

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2026

So you want to own a horse?

Keith Gisser breaks down the monthly regional costs associated with getting your pacer or trotter to the track and racing regularly



CONFESSIONS

By Keith Gisser

When I trained horses as an all-knowing 20-year-old in the late 1970s, I knew I had to do something to persuade owners to give me a chance. So, while established trainers were charging \$15 a day (and some of the top guys had the nerve to charge \$18), I charged \$12 and typically owned at least a quarter of every horse. I was working alone and while I had to pay the occasional race day paddock (\$20), I got by. When the barn expanded and I had to hire a groom or two, they got paid cash under the table. There was no Workman's Compensation insurance or taxes to deal with. It was the norm at the time and I am pretty sure the statute of limitations has run out.

Other expenses included the veterinarian, the tack shop and the farrier. I would get billed directly and I would then bill fair shares out to the owners.

I have been comparing notes with several trainers from around the country to see where things stand today. To say the least, times have changed. The trainers I talked to have day rates between \$40 and \$75. For some that's a bare bones price, for others a lot of extras are included. I currently have horses with five trainers and their day rates range from \$55 to \$75, so there is a great deal of variation. One thing I learned, in 40-year hindsight, about that special \$12 deal I offered, I probably shouldn't have.

"I'll have owners ask if I'll give them a deal," veteran trainer Ray Schnittker told me. "I won't. I'll put them in touch with someone who will, but if they need the deal, they should probably look at getting a better horse." (My barn consisted of \$2,500-\$4,000 claimers, so...)

Schnittker, who has trained at the Goshen Historic Track for nearly 30 years, charges a day

rate of \$75 daily. This includes feed, paying caretakers and training. Stall rent is \$400 monthly, which includes bedding (not included in the day rate). He recently increased his day rate by \$5.00, the first increase in 15 years.

"Everything is getting more expensive. All of my employees are on the books and I have to pay FICA and Workman's Comp, which adds about 13% to my payroll costs," he explains. "A one bedroom apartment around here can run \$1,600 a month! Ryan Miller used to work for me and he moved out to Ohio, training at Greenville ten years ago or so. He was able to buy a three-bedroom ranch house for \$110,000. At Greenville there was a huge argument when stall rent went from \$30 a month to \$60 a month. Losing on-track stabling with grooms quarters cost us all a lot."

On the other side of New York, Ryan Swift plies her trade at Batavia Downs and Buffalo Raceway, aka the Western New York circuit.

She says, "Day rate is \$55 a day for anything 4 years old and up; babies are \$60 a day - they require more time. Everything else is extra. I'm stabled at the track so no stall rent. Everything is so expensive. Feed is \$30 a bag, we are paying \$8 a bag for shavings, \$9.50 for a bale of hay - it's crazy. As a trainer, where we make a money honestly is in our five percent (standard trainer's share of purse earnings). I have a horse at Saratoga with another trainer and I am paying a \$3,000 flat fee for everything but the vet."

Meanwhile Northfield Park is one of the tracks that does offer on-track stabling and also grooms' quarters, though Calvin Hollar's stable doesn't need the housing. He charges \$40 a day, unless the horse is also using the water treadmill, in which case it is \$55 daily. That includes feed, care, daily work, bedding and miscellaneous accessories. Hollar raised his rate \$5 a day two years ago because it was becoming a struggle to make ends meet. How does he train for just more than half the cost of Schnittker?

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Jay Bergman: Pelling done with winter and looking forward

Derick Giwner: Making a case for Case

Lambert looking for big things from Gentleman's Club

Ridge Warren looking to build on opportunities

Contest, carryovers at Big M, Northfield

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“The biggest reason we can keep costs down is that (wife) Amy and I do all of the work. We don’t have any full-time employees. We hire race paddock help and we have a regular Sunday stall cleaner so we get a day off. Sometimes we will hire someone for stalls when Amy can’t be there in the morning. That’s why we keep our head count at ten or below,” Hollar explains.

“That works out to about 5 hours a day, plus racing at night. That gives me a chance to golf in the afternoon and Amy to take her nap,” he jokes.

In Southern Ohio, Nate Alexander stables at the Urbana Fairgrounds and charges \$60 a day.

The Maine native explains, “My rate had to go up \$20 in the last two years because the cost of everything has gone up. That \$60 includes hay, grain, bedding and daily care, along with basic supplies like low-end supplements, vet wrap, tape, liniments. That’s the lowest price I can possibly charge to ensure all the bills and employees are paid. And I have to make sure my family can live on what’s left.” Also worth noting the Workman’s Comp rate in Ohio is about one-third what it is in New York, saving the Buckeye State’s trainers about \$50 a month per employee.

Stall rent at Urbana is a reasonable \$75 monthly. By contrast, at a training center like Winner’s Circle, near Scioto Downs, stall rent is \$380 monthly. At Northfield, the Hollars are paying \$110 per stall, so while not directly related to the day rate, those numbers can be all over the board and add to the cost.

Meanwhile, in the thriving Metropolis of Sandstone, Minnesota, Dan Roland charges a flat monthly rate of \$1,750 which includes everything but special Vet work. He raised that rate from \$1,500 two years ago. He trains at his own farm, although he does have some stalls at Running Aces most years. And, full disclosure, I own two horses in partnership with him.

Roland says, “I track actual expenses and try to average out those costs across all the horses, plus factoring in my time and the number of staff I have.” Roland not only trains (currently 18 head) but has seven broodmares on the farm. He or his wife Jeri own a piece of nearly everything they train.

Perhaps the most interesting non-day rate, line-item to me was shipping expense, which is another big cost of horse ownership. The big four expenses are day rate, stall rent, shipping and Veterinarian. Roland’s farm is just an hour from Running Aces and his rate includes shipping. Schnittker charges between \$300-\$700 to ship depending on the track, and it is a flat rate regardless of how many horses are being hauled.

“If I ship just one, I lose money, if I ship several I make some money. It all averages out,” He says. He also points out that in New York, you are paying tolls on nearly every ship. That is not the case in Ohio or Minnesota.

Alexander echoes that statement, saying, “We lose money taking one or two, but make money if we ship three or five, so everything averages out. It’s just easier for billing that way.” Alexander charges \$100 per horse to ship to the three Southern Ohio tracks, and \$200 to Northfield.

The Hollars also charge a flat rate, between \$100-\$250, depending on destination. This is unlike several of my trainers who pro-rate shipping. For instance, one horse may be \$150, but two will be \$125 each and four might be \$100 each.

Nearly all of these trainers have veterinarians and farriers bill their clients directly these days. They will also adjust the daily price if a horse is turned out (with that charge being \$15-\$23 a day). Training centers like Winner’s Circle offer grassy turnout paddocks, which trainers pay to use. Schnittker has a farm three miles from the race track where he can turn horses out, but there is still a cost involved.

I was surprised that they all charge the same rate whether an owner has one horse, two horses or eighteen. This is a factor that seems to dispute the idea that the “little guy” can’t make it in this business. I was also surprised that some trainers did not want to share their numbers.

Secondly, most of these trainers charge the same day rate whether it’s a stakes horse, a two-year-old in training or an old warhorse who may just jog a few days a week. Slow horses tend to eat just as much as fast ones.

The most surprising thing to me was that training fees have no particular relation to purses. Some trainers at The Meadows charge more than some in Ohio, even though purses there are lower. Some in New York charge more than others, despite racing at the same venues. Granted, the trainer does make that 5% of earnings and Schnittker, like Swift, told me that is where the profit is, not in the day rate. And of course for trainers who retain an ownership share, the potential is better. Day rates are set to cover costs and make just enough to get by. It is the success of the horses that determines earnings.



GOOGLE MAPS SCREENSHOT

Northfield Park in Ohio offers plenty of on-track stabling as well as grooms quarters on their backstretch,

That’s it for this time. Now go cash. Hopefully enough to cover that day rate.

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

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(Captaintreacherous - Cinamony - Art Official) p,2,1:49; 3,1:48 -'25 (\$1,573,723)



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Pelling done with winter weather and looking forward



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman [X BergmanJay](#)

The arctic temperatures we've been experiencing on the East Coast have wreaked havoc with the racing schedule. While many evening programs were forced into cancellation the weather has also put a damper on the progress of horses making their way back to the races in 2026. For trainer Brett Pelling, who has a stable with a large majority of freshman preparing for a first season on the track, the conditions have slowed the progress of some.

"Diamond Creek Racing sent me 11 babies (2-year-olds) in January," said Pelling. "They came at almost the exact time that the weather changed." So, horses that needed to be broken and take the first steps to getting on the racetrack had to first adapt to the change in scenery and then have only minimal time going through the first paces.

"It's a nice group with a many of them by Downbytheseaside," said Pelling, optimistic about the group. "The tough part is staking them." With the February 15 deadline for nominating and sustaining to some major races Pelling appeared overcautious in his assessment. "You don't want to put any added pressure on these horses as 2-year-olds." With the group eligible to races in Kentucky later this year Pelling is hoping the loss in time this winter will still give the 11 a chance to race regionally at least.

The 20 other babies Pelling is conditioning have been going for much longer and the trainer is more than happy with what he has seen to date. "It's a much more diverse group of horses this year," said Pelling. "We had a lot of Papi Rob's (Hanover) over the last couple of years but that's not the case this year." Most notable in the diversity are three from the first crop of Pebble Beach.

"There are a lot of people that shy away from first-crop sires," Pelling said. "I'm more willing to take the chance versus other sires that have already established themselves." Pelling seemed rather enthusiastic about a pair of colts by Pebble Beach that fell into his price range at last year's auctions.

"I like a colt out of Agent Q," Pelling said while referring to Vandros, a \$97,000 Lexington Selected purchase last fall that has done everything right to date. Pelling is hopeful that Pebble Beach, who stood his first year of stallion duty in Kentucky, will pass along the traits of the Somebeachsomewhere line. Vandros is just the third foal from Agent Q, a \$1.2 million winner on the racetrack that captured the 2017 Mistletoe Shalee at The Meadowlands in a lifetime best 1:48 4/5 clocking.

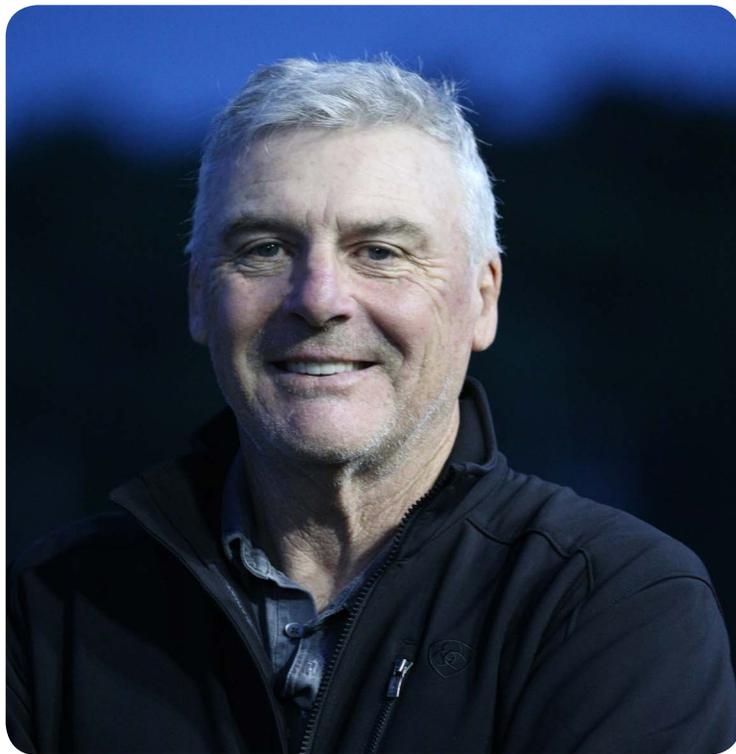
"I have another colt out of Square Dancer and he's a brother to that nice horse Noel (Daley) had Signal Caller," Pelling said. August National was a \$200,000 yearling purchased at Harrisburg last fall and while that may seem like strong money for a first-crop sire, the dam is a 100 percent producer from her first five foals with Signal Caller her fastest with a 1:48 4/5 mark.

In addition to the Pebble Beach contingent Pelling is pleased with the depth of his freshman with three by Captaintreacherous, three by Papi Rob Hanover and three by the top sire Sweet Lou. The Captaintreacherous-sired Carminia Hanover, a \$115,000 Harrisburg buy, hasn't trained very fast but already looks to have standout qualities. "She's got the demeanor of a 3-year-old," Pelling said.

"There's a Papi Rob Hanover colt that David McDuffee has that's the first foal from Sweet Rodeo Drive," Pelling said, among the ones he has high regard for. Papito is out of a half-sister to Rocket Deo as well as millionaire Rocknificent.

With 2-year-olds more than a few months away from getting to an actual racetrack Pelling is poised to get some of his stock to the track. "I've got five in to qualify Wednesday (February 18) at Pocono," Pelling said, while noting that due to the adverse weather in January he had lost some time and didn't have conditions that allowed him to train horses overly fast for their debuts. "They are a group that I liked last year but didn't get to the races," Pelling said of the quintet.

Another Captaintreacherous-sired female will be heading to the track in short order with the now 5-year-old Rocket Deo ready for action. "We're



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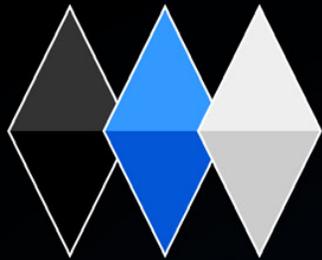
Long-time trainer Brett Pelling is optimistic about his upcoming group of two-year-olds joining the veterans in his barn.

getting her prepped for the series at Yonkers," said Pelling of Rocket Deo, a three-leg winner in last year's Blue Chip Matchmaker Series at Yonkers that wound up fourth in the final. The race has been renamed this year in honor of Ursula McIntyre, the longtime Yonkers Raceway staffer who wore numerous hats, including office manager for retired race secretary Steve Starr and GM Bob Galterio. Rocket Deo is expected to qualify for the first time on Saturday (February 21) at The Meadowlands with the McIntyre opening leg at Yonkers slated for March 27. The McIntyre and MGM Borgata series will run into May with both having \$200,000 added finals on May 8.

Pelling has a pair of 4-year-old pacers that will be heading to Oak Grove when the Kentucky Sire Stakes kicks off on April 27. The mare Three Times Bettor has always been a favorite of Pelling and he feels the best is yet to come for the daughter of Bettor's Delight. "I thought she was one of the better fillies in the country towards the end of the year," said Pelling of Three Times Bettor, who won her last four races in 2025 including a Kentucky Sire Stakes final at Cumberland Run in a career-best 1:50 mile.

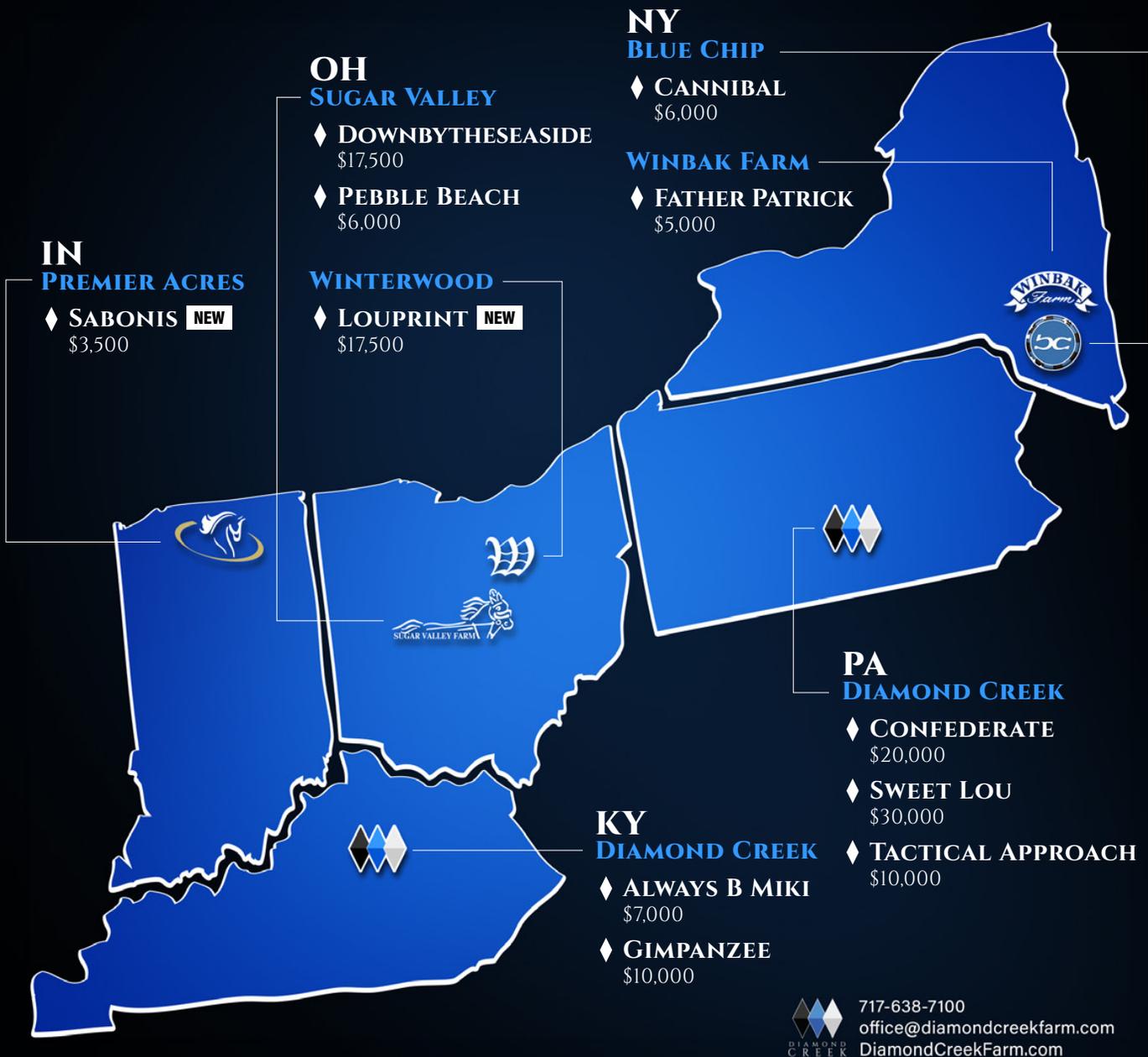
There is plenty of reason to believe that Fusion, the son of Always B Miki and champion Pure Country, could be in for a big year as a 4-year-old given some of the efforts he put forth late in the 2025 season. Fusion won the Bluegrass at The Red Mile and then recovered from a break and nearly won the Tattersalls a week later in a race timed in 1:48 1/5. If he matures with age as well as his celebrated parents, the sky is the limit for Fusion.





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EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner [X @harnessveguy](#)

Can we make a Hall of Fame case for Case?

Recently I wrote about the unbelievable success Dan Noble was seeing as a driver at Northfield Park. At one point I made a parallel between Noble and Walter Case Jr., who similarly dominated the driver standings at Yonkers Raceway in the late 1990s. The comparison sparked another previous thought that went through my head a number of months ago.

Back in May 2025, Pete Rose, less than a year after his death, was finally removed from Major League Baseball's ineligible list. MLB made the decision that all former participants on the list would be reinstated upon their passing, thus removing 17 players from banishment. The move also opened up the door for Rose as well as other blacklisted stars of the past like "Shoeless" Joe Jackson to be eligible to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

A decision on whether Rose and others will finally join their contempo-

blacklisted from harness racing from 2004 to 2020 with the exception of a few handful of drives in 2008 and 2017. He was finally able to get licensed and raced in Maine from 2021 to present, adding Plainridge Park in Massachusetts only last year, but he hasn't raced since June due to health concerns according to social media posts.

Case certainly had his issues on the track with removing his feet from the stirrups of the bike and off the track with substance abuse which led to the stabbing of his ex-wife. That should never be forgotten, but I have to wonder if there comes a point where enough time has passed that Case deserves a place in the Hall of Fame for what he accomplished on the track.

The record speaks for itself. Case's 11,525 career wins ranks him 13th all-time and there is no doubt that he'd be at 20,000 or more were it not for his demons. He won a number of stakes during his prime years, competed on multiple circuits and set many records.

In a recent Facebook post asking for opinions on the best driver of all time, over 500 people chimed in and Case was named on dozens of replies. That alone speaks volumes of his on-track ability.

So the question I raise is whether Case, who is now 64, will ever be recognized for his on-track excellence, whether during his lifetime or after his death?

Other than perhaps one handshake/hello and some texting/messaging conversations, I've had no contact with Case during my 30 years in



THOMAS SMITH (L); STOCK PHOTO (R)

Should Walter Case, Jr. be recognized for his on-track achievements with a Hall of Fame nod?

aries in the Hall of Fame will be made at a December 2027 meeting according to this release, which also included this reasoning on the decision:

"In my view, once an individual has passed away, the purposes of Rule 21 have been served," Commissioner Rob Manfred wrote, referring to the rule that outlaws betting on baseball by league personnel. "Obviously, a person no longer with us cannot represent a threat to the integrity of the game. Moreover, it is hard to conceive of a penalty that has more deterrent effect than one that lasts a lifetime with no reprieve. Therefore, I have concluded that permanent ineligibility ends upon the passing of the disciplined individual, and Mr. Rose will be removed from the permanently ineligible list."

I've always taken a stance that time heals most wounds. Rose – by betting on baseball games – and Jackson – for being a part of the 1919 World Series fixing scandal – both harmed the sport and paid the price for their actions. I'd be in favor of both players being inducted in the HOF, though I wouldn't be opposed to some mention of why they were kept out for so long included on their plaque or messaging.

The MLB situation got me to thinking about Case, who was basically

the sport. My memories of him are as the most dominant half-mile-track driver in harness racing and someone who could awaken even the slowest horse.

Since his name hasn't been in the news and people who've had contact with him have relayed positive comments to me over the last few years, I'm assuming he's turned his life around and is doing the right thing. If that is true, shouldn't we be a society that at least forgives, even if we don't forget? Shouldn't we separate the man himself from his achievements?

Discussing the situation with another member of the industry, they brought up whether I would feel the same way if the stabbing resulted in death. It's an interesting IF to add to the equation and I don't have the answer other than to say that we don't deal in what could've happened but what did happen.

I write all of the above with a confident belief that Case will never make it into the Harness Racing Hall of Fame. Yet, I can't help but feel the need to express that it is a shame to ignore his accomplishments as they are part of the sport's history.

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Lambert looking for big things from Gentleman's Club

By Jay Bergman

Trainer Aaron Lambert saw his 2-year-old pacer Gentleman's Club close out a solid season at The Meadowlands capturing the Governor's Cup in somewhat of an upset. The Downbytheseaside-sired colt had spent much of his campaign racing on the Ohio Sire Stakes circuit, but Lambert believed he had enough talent to compete on a Grand Circuit level. Gentleman's Club's Grade 1 victory may have impacted Lambert's plans just a bit as he looks forward to the 2026 sophomore season.

"We're staking him to the big ones," said Lambert. By definition that means that the \$120,000 yearling buy in the autumn of 2024 will have sights set on the North America Cup in June at Woodbine Mohawk Park and The Meadowlands Pace in July. "I think we really got to see him at his best over the mile track," Lambert said. "He got over the smaller sized tracks in Ohio fine but was much better when he stretched out at The Meadowlands."

Following the victory last November Lambert gave Gentleman's Club a well-earned rest. "Andy and Julie Miller had him over the winter and I just got him back," said Lambert. "He looks great. They did a fantastic job with him." A nice-sized colt as a freshman Gentleman's Club looks bigger and stronger according to Lambert and that could make him more

of a regular player in this year's major races. What impressed Lambert about the colt last year was his durability considering a season filled with plenty of travel.

"Each time we raced him in Ohio I brought him back to New Jersey," said Lambert of the hands-on experience not letting Gentleman's Club out of his care but also putting a ton of shipping miles on his horse. Unlike last year's 2-year-old champion Beau Jangles who stayed out home primarily during his freshman season, Gentleman's Club logged plenty of road miles but was at his best at the end of the year. "That's what was remarkable about him. He traveled so well and never wore himself out," Lambert said.

The 2026 plan could see him back in Ohio for certain with Lambert open to a flexible schedule. "It's going to come down to what horses get a little better from last year and which horses don't," said Lambert, obviously hopeful that the 3-year-old version of Gentleman's Club will compete with the best male pacers in North America.

With Gentleman's Club just beginning his training for a sophomore campaign Lambert has a few others ready for action on Saturday night at The Meadowlands with three in the box on the 14-race program. Effingham is likely to be Lambert's biggest opportunity to secure a win. The 7-year-old recent addition to the stable made his debut on February 14 with Lambert and closed powerfully to finish third in a claiming handicap.

"I was really happy with his race," Lambert said. "They had been torturing him on the front end and we weren't going to race him that way again." Effingham had won two of his last four races before being claimed by Lambert and in all four of those starts was on the lead the entire mile. Reserved off the pace Effingham blasted home in :26 1/5 going from eighth to third in the stretch.

On Saturday Effingham was assigned post 10 in the seventh race, a



LISA PHOTO

Gentleman's Club (3) got his neck up on the wire for a Governor's Cup upset as a freshman and he's been staked to the major races for his 3-year-old season.

\$19,000 claiming handicap event with Effingham in for a \$55,000 tag and the inside four horses in the field in at the \$40,000 level.

"There aren't that many options," Lambert said when asked about landing post 10. "There's no \$50,000-\$75,000 claiming handicap so we'll have to race him until we can find a conditioned level that he fits at."

Former MGM Grand Prix champion Typhoon Banner N ships to The Meadowlands for this claiming handicap after racing on Monday (February 16) at Yonkers in a conditioned race. Put in for a \$50,000 tag Typhoon Banner N, now a 10-year-old, starts from post nine.

Lambert has been entrusted with many nice horses coming from Australia and New Zealand because of his patience and care. Expensive Ego A, a 25-time winner during a brilliant career Down Under, made his North American debut on the February 14 card at The Meadowlands, his first start in nearly two years. "When Luke (McCarthy) sent me the horse he told me to take as much time as necessary to get him ready. Expensive Ego A had sustained an injury that takes time to repair, and Lambert showed patience. "I've had him for 12 months," Lambert said.

Expensive Ego A qualified in November one time and then returned two months later with a pair of qualifiers at The Meadowlands before his first start against high-level conditioned pacers. "I was very happy with his first trip. I'd never expected he would pace in 1:50 and change and I was concerned about that," Lambert said. "But he came out of the race really well. I think he's going to need a few more runs."

Expensive Ego A drew the pole position in Saturday's eighth race, a conditioned affair for non-winners of \$12,500 in last 5 starts for a \$17,500 purse.

Lambert also sends out Water Sports Teen (post 7) in the ninth race, a \$25,000-\$30,000 handicap, but just got the veteran in his stable and couldn't report on what to expect with the horse returning from Dover Downs after five weeks on the sidelines.

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Ridge Warren is looking to build on opportunities

By Ken Weingartner

Ridge Warren has been busier than usual this winter.

In addition to become the father of twin girls a month ago, Warren has been more active in the sulky this year – launching his campaign on Jan. 2 at the Meadowlands and making 101 starts through Wednesday (Feb. 18).

Each of the past two years, Warren didn't begin his season until the calendar turned to February. At this time last year, he had only 11 starts, which came after the mid-February opening of the 2025 meet at his "home track," Pocono Downs at Mohegan Pennsylvania.

With Pocono having started its 2026 season just a week ago, most of Warren's work this year has been at the Meadowlands, where his nine wins put him fourth in the driver standings. His top night so far came on Jan. 24 when he led all drivers with four victories, two each for trainers Jake Leamon and Eddie Sager.

"I started driving for Jake toward the end of the Harrah's Philadelphia meet and that led into the Meadowlands," said Warren, a 37-year-old Michigan native now residing in northeast Pennsylvania. "I was happy to go there when he asked me to, and it's led to some other drives for people. I'm still a new guy, new to the colony, so I'm putting my time in."

"This business just stems from opportunities. You need the trainer with 10 or more horses to give you a chance. For me, Jake has been that guy. He's been a guy who has stuck with me and understands you're not going to win every week, but that you can take care of a horse and live to fight another day."

Warren plans to keep driving at the Meadowlands while also competing at Pocono, including doubleheaders on Saturdays, as long as the opportunities continue. He will add Tioga Downs to his schedule when it opens in May. He finished fifth in the standings at Tioga and seventh at Pocono in 2025.

"Everything I'm doing right now kind of stems around my family life and trying to create a balance, but if you're not willing to be everywhere,



somebody else is," Warren said. "There is a lot of talent out there."

"Right now, on the East Coast, you're not driving against the Meadowlands colony, or Harrah's Philadelphia or Pocono – everybody is inter-mixed into this big East Coast driver colony. People are willing to drive three hours to get the next opportunity. When you get it, you've got to take advantage of it. You don't get many missed opportunities, it's that tough out here. I'm just doing the best I can with each one and trying to stay as busy as I can."

Warren, who has won 1,821 races since beginning his career in 2007, visited the winner's circle 192 times last year and guided horses to \$2.78 million in purses. His earnings were less than \$38,000 from being among the top 50 in North America.

In 2024 and 2023, Warren won 229 and 237 races, respectively, and earned more than \$2.8 million in purses both seasons. Although his numbers dipped slightly in 2025, his average earnings went up as he drove far fewer races than in either of those years.

Warren also saw his opportunities increase in stakes races, driving in 16 events with purses of at least \$100,000, compared to a total of two the previous two years, and traveled the New York Sire Stakes circuit.

He finished third in the Grade 2 Joe Gerrity Jr. Memorial with Howlenthills for trainer Travis Alexander and fourth in the Grade 2 Matron Stakes for 3-year-old pacing fillies for trainer Ron Coyne Jr. In addition, he had a third in the Big Apple final for 2-year-old pacing fillies with Odds On Monetary (Alexander) and fourth in the Big Apple final for freshman male pacers with American Pastime and trainer Jenny Melander.

"I was super fortunate for those opportunities, and I made good checks," Warren said. "If I can get those opportunities again, I'll just feel so much more comfortable in those instances. I never drove in those races before, but if I do again in 2026, I'm going to be way better than I was in 2025 just because of having been there. The more you do it, the more confident you get. I just have to get those opportunities."

As for the remainder of this season, Warren said, "The goal is to do the Meadowlands as much as I can, the New York Sire Stakes, Pocono, Tioga is a nice spot, too."

"The main thing is to stay healthy. I think I'm on the cusp of a breakthrough, I just need to get that break. If I can build on last year, I could have a heck of a 2026. I'm already further ahead than last year, so we're on track."

Contest, carryovers certain to create crowd buzz at Big M

A recurring \$1,000 handicapping competition plus a pair of carryovers will be served this weekend to please the palates of punters at The Meadowlands when 14-race programs take place on Friday and Saturday. Post time is 6 p.m.

The popular monthly handicapping contest features the same basic rules as in 2025, with the top-two finishers from each monthly "qualifier" earning a berth in the December invitation-only \$10,000 "final".

The first leg of the contest this year took place on Saturday, Jan. 10, with Del Kern and Stefan Ferrara finishing 1-2 to earn spots in the year-end competition.

This Friday (Feb. 20) will be the second of the 11-leg contest, and defending champion Sean Loeb, who took home the grand prize of \$5,000 in last year's final, is raring to go.

"I'm not the biggest tournament player in general, but a contest like this was very appealing because I like to play doubles, Pick-3s, Pick-4s and Pick-5s," said Loeb, "and a contest where you can choose your bet and everybody starts with the same bankroll and we see who tallies up the highest at the end of the night, that's what was appealing to me."

Is this contest about picking the most winners? Or is it about the guy who knows how to play the game?

"I consider myself a good handicapper but I think I'm a better player," said the 35-year-old Loeb, a Big M regular from Cresskill, NJ. "The better bettor will always come out ahead in terms of dollars than the handicapper. I know some great handicappers that are not the best bettors, and I know some decent handicappers that know how

to make money. I try to be a mix of both but more in line of being a player than a handicapper."

Being a shrewd player came in handy for Loeb, who owned a now-retired horse that won seven times at The Meadowlands.

"The contest in November, I was down to \$36, and I bet an \$18 base-bet Pick-4 ticket and hit it and went from last to first," said Loeb. "I might not be doing that if I'm first or second, but if I need a score, that's where the contest gives you an option to do that."

That second qualifying win gave Loeb two entries in the final, so that one bet played a major role in Loeb taking home the title last year.

Is a repeat in the making?

"I'm definitely going to participate," said Loeb. "I airballed in January, but this Friday, I'm going to give it my best shot and, hopefully, get a seat at the final table again."

"The contest is a lot of fun. I see a lot of the same guys and new faces. I can't think of a reason why anyone wouldn't get in."

There is no entry fee (a \$100 live-money bankroll is required) for players, and the prize pool is guaranteed at \$1,000, funded by The Meadowlands.

On the night of the contest, players must register/check-in at the Clubhouse Lobby by 6 p.m. A \$100 betting card must be purchased to participate, as this is a live money/wagering contest.

The top two finishers from each contest earn spots in the \$10,000 tournament "final" on December 12 (22 total players).

-edited release (Dave Little, Meadowlands Media Relations)

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Indiana aiming for Hambo opportunity

Indiana is stepping forward with a bold opportunity to bring one of the most prestigious events in global harness racing to the Hoosier State. Governor Mike Braun, in partnership with the Indiana Horse Racing Commission, and the Indiana Standardbred Association, today (Feb. 19) highlighted Indiana's interest in hosting the Hambletonian in Anderson for a three-year commitment.

Long regarded as the Super Bowl of harness racing, the Hambletonian has been held in New Jersey for decades. With the Hambletonian Society now at a critical fork in the road regarding its future host site, Indiana is making clear that it is ready to lead.

"Indiana has proven time and again that when it comes to major national events, we don't just compete, we set the standard," said Governor Braun. "Just as we've made clear that Indiana is ready to host world-class professional sports, we are equally prepared to welcome one of the most iconic events in international horse racing. Just like our great business climate that values stability, partnership, and growth, we also are known across the country with our great standard in horse racing and breeding programs."

Harrah's Hoosier Park, recognized nationally for its racing surface, infrastructure, and commitment to horse racing, stands ready to showcase Indiana's strength as a premier racing destination. The event would draw tens of thousands of visitors, generate significant tourism activity, and shine a national and international spotlight on Indiana's agribusiness and equine industries.

"Caesars and Harrah's Hoosier Park are very interested in putting forward a committed effort to showcase Indiana, the track and the outstanding horsemen who make this industry thrive," said Tom Reeg, CEO of Caesars Entertainment. "The Hambletonian is a uniquely American race and if given an opportunity, we would love to bring it to Hoosier Park. Caesars is prepared to invest to help deliver a world class event that drives tourism, supports the local economy and elevates Indiana's profile on the global racing stage."

The Indiana Standardbred Association emphasized that the opportunity aligns with Indiana's long-standing leadership in harness racing, workforce development, and rural economic vitality.

"This is exactly the type of opportunity that rewards Indiana's decades-long commitment to horse racing and agribusiness," said Mike Smith, Executive Director of the Indiana Horse Racing Commission. "Hosting the Hambletonian would not only honor the sport's tradition but secure

its future by introducing it to new audiences in a state that understands how to do racing right."

State and local partners, along with the Indiana Standardbred Association, will continue working to advance Indiana's proposal as the Hambletonian Society considers the next chapter for this historic event.

ABOUT THE INDIANA HORSE RACING COMMISSION

The Indiana Horse Racing Commission ensures that pari-mutuel wagering on horse races will be conducted with the highest of standards and the greatest level of integrity and promotes the horse racing industry in Indiana.

For more information, see the Indiana Horse Racing Commission's website: <http://www.in.gov/hrc/>

ABOUT THE STANDARDBRED BREED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

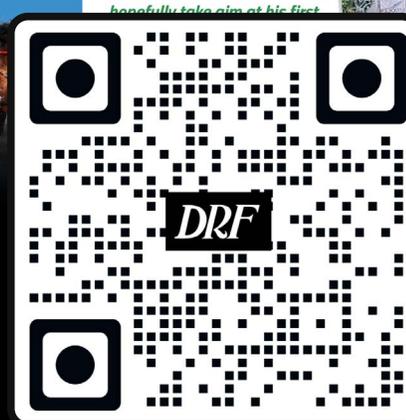
The Standardbred Breed Development program was established to promote the Indiana Standardbred industry. In 2007, legislation was passed which approved slot machines at Indiana's pari-mutuel race tracks. Hoosier Park and Horseshoe Indianapolis both opened their slot operations in June of 2008. The Indiana Standardbred Breed Development Fund receives 50% of the revenue generated from slot machines that is allocated for Standardbred Horse Racing.

-edited release (Indiana Horse Racing Commission)





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Greg Merton hits 6,000 wins

It would be hard to be more Monticello than Greg Merton. He jogged his first horse at six years old and was in the business full time by the time he was 16 at the famed Catskill Mountain oval. This afternoon (Feb. 18), the 52 year horseman reached another milestone in his long career, his 6,000th win aboard Lanas Desire in 1:57 3/5 - for trainer Art Green.



MJBL PHOTOGRAPHY

Greg Merton's milestone win came aboard pacer Lanas Desire on Wednesday afternoon at Monticello Raceway.

He and his siblings (Michael, Thomas and Veronica) were also born into the industry and his father Robert was the Track Superintendent at Monticello Raceway for decades.

The Monticello native sports some impressive numbers in his 37 year driving career, Greg's first drive was in 1989 and he recorded 3 wins in his first year of driving. Greg eclipsed the million dollar mark in driving earnings 16 times in his stellar career; his best year was 2017 when he drove winners for purses of \$2,934,479. When you take into consideration that the majority of the tracks he raced at were not premier tracks, the fact that he broke the million dollar barrier multiple times driving primarily at Monticello and Plainridge is a testament of his ability and durability. His best year for wins was in 2005 with 352 and has amassed total lifetime earnings of \$30,049,127. Greg is a two-time leading Dash winning driver at Monticello and has won two titles at Plainridge Park. Greg reached his 5,000th win five years ago at Monticello.

Following the win, Greg was greeted in the winner's circle from his fellow horsemen and friends.

On to win #7,000!

-edited release (Monticello)

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DRF HANDICAPPER'S CORNER

At DRF Harness we strive to provide the best handicapping information in the sport. Each week we'll use this space to bring you some of our handicappers' best bets and value plays. Use this information as one of your tools when wagering or head to your nearest ADW and simply make a win bet.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

RACE 6

(2) VLAHOS landed an inside post here off two outside draws, and I think that makes him the one to beat. I expect they'll go back to aggressive tactics with him as well.

-Greg Reinhart

EMPIRE CITY.
CASINO
YONKERS RACEWAY

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

RACE 6

(3) FATED FIRE lacked room in the stretch after leaving out and sitting what looked to be a perfect pocket trip. That's two weeks in-a-row now where she has looked live after making an initial move.

-Kevin Plowcha



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

RACE 6

(2) GOO FOR BROKE couldn't have been more impressive last week and I don't see any reason why he shouldn't handle the step up in class tonight

-Reinhart



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21

RACE 12

(1) JMR SPEAK AWAY took a solid step forward in his second start back. This is a sharp drop in class for a horse that made nearly six figures last year.

-Plowcha



WOODBINE
MOHAWK PARK

FULL CARD ANALYSIS / PAST PERFORMANCES

Mohawk Park Analysis

[Friday](#) [Saturday](#)

Meadowlands Analysis

[Friday](#) [Saturday](#)

Yonkers Analysis

[Thursday](#) [Friday](#)

DHP PPS

HARNESS EYE PPS

TRACKMASTER PPS

FREE PPS

INSTANT RACING UPDATES VIA TWITTER: @DRFHARNESS

NEWS FROM AROUND THE HARNESS INDUSTRY

ROBERTS SCORES 5,000TH CAREER WIN

Driver Jonathan Roberts reached the 5,000-win milestone of his career on Monday (Feb. 16) at Rosecroft Raceway when he teamed Freaky Feet Beast to a 12-1 upset in the night's eighth race, a \$7,500 conditioned claiming race.

Roberts powered to the front from post 9 with Freaky Feet Beast and controlled fractions of :27 and :56 3/5 before facing a stern first-over challenge from Playin For Real (driven by Justin Walters) up the backstretch and through the far turn. After shrugging off Playin For Real upon cornering for home, Freaky Feet Beast and Roberts dug in to stave off a ferocious late rally from 3-5 favorite Levi At Play (Roger Plante Jr.) to win by a diminishing neck in 1:54 4/5.

Roberts' father, William "Bib" Roberts, trains Freaky Feet Beast for Kiwi Stables — of whom Roberts is a partner — and Graham Grace Stables. The 4-year-old Freaky Feet Pete-Keene Supreme gelding paid \$26.20 to win.

Four races later, the 44-year-old Roberts came back to score his 5,001st win, doing so with Sheer Terror (1:52 1/5, \$2.40) in a \$9,000 top-level conditioned race.

-edited release (Rosecroft)

MILLER VAULTS PAST \$300 MILLION IN LIFETIME EARNINGS

Less than a week after he became harness racing's all-time leading driver by earnings, David Miller's lifetime bankroll went over \$300 million, making him the first driver to reach that mark.

Miller reached the milestone in the 14th race on Tuesday's program at Miami Valley Raceway when he won with 5-year-old Well Said gelding Perfect Paradise in 1:54 3/5 for trainer Chris Presley.

In harness racing, only trainer Ron Burke had previously crested \$300,000,000 in career earnings. Miller ranks seventh all-time in earnings between Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing jockeys and drivers, joining jockeys John Velazquez, Javier Castellano, Irad Ortiz Jr., Mike Smith, Joel Rosario and Jose Ortiz in the \$300 million club.

Currently the leading driver at Miami Valley in both victories and earnings, Miller's next major accomplishment will be when he reaches 15,000 career wins; his total currently sits at 14,903.

-Greg Reinhart

ANOTHER BIG M HANDICAPPING CONTEST THIS FRIDAY

The Meadowlands Racetrack monthly handicapping contest schedule continues on Friday, February 20. Players must register/check in at the Clubhouse Lobby by 6:00 p.m.

There is no entry fee for players, and the prize pool is guaranteed at \$1,000, funded by the Meadowlands Racetrack. A \$100 betting card must be purchased to participate, as this is a live money/wagering contest.

The top two finishers from each contest will be eligible to play in the \$10,000 tournament on December 12 (22 total players).

Remaining 2026 Contest Schedule:

Friday, February 20

Saturday, March 21

Friday, April 17

Saturday, May 23

Friday, June 12

Friday, July 24

Saturday, August 22

Saturday, September 5

Friday, October 23

Saturday, November 14

Invite Only \$10,000 Contest - Saturday, December 12

-Each monthly contest will follow the same format:

-Contestants must bet a minimum of 5 Meadowlands races.

-No minimum and no maximum bet per race.

-Open to any wager on the Meadowlands live wagering menu. This includes W/P/S, Exacta, Trifecta, Pick 3/4/5/6, Daily Double, Superfecta, and Pick X wagers.

-Contestants keep all pari-mutuel winnings

-Unlimited entries are allowed per person.

Complete contest rules/regulations can be found at <https://playmeadowlands.com/handicapping/contests-challenges/>

-release (Meadowlands)

2026 OHIO STAKES GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

The 2026 Ohio Stakes Guide is now available on the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association [website](#).

The guide includes conditions and nomination forms for Ohio-bred restricted stakes including the Ohio Sires Stakes, Buckeye Stallion Series, Ohio Fairs Championship, Ohio Breeders Championships, the Ohio State Fair Stakes, and the four Ohio County Fair circuits as well as other events.

Hard copies are available as part of an OHHA membership. U.S. members will receive a staking guide in their mailbox. For more information on being a member of the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association, visit ohha.com or call 614-221-3650.

-release (OHHA)

DAN PATCH AWARDS DINNER TO BE LIVESTREAMED SUNDAY

The 2025 Horse of the Year will be announced Sunday night, Feb. 22, at the annual U.S. Harness Writers Association's (USHWA) Dan Patch Awards dinner, presented by Caesars Entertainment, at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Fla. But even if you aren't among the attendees, you will be able to watch the announcement live through the U.S. Trotting Association's website and USHWA's Facebook page.

The banquet will be held in the Panzacola Ballroom, with the awards ceremony getting underway at 6:30 p.m. (EST). At approximately 9:30 p.m., emcees Roger Huston, Jason Settlemoir and Dave Little will announce the names of the Trotter of the Year and the Pacer of the Year, with the winner of the E. Roland Harriman Horse of the Year trophy to follow shortly after.

Post time for the evening is 5:30 p.m., with the cocktail hour and open bar sponsored by William Pollock, Bruce Areman and Andrew Harris. Starring on the Courant Inc. Red Carpet, presented by the USTA and USHWA, will be the USTA's Wendy Ross, who will broadcast live on the USTA [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) pages and the USHWA Facebook page. It's your opportunity to see who's wearing what and what the attendees have to say about the festivities.

The USTA website can be found [here](#) and the USHWA Facebook page can be found [here](#).

-edited release (USHWA)

CARRYOVER ACTION ON THE FLYING TURNS

When live racing resumes on Saturday night (Feb. 21st) there will be a pair of sizeable wagering opportunities awaiting the loyal fans of MGM Northfield Park.

The \$1 early pick-4 wager beginning in race 2 has a carryover of \$12,453 and features an estimated power-packed pool of \$75,000.

There will also be a 50-cent pick-6 carryover of \$7,871 beginning in the 8th race with an estimated pool of \$30,000. As always, both wagers feature the player-friendly 14% takeout. The pick-4 and pick-6 are offered in conjunction with the U.S. Trotting Association's Strategic Wagering Program as well as the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association(OHHA).

Post time for the 14-race program on Saturday is 6:00 pm. MGM Northfield Park currently races four evenings a week on Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. For more information on live racing and promotions, visit www.northfieldpark.com.

-edited release (Kenny Livengood for MGM Northfield Park)

