) and Hemsworth N (post 2) proven commodities over the Yonkers half-mile surface. Hemsworth N competed in four legs of last year's Borgata series.

Huntinthelastdolar (post 1) and Chase H Hanover (post 3) were heads apart on the wire with the former finishing second and the latter third in a Borgata division last week. They meet in the fourth race and second Borgata division on Monday.

The 12-race card at Yonkers on Monday begins at 6:45 p.m. (EDT) and includes a \$20,000 guaranteed Pick 5 starting in the fifth race.

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# Ontario Breeder Rewards recipients reinvesting heavily in the province

By Dave Briggs / Ontario Racing

George Millar could produce Standardbreds anywhere. But Canada's reigning Breeder of the Year said Ontario Breeder Rewards – that in 2025 will be about \$2.5 million in total – are the prime reason he produces all of his horses in province.

In 2024, Millar Farms, which bred and campaigned the nation's Horse of the Year, Chantilly, was second among all Standardbred breeders with total Ontario Breeder Rewards of \$225,883. Of the top 10 rewards recipients, seven earned rewards of more than \$75,000.

"The rewards help take the edge off the cost of the broodmare farm," said Millar, who is based in Aurora, ON. "Everybody sees the nice horses that you come up with, but they don't see the so-so horses that still cost about the same amount of money to get [to the races]."

Millar was one of many Ontario breeders that said the reward money is used to reinvest in both their businesses and the Ontario economy. At a time when Ontarians are more conscious than ever about supporting Ontario businesses, the result is a churn that produces economic activity far in excess of the total value of the rewards.

"[The rewards] help support everything," Millar said. "And there's always something. Every couple of years we're replacing fencing on the farm. And I've got six miles of four-plank oak fencing on the farm. It can be \$100,000 a year just replacing a bunch of that fencing to keep it looking nice. So, when you get those rewards in, it helps."

## SEELSTER REINVESTS WITH 'FOUND MONEY'

Ann Straatman is the reproduction manager for Seelster Farms in Lucan, ON. Seelster, one of the largest commercial breeding farms in the province, led all Ontario breeders in 2024 with total rewards of \$297,103.

"For Seelster, [rewards] are found money," Straatman said. "We don't ever count on them to pay any bills. When it comes in, and it's six figures plus, it's always something that's turned around into new broodmares or we had a big year once where we built a new barn. It's not something that sits with us."

Straatman said the farm maintains an informal wish list – such as new mares, higher wages or benefits for staff, a new truck or other equipment.

"It's a forever wish list... Sometimes we're lucky enough to earn some rewards that we can maybe get that wish list looked after sooner rather than later," Straatman said. "I wish we could say that we did something fancy with it, but every bit of [the rewards] that come in are turned around to make this place run more efficiently."

"It's a thrill to see [rewards] come in, but, like I said, we always treat it as found money, because you never know how your horses are going to perform. It's always an incentive for us to aggressively buy new broodmares and breed to more popular stallions and pay out more in service fees... We're always trying to create a variety [of horses for] public sale."

## SMALL BREEDERS CAN REAP HUGE REWARDS

Significant breeder rewards don't just go to the large breeders. Jake Higgs and his family have only four broodmares and that only recently increased from one lone, prolific mare, Rite Outa The Park. That mare helped the high school teacher from Strathroy, ON, earn virtually all of the \$149,270 in breeder rewards he collected in 2024. It was the fourth highest total in the province last year.

Two offspring produced by Rite Outa The Park won O'Brien Awards in 2024 – Canada's top older trotter of the year, Logan Park, and his full-sister, Willy's Home Run, the 3-year-old trotting filly of the year. It was Willy's Home Run that delivered the significant rewards to Higgs. She earned over \$430,000 on the track as a sophomore to help Higgs collect rewards exceeding a quarter-of-a-million dollars.

"It's been amazing," Higgs said. "[The rewards are] unmatched in the industry, as far as I know. It helps when you have a successful year, like Willy did. The money falls back into the business."

"We have reinvested all our money, plus some, into purchasing new mares... We never saw ourselves increasing our mares, because we don't

have a farm yet. That's the problem. We're looking for our own farm so we can bring these mares home. Right now, they're kind of spread around. That's the next plan."

## HOW ONTARIO BREEDER REWARDS WORK

Ontario Bred Rewards are paid to the owners (or lessees) of mares that are enrolled in the Ontario **Resident Mare Program** prior to Sept. 1 of the foaling year. Foals from enrolled mares are considered Ontario Bred.

To be eligible a mare must be physically in the province of Ontario at the time of enrolment and remain in the province for a minimum of 180 consecutive days surrounding foaling in Ontario.

Foals racing in the Ontario Sires Stakes, and Finals of select Open Stakes races in Ontario earn Ontario Bred Rewards.

In 2025, approximately \$2.5 million will be available for Ontario Bred Rewards, broken down as follows:

- \$2 million based on earnings in Ontario Sires Stakes
- \$130,000 based on earnings in selected Open Stakes
- \$400,000 for Divisional Leaders based on Ontario Sires Stakes earnings.

## MILLAR USING REWARDS TO CARE FOR RETIRED HORSES

Millar said the rewards have been "awesome," especially in recent years when he's had his greatest success on the track.

"I have had some rewards cheques before, but there weren't a lot," Millar said. "And then in 2021, I think they told me my rewards cheques were like \$380,000. I said, 'I got the cheques, but there has to be a mistake. There are a few more zeros than there probably should be.' They said, 'Oh, that's for real.' We had a good year that year."

Some of the rewards money is being used by Millar to improve the lives of horses in Ontario. The province is home to some 10,000 horses connected to the racing industry. Millar said the rewards have helped him build a third farm he's mostly using to provide lifelong care for some of his retired horses.

"The farm is just about finished," Millar said. "The barns are just about finished. The house was finished a while ago. The paddocks are all done. The property is fenced off... That farm is for mostly my retired mares and horses, ones I can't find good homes for right away that are finished racing. I'll leave them over there until I find a good home for them. But, you know, the older broodmares, you can't really find a home for them, so it's just a place where they're going to live out the rest of their lives and then I'll use it for some of my mares that are barren."

Millar's horses were so successful in 2024 he would have earned even more in breeder rewards if it wasn't for a cap of 20 per cent on the amount any one enroller can earn from Open Stakes. He topped out at \$26,000 in that category. Had there not been a cap, he would have earned nearly \$5,000 more.

He isn't complaining in the least. Apart from the other uses already mentioned, some of the \$225,883 he received in rewards has been used to replace farm equipment.

"We bought another tractor to work the farm," he said. "You're always replacing equipment and I'm trying to get more environmentally friendly. We're switching away from electricity and going to power grids and things like that. So, it's just always trying to upgrade."

Top 10 Ontario Breeders Reward Standardbred recipients in 2024:

1. Seelster Farms – \$297,103
2. Millar Farms – \$225,883
3. Shmuel Farhi – \$154,463
4. Jake Higgs – \$149,270
5. Tara Hills Stud – \$99,941 (+\$25,000 for standing the leading sire of 2-year-old trotters, Green Manalishi S)
6. Century Spring – \$86,267
7. Darryl Kaplan – \$77,967
8. Prince Lee Acres – \$69,140
9. Stonebridge Farm – \$62,988
10. Jesse Gebhardt – \$62,932





# Senate committee passes Florida decoupling bill, but guarantees seven years for Gulfstream

By Matt Hegarty

A Florida Senate committee on Tuesday night advanced a bill that would allow Gulfstream Park to decouple its live racing license from its casino license, but only after amending the legislation to ensure that live racing would continue at the track for at least the next seven years.

Senators who ultimately voted for the bill did so after hearing nearly three dozen individuals testify against it under the contention that it would be extraordinarily damaging to the entire state's horse industry, and, in some cases, after pledging to the Thoroughbred industry that they would work together with equine interests on a future beyond live racing at Gulfstream.

"You have a group of senators on this committee who are committed to your future," said the chair of the committee, Sen. Jennifer Bradley, after the vote. "We don't know what that future looks like right now but we are committed to having those conversations to see what that future looks like. ... This is the start of the conversation."

The vote was 5-2.

The hearing in front of the Senate Regulated Industries Committee was the first to take place outside of the legislature's House, where similar legislation passed out of two different committees earlier this year. The second committee added an amendment ensuring five years of live racing at Gulfstream.

The introduction of the legislation has galvanized nearly the entire Florida Thoroughbred industry to join up in opposition to its passage. Lobbyists hired by the industry under the banner of a newly formed organization called the Thoroughbred Racing Initiative have said that there is less support for the bill in the Senate than in the House.

Prior to the bill being called for discussion or a vote, the sponsor, Sen. Danny Burgess, offered an amendment that would require the casino and racing licenses at Gulfstream Park to remain coupled for four years. After that, if Gulfstream wanted to decouple the licenses, it would have to provide a three-year notice before ceasing live racing.

Burgess was nearly apologetic in comments accompanying the introduction of the amendment, foreshadowing that he intended to vote in support of the bill. After voting in support, he called the seven-year timeline "a lengthy runway out the gate so that we can build this out," reiterating comments by other legislators that contended that the passage of the bill would force Gulfstream's parent company, 1/ST Racing and Gaming, to meet with racing constituents on a plan that would ensure the survival of the industry over the long-term.

"Help us find a solution," Burgess said. "Help us find the road map ahead."

Current statutes require Gulfstream to run at least 40 days of live racing to retain its casino license. Still, Gulfstream runs approximately 200 days, on a year-round schedule, under an agreement with its horsemen in which purses receive subsidies of approximately \$6 million a year from the casino operations. According to multiple officials with knowledge of Gulfstream's finances, the racing operation has always generated positive cash flow for its owner, 1/ST Racing and Gaming.

1/ST Racing, which is headquartered in Aurora, Ontario, Canada, has been headed by Belinda Stronach for the past decade. She took control of the company's racing assets as a result of a settlement of a bitter feud between herself and the founder of the company, her father, Frank Stronach.

Still, Gulfstream, which is located inland in Hallandale Beach, Fla., in the metro Miami area, sits on extremely valuable real estate, and officials for 1/ST have told horsemen that the company is considering redeveloping the site or possibly selling it outright. Nothing in current Florida law would prohibit the company from selling the site or developing it as long as the new or current owner did not operate a casino.

People who testified in opposition to the bill represented varied elements of the Thoroughbred industry's economic ecosystem, including trainers, owners, breeders, veterinarians, horsemen's officials, auction houses, and suppliers. All contended that the bill would devastate the horse economy in Florida – under the belief that 1/ST would pull the plug on live racing at its earliest opportunity.

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THURSDAY, APRIL 3

RACE 8

(6) DIRTY LIL PIGLET is coming off a very good 2nd-place outing at Flamboro. It was a remarkable effort and he's back in the Des Tackoor barn, where he is a perfect 1-1.

-John Rallis



WOODBINE  
MOHAWK PARK

FRIDAY, APRIL 4

RACE 3

(2) GLITTERING HOPE made a crazy wide move to get the lead but paid the price for it by fading in the stretch. Inside post should allow her to make one brush to the front if Boyd chooses that trip or pick up cover.

-Derick Giwner



RACE 5

(2) TWIN B SUNKISSED has been racing well enough to finish third in her last three and she gets away from a couple of sharp rivals tonight. Burke trainee seems more than capable of handling this field.

-Matt Rose



SATURDAY, APRIL 5

RACE 2

(1) HYPEBEAST made a nice first-over bid for the lead last time before weakening some to be third. That was his best race of 2025 and perhaps a sign that a big mile is in the offing.

-Giwner



FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Mohawk Park Analysis

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Meadowlands Analysis

Friday

Saturday

Yonkers Analysis

Thursday

Friday

DHP PPS

HARNESS EYE PPS

TRACKMASTER PPS

FREE PPS

INSTANT RACING UPDATES VIA TWITTER: @DRFHARNES

# NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

## BARTLETT'S SIX-BAGGER INCLUDES JOHN BRENNAN SERIES HAT TRICK

Jason Bartlett had six consecutive victories on Wednesday night (April 2) at MGM Yonkers Raceway, including a trio of tallies in the opening leg of the John Brennan Trotting Series. Each of the series races went for a purse of \$30,000.

[READ MORE](#)

## HOOSIER PARK'S GUARANTEED WAGERS IN PLACE FOR 2025 MEET

Harrah's Hoosier Park Racing & Casino is proud to announce a host of nightly guaranteed pools for horseplayers going into effect on Thursday, April 3 through the remainder of the 2025 racing season.

[READ MORE](#)

## GRADUATE FINALS RENAMED TO HONOR STAN BERGSTEIN

The Meadowlands is pleased to announce that beginning with the 2025 edition, the Graduate Series finals will be titled to memorialize Stanley F. Bergstein.

[READ MORE](#)

## LIVE RACING RETURNS TO VERNON ON APRIL 19

Vernon Downs is set to begin its 72nd anniversary of racing on Saturday, April 19. Post time for Opening Night is 5:05 p.m. and features a t-shirt giveaway after the third race.

As the only 7/8ths mile track in New York, Vernon Downs features exhilarating racing action and family friendly entertainment. In 2024, "Lightning" Leon Bailey cruised to the top of the driver standings with a career best 166 wins. Last year's leading trainer was Jessica Okusko. Both will be returning to defend their titles.

[READ MORE](#)

## BELLA ARTISTE CAPTURES DOVER SERIES FINAL

Bella Artiste benefited from an early speed duel and won the \$51,750 final of a late-closing series for Delaware-eligible 3-year-old pacing fillies at Bally's Dover on Wednesday night (April 2).

Sparks were flying early when Little Miss Peyton parked out Tilted Crown through the opening quarter in a blistering 26. Tilted Crown eased off the accelerator and took a pocket trip behind a headstrong Little Miss Peyton through a 55 2/5 half. Bella Artiste, the 3-5 favorite, gathered momentum and rushed first-over before the three-quarters in pursuit of Little Miss Peyton while Odds Beater followed second-over and One Hot Shark followed third-over.

Little Miss Peyton continued on a tenuous lead as Bella Artiste drew alongside. The stablemates raced on even terms passing the three-quarters in 1:24 3/5. The blistering early fractions took their toll on pacesetter Little Miss Peyton as she became leg weary late, and Bella Artiste roared home to win by 2-1/4 lengths in 1:55 1/5. Little Miss Peyton finished second and Tilted Crown was third.

Bella Artiste, a daughter of Badlands Hanover driven by Jim Morand for trainer Les Givens, is owned by Nanticoke Racing, Chad Tate and Arthur Feeney. She paid \$3.20 to win.

Elegant A was a wire-to-wire 1:52 winner in the \$25,000 Mares Open Handicap Pace over Disturbed Hanover and Melody Hanover. Tim Tetrick drove for owner owner Pollack Racing and trainer Jeff Cullipher.

Bally's Dover boasts an outstanding Thursday (April 3) card, the final day of live harness racing for the season. There is a \$51,000 late closer final for Delaware-eligible 3-year-old male pacers, and Itsrockandroll A will take on seven rivals in the \$25,000 Open Handicap Pace. First post is 4:30 p.m.

**-edited release (Dover)**

## CAL-EXPO FAIR CANCELS SUMMER THOROUGHBRED RACE MEETING

The Cal-Expo fair in Sacramento, Calif., will not hold a brief race meeting this summer, officials said last Friday.

The decision was widely expected and formalized after officials met. Cal-Expo is the fourth Northern California fair to cancel live racing this year, preceded by county fairs in Fresno, Pleasanton, and Santa Rosa.

Tom Martinez, the chief executive of Cal-Expo, cited the closure of Golden Gate Fields in the Bay Area in 2024 and the lack of available horses as two reasons the fair venue in California's capital would not seek racing dates, according to comments reported in the Sacramento Bee.

The Humboldt county fair in Ferndale, in the far north of the state, is expected to request racing dates from the California Horse Racing Board in April for a three-week meeting in late August and early September.

Golden Gate Fields closed permanently last June.

Pleasanton hosted a fall meeting in 2024 to replace dates previously held at Golden Gate Fields; the season failed to meet business expectations. A winter-spring meeting was cancelled, leading Santa Anita in Southern California to add a small number of races for Northern California-based stables beginning in December.

Last week, Pleasanton closed as an auxiliary training center, forcing stables to relocate to Emerald Downs in Washington state or to Southern California.

Cal Expo currently hosts two harness racing meetings annually, with the current meeting scheduled through May 2.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Reports on social media state that harness racing will continue at Cal Expo until at least spring 2026.]

**-by Steve Andersen**

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

"You are voting on a bill that on one hand that will benefit a single Canadian company," said Joe Imbesi, an owner and breeder who owns Briardale Farm in Marion County. "On the other hand it will severely adversely affect thousands of your constituents, people who voted for you."

Multiple Thoroughbred constituents said that the state was breaking a promise to the horse industry that casinos at pari-mutuel facilities would be used to "sustain the horse industry, not destroy it," when casinos at racetracks were authorized in 2005, as Vanessa Nye, a lawyer who is an owner and breeder put it.

"You're doing this on behalf of getting a single sparkling casino in Hallandale that will destroy an entire agricultural ecosystem of small businesses," said David O'Farrell, the general manager of his family's Ocala Stud.

Sen. Jason Pizzo, who comes from a real-estate development family and whose district includes Hallandale Beach, pushed back against contentions that the Florida racing industry was thriving, leaning on foal-crop and mares-bred figures that show a steep decline in both metrics over the past 20 years.

Pizzo also said that the industry was benefiting from a "subsidy" from 1/ST through the slot-machine revenues at its casino, and he said that Florida law does not require any companies other than pari-mutuel permitholders to use some of their revenue from one business to subsidize another.

"I've had discussions with the 1/ST people, and I've told them, just get rid of the slot machines. Hand them back," Pizzo said. "Because I want you to build affordable housing. I want you to build commercial spaces. ... Because [Gulfstream Park is] not even close to being at its highest and best use as a racetrack."

Still, Pizzo said that he supported the industry, but not in its current direction, and he said that the vote providing a seven-year "glide path" would force the industry to reckon with its future in a way that it would not in the absence of the legislation.

"This had to happen today so a conversation is had," Pizzo said, addressing the dozens of horse constituents who had just testified. "Everyone up here feels very, very passionately about you and your future. I'm not a fan of the casino, of the slot machines, I'm not. But that's leverage to make sure we accommodate your futures. ... That conversation is now going to be had."