

THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025

Farewell to Cal Expo



After 54 years, Cal Expo in California is expected to hold its final card of live racing on Friday, thus eliminating Harness Racing west of Minnesota

ROBIN SCHADT PHOTO

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EDITOR'S EYE



By Derick Giwner

[@harnesseveguy](https://twitter.com/harnesseveguy)

Standardbred racing took yet another hit last week as the California State Fair Board announced that it would be terminating its lease with Watch and Wager LLC, effectively ending a 54-year run of harness racing at the Sacramento one-mile Cal Expo oval. The news was a shock to all involved and will have lasting effects.

"Ever since June when Golden Gate announced it was closing this whole thing has really been a nightmare," said Chris Schick, General Manager of Watch and Wager, which runs the December to May meet at Cal Expo. "We knew they were going to exercise the option but instead of a six-month notice, we thought they were going to give us a year so we could get one more season in until May of 2026."

The Fair Board activated a clause in the lease which allowed them to provide six months' notice at any time to effectively end the contract. According to Schick, who has been working at the track on and off since 1995 and is now in his 13th year at the helm for Watch and Wager, the clause was initially put in place because the Fair Board felt there was the possibility of the property becoming too valuable to continue as a racetrack. Additionally, at the time of signing, the risk was lowered because the clause could only be put in

motion if there was no other racing at the track. The Board elected to suspend the Thoroughbred meeting in late March, citing among other things a lack of horse population in the Northern part of California.

"This termination had nothing to do with us," said Schick, who added that Watch and Wager would never have gotten the lease without the clause included. "The collapse of Thoroughbred racing in the north is the root cause of what allowed them to do this. If Pleasanton didn't fail we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Cal Expo joins Freehold Raceway, Pompano Park and Northville Downs in recent years as Standardbred tracks to close their doors permanently. In terms of the impact on the racing community, perhaps this shuttering best compares to Pompano in that both tracks are/were located on an island in a way since each is more than 950 miles from the nearest U.S. harness track. In the case of Cal Expo, it is about 2,000 miles from Running Aces in Minnesota and Hawthorne Racecourse in Illinois.

Those that are able, like current leading driver and trainer Nick Roland, must find a new location to race their stock from December until early May when Running Aces opens. That said, the end-of-days for the track means a life-changing event for many families.

"It is pretty devastating. For me, we [along with partner Jessica Johnson] have an apartment here and we can sell all our stuff and move, but there are a few hundred people that live here," said Roland.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

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Roland was referring to the backstretch where a trailer park houses some 75 families according to Schick. They pay approximately \$450 a month to live on the grounds and now will have to not only find a new place to live but perhaps uproot their kids from their schools and routines. That is on top of finding new employment for nearly half the year.

"My biggest fear is that these people have gotten short notice and really weren't given the chance to deal with the issue. Will they give up their apartments? Many of them store their equipment here. Also, where do these people pivot to? What do the people in the trailer park do and how does it affect their kids in school? All of those issues are impacting our little community which is basically being unearthed," said Schick.

For Roland, who has taken past shots in New York and as recently as 2023 in Pennsylvania rather than head back to California during the winter, there is another similarity Cal Expo has to the now torn-down Pompano Park which made it very desirable – good weather.

"We make the majority of our living in Minnesota where the purses are twice as high as Cal Expo, but we make some money out here. It can get chilly but it doesn't snow. It is a really nice place to race. To spend the winter in a place like this and train babies down while being able to race . . . with Florida being gone it is kind of the only place that is still racing in a climate where it isn't snowing on you in the winter time," said Roland, who has a dominating 60 to 38 lead over Luke Plano in the driver standings at Cal Expo with one card to go.

Roland will get one last chance to dominate at Cal Expo on Friday night when he will drive in virtually every race and his barn will send out four horses on the 14-race card. His best chance comes in one of two \$50,000 California Sire Stakes races for 4-year-olds with Celebrity Status. Bred and owned by Set The Pace Racing [Jessica Johnson and Ken Stauffer], Celebrity Status has won six of 10 races at Cal Expo during the meet and



(Kim Schneider)

KIM SCHNEIDER PHOTO

The final card of racing at Cal Expo gets underway at 5:40 p.m. local time on Friday.

is expected to be the heavy favorite in the eighth race against four others.

It will be back to Minnesota, Canada, Indiana or wherever for those Cal Expo faithful who ship in for five months to compete before heading back north or east during the warmer months. Where they will go as next winter approaches is very much a mystery. There is a last-ditch humanitarian plea to reconsider racing at Cal Expo through May of 2026, though that could be a bit of a longshot at this point. At least from a humanity standpoint, those contacted agreed allowing for some extension would be a good compromise – perhaps even a shortened December 2025 to March

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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2026 meet to give management, all horsepeople, and everyone on the backstretch a chance to plan for the future.

While there isn't enough time to get a meet together for late this year at a different location in California, other options are perhaps on the table for the fall/winter of 2026 into 2027. The San Joaquin fairgrounds in Stockton about 40 miles away is something Schick and team are exploring. There are hurdles to overcome since the facility hasn't been used for racing in years and also has no nighttime lighting system, meaning Cal Expo would have to race during the daylight hours, something Schick said was a possibility.

"The horsemen have indicated that they support it," said Schick, who also has another potential option up his sleeve if officials in Arizona are to play ball. "The operator at Arizona Downs has reached out to about us and expressed an interest in us racing there."

Schick and team have been exploring Arizona Downs for years and were originally planning to run a bridge meet there from late September when Running Aces closes until early November to provide an opportunity ahead of the normal Cal Expo meet. Despite reaching an agreement with the facility operator, the Commission in the state wouldn't hear the application.

"We would have to go through the process again," said Schick about the possibility of revisiting Arizona Downs, another location with support of the racing community.

"They flew a bunch of us out there a few years ago. It is a beautiful facility and is definitely something I would do," said Roland, who would be open to almost any warm-weather location. "I'd be interested in a similar product anywhere out west. Somewhere we can get babies ready and stay away from winter weather."

In the meantime, options for the racing community this winter include Hawthorne Racecourse or perhaps Monticello Raceway, two locations where Cal Expo-caliber horses figure to have a fighting chance to be competitive and earn their keep. Robin Schadt, who is the Racing Secretary at both Cal Expo and Hawthorne, said the horses would fit nicely in Illinois and that she would welcome them with open arms.

"We've kind of talked about [racing at Hawthorne] with some of the people here [at Cal Expo]. They would fit nicely because the talent level at Hawthorne has dropped off," said Schadt, who has been at Cal Expo since 2014. "We could absolutely use them. We have a hard time filling the races that are not for 2- and 3-year-olds."

A dual-breed facility, Hawthorne is already scheduled to conduct a three-nights-a-week winter meet for Standardbreds from November 7 to December 28. It is not yet known if/when there will be harness racing dates in 2026.

Assuming the curtain comes down on Cal Expo on May 2 and the show never returns for one more limited run, those who have been there for decades will have to keep the track alive via their memories. Many will recall the friendships they've developed while others have some regret on what could've been if things were different.

"It is a really great facility. The barn area is great. It is a beautiful mile track that is kind of picturesque right in the middle of town," said Schick. "I would also remember it as a place that could've been great if something happened [alternative gaming revenue], but something never did happen. If we announced we were doubling our purses next year and instead of paying out \$60,000 a night we were paying out \$120,000 a night, how many horses would we have? We are fully contained on track, have decent weather, and we are a mile track."

"I won a couple of driving titles here. Right now it's 1 o'clock and the weather is 80 degrees. Any day it is like that is a great memory," said Roland. "I'll also remember the people. A lot of places where you go for racing, I don't know if you've been on a lot of backstretches, but a lot of places people are half-miserable after competing with each other for their livelihood for generations. They don't like each other. Here, there are people who don't like each other, but for the most part people's attitudes are upbeat and it is like a big family. Everybody helps everybody out."

"I will be in tears watching my horses load in that van next week knowing I will never see them again! I get choked up just thinking about it,"

said trainer Robin Clements. "I've been around Cal Expo since 1972 with a 17-yr stint in Chicago but came back to my hometown track in 2001.

"I know the history of this place and the people and horses who raced here all along. I remember when it was a winter training place. I watched the track records being broken and all the Sires Stakes babies make it to the races. I'm sad to see it close up and so quickly!"

"It's been very sad. A lot of tears are being shed because the people here have formed a family, and that happens in Standardbred racing. I have my California family and it is tearing me apart, and I'm not in the predicament of the California horsemen. I have a home in Illinois and I'm only out here in the winter," said Schadt, who called the Fair Board decision "heartless" with respect to the lack of notice and timing of the Board's decision.

Reality can often be disheartening and that is certainly the case for Cal Expo and its racing community. They'll put on one final show on Friday. Stories will be shared and perhaps memories of former standouts like all-age track-record holder Eaton Kill Road (1:49 4/5, 2005) or the ever-popular Pridecrest, who holds the trotting record of 1:53 2/5 set in 2017, will be in the thoughts of those in attendance or watching. Now 13, Pridecrest got one last winning mile at Cal Expo on April 25, the 66th win of his career.

For some horses, like Allmyx'sliventexas, a son of California Hall of Fame stallion Hi Ho Silverheel's, Friday will mark his final go around the Cal Expo oval. The 12-year-old began his career over the track as a 2-year-old in December 2015 and has won the majority of his 68 races in Sacramento. Fittingly, Allmyx'sliventexas will reportedly have a retirement ceremony after his 225th lifetime start on Friday in race seven. As he'll leave fond memories for those that have watched him race there through the years, so too will Cal Expo, a track that survived

more than half a century and seems to be checking out before its time.



ROBIN SCHATD

A Cal Expo mainstay over the years, Allmyx'sliventexas is expected to make the last start of his career on Friday according to race secretary Robin Schadt



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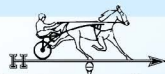
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Tie The Knot a potential stakes star in the making for Cleary



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [X BergmanJay](#)

Each spring for as long as I can remember I've paid close attention to returning 3-year-olds of both sexes and gaits hoping to find horses that might meet the characteristics of stakes-worthy talent. Unraced 2-year-olds have a difficult time generally reaching that level, perhaps having ability but lacking in experience. Sometimes horses that raced just a few times as freshman for varied reasons return the following year and take on an entirely new identity and jump from obscurity to the national spotlight.

In these days of exceedingly fast miles put up by horses in the non-winners-of-one class at racetracks throughout North America, time is a factor that's equally hard to read. Knowledgeable horsemen understand that time is not a safe barometer and the real measure of a horse's talent only comes when put in with horses of similar or theoretically greater ability.

So, it's a challenge to scope out horses that can not only beat non-winners of one race but elevate their game to the stakes level. That said, it's a lot of fun watching young horses make their first starts and to see how they progress.

One such horse elevated herself to the category of potential star this Monday (April 28) at The Downs at Pocono. Tie The Knot, a 3-year-old from the Robert Cleary stable, followed up an extraordinary debut victory a few weeks earlier with an even more eye-catching effort in just her second career start. With Tyler Buter in the bike, the homebred filly by Sweet Lou floated over the Wilkes Barre five-eighths mile oval with incredible ease, stopping the timer in 1:50 4/5. Track announcer Jim Beviglia suggested correctly that the time was more reflective of a stakes races rather than a non-winners-of-one.

To put both of Tie The Knot's performances under the microscope, there is a key element that sticks out in her ability and high-level potential. The filly doesn't just have speed, she has an incredible quick burst to her. It's the kind of quick twitch that springs athletes free from their defenders and it's the kind of ability that can render a horse on the front end powerless to withstand.

In her April 7 debut at Pocono, Buter was able to relax Tie The Knot comfortably in fourth through a soft 57 3/5 opening half. When asked for speed on the backstretch, Tie The Knot overwhelmed the leader so quickly that she quickly lost contact with the field on her way to a seven-lengths triumph in 1:53 4/5 on a cold and damp afternoon. As explosive as the effort was, it didn't come as a surprise given the filly had won a qualifier a week earlier at The Meadowslands in 1:52 2/5, a performance that obviously led to her 1-5 status in her career debut.

As sharp as Tie The Knot looked in her first race, there didn't appear to be any horses with reasonable ability in the race. In her second start Tie The Knot did meet up with a few fillies that had seen some form of stakes action as freshman and though the race was technically the same class as the group she demolished three weeks earlier, it was definitely a step up and a more advanced test.

With the weather warmer and the sun in view, Tie The Knot was a bit more assertive the second time around as Buter put her on the lead with a quick burst after the first quarter and let her glide to the half in :55 1/5. Without the threat of competition, Buter seemed to have the filly relaxed while the pace remained strong. A 27 3/5 third quarter with no one in sight begged the question of whether Tie The Knot was going too fast and would ultimately slow down in the stretch. The

answer came quickly when horses started approaching on the outer tier. Buter showed Tie The Knot the whip and she instantly opened up lengths on the field and cruised home in 28 with apparent speed to spare.

"She's a sweetheart," Cleary said in describing the filly that he became a partner in late last year.

Asked why we didn't see Tie The Knot race as a 2-year-old, Cleary said, "She was just immature, that's all."

In a racing canvas that over time has become less patient with young horses and seeing them pushed forward even when all the pieces didn't seem to fit, Cleary's approach here may be about to pay off in a big way.

"She's still learning but has a great attitude," said Cleary of Tie The Knot, a homebred sent to Cleary last year by breeder and co-owner Eric Cherry.

Cleary relayed that Tie The Knot has been staked predominantly in Pennsylvania to the Sire Stakes as well as the Lynch and a few other races, but wasn't exactly ready to commit to where Tie The Knot might show up next.

"We'll let her tell us," Cleary said, perhaps with tongue-in-cheek given the clarity of her stakes-like performance in her overnight race.



CURTIS SALONICK PHOTO

Tie The Knot was a 1:50 4/5 winner on Monday (April 28) at The Downs at Pocono.

If there is a second side to predicting whether a brilliant effort on the track will translate into success at the highest level it may just be in the pedigree a horse is born with. In the case of Tie The Knot, I was quite fortunate to see some of the great horses that run through her maternal line. Perhaps of most prominence is the connection of her fifth dam Merman Hanover, full sister to Maryellen Hanover, the dam of the great champion Silk Stockings. Merman Hanover's daughter Noisy Cheers, a successful New York Sire Stakes filly during her career, is a full sister in blood to Silk Stockings.

The family found solid footing over the last few generations with Tie The Knot's dam Love Canal, a \$607K earner and 10th richest horse sired by Badlands Hanover. Her second dam A Votre Pante was a Breeders Crown elimination winner as a 3-year-old in 1999 and banked \$448K during her three years on the track.

Tie The Knot is the seventh foal from Love Canal. Her full sister Heartbreak Hotel captured the Pennsylvania Stallion series final in 2022 as a sophomore.

Tie The Knot seems destined for greater things this year, but Cleary was mum when asked.

"I think it's better if I let my horses do the talking," said Cleary about a horse that may give a lot of racing fans something to talk about this year.



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| 1 Northfield Park | Sun. July 13 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 26 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Sat. Aug. 9 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. Aug. 23 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Sat. Sept. 6 |

2-YEAR-OLD COLT TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 12 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Wed. July 23 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Sun. Aug. 10 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. Aug. 23 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Mon. Sept. 1 |

2-YEAR-OLD FILLY PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Sun. July 13 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Fri. July 25 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Sat. Aug. 9 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. Aug. 23 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Sat. Sept. 6 |

2-YEAR-OLD FILLY TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 12 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sun. July 20 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Sun. Aug. 10 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. Aug. 23 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Mon. Sept. 1 |

3-YEAR-OLD COLT PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Sat. May 17 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sat. June 7 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 5 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 26 |
| 5 Northfield Park | Wed. Aug. 27 |

3-YEAR-OLD COLT TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Sat. May 17 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sat. June 7 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 5 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Sat. Aug. 9 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Sat. Sept. 6 |

3-YEAR-OLD FILLY PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Fri. May 16 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sat. June 7 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 5 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Sun. Aug. 10 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Sat. Sept. 6 |

3-YEAR-OLD FILLY TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Fri. May 16 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sat. June 7 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Sat. July 5 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Sat. Aug. 9 |
| 5 Scioto Downs | Fri. Sept. 6 |

BUCKEYE STALLION SERIES

2-YEAR-OLD COLT PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Sat. July 19 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Fri. July 25 |
| 3 Urbana | Mon. Aug. 4 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Fri. Aug. 22 |
| 5 Delaware | Wed. Sept. 17 |

2-YEAR-OLD COLT TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 Bucyrus | Wed. July 16 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Thurs. July 24 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Wed. Aug. 13 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Tues. Aug. 26 |
| 5 Delaware | Tues. Sept. 16 |

2-YEAR-OLD FILLY PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Mon. July 14 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Wed. July 23 |
| 3 Urbana | Mon. Aug. 4 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Thurs. Aug. 21 |
| 5 Delaware | Sun. Sept. 14 |

2-YEAR-OLD FILLY TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Thurs. July 10 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Mon. July 21 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Tues. Aug. 12 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Sun. Aug. 24 |
| 5 Delaware | Mon. Sept. 15 |

3-YEAR-OLD COLT PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Sat. May 24 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Sun. June 8 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Sun. July 6 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Sat. Aug. 16 |
| 5 Delaware | Thurs. Sept. 18 |

3-YEAR-OLD COLT TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 Scioto Downs | Fri. May 23 |
| 2 Northfield Park | Mon. July 9 |
| 3 Northfield Park | Mon. July 7 |
| 4 Scioto Downs | Fri. Aug. 15 |
| 5 Delaware | Tues. Sept. 16 |

3-YEAR-OLD FILLY PACE

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Sun. May 18 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Fri. June 20 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Fri. July 4 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Sun. Aug. 17 |
| 5 Delaware | Thurs. Sept. 18 |

3-YEAR-OLD FILLY TROT

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 Northfield Park | Mon. May 19 |
| 2 Scioto Downs | Thurs. June 19 |
| 3 Scioto Downs | Wed. July 9 |
| 4 Northfield Park | Mon. Aug. 11 |
| 5 Delaware | Mon. Sept. 15 |

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AT THE TRACK

By Darin Zoccali [X AtTheTrack7](#)

\$101 MILLION

The title of this column is how much harness racing handle in North America is down through April 27 this year and it represents a 16 percent decline compared to this same point of 2024.

What is the reason for the decline? That's a complicated question.

For starters, Freehold Raceway is closed, which is responsible for \$14.5 million of the total decline. In addition, Northville Downs is closed, taking another \$1.1 million out of the wagering pools.

The biggest culprit is Woodbine Mohawk Park, which is down \$22.8 million or 22 percent compared to last year. They have run 22 fewer races, or the equivalent of two racing programs, but obviously that is not nearly enough to be the reason for such a steep decline.

Miami Valley is down \$16 million or over 32 percent and The Meadowlands is down \$11.2 million (nearly 11 percent). In addition, Monticello Raceway is down \$9.8 million on 75 fewer races due to an array of cancellations over the winter and Western Fair is down \$7.6 million on 57 fewer races.

The above tracks are responsible for about 85 percent of the total Standardbred handle decline.

All racetracks in North America collectively have combined to run over 800 fewer races than at this point last year. Thus the average handle per race is down roughly 10 percent on a 16 percent total decline.

Recently The Meadowlands implemented a change to their "off times" by steadily decreasing their post time drag each of the last three weeks. This month, The Meadowlands handle is down substantially, about \$4.5 million, with the decline increasing each week of the new system. They are also trying to get their race cards completed faster, a policy that Woodbine Mohawk Park is also trying to follow.

The declines are so steep that it's hard to imagine all of this is what is known as "retail" handle.

One of the hot topics in horse racing right now is the subject of Computer Assisted Wagering (CAW). While many have their opinions about CAW play, one fact about it is that CAW play is wagered through a "model." This model is designed to find value as a race nears post time and send a large amount of wagers around that perceived value. If a racetrack changes their "drag" and thus post-times, this impacts the computer model adversely.

The Meadowlands has made adjustments to their post time drag each of the last three weeks and unless those who wager through CAW are adjusting their model in kind week to week, the post-time drag changes

will impact their handle. While Woodbine Mohawk Park has not made changes as noticeable as The Meadowlands, they too would face some of these same headwinds by speeding up their races.

If it is CAW wagering that is largely contributing to these handle declines, which admittedly is a hypothesis on my part, then the silver lining is that this handle does not impact the racetrack's revenue as much as "retail" handle. This is because CAW play at a high-level is typically accompanied by a large rebate and thus the margin or yield the racetrack earns on that play is not nearly the same as if you or me placed a wager at a betting window. It would make sense for the model not to be adjusting as fast as a person who is seeing these races being run faster and/or closer to their listed post times.

While this CAW impact may certainly be a part of the equation, I highly doubt it makes up close to the entire \$101 million. Looking at all the Standardbred racetracks in both the United States and Canada that have contested races this year, I could only find seven of the 33 showing handle increases compared to last year.

Two of those tracks – Vernon Downs and Bangor Raceway – are responsible for roughly \$100,000 in increased handle as both of those meets just began and have contested a combined 44 races.

Hoosier Park is off to a great start in their young meet, showing an increase of \$1.6 million on 11 more races than the previous year. Oak Grove is also having an excellent start to their meet, with an increase of \$1.1 million on 25 more races.

The other three tracks are: Hawthorne (\$1.1 million) on 52 more races; Century Downs (\$325k) on 39 more races; Yonkers Raceway (\$391k) on 13 more races. That's the complete list of tracks showing increases compared to 2024.

Of the 26 tracks showing declines, seven have run the same or more races than 2024 while the other 19 have run less. While it is easy to say "less races means less handle," it is worth noting a point I made earlier, that handle is down 10 percent per-race.

I have written handle articles before, most of which tied back to a common request. The industry cannot just accept handle decreases, look for excuses and operate as business as usual.

Pompano Park is gone due to decoupling. Freehold Raceway is gone. Cal Expo is about to be gone.

Sure, The Meadowlands and Woodbine Mohawk Park are bloodied because they are the first to run through the wall. They need industry support in working toward a better product. Racetracks must stop fighting for handle and instead work together to increase handle. Getting a larger piece of a shrinking pie should not be the goal.

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'Wild Bill' looks to wrangle in champion Louprint in PASS opener

By Jay Bergman

While Saturday may be Kentucky Derby Day to some, the afternoon has significance as well in the standardbred industry. Notably three divisions of Pennsylvania Sire Stakes races are on the card at Hollywood Casino at The Meadows, with last year's champion Louprint's much-anticipated sophomore debut occurring in one of three \$41,121 divisions of the Bye Bye Byrd for sophomore colt and gelding pacers.

Trainer Brian Brown has no illusions yet remains confident that his Wild Bill Wyatt can at least be competitive against Louprint and perhaps any other horse in this division. Wild Bill Wyatt landed post three in Saturday's ninth race and second Sire Stakes division while the champion Louprint starts from post eight.

"I'm not saying we can go with Louprint right now," Brown said quite frankly. "But my horse has improved an awful lot since last year and he's getting better every week."

Last year Wild Bill Wyatt went winless in seven starts though he did hit the board in five of those races. Things have been dramatically different in 2025 as the altered son of Sweet Lou has won both starts here at The Meadows in preparation for his initial stakes engagement and has not only gained a new speed record but has displayed a racing style not accessible to him as a freshman.

"You couldn't put him on the front end at all last year," said Brown. "This year he's just fine."

A 1:52 1/5 victory on April 24 at The Meadows is proof positive that Wild Bill Wyatt is going in the right direction and that's a good thing for Brown, who despite last year's disappointment saw much potential.

"His attitude has gotten better, and he's learned what he's supposed to do out there," said Brown, categorizing the changes that have him more than optimistic this week and throughout the sophomore stakes season.

"I raced his brother," Brown said. "He had speed but a bad attitude."

While Wild Bill Wyatt was winless last year the same can't be said for Louprint, who won seven of his 10 starts as a freshman completing the season with a victory in the Breeders Crown that propelled him to the Dan Patch award as tops in the 2-year-old male pacing division. Louprint has had two qualifiers in preparation with the last coming on April 22 at The Meadows, a 1:52 2/5 mile cut out with pilot Ronnie Wrenn Jr. coaxing him through a 27 1/5 final quarter. A 1:48 4/5 winner at The Red Mile as a freshman, Louprint will be a heavy favorite in this division.

The Burke-trained Railroad Station (post 1) has an inside track in the

first Sire Stakes division (race 8). Also by Sweet Lou, Railroad Station finished on the board in 10 of his 14 starts as a freshman but didn't get the luck of the draw in major year-end contests, drawing post 10 in the Breeders Crown and post eight in the Governor's Cup.

The third \$41,121 division goes as race 10 on Saturday's 14-race Meadows program that offers an early 11:30 a.m. start, and includes last year's Pennsylvania Sire Stakes final champion Papi's Rocket (post 6), one of two in the field for the sport's leading trainer Ron Burke.

Go Go Grasshopper, second in that Sire Stakes championship a year

ago, makes his sophomore debut in this division from post five following three qualifiers for trainer Joe Bongiorno. Bobby Weiss champion Charge Me Up (post 4) ships west and takes a big step up in class but has been rock solid this year for trainer Nick DeVita.

In addition to the first leg of the Sire Stakes, The Meadows Saturday program is supported by five \$20,000 divisions of the Pennsylvania Stallion Series and trainer Brown has a pair among the entries that are moving in the right direction.

"I think he's going to be a nice racehorse," said Brown of Goodbye Stranger (post 4) in a

third-race Stallion Series. "He had a chip in a knee last year, that's why he didn't race."

Goodbye Stranger, a colt from the first crop of Tall Dark Stranger, won for the first time in just his second start at Hoosier Park on April 19. The colt has some impressive bloodlines as just the third foal from the \$1 million winner Solar Sister.

Damn The Torpedos is another potential "nice horse" for Brown. The Always B Miki-sired gelding drew post two in Saturday's fifth race and comes off a 1:54 victory on April 24 over the same surface.

Brown is putting the finishing work on many of his 2-year-olds at the Delaware County Fairgrounds where he sets up shop. In addition to a solid group of Ohio-sired horses, he has a couple of colts with Grand Circuit aspirations.

"I have a Captaintreacherous colt that Doc Egloff thought would be in my price range and was a nice horse. He was absolutely right," said Brown, referring to Jackaroo, a colt purchased for \$52,000 at the Lexington Selected sale.

"I've got a Sweet Lou colt named Blue Indigo that's a brother to that nice filly Joe Holloway raced, Blue Pacific," said Brown.

Blue Indigo is the fourth foal and first colt from the dam Miss Jones and was a \$70,000 Harrisburg purchase last fall.



CHRIS GOODEN PHOTO

Wild Bill Wyatt starts from post three in race 9 at The Meadows Saturday.

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Todd McCarthy seeks to roll with Hard Seven in Dexter Cup

By Ken Weingartner

The road to the 100th edition of America's Trotting Classic, the Grade 1 Hambletonian Stakes, begins Saturday (May 3) with the Grade 3 Dexter Cup for 3-year-old male trotters at The Meadowlands. The Dexter Cup is the season's first Grand Circuit event for sophomore colt and gelding trotters and features four Hambletonian eligibles in the field.

Leading that group is 8-5 morning-line favorite Hard Seven, who brings a four-race win streak to the Dexter Cup. The son of Chapter Seven-Whispering Oaks will start from post six in the six-horse field and have Todd McCarthy in the sulky for trainer Nancy Takter.

The remaining three Hambletonian eligibles in the field are My Degenerate (the 2-1 second choice) for trainer Julie Miller, Tactical Dynasty (7-2) for trainer Ron Burke, and Civilian Drone (8-1) for Takter. The past two editions of the \$1 million Hambletonian were won by Takter trainees, Karl in 2024 and Tactical Approach in 2023.

First contested in 1960, the Dexter Cup was held previously at Freehold Raceway. Following Freehold's closing at the end of last year, the race found a home at The Meadowlands, which will host the 100th Hambletonian on Aug. 2.

Dexter Cup favorite Hard Seven finished last year with three consecutive wins in Kentucky Sire Stakes action, including the \$100,000 final, at Cumberland Run before opening this season with a career-best 1:53 3/5 victory in a conditioned race that included seven older rivals at The Meadowlands last week.

"He finished his year off pretty good as a 2-year-old, so it's good to see him come back nice and strong as a 3-year-old, said McCarthy, who has driven the colt in seven of his 10 lifetime races, including all four wins. "He had a couple issues early on at 2 and just needed to mature. I think he was starting to figure it out pretty well toward the end of the season.

"Getting behind him now, he feels like he's pretty calm and confident. He's probably just gotten a little smarter. He's quite a nice horse to drive. You can kind of position him anywhere you need to."

Hard Seven went off stride in five of his first six starts last season, then started his win streak one race after the addition of trotting hobbles.

"They just probably give him that little bit of support," McCarthy said. "It helps him keep his mind on the job and keeps his legs where they need to be. He just tries to go a little bit too fast for himself sometimes."

Hard Seven's speed, though, is McCarthy's favorite attribute in the horse.

"He's very fast," McCarthy said. "And he wants to go fast, too. I like that. You don't have to ask him much; you just show him daylight and ride with him. He seems to love passing horses, and it's always a bit of a thrill when you get behind one like that."

Hard Seven has earned \$118,415 lifetime for owners Let It Ride Stables, Maurice Chodash, and Boca Racing.

My Degenerate also enters the Dexter Cup 1-for-1 this season thanks to a 1:55 1/5 victory in a conditioned race at Harrah's Philadelphia on April 17. The son of Muscle Hill-Decadence, who finished second in last year's Massachusetts Sire Stakes final, has two wins in nine lifetime races and \$80,881 in earnings for owners Knutsson Trotting, Lindy Farms of Connecticut, Preferred Equine Marketing, and Andy Miller Stable.

Andy Miller will drive My Degenerate, leaving from post two.

Tactical Dynasty is making his seasonal debut for driver Yannick Gingras and trainer Burke, who won the 2015 Dexter Cup with Habitat.

Last year, the son of Tactical Landing-Dynasty was a multiple stakes winner, including a division of the Bluegrass Stakes at Lexington's Red Mile. He also won a preliminary division of the New Jersey Sire



LISA PHOTO

Hard Seven was an impressive winner in his 2025 debut at The Meadowlands.

Stakes in a career-best 1:53 2/5 at The Meadowlands and an elimination of the William Wellwood Memorial at Woodbine Mohawk Park. He closed his campaign with a triumph in a division of the Garden State at The Big M.

For his career, Tactical Dynasty has banked \$161,188 for owners Burke Racing Stable, Phil Collura, Larry Karr, and J&T Silva-Purnel & Libby. He will start the Dexter Cup from post three.

Prior to Saturday's Big M card, the \$45,000 Lady Suffolk for 3-year-old female trotters will be contested as a non-betting race. The four-filly field features one Hambletonian Oaks eligible, Conversano for trainer Juan Cano.

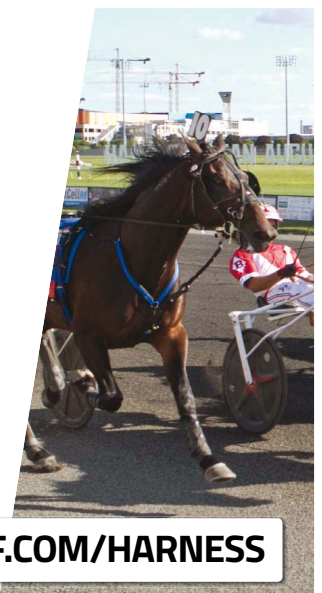
A winner on the New Jersey Sire Stakes circuit last year, the home-bred Conversano is owned by Hot Lead Farm. Her full brother Celebrity Bambino won a Hambletonian elimination in 2023 and was fourth in the final. The family also includes Housethatruthbuilt, who finished second in the 2004 Hambletonian Oaks.

The Lady Suffolk is scheduled for 6 p.m. (EDT) with The Meadowlands' 14-race betting card to follow at 6:20 p.m.

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Entries & Results

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RACE OF THE WEEK

6 MEADOWLANDS SAT

1 Mile Trot. DEXTER CUP. 3 YEAR OLD OPEN (DECLARATION FEE - \$3,000) Purse \$115,500

EXACTA AND TRIFECTA | 50 CENT EARLY PICK 4 (6-7-8-9) (\$50,000 GUARANTEED POOL) (TAKEOUT 15%)

1 #SOFT LANDING

22:03.3 \$465

15-1 S. Zeron 99-9-11 (182)

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b c 3, by Tactical Landing, Classic Martine by Classic Photo
Edwin J. Gold,Phoenixville,PA;Conrad E. Zurich,Fayetteville,NY

Last 4 Sts-\$2,500

2:03.3 Fhd

25 M1	1	0	0	0	\$0 25 Tot	1	0	0	\$465
24 M1	6	0	0	0	\$3,000 24 Tot	9	1	1	\$10,500
23 M1	0	0	0	0	- Life	10	1	1	\$10,965

2 #MY DEGENERATE

21:53.1 (58) \$6,000 LEX-SEL \$125,000

2-1 A. Miller 38-3-5 (179)

17 Apr 25	12Ph	fst60°	28	57.4	1:26.1	1:55	NW3	12000	3	33	12	11	15	12		AnMiller	JuMiller	29	283	282	29	1:55.1	80	+1 9w	*1.10	MyDegrntt ISeeAStar GivMAYnk	-8
8 Apr 25	2Ph	fst69°	29	58.1	1:26	1:54	Qua		6	21	12	13	11	11	11	AnMiller	JuMiller	29	283	28	282	1:54.2			nb	MyDegrntt EvasPfc MitoGrnde	-6
2 Apr 25	3Pcd	fst42°	28	57.1	1:25.4	1:54	Qua		5	33	21	11	11	11	x1ynk	AnMiller	JuMiller	28	291	28	281	1:54			nb	MyDegrntt EugnoRltt BlackwKZ	-6
30 Nov 24	7M	fst39°	28	55.4	1:24.1	1:51	VillyVictry	447000	1	21	33	42	31	51		AnMiller	JuMiller	28	281	282	292	1:54.1	79	+6 5w	28.80	Monserate SuprChpR GoDogGo	Led,shld,no bid-9
23 Nov 24	4M	fst46°	28	57	1:26.2	1:53	283yoww2cd	16000	5	11	22	21	21	32		AnMiller	JuMiller	28	283	291	274	1:54.2	81	+5 5w	1.90	WhatABHvUnhlyMgnt	Ld,yld,2w b3 3/4,ind-9
8 Nov 24	4Ph	fst67°	28	57.3	1:25.1	1:53	CG NW2	11250	5	12	22	15	11	11	11	AnMiller	JuMiller	28	293	273	28	1:53.1	92	+6 4w	*4.40	MyDegrntt ZeusDeVile FreeClimb	-7
24 Oct 24	1PRC	fst68°	27	56.1	1:26.4	1:53	D-MASS STK	160000	3	46	45	43	43	23		AnMiller	JuMiller	28	29	30	282	1:55.4	80		6.90	Belmondto MyDegrntt MonMan	-6
14 Oct 24	5PRC	gd51°	28	58	1:27.1	1:56	MASS STK	75000	6x	x6ds	x6ds	6ds	6ds	6ds		TyMiller	JuMiller					2.19			8.50	Belmondto CastelLyn MonMan	-6
1 Oct 24	5PRC	fst67°	28	57.2	1:26	1:55	MASS STK	75000	3	46	44	21	31	31	x25	TyMiller	JuMiller	29	29	28	33	2:00	62		4.50	Belmondto CastelLyn MonMan	-6
24 Sep 24	7PRC	fst63°	28	58.2	1:27.3	1:55	MASS STK	75000	6	61	68	45	43	43		TyMiller	JuMiller	30	291	283	274	1:56.2	78		22.60	CastelLyn Belmondto MonMan	-7
17 Sep 24	3Lx1x	fst69°	29	58.1	1:26.1	1:53	QUAL		5	44	41	41	41	41		AnMiller	JuMiller	30	29	28	28	1:55.1			nb	WorldBetr TactDn SpicyNlce	-7
1 Sep 24	16Lx1x	fst76°	28	57.2	1:27.1	1:56	WILDCAT	10000	4	x3x1	x9xds	9ds	9ds	9ds		AnMiller	JuMiller	28							*9.9	Lexion TheDrinker Portillo	-10

b g 3, by Muscle Hill, Decadence by Donato Hanover
Knuttson Trotting,FL;Lindy Fms Of Conn,CT;Preferred Equine Mkt,NY;Andy Miller Stb,NJ

Last 4 Sts-\$35,895

1:54 Pcd 5/80

25 M1	0	0	0	0	- 25 Tot	1	1	0	\$6,000
24 M1	2	0	0	1	\$24,270 24 Tot	8	1	1	\$74,881
23 M1	0	0	0	0	- Life	9	2	1	\$80,881

3 TACTICAL DYNASTY

21:53.2 (1) LEX-SEL \$60,000

7-2 Y. Gingras 24-9-3 (250)

19 Apr 25	2M	fst69°	29	57.2	1:26.3	1:54	Qua		2	47	48	44	42	45		TitTrick	RoBurke	30	283	282	282	1:55.4			nb	MWahfFhldgoBhl	Sat,ang pst 3/4 no bid-6
12 Apr 25	8M	gd38°	29	57.2	1:26.3	1:55	Qua		3	12	11	11	11	11	2hd	DeDunn	RoBurke	29	282	291	291	1:55.4			nb	HardSevenTactDn CvrDm	Ld,ovrtn,ln cr 2nd-4
16 Nov 24	3M	fst51°	28	57.1	1:26.2	1:54	GardnState	50000	5	33	11	11	11	11	11	YaGingras	RoBurke	28	284	284	282	1:54.4	78	+3 9w	3.50	TactDnYnckGKmpBlrmd	2w pst 1/4,led,handly-6
9 Nov 24	8M	fst45°	28	58.1	1:26.2	1:53	KNDRGARTEN	173300	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	ScZeron	RoBurke	30	293	28	284	1:57.1	64	+4 3w	73.80	Marlonate Monerate DumtHrv	Traled no bid-10
2 Nov 24	14M	fst51°	29	58.1	1:27	1:52	KNDRGARTEN	20000	5	11	11	11	11	11	11	YaGingras	RoBurke	29	29	284	281	1:55.1	76	+1 5w	2.60	Monserate UnnoTactDn	2w pst 1/4,led,ind-8
25 Oct 24	8M	fst66°	27	56	1:24.3	1:51	D-Br Crown E	70000	9	89	81	85	85	810		TitTrick	RoBurke	29	274	282	281	1:53.4	83	+4 3w	124.90	Maryland MmMersS GoDogGo	Cvr no bid-10
18 Oct 24	5M	fst65°	27	55.4	1:24	1:52	D-Br Crown E	25000	2	51	52	51	51	51	51	YaGingras	RoBurke	28	281	28	281	1:54.1	80	+9 4w	*1.90	EmrtonLgylMeshuggahHidgo	Gapd ov,roll no bid-8
4 Oct 24	4Lx1x	fst79°	28	55.4	1:24	1:52	INSTALION	80000	1	32	34	34	34	34	21	YaGingras	RoBurke	29	272	281	28	1:52.4	88		3.85	Onajlptne TactDn CvrDm	-9
26 Sep 24	2Lx1x	fst68°	29	57.3	1:26.4	1:53	Bluegrass	77300	8	31	11	11	11	11	11	YaGingras	RoBurke	29	274	291	274	1:54.3	81		8.35	TactDn HeyPorter MmMori	-8
17 Sep 24	3Lx1x	fst69°	29	58.2	1:26.1	1:53	QUAL		6	11	11	11	11	11	11	YaGingras	RoBurke	29	29	28	272	1:53.4			nb	WorldBetr TactDn SpicyNlce	-7
30 Aug 24	1M	fst71°	28	58.1	1:27.2	1:54	NJClassicE	25000	x3x	10ds	102	10ds	10ds	10ds		YaGingras	RoBurke	33	2:06.2	18			+6 3w	*1.20	GoAndMkmy PresLndn GoBom	Bkfst start-10	
24 Aug 24	10Wbs	fst73°	28	57.2	1:26.1	1:53	WM WELLWOO	425500	4x	10	10	10	10	10	10	YaGingras	RoBurke	31	293	273	291	1:57.3	66	+8 2w	2.40	Maryland NlckDchtr StrCaspin	Broke bnf start-10

b c 3, by Tactical Landing, Dynasty by Father Patrick
Burke Rco Stb & P Collura,PA;L. Carr,NJ;J&T Silva-Pumel&Libby,FL

Last 4 Sts-\$27,400

1:53.2 M1

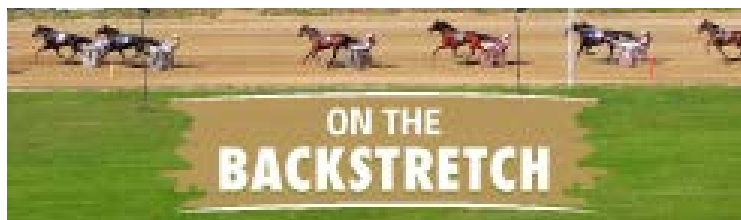
25 M1	0	0	0	0	- 25 Tot	0	0	0	\$0
24 M1	10	2	1	3	\$73,480 24 Tot	14	4	2	\$161,188
23 M1	0	0	0	0	- Life	14	4	2	\$161,188

4 #CIVILIAN DRONE

21:55.2 (78) \$25 SHS-HBG \$110,000

8-1 D. Dunn 48-9-5 (188)

26 Apr25	7M1x	g64°	26	54.3	1:23.2	1:53	6u w1-nw5	17500	1	45	41	41	41	41	7	YaGingras	NaTakter	28	272	283	31	1:55	77	+4 3w	5.40	HrdSnFnt YnckGKmp	3rd ov,dull cr,no bid-10
12 Apr 25	8M1x	gd38°	29	57.2	1:26.3	1:55	Qua		2	34	33	42	43	36		JoFonseca	NaTakter	29	281	29	292	1:56.2			nb	HardSevenTactDn CvrDm	Rode rail no bid-4
5 Apr 25	2M1x	fst51°	29	59.2	1:28.4	1:55	Qua		1	32	32	32	32	32		JaMacdnld	NaTakter	29	302	292	27	1:56.1			nb	ChrsHv CvrDmHrdSn	3hde,2w b3 3/4,study-6
16 Oct 24	5M1x	fst65°	27	55.4	1:24	1:52	D-Br Crown E	25000	1	67	69	77	65	72		JaMacdnld	NaTakter	29	282	274	284	1:54.1	79	+9 4w	14.70	EmrtonLgylMeshuggahHidgo	Took bck,gapd no bid-8
4 Oct 24	4Lx1x	fst79°	28	55.4	1:24	1:52	INSTALION	80000	4	67	61	81	56	34		JaMacdnld	NaTakter	30	273	282	27	1:53.1	86		56.10	Onajlptne TactDn CvrDm	-9
26 Sep 24	7Lx1x	fst68°	27	57.4	1:26.4	1:53	Bluegrass	77300	3	51	56	54	54	45		ScZeron	NaTakter	29	283	274	1:55.2	75		7.80	GapKronos GimpDn CvrDm	Ld,yld,pkt,no bid-8	
13 Sep 24	10HOP	fst72°	27	57.4	1:27	1:54	D-P Haughton	390000	[10	810	812	78	79	79		ScZeron	NaTakter	29	31	282	271	1:55.4	79		12.90	Maryland Hidgo EugntHns	-10
7 Sep 24	8YR	fst73°	28	57.1	1:26.1	1:56	D-N																				
31 Aug 24	3M1x	fst75°	29	59	1:28.2	1:56	D-N																				
24 Aug 24	1Wbs	fst73°	28	58.2	1:27.2	1:55	Opn 2																				
17 Aug 24	10Wbs	fst22°					WmW																				
2 Aug 24	7M1x	g78°	27	58	1:27.2	1:54	KnDn																				



BY DERICK GIWNER

Geovany Hernandez is just in his third full year as a trainer and second as an amateur driver, but the New Jersey resident is making a name for himself as someone to watch in the overnight ranks at The Meadowlands. The 33-year-old already has 63 training wins from 465 starts (13.5%) and a healthy 23 wins from 132 starts (17%) as a driver.

While Hernandez only has a few years “on record” as a trainer, he has been in the country for 15 years learning the ropes from top barns. Now he trains a dozen of his own. It took a day to track down the busy horseman, but once we did he spent ample time discussing his path in the sport, the success of his barn, his goals and much more. Enjoy!

DRIVER/TRAINER GEOVANY HERNANDEZ

How did you get started in harness racing?

I’m from Guatemala. We have horses and I always liked to be around them. We don’t race horses but I would ride them. I came here in 2010 and starting working for Buzzy Sholty as a groom. It never seemed like a job because I liked it. I worked for him for about two years but he started to lose his horses and didn’t have a job for me anymore. Then I worked for Nifty Norman for like three years. I was a groom but when the people who rode for him had to qualify or go on the road, I would go to the track to jog. He saw that I liked to do it and would always ask me if I wanted to train in sets. So I learned how to train but I wasn’t making enough money because he only had 2- and 3-year-olds and not that many horses. Then Gilbert Garcia-Herrera, who has all [overnight] race horses, offered me a job and I got to go to the races almost every day [to paddock horses] and he would let me train some with him. After a little while I saved money and started buying my own horses. I bought my first horse with Tom Shay. I would get up at 4 a.m. and work on my horse before I worked for Gilbert and started doing good. That proved to me that I could do the job. After about a year of having a couple of horses I applied for my trainer’s license. I love training.

You also participate as a driver in the sport. How did that get started?

Tom Shay saw me on the track and thought I could do both training and driving. When I started driving amateur races I really enjoyed it and started doing good. For my horses it is a little easier for them because they don’t have to go as fast and the money is still good.

You own a 13.5% win rate as a trainer but an even better 17% success rate as a driver. Are you a better driver or trainer?

That is a tough question. I very much drive my own horses. I’d have to start driving for other people more before I could know that. I know when my horses feel good and when they can win a race.

I think I’m a good driver because when the driver is nervous the horse can feel that. You need to feel the horse through the lines. They tell me in the post parade whether they’ll be right there. They might not win but they’ll be there. Sometimes I’ll even know in the warm-up because I like to warm up all my own horses.

While you mostly compete in amateur races as a driver, you aren’t afraid to drive in the regular races. What makes you decide to use a catch-driver?

Sometimes if I don’t have enough help to warm up my horses I’ll put



DERICK GIWNER PHOTO

Geovany Hernandez is typically all smiles when he makes it into the winner’s circle at The Meadowlands.

down a regular driver. At The Meadowlands I like to drive myself if I can because it is more fun to drive on the mile track.

How many horses are in your barn?

12. Two of them are babies.

You own a lot of your own horses. Was that always the plan when you started on your own?

When I first started I had my own horse and I was doing ok. When I was working for other people I saw that some people don’t like to pay the trainer and when the horses didn’t race good they’d have to explain what went wrong. The people ask a bunch of questions, but sometimes the horse was just no good. There are no answers. When you have your own horse, you don’t have to worry about anyone but yourself. You just get up earlier the next morning and try to figure out how to fix it for next week.

Is it difficult to start a stable from scratch? What types of horses do you look to buy?

I buy skinny horses that don’t look good or horses that haven’t been doing good for other people. It takes me like a month or a month and a half to get them good.

I do a lot of work myself to try to save money. I paddock my own horses, warm up, and I shoe my own horses too. Like I said, I had horses my whole life and would shoe my horses at home.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

What is your favorite track to race at and why?

The Meadowlands, but I started at Freehold. I won my first race there. I liked when it was open. But The Meadowlands is more fun to drive at. You can come from the back and a couple of my horses have won that way.

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

Spend time with my family. I have two kids and when I don't have to race I spend time with them. I have a girl who is 4 and a boy that is 2.

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

Everybody I have worked for have really helped me. I always tried to do my job right. When I worked with Nifty and told him it was my last week, he didn't want to believe it. He offered me more money. He told me, I understand you want to make more money but anytime I wanted to come back I would have my job there. Before that, Buzzy helped me get the job with Nifty. Everybody I worked for treated me good. So the advice is to be good to other people.

What was your best moment in harness racing?

When I won my first race driving and training [Sept 2024]. That was only in my dreams when I started in this business. My dreams were coming true slowly and when it finally happened I was so happy. I went to Freehold to drive that horse [Rockford Peach] and he won. I then went right to Yonkers to do one or two paddocks. I was so happy driving to Yonkers that day. Another big moment was when I won two races at The Meadowlands on one card.

Which is the best or favorite horse in your barn right now?

When I was a groom there were people who picked favorites. For me they are all my favorites. I treat them all the same – good. Whether the horse is good or not I love them all.

You are just 33 years old. How do you see your future in harness racing?

I just want to keep training my own horses. I can see some people might want to give me horse because they see I'm doing good. I just want to keep working hard and do my best. My wife told me not to work too hard but this is a business where you have to work hard to do good. I come into the barn like 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning every day. If we are racing I get home at like 1:00 in the morning and I still show up by 5:00 because you need to be there every day. If you do the right job every day the horses will pay you off on the track. So I treat them good every day. I told my wife that I want to keep working hard so I can make enough money to one day buy a house for my family.

Earlier this year you were winless at The Meadowlands in 23 starts but since then you have won 10 times in 36 starts. How does a sharp turnaround like that occur?

Around January I went home to Guatemala for two weeks. I gave the horses one week off and then I paid someone to jog the horses the other week. When I came back I trained the horses only once and put them

in to race. I went easy with the horses the first couple of weeks because I knew they weren't going to be ready for their best. The weather also wasn't good. I couldn't train some days and some got sick. Once they all got back to their regular routine things got back to normal.

I recall an interview with Gilbert Garcia-Herrera where he also would go home for two weeks and his horses would come back to form slowly. Did you get that from him?

Yeah. He didn't push his horses when he first came back. After a couple of starts he would race them more aggressively.

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

Maybe tracks only racing in the daytime. It would be better for us because we could sleep more [laughing]. It is tough to come back at 1 am and be in the barn at 5 am or 6 am to feed the horses and put them out in the field.



LISA PHOTO

Even a broken hobble couldn't keep Lou On The Beach and Geovany Hernandez from the winner's circle on April 25.

What does a day in the life of Geovany Hernandez look like?

Today I'm on my way to Pocono. I had to leave the barn at 9 am. I got up at 3 and was in the barn at 3:30 to feed the horses and put them out. I did leave a couple out at night. I did the stalls I had to do; someone helped me. I had to move like 12 horses. The first one was on the track at like 5:30. The horses can't win if they sit in the stall. The races go fast and the horses need to be out and in good condition. I like to put all of my horses out in the field before they go to the track. It is not good to keep them in a room and then send them to the track to run. They need to be moving a little bit.

Where are you stabled?

Winners Training Center. It is a very nice place.

Time for the stretch drive.

Best Horse you ever saw: When I was working with Nifty he had Bee A Magician. That mare was a big machine; an amazing horse.

Lasix – Yes or No: Yes. It helps the horses a lot.

Favorite TV Show: I put in a lot of hours with my horses so I don't really watch TV.

Trotters or Pacers: I like them both. I've never driven a trotter until the one I have now Gingertree Stakias, but he is very nice to drive. I love that horse.

Clever Cody ready for 4YO debut in Miami Valley's \$100K Mindlin Memorial

By Derick Giwner

Saturday is closing day at Miami Valley Raceway in Ohio and trainer Dr. Ian Moore is coming to town hoping to walk away with the bulk of the \$100,000 purse in the featured Pacey "The Wizard" Mindlin Memorial with Clever Cody.

The Mindlin Memorial is part of a stacked 14-race card that starts at 1:00 PM (EDT) and includes four \$75,000 James Hackett Memorial finals for 3-year-olds as part of \$617,500 in purse money being distributed.

The Pacey Mindlin is an Invitational event for older pacers and last year's 3-year-old Ohio champion Clever Cody will be making his first start in the division versus some heavy hitters. While the task is often tall for a 4-year-old to beat his elders, Moore feels his son of The Panderosa is ready to roll.

"I think he's ready. He has lots of miles in him," said Moore.

Those miles include a pair of efforts at Southern Oaks Training Center where Clever Cody won the first in 1:51 and was second behind last year's Metro runner-up and potential top 3-year-old Prince Hal Hanover in a same-timed mile.

"It is hard to say which horse is better off the qualifiers," Moore, comparing Clever Cody to Prince Hal Hanover, who will start in Saturday's Pennsylvania Sire Stakes at The Meadows. "Typically if they go about 1:52 down there on the clay in Florida they will go a second or two quicker on the racetracks up north."

Clever Cody (5-1) will start from post four with Aaron Merriman in the bike for owner Clever Cody Stable and faces a strong group that includes 2024 winner Carbine (post six, 6-1, Austin Hanners) and 2023 champion Little Rocket Man (post three, 5-2, Jeremy Smith). Both horses are coming off fast wins over the Miami Valley oval, with the former winning in 1:49 4/5 on April 13 and the latter off a April 27 victory in 1:49 1/5.

Adding to the intrigue in the race is the presence of \$2.3 million winner Bythemissal. The Ron Burke trainee missed a bunch of time in 2024 due to injury but was still able to post a 1:47 2/5 winning effort at The Red Mile as one of two wins in eight starts.

After a pair of qualifiers at The Meadowlands with Yannick Gingras in the bike, Chris Page picks up the drive from post five as the 7-2 second choice on the morning line.

The field also includes PJ Lou (post one, 9-2, Brett Miller), Mccrunch (post two, 20-1, Dan Noble), Brookview Bullet (post seven, 12-1, Tyler Smith), Saulsbrook Victor (post eight, 10-1, Brett MacDonald), Dale Yeah (post nine, 20-1, Marvin Luna).

"It all depends on whether he can step up a notch and I'm optimistic that he can," said Moore on Clever Cody's chances. "We'll be racing. We are not there to just get a start. He is going to the Confederation Cup [Charles Juravinski Memorial at Flamboro Downs] the following week."

The Pacey Mindlin Memorial is scheduled as race 12 on the Saturday card. The four Hackett Memorial races go as races four, six, eight and 10, with the last of those containing a pair of potential Grand Circuit pacing colts in Swingtown and Sippinonsearoc. Both horses earned around \$500,000 in 2024 for the Burke barn.

TOP STANDARDBREDS SET TO QUALIFY AT THE MEADOWLANDS

Because of the anticipated additional on-track attendance on Kentucky Derby Day, qualifiers at The Meadowlands will be conducted on Friday rather than the usual Saturday this week.

There will be 14 qualifiers conducted, and they will begin at 9 a.m. The dashes can be seen live on [The Meadowlands website](https://www.themeadowlands.com).

Notable horses who will be qualifying include:

- 3rd qualifier – Oh Well, Up Your Deo, Periculum, Amazing Catch
- 4th qualifier – Yo Tillie, Elista Hanover
- 7th qualifier – Ari Ferrari J
- 8th qualifier – Miki And Minnie, Rose
- 9th qualifier – Papis Pistol, Captain Optimistic, Fallout
- 11th qualifier – Voukefalas, Abuckabett Hanover, Seven Colors
- 13th qualifier – My Girl EJ, Twin B Joe Fresh

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THURSDAY, MAY 1

RACE 5

(8) SPRITE SEELSTER is coming off a pair of qualifiers as she gears up for her 3YO debut. She showed very good wheels at the end of both of those miles and looks primed for a very good effort. I think she is a standout here.

-John Rallis



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

FRIDAY, MAY 2

RACE 11

(6) MADRID A is allowed to freefall three classes tonight and into this very soft spot. It's almost impossible to pick against her at what should be 2-5 final odds.

-Derick Giwner



RACE 7

(3) QUEEN OF ALL woke up in a huge way last week and she's got loads of class so the step up shouldn't bother her at all; repeats as deserving chalk.

-Matt Rose



SATURDAY, MAY 3

RACE 12

(3) KEN HANOVER blitzed his final quarter as David Miller kind of measured out the victory last time. That's three qualifiers under his belt now. He might not be handled very aggressively here but he'll get the job done.

-Giwner



FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Mohawk Park Analysis

[Thursday](#)

[Friday](#)

[Saturday](#)

Meadowlands Analysis

[Friday](#)

[Saturday](#)

Yonkers Analysis

[Thursday](#)

[Friday](#)

[Saturday](#)

DHP PPS

HARNESS EYE PPS

TRACKMASTER PPS

FREE PPS



INSTANT RACING UPDATES VIA TWITTER: @DRFHARNES



NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

SATURDAY RACING RETURNS TO YONKERS THIS WEEK

MGM Yonkers Raceway is in the midst of a six-day week as Saturday racing is back at the Hilltop oval starting on May 3. While the track is live this Wednesday (April 30), Wednesdays will become a dark day starting next week, putting the track on a Monday/Tuesday and Thursday through Saturday schedule through the remainder of the summer.

The new racing schedule is headlined by several stakes events, starting with the Grade 1 \$516,000 MGM Borgata Pacing Series final and the Grade 1 \$490,000 Blue Chip Matchmaker Series final on Friday, May 9. Both races will also have consolation events on the same card. Those eligible to each of the stakes events will have a chance to compete for \$50,000 in three tests (two for the boys and one for the girls) on Monday (May 5) at the distance of a mile and a quarter.

"We just had so many eligibles that I wanted to create one more opportunity for them to make a little money," said Racing Secretary Joe Frasure on the added "eligible" races.

The Grand Circuit will come back to Yonkers in June with eliminations (if necessary) for the Grade 2 MGM Yonkers Trot and Grade 2 MGM Grand Messenger Stakes on Friday, June 20 and the finals the following Friday. The companion filly races - the Grade 3 Park MGM Pace and Grade 3 New York New York Mile will also occur on the 27th.

Last, but certainly not least, the Grade 1 \$1 million MGM Yonkers International Trot, Grade 2 Aria Invitational Pace and Grade 2 Bob Miecuna Invitational Trot are slated for Saturday, September 13.

New York Sire Stakes action will also be on the docket throughout the summer, starting on Thursday, June 19 with the first leg for 2-year-old male pacers.

First race post time at MGM Yonkers Raceway remains at 6:45 p.m. (EDT).

-release (Yonkers Raceway Media)

OHIO HARNESS RACING FANTASY LEAGUE RETURNS

Experience the thrill of owning a racehorse for free! The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association (OHHA) is thrilled to announce the return of the Ohio Harness Racing Fantasy League for its ninth season in 2025. This exciting competition invites fans to create their own "fantasy stable" and follow the real-life success of Ohio's Standardbred racehorses.

Each participant will build a fantasy roster of six horses:

- Four horses of any age selected from a pre-determined list supplied by the OHHA

- Two Ohio-sired two-year-olds of the participant's choice

Fantasy stables will earn points based on actual purse earnings from May 16 through October 25, 2025, culminating on Breeders Crown Day.

The grand prize for the top-earning stable is \$2,000! Additional cash prizes will be awarded:

- 2nd Place - \$1,000
- 3rd Place - \$500
- 4th Place - \$250
- 5th Place - \$125

Bonus prizes will be given for:

- The stable whose Ohio-sired two-year-olds earn the most money
- The stable with the best "return on investment"

Entries must be received by May 15, 2025. Rules, entry forms, and horse lists are on the [OHHA website](https://ohha.com). Completed forms may be emailed to kpoma@ohha.com or faxed to 614-221-8726.

Participation is free and open to any individual who has not owned a Standardbred that has raced in the past two years. Fractional ownership of less than 5% does not disqualify participation.

FRESHMAN FOCUS: The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association (OHHA) will feature Todd and Greg Luther and their Ohio 2-year-olds in training in this week's edition of Freshman Focus.

Hosted by Roger Huston, Freshman Focus will air at 7 PM on Thursday (May 1) on the OHHA's [Facebook page](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

-edited release (OHHA)

BREEDINGS AVAILABLE THROUGH NEW VOCATIONS

New Vocations Racehorse Adoption Program has a few 2025 live foal guarantee breedings available with all proceeds going to rehab, retrain, and rehome retired Standardbreds. These include Indiana stallions Captain Midnight, Letsdrinkonit, Pilot Discretion and Swan in a Million; Ohio stallions Traceur Hanover and Western Terror; Ontario stallions My MVP and Trixton; and New York stallion So Surreal.

"We are ever grateful to the stallion owners for their generous show of support," said Executive Director Dot Morgan. "Now we need mare owners to utilize them."

If you have a mare to breed that is not currently booked, please email dot@horseadoption.com or call 937-205-4667 for prices.

-edited release (New Vocations)

BROOKSFORREAL WINS 10TH IN A ROW IN MARYLAND SIRE STAKES

After reeling off nine consecutive stakes wins to end his rookie season, Brooksforreal picked up right where he left off and posted a 1:53 1/5 win in his 3-year-old debut, the second of two \$10,000 first-round Maryland Sire Stakes preliminaries for sophomore pacing colts on Wednesday (April 30) at Rosecroft Raceway.

In line to Jared Moyer, Brooksforreal sat off a 27 3/5 first-quarter duel between Hungry Cougar and Rusty's Lancelot before brushing three-wide to the lead with a lap to go. Once in control, the Rusty's For Real-Brooks Range gelding clicked off middle splits of 55 2/5 and 1:24 4/5 before fending off a resurgent Hungry Cougar (driven by Jonathan Roberts) by a half length. Rusty's Lancelot finished third after failing to convert a pocket bid off the home turn.

Stacey McLenaghan trains Brooksforreal, now a 10-time winner with \$175,502 in earnings, for Lucky Lilly Belle Stable. He paid \$2.10 to win as the overwhelming favorite.

-edited release (Rosecroft Raceway)

\$100,000 PAUL REVERE COMING THURSDAY AT PLAINRIDGE PARK

The Grand Circuit makes its first 2025 visit to Plainridge Park on Thursday (May 1) as the track hosts the \$100,000 3-year-old Paul Revere Pace.

A full field of nine pacers will go postward in what appears to be a wide open betting event that features a Wicked Hi-5 pentafecta wager with a \$3,764 carryover pool.

Some of the main contenders include Primo Maschio (Badlands Hanover-Primadonna), who was a winner of \$174,170 last year that came from nine wins and two seconds in only 11 starts and included stake victories in the \$110,000 finals of the Delaware Breeders Fund Stake at both Harrington Raceway and Dover Downs.

[READ MORE](#)

CHAMBA INHERITS GAME OF CLAIMS TITLE VIA PLACING

Pocono Downs at Mohegan Pennsylvania rang down the curtain on its 2025 Game Of Claims Series events in classically dramatic style - there were even a Shakespearean Prologue and five "Acts" to the last contest. And in the final resolution of the \$35,000 GOC Championship for high-level claiming trotters, it was 18-1 shot Chamba who got the big end of the money after In My Dreams crossed the wire first but was placed down for causing interference.

[READ MORE](#)

WINBAK FARM PARTNERS IN NIJINSKY

Winbak Farm is proud to announce that they have partnered with the existing ownership of O'Brien Award winner Nijinsky.

"Nijinsky is an extremely fast horse that refuses to lose," said Casie Coleman. "He never gives up and goes to every dance and is always in the hunt."

Nijinsky led all horses for earnings in North America in 2024 with a notable 11 victories from 17 starts including being nine-for-nine in Canada.

[READ MORE](#)