

# DOWN THE STRETCH

CANADA'S MOST INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING HORSE RACING NEWSPAPER



Opening Day  
Pages 12-13

**CANADIANS CASHING IN THE U.S.: CHANTAL SUTHERLAND, AILSA MORRISON, MARTIN DREXLER, ROGER ATTFIELD, CHARLES FIPKE, BRUNO SCHICKEDANZ, CHEIFSWOOD STABLE, ADENA SPRINGS, JIM & SUSAN HILL, BILL THARRENOS AND TALL OAKS FARM - Pages 10-11**

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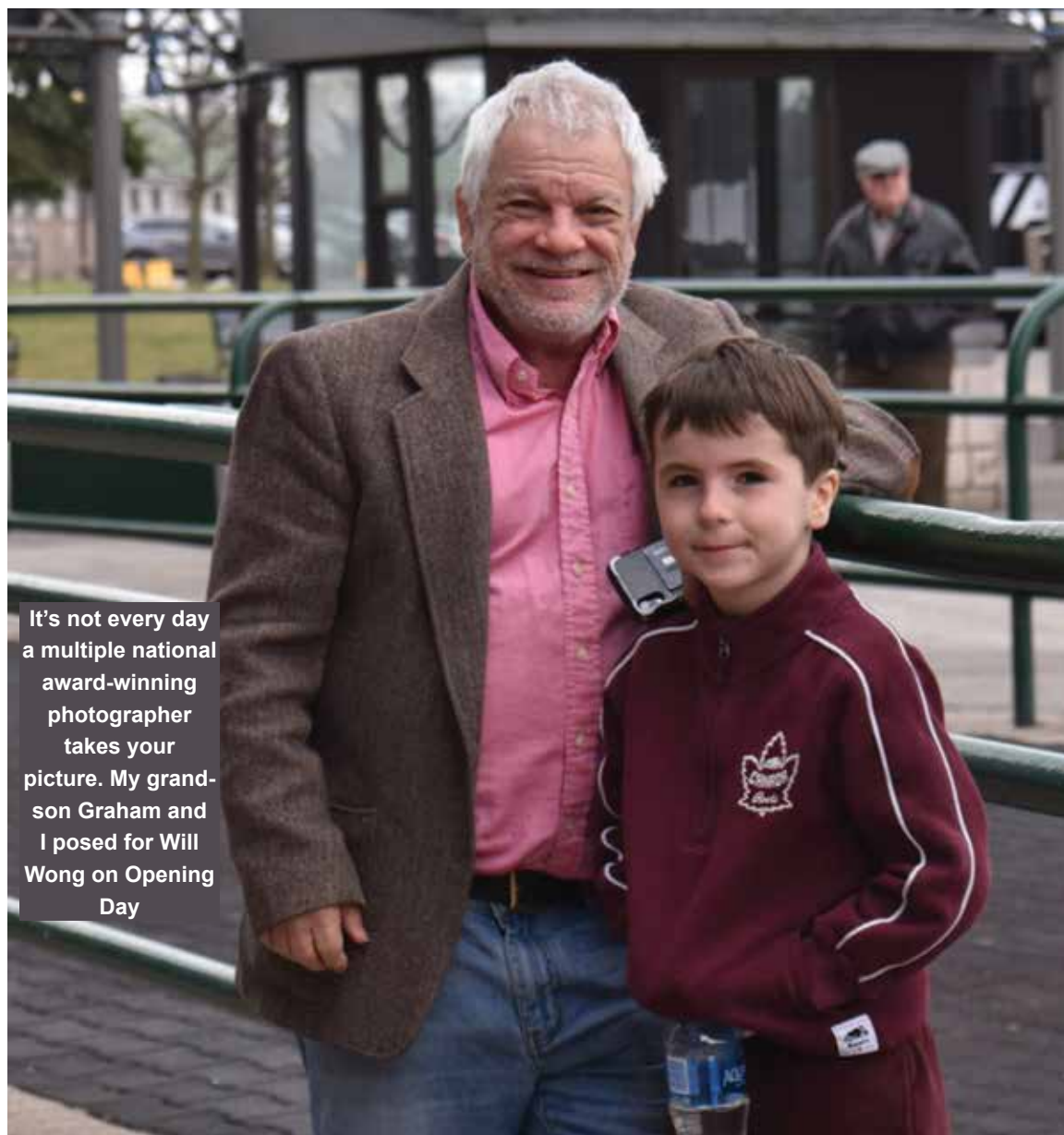
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# THE EDITOR WEIGHS IN



It's not every day a multiple national award-winning photographer takes your picture. My grandson Graham and I posed for Will Wong on Opening Day

There is at least one aspect of my fatherhood in which I am an abject failure. I have two adult children and neither of them have the vaguest interest in horse racing. Emily, 24, can spend an entire afternoon enhancing her eyebrows and nails, but the 70 seconds necessary to enjoy a 6 furlong sprint? It's not going to happen. Roger is 30. He is more than happy to accompany me to the dining room at Woodbine or Mohawk, but he comes for the food and stays for the Japanese anime on his phone. I have sometimes staked him to bets on live races. When the official sign is posted and I tell him the result, he lifts his head from the I-pad and says, "Oh well."

There is hope, however. As indicated in the photo above by the award-winning Will Wong, my 7-year-old grandson, Graham, likes coming to the track. He loves standing by the rail at Mohawk when the field thunders

for home. He already understands odds and the thrill of a bet. One night at the track, he saw on the betting machine the capacity to place a \$1 show bet.

"If I do that, I will have more for other races," he observed, which suggests he hasn't necessarily inherited his grandfather's excessive wagering skills.

In my family, the appreciation of betting on the horses did not skip a generation. My father, Ben enjoyed a Saturday afternoon with his buddies at Woodbine, long before satellite wagering and tris and superfectas existed in every race. Dad could make \$20 last the whole afternoon. His father, Pincus Grossman, possibly as far back as the 1920s, used to take the Queen streetcar to Greenwood to enjoy an afternoon of trot races.

In fact, one of the most satisfying events in my horse racing-filled life concerns my grandfather. In 1983, the

Canadian 3-year-old, Sunny's Halo won the Kentucky Derby. I was a reporter with CityPulse, and I interviewed the owner, David "Pud" Foster. He told me that he used to place bets with my grandfather in Zaidy's tailor shop on Baldwin Street, near Kensington Market. It may have been a dark family secret that my grandfather made a little book on the side so many decades ago, but discovering that was a thrill for me.

My children won't read a word of this paper, but my grandfather would have loved it.

In this issue, we have the 148<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Derby in which the stands were full and (hopefully) the "official" sign won't be altered (page 6). Opening Day at Woodbine on April 16 (pages 12-13) attracted a huge crowd and a huge sigh of relief from everyone at Woodbine to be racing in April.

**Down The Stretch** was an "also ran" at the Sovereign Awards in April, but we celebrate the winners on page 4. Mark Casse won as Outstanding Trainer for the 14<sup>th</sup> time, but on page 5 he tells us he wants to keep winning.

Our Thoroughbred Owner of the Month is Bernie Kooner (page 17). Several of his horses have won at Woodbine, but Bernie has never attended the Rexdale plant.

Prime Time Bobcat was a special pacer, once timed in 1:47.2 He was originally owned by his namesake, radio talk show host, Bob McCown, but was later acquired by our Standardbred Owner of the Month, Bill Rogers (page 18).

Jene Rene Plante has won over 2,800 races as a driver, but he may be proudest of coaching a minor hockey team to an important championship. We have that story on page 8.

A couple of harness drivers reached major plateaus in recent weeks. Doug McNair recorded his 4,000<sup>th</sup> win. He's got some work to do to catch Paul Mackenzie, who notched his 9,000<sup>th</sup> – both stories on page 22.

How many great jockeys have come from New Brunswick? We can think of one – Ron Turcotte, born in Drummond and in this issue, we profile Ailsa Morrison who is from Moncton. Morrison (page 15) is bringing in horses at Gulfstream at a rate far greater than her minimal experience would predict.

Morrison is one of many Canadians getting their props in our Out of Town reports (pages 10-11). We cite Bruno Schickedanz, Martin Drexler, Chantal Sutherland, Bill Tharrenos, Chiefswood Stables, Susan and Jim Hill, Stronach Stable, Roger Attfield, Charles Fipke, and Ivan Dalos.

And with Canada happily included in the upcoming World Cup, you will be pleasantly surprised to learn that its star forward, Cyle Larin, is equally passionate about horse racing (page 19).

So there's lots of engaging stuff in this issue of **Down The Stretch**. I can assure you that Emily and Roger won't read a page. As for the grandchild, Graham, well he's just halfway through *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

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# The 47<sup>th</sup> Sovereign Awards



For the second straight year, Will Wong won the Sovereign for Outstanding Photography. Wong caught this wonderful moment of Emma-Jayne Wilson leaving the paddock as her partner, Laura Trotter and two children, Avery and Grace offered an affectionate wave

The Sovereign Awards celebrating accomplishments in thoroughbred racing in 2021 were held at the Universal Events Space in Vaughan on Thursday, April 14.

As he has in many past years, Jason Portuondo executed a Grade 1 Stakes winning performance as the host, moving things along briskly and injecting his sense of humour throughout the night.

It was Larry Cordes' Mighty Heart, the one-eyed 2020 Queen's Plate Champion who was the star of the night. Mighty Heart scored a Sovereign as Outstanding Older Main Track Male, and then he was a most popular winner as Horse of the Year, outpolling Pink Lloyd and Town Cruise. Mighty Heart had an excellent 4-year-old season that began with a stunning victory last May in the 1 1/8<sup>th</sup> Blame Stakes at Churchill Downs and he added to that glory with victories at Woodbine in the Dominion Day Stakes and the Autumn Stakes.

"It was unexpected," said Cordes. "He puts every effort into his races, and how he overcomes this one-eyed business is beyond me. It can only be because of his heart – he has a mighty heart and desire. It's awesome to be honoured as Horse of the Year two years in a row."

It was not unexpected that trainer Mark Casse would have a huge night. This happens every year. Casse was named Outstanding Trainer for the 11<sup>th</sup> straight year and the 14<sup>th</sup> time. He is also the trainer of 4 Sovereign Award-winning horses – Mrs. Barbara the 2-Year-Old Filly, God of Love, the 2-Year-Old Colt, Frosted Over, the 3-Year-Old Male and Skygaze, recognized as the best Older Track Female.

The Groom of the Year tends to challenge as the most popular bling given out, and the well-dressed crowd gave 68 year old Denzil Fonseca much love when he stepped forward to claim his award. It's hard to imagine a more deserving guy – this is Fonseca's 40<sup>th</sup> year working the Woodbine backstretch. For the past 14 years, he has been a groom for trainer Mike Doyle. In 2017, Holy Helena, a horse that Fonseca groomed won the Woodbine Oaks and the Queen's Plate for the Stronach Stable.

**Down The Stretch** was able to grab Fonseca as he needed to leave the awards ceremony well before 10 p.m.

"I am so happy to be recognized by the Jockey Club," said Denzil. "I love horses and my job, and I have a great respect for Mr. Doyle and his team. I don't want to go, but I have to get up at 2 a.m."

One of the best moments of the night came when Pink Lloyd was named Sprinter of the Year. The now retired 10-year-old is the only horse in Canadian history to win a Sovereign 5 years in a row. Trainer Bob Tiller, always a treat when he steps up to the mic, emphasized how much he loves this horse and just how sensational Pink Lloyd was, winning 26 Stakes races out of his 29 victories.

"Match that," exclaimed Tiller. "Let's see someone do that again."

Mauricio Malvaez was the Apprentice Jockey of the Year, and Kazushi Kimura put an exclamation mark on his sensational 2021 by claiming the Jockey of the Year Sovereign. **Down The Stretch** asked him if his plans included topping his 140 wins and over \$5,000,000 in purses.

"For sure," he said. "I hope to win over 200 and break Eurico Rosa da Silva's record."

In 2017, da Silva set the Woodbine mark with 237 wins.

The charismatic Will Wong doubled up in the Outstanding Photograph category. He won in 2020 and his emotionally riveting image of Emma-Jayne Wilson waving to her spouse Laura Trotter and their daughters, Avery and Grace clearly swayed the voters.

"It's a magical moment," says Wong. "It just happened. It was kismet."

Hayley Morrison won the award in the Writing Category for her *How I Fell for the Fort* that was published on [canadianthoroughbred.com](http://canadianthoroughbred.com).

The **Down The Stretch Podcast** was a finalist for Outstanding Audio-Visual, but being that the podcast has no visual, the morning odds of 80-1 were accurate as Woodbine Entertainment was recognized for its televised production of the 2021 Queen's Plate.

Ivan Dalos, a huge contributor to the horse racing scene in Canada for many years was a most deserving recipient of the E.P. Taylor Award of Merit. His Tall Oaks Farm has won 2 Sovereigns as Outstanding Breeder (2018, 2020). Dalos' Avie's Empire was named the Outstanding Broodmare.

This year, it was the legendary Sam-Son Farm that scored the Sovereign as Canada's best Breeder. This was a poignant moment, as Tammy Balaz mentioned it would probably be the last time Sam-Son would even be eligible for this trophy because of cutting back on resources.

It was comforting to **Down The Stretch** that Amalfi Coast was named Outstanding Female Sprinter. Amalfi Coast is owned by Terra Racing Stable, a property of the Romeo Family. The Romeos have been faithful supporters of both **Down The Stretch Newspaper** and the **Down The Stretch Podcast**.

Following are all the results with voting totals:

**Champion Two-Year-Old Female: MRS. BARBARA**

**Trainer:** Mark E. Casse

**Owner:** Spruce Stable

**Breeder:** Jim Dandy Stable

*Mrs. Barbara (112), Moira (59), Diabolic (49)*

**Champion Two-Year-Old Male: GOD OF LOVE**

**Trainer:** Mark E. Casse

**Owner:** Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners and Barber, Gary

**Breeder:** William D. Graham

*God of Love (113), Grafton Street (54), Ironstone (40)*

**Champion Three-Year-Old Female: MUNNYFOR RO**

**Trainer:** Kevin Attard

**Owner:** Raroma Stable

**Breeder:** Daybar, LTD.

*Munnyfor Ro (118), Our Flash Drive (69), Lorena (27)*

**Champion Three-Year-Old Male: FROSTED OVER**

**Trainer:** Mark Casse

**Owner:** Gary Barber

**Breeder:** G. Watts Humphrey Jr.

*Frosted Over (123), Uncharacteristic (35), Artie's Storm (35), Haddassah (18)*

**Outstanding Broodmare: AVIE'S EMPIRE**

*Avie's Empire (72), Include Katherine (71), Sunday Affair (28)*

**Outstanding Breeder: SAM-SON FARM**

Starters 52; Winners 31

278 Starts; 45 Wins; 48 Seconds; 32 Thirds

Earnings \$2,671,554

*Sam-Son Farm (123), Adena Springs (35), Tall Oaks Farm (31)*

**Champion Female Sprinter: AMALFI COAST**

**Trainer:** Kevin Attard

**Owner:** Tracy Farmer

**Breeder:** Terra Farms Ltd.

*Amalfi Coast (116), Our Secret Agent (60), Lorena (22)*

**Champion Male Sprinter: PINK LLOYD**

**Trainer:** Robert P. Tiller

**Owner:** Entourage Stable

**Breeder:** John Carey

*Pink Lloyd (117), Avie's Flatter (57), Souper Stonehenge (37)*

**Outstanding Apprentice Jockey: MAURICIO MALVAEZ**

252 Starts; 28 Wins; 34 Seconds; 34 Thirds

Earnings \$470,225

*Mauricio Malvaez (136), Michael David (59), Edgar Zenteno (43)*

**Outstanding Jockey: KAZUSHI KIMURA**

722 Starts; 140 Wins; 98 Seconds; 99 Thirds

Earnings \$5,152,154; Stakes wins 8

*Kazushi Kimura (116), Rafael Manuel Hernandez (58), Patrick Husbands (25), Justin Stein (25)*

**Champion Female Turf Horse: JOLIE OLIMPICA**

**Trainer:** Josie Carroll

**Owner:** Shimokobe Farm

**Breeder:** Stud T N T

*Jolie Olimpica (92), Amalfi Coast (56), Our Flash Drive (50)*

**Champion Male Turf Horse: TOWN CRUISE**

**Trainer:** Brandon Evan Greer

**Owner:** Brandon Greer

**Breeder:** Terrance Reg Greer & Brandon Evan Greer

*Town Cruise (127), Avie's Flatter (62), Silent Poet (24)*

**Outstanding Trainer: MARK E. CASSE**

540 Starts; 110 Wins; 80 Seconds; 67 Thirds

Earnings \$6,525,302; Stakes wins 27

*Mark E. Casse (123), Kevin Attard (67), Josie Carroll (30)*

**Champion Older Main Track Female: SKYGAZE**

**Trainer:** Mark E. Casse

**Owner:** Tracy Farmer

**Breeder:** Normandy Farm LLC

*Skygaze (106), Amalfi Coast (73), Infinite Patience (29)*

**Champion Older Main Track Male: MIGHTY HEART**

**Trainer:** Josie Carroll

**Owner:** Lawrence Cordes

**Breeder:** Lawrence Cordes

*Mighty Heart (108), Pink Lloyd (60), Sir Winston (40)*

**Outstanding Owner: LIVE OAK PLANTATION**

68 Starts; 19 Wins; 7 Seconds; 4 Thirds

Earnings \$1,403,812; Stakes wins 7

*Live Oak Plantation (100), Gary Barber (61), Godolphin, LLC (35)*

**Horse of the Year: MIGHTY HEART**

**Trainer:** Josie Carroll

**Owner:** Lawrence Cordes

**Breeder:** Lawrence Cordes

*Mighty Heart (63), Pink Lloyd (55), Town Cruise (34)*



# Mark Casse: “It never gets lame.”



It would be understandable if the Sovereign Award voters eventually suffer from Mark Casse burnout, but not this time around. At the 2021 celebration of excellence in Canadian Thoroughbred Racing, Casse was awarded the Sovereign as Outstanding Trainer in Canada for the 11<sup>th</sup> straight year and the 14<sup>th</sup> time overall. Does it ever feel blasé to him?

“No,” Casse says emphatically. “I remember some time ago when the Yankees had won two or three World Series in a row, and I wondered what could possibly make them continue to fight the way they did. What motivates you, is you don’t want to lose. Once you’ve won something, you want to continue to win it. I realize that, at some point it’s going to come to an end. Inevitably, there’s going to be some Mark Casse fatigue among the voters.”

There are criteria that determine the best trainer, and you can’t argue with Casse’s numbers, even if those marking the ballots were thinking, “How many times can we vote for this guy?” In 2021, he sent out 540 starters at

Woodbine, producing 110 wins and 27 Stakes victories. Also on the ballot were Kevin Attard (345 starts, 58 wins, 10 Stakes) and Josie Carroll (34 wins, 8 Stakes). The voters had no choice. Casse earned 123 first place votes, Attard got 67, and Carroll got 30. Casse knows that to continue his remarkable streak he needs to put up extraordinary results.

“Oh, I have thought that for some time,” he says. “I’m sure there’s a lot of voters out there that don’t want to vote for Mark Casse anymore. So, yes, we have to have extraordinary numbers to continue to win.”

I point out to Casse that Attard has been nominated 5 times for this award.

“Is it cruel of me to refer to him as the Susan Lucci of Canadian trainers?” I ask.

“I’m not going there,” laughs Casse. “How many years in a row did Susan Lucci lose in the Emmys?”

Lucci, a long-time actress on the daytime soap, *All My Children* was famous for being nominated 18 times for an Emmy before finally winning with her 19<sup>th</sup> nomination.

That suggests there’s still hope for Attard.

Aside from winning as Outstanding Trainer, it was a brilliant night for Casse at the Universal Events Space in Vaughan. He was also the trainer of 4 horses that scored trophies. He also trains horses for Charlotte Weber’s Live Oak Plantation, named Outstanding Owner. So which one ranks at the top for Casse?

“Oh that’s easy,” he exclaims. “Charlotte Weber, Live Oak is number one. For me, it’s always about the owner. She’s a wonderful woman to work for and she deserves all her success.”

Of the four-legged athletes, it was Mrs. Barbara winning as Champion Two-Year-Old Filly, God Of Love as Two-Year-Old Male, Frosted Over as Three-Year-Old Male and Skygaze took the Sovereign as Outstanding Older Main Track Female.

“Mrs. Barbara was special because I felt very honoured for Jim Lawson and his family,” says Casse about Lawson’s Jim Dandy Stable. “I know how much that family has done for the sport. God of Love is a horse that I’ve been impressed with for a long time. Skygaze winning for Tracy Farmer was extremely important because she’s going to end up in the broodmare band, I was a little surprised about Frosted Over. I wasn’t sure he was going to be Champion Three-Year-Old. I felt like both two-year-olds would be Champions, and I knew Skygaze would be Champion. Frosted Over was my only question mark.”

Casse was unable to attend this year’s awards. His assistant, Kathryn Sullivan accepted his award and made a lovely reference to Bob Tiller and Pink Lloyd.

Congratulations to Bob Tiller,” she said. “A great horse can make a trainer look good, but what Bob did in crafting Pink Lloyd’s career created the rarest of things in horse racing – a superstar, an icon and a national treasure.”

Pink Lloyd, now retired at 10, was named the Outstanding Male Sprinter and is the only horse to take home a Sovereign Award in 5 consecutive years.

“I wrote that speech,” says Casse. “I have been so impressed by not just the horse, but when you run as long as that horse did, winning all those races, it’s just a remarkable feat. I’ve been fortunate through my career to be around the best in the game – Todd Pletcher, Chad Brown, Bob Baffert. There’s very few trainers that I would actually give my own horses to, and Bob Tiller would be one. I just wanted to tell everybody how much I thought of Tiller and how much I respect him.”

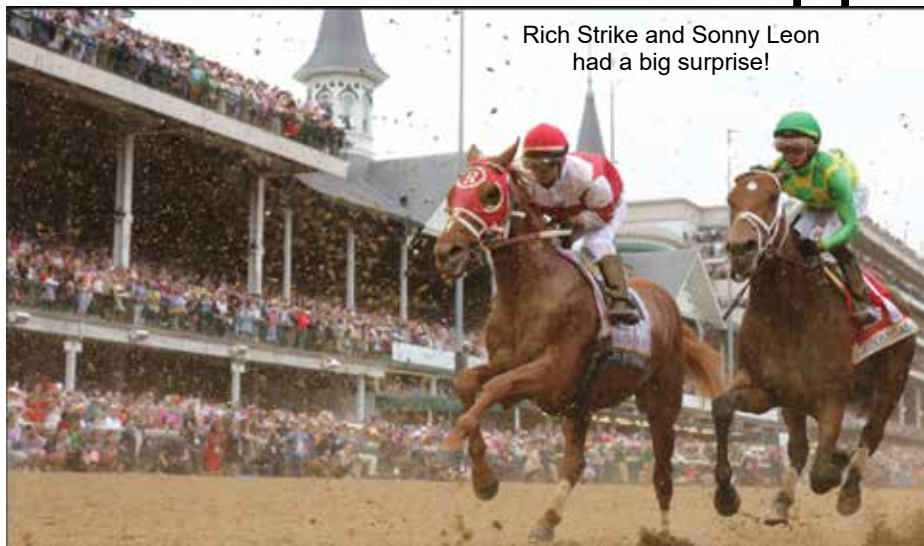
So, if you’re counting, Mark Casse was a key contributor to 6 of the Sovereign Awards for 2021. However, I felt the need to inform him of the one he didn’t get.

“Not to rain on your parade,” I said. “But remember we talked last summer about you getting into the American Hall of Fame at Saratoga? You made a point of saying that you got there because of your experiences at Woodbine. You told that emotional story about when your parents broke up and your mother said you could go stay with your dad because that would keep you connected to the horses. It was a remarkable story, and I wrote it, and I was really proud of it. I submitted it for a writing Sovereign, and it didn’t even make the cut.

“Well, that’s a shame,” deadpanned Casse.



## That Happened?



Rich Strike and Sonny Leon had a big surprise!

For the bettors, Kentucky Derby 148 offered a profoundly complex series of questions:

Could Zandon duplicate his remarkable win in the Blue Grass and pass everyone late to win?

Could Messier give props to his breeder, Sam-Son Farms, and skate to an impressive win?

Would Crown Pride double up after his UAE Derby win and give the Japanese their first Kentucky Derby?

Was Taiba ready after only 2 career races to win for Tim Yakteen, who had to replace Bob Baffert as the trainer?

Could Mo Donagel and Irad Ortiz overcome the deadly rail and add the Derby to the Wood Memorial?

Or would something crazy take place?

Pick that last one, as 80-1 bomb, Rich Strike, under a brilliant ride by Venezuelan, Sonny Leon, amazed and stunned all racing fans by scooting up the rail in the final 16<sup>th</sup> to deny Epicenter (Joel Rosario) and a late charging Zandon (Flavien Prat).

Rich Strike got into the race as an “also eligible” when Ethereal Road, scheduled to be ridden by Luis Contreras, was scratched some 30 seconds before the deadline on Friday. Getting into the race was one thing, but overcoming post 20 was another, and Leon did it perfectly. Rich Strike was 18<sup>th</sup> after 6 furlongs, but up front, Messier (John Velazquez) had battled too hard with Summer is Tomorrow (Mickael Barzalona) – those two were timed in :45.36 to the half and a suffocating 1:10.34 through 6 furlongs. The race was setting up for a deep closer. As the field came into the stretch, Rich Strike was passing rivals as Leon kept the horse moving forward and closer to the rail at the same time. In mid-stretch, it looked to be a battle between Epicenter and Zandon as those two slugged it out. But up the inside came Rich Strike, and he was hitting his best stride very late, cruising past those two more well-regarded competitors, and winning by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a length.

The time of 2:02.61 is relatively ordinary. In 2020,

Authentic won in 2:00.61. Nyquist in 2016 was timed in 2:01.31, and I’ll Have Another did it in 2:01.83 in 2012. Monarchos (1:59.97 in 2001) and Secretariat (1:59.4 in 1973) are the only horses to break 2:00 in this race.

There are many head-spinning things about this winner. He came into the Derby with 3 straight decisive losses on the synthetic course at Turfway Park. His only win was at a mile in a maiden race at Churchill Downs last September. That was a \$30,000 claim race, and he was grabbed from Calumet Farm by his present owners, Red TR Racing.

Richard Dawson, one of the owners, had much more faith in his horse than the bettors did.

“We felt like if we got in, we could win,” said Dawson. “We never entered a race that we did not think we could win. This is the most unbelievable day ever. It’s like having a football team and winning a Super Bowl ...with one player.”

Rich Strike’s trainer is Eric Reed, who sends out horses at Belterra Park, Mahoning Valley, Keeneland and Turfway. Rich Strike was his 1,445<sup>th</sup> training win. According to Reed, Rich Strike is now the horse to beat in the next two legs of the Triple Crown.

“This horse is just getting good, getting better every race,” Reed said.

There is an important Canadian angle to this year’s Derby champ. Rich Strike is out of Gold Strike, a Manitoba bred mare whose sire is the brilliant Smart Strike, bred and owned by Sam-Son Farm.

Rich Strike is an appropriate phrase for anyone who bet on the 2022 Kentucky Derby winner. He paid \$163.60 to win, the 2nd highest win price in Derby history. The \$2 exactor with the 4-1 favourite, Epicenter paid \$4,101, the triactor kicked back \$14,890 for each \$1 bet, and the superfecta was a nifty \$321,500.10 on a \$1 investment

And it would not be true to say ‘no one’ bet on Rich Strike. There was actually \$642,821 in the win pool on the horse; the total win pool was \$63,730,620.

## The Oaks Made More Sense



Secret Oath in the Oaks

A field of 14 fillies burst from the gate for the \$1.25 million Kentucky Oaks on the Friday before the Derby. The 2-1 choice was Nest ridden by Irad Ortiz, but that one got going a little late. 0-1 shot Yuugirl (Florent Geroux) did some early lifting, shooting to the front after a quarter mile in a swift :22.45 and leading to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in 1:11.44. Yuugirl had no go after that, fading abruptly as Secret Oath and Luis Saez were executing an impressive move from 8<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch to the lead, with a 5-wide move into the stretch. Secret Oath scampered away in the final furlong and was never in danger. Nest had to work hard just to grab second from 50-1 shot, Desert Dawn (Umberto Rispoli).

The rather good time for the mile and an 8<sup>th</sup> was 1:49.44. In the past 20 years, 6 fillies have run the Oaks faster – Malathat (1:48.99 in 2021) Shesharesthedevil (1:48.28 in 2020), Monomoy Girl (1:49.13 in 2018), Princess of Sylmar (1:49.17 in 2013), Rachel Alexandra (1:48.87 in 2009), and Bird Town (1:48.64 in 2003).

Secret Oath was a good bet at 4-1. This was her 5<sup>th</sup> win in 8 starts and she pushed her earnings to \$1,113,250. The daughter of Arrogate is owned by Briland Farm and trained by 86-year-old D. Wayne Lukas. This was Lukas’ 5<sup>th</sup> Oaks win, tying him with Woody Stephens. It had been 32 years since Lukas last won the Kentucky Oaks, with Seaside Attraction in 1990.

“I love the big ones,” Lukas said. “These are the ones you play for.”

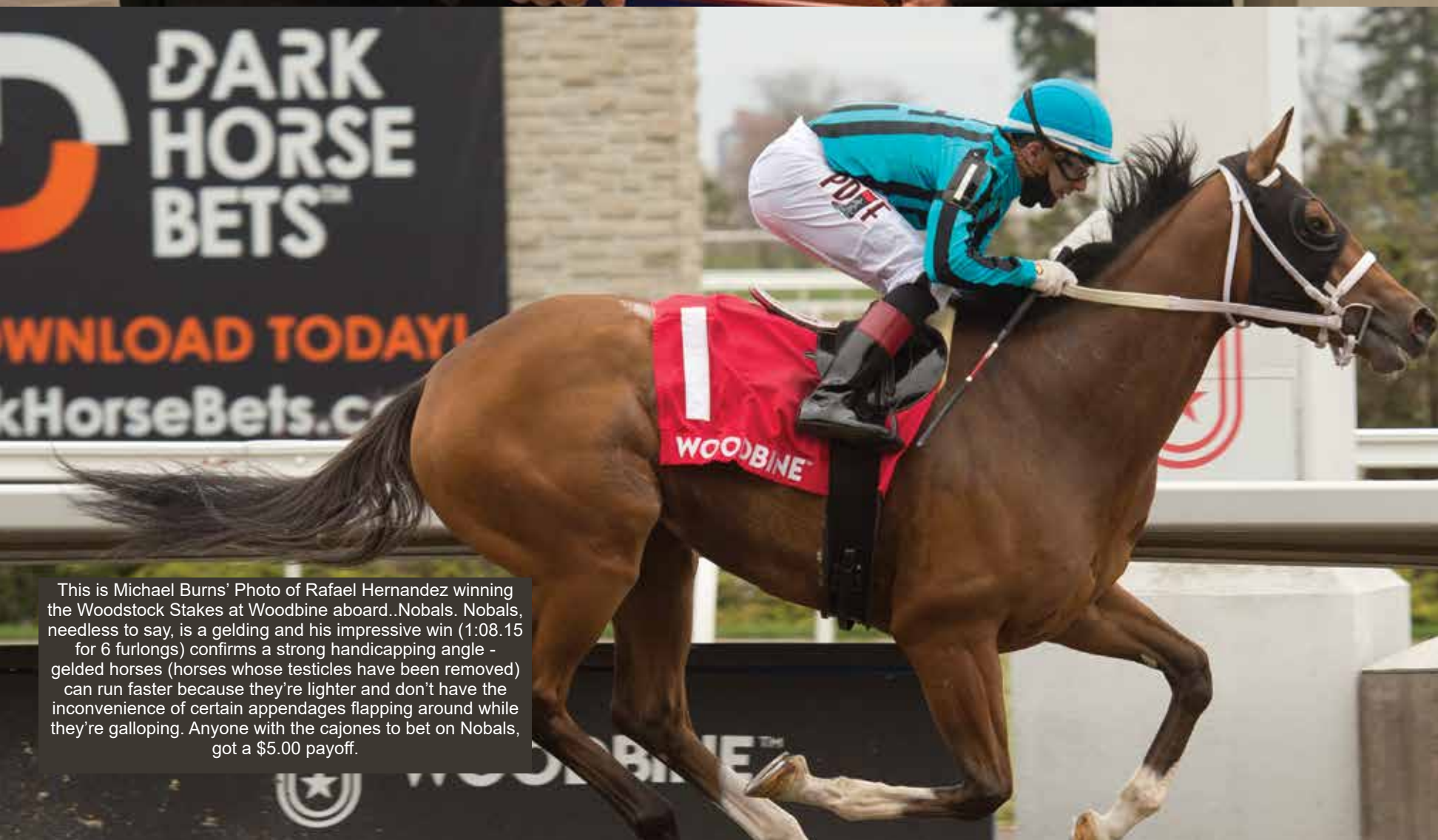
Those who played Secret Oath got paid \$10.80.



# Sovereign Award winning jockey Kazushi Kimura and his agent, Jordan Miller

“ソウリン賞を授賞できて、光栄です。”

(I am honoured to win this Sovereign Award)



This is Michael Burns' Photo of Rafael Hernandez winning the Woodstock Stakes at Woodbine aboard..Nobals. Nobals, needless to say, is a gelding and his impressive win (1:08.15 for 6 furlongs) confirms a strong handicapping angle - gelded horses (horses whose testicles have been removed) can run faster because they're lighter and don't have the inconvenience of certain appendages flapping around while they're galloping. Anyone with the cajones to bet on Nobals, got a \$5.00 payoff.



# JR Plante's Love for Horse Racing...and Hockey



Jean Rene (call me JR) Plante is 41, and in a 23-year career that began in 1999, he has assembled some impressive numbers. As a driver, he has surpassed 2,800 wins and close to \$17 million in purse earnings. As a trainer, he has more than 300 wins. What makes these numbers even more awesome is that Plante has done this almost exclusively on the "B" tracks of Ontario, with only the occasional foray to Mohawk.

From 2007 through 2015, Plante was really rocking the leader board, winning 2,451 races – an average of 273 per year. In 2011 and 2012, horses he steered earned more than \$2 million a year.

"I won the driving title in 2011 at Flamboro," Plante says. "I got 250 wins there alone that year."

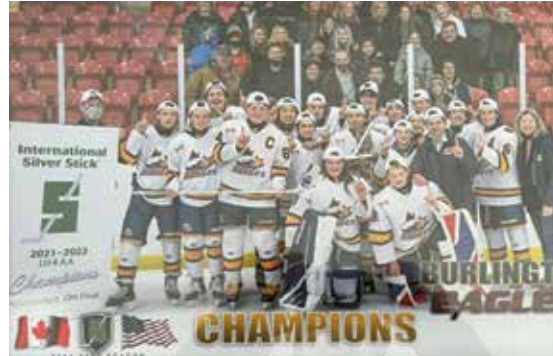
While compiling great numbers at Flamboro and Georgian Downs, did Plante consider competing regularly at Mohawk?

"Yeah, I thought about it many times," he says, "but I never really gave it an honest try. I'm better on the smaller track where I can be more aggressive, so I never really gave it a shot."

Being the big fish in a smaller pond was lucrative for Plante, especially earlier in the century.

"Back then, the purses were really good before the Slots at Racetracks program ended," he says. "There was a lot of racing every day. At the time, I had only one kid – now I have three. So I had more time to race at night."

So we learn that Jean Rene Plante is not only a skilled driver and trainer, but as a procreator, he's also effective. But recently, Plante has cut down on



the nights that he drives. There's something more important he's dedicating his time to.

Plante is a hockey coach. Recently, the Burlington Eagles, the gang of 13 and 14-year-old boys that he coaches, won the prestigious Silver Stick tournament in Newmarket.

"There were only 8 teams in the tournament," he points out. "But every one of those teams had previously won a tournament to get into the Silver Stick. It's really an International Tournament of Champions."

Plante agrees that his Eagles didn't really dominate in the early games.

In the round robin, it took until game four to get everyone seeded for the semi-finals," he says. "Every team lost at least one game. In the 4<sup>th</sup> game, we didn't know if we were going to make it, but we did."

Plante's Eagles saved their best performances for when it really counted.

"In the semi-final, we beat the Ottawa Sting 4-0," says Plante. "Our goalie, Callum Parkinson had a great game. He made 20-25 saves. He rebounded from a poor performance the game before and got us into the final. In the final, we beat the Gloucester Rangers 4-2. Our other fantastic goalie, Lukas Boudreau was great in that game." "Also we won our league this past weekend and we're off to the OMHAs in Kingston in 2 weeks. It's tournaments like this that we first see the possibility of future NHL stardom."

"Our captain, RJ Bevington and Jason Smith had a

lot of points," says Plante. "Smith had two goals in the final. I don't know if Burlington had ever won this before, so it was a pretty big thing."

*Down The Stretch* asked Plante, "what were your most memorable moments in the bike?"

"At Georgian Downs in 2011, I was second in the \$500,000 Upper Canada Stakes with Machal Jackson," he says. "And then in July, I won the Ontario Masters at Georgian with Strand Hanover."

We asked him, "So what's better – winning a Stakes race or winning a hockey tournament?"

"I got to say it's about the same, but winning a hockey tournament is hard to beat."

Plante's personal decision to cut down on competitive driving pretty well tells us where his heart is.

"I just love the sport of hockey," he says warmly. "It's unbelievable how much I love the sport, and now I'm starting to love teaching. I didn't know how much I like teaching as well. The biggest thing is winning. So you combine all that and it's my passion to be at the rink and helping young kids to be better. It's really fun."

We didn't want to drag Plante into any controversy, but *Down The Stretch* had to ask about the evident dissatisfaction many horse people are having these days with Flamboro Racetrack.

"There's nothing there for the fans, for kids or families," he says. The track is in terrible condition. There's not much to be happy about. Not many big fields, not many different races, conditions, good horses, preferred. It's easy to complain about Flamboro. I'll leave it there."

Considering his last name, we had to ask if Plante has any relation to the great goalie Jacques Plante.

"I wish," he laughs. "He was the first goalie to wear a face mask. It was pretty unbelievable back then."

The hockey conquests continue for Jean Rene Plante and his Burlington Eagles. On the last weekend in March, they won their league championship, which sent them to the OMHAs in Kingston in mid-April.

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# RACETRACK HUMOUR

## Perry & Mooch



Cartoon idea by Perry Lefko



# Unfortunate incident at the Sovereigns





# Canadians Out of Town

## Gulfstream, March 17:

Race 5 was a mile and 70 on the all-weather track for fillies and mares with a tag of \$20,000. José Ortiz, on his way to a 4-win afternoon, was aboard the 7-5 favourite, Katiesdreamgirl, in the field of 9. Ortiz exercised a wait-and-see approach. Katiesdreamgirl was 8<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch and 3-wide, but as the front runners started to falter, she made a 5-wide move into the stretch and powered past impressively to win by 2 lengths. Katiesdreamgirl is owned by Bruno Schickedanz and trained by Marty Drexler. Those two claimed the 4-year-old filly for \$20,000 on February 3, and she has subsequently earned a second and a win, amplifying her owner's bankroll by \$22,950 in the process. The win ticket was worth \$4.80.

## Gulfstream, March 18:



Sutherland & Delgado (far right) teamed up for 2 wins)

Race 5 was a maiden special weight, 5 ½ furlongs on the dirt with an attractive purse of \$53,000. Chantal Sutherland was riding Winkiwinki, who got little love from the bettors, going off at 7-1. But Sutherland took Winkiwinki to the top early and kept her there right to the finish to win comfortably by 1 ½ lengths. The 3-year-old filly broke her maiden on the first try for trainer Jorge Delgado and paid \$16.20.

## Gulfstream, March 19:

We have more from Schickedanz and Drexler. The 3<sup>rd</sup> race was a \$10,000 claimer for fillies and mares going 5 ½ on the all-weather. It was Lucky Girasol, ridden by Luis Saez who got up in the final stride for a close win in the very good time of 1:04.51. Schickedanz and Drexler had claimed the 6-year-old mare last November for \$15,000. She finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in her first race for the pair, then pulled off this win. Those 2 efforts upped the Schickedanz bankroll by \$17,000. Throw in the fact that Lucky Girasol was claimed from this race, and you can see the happy cash flow. The bettors had to settle for a \$5.80 win ticket.

The 7<sup>th</sup> race that Saturday was at a mile and a 16<sup>th</sup> on the all-weather for \$35,000 claimers. The 1-2 favourite, Peace of Ekati, ridden by Irad Ortiz needed his best effort to win by a neck. Peace of Ekati, now a 7-year-old gelding, was bred by Charles Fipke and named after the Ekati diamond mine owned by Fipke. If you backed Peace of Ekati, you're not buying a diamond soon – the win ticket was just \$3.

## Gulfstream, March 25:

This was a great day for Canadian connections. Race 1 was a \$25,000 claim race for fillies and mares at a mile and 70. Angel Arroyo timed it perfectly with Bayou Belle, hitting the wire best by a neck. This was the 10<sup>th</sup> win at Gulfstream for trainer Marty Drexler. Bayou Belle, winning for the 5<sup>th</sup> time in 19 tries is owned by Bruno Schickedanz and was bred in Ontario by Adena Springs. Bayou Belle paid \$7.20.

It was an all-Canadian daily double. The second race was won by Super Lunar, a 4-year-old filly bred in Ontario by John Carey and owned and trained by Mike De Paulo. Tyler Gaffalione gave the filly a nicely timed race, coming on in deep stretch to win by neck at the end of 5 furlongs in :57.94. This was Super Lunar's 2<sup>nd</sup> win in her 11<sup>th</sup> race, and she paid \$12.20.

Race 6 that Friday was a starter allowance at a mile and 70 for fillies and mares. Rafael Hernandez was the pilot on Lido Key, and he delivered the 4-year-old filly by a neck for trainer Bill Tharrenos. Tharrenos had claimed Lido Key for \$10,000 back on February 10 for Steven Chircop. Lido Key has a 2<sup>nd</sup> and a 1<sup>st</sup> for her new owners, earning \$27,690 in the process. She paid \$7.20.

## Gulfstream, March 27:



Sand and Sea romped for Morrison

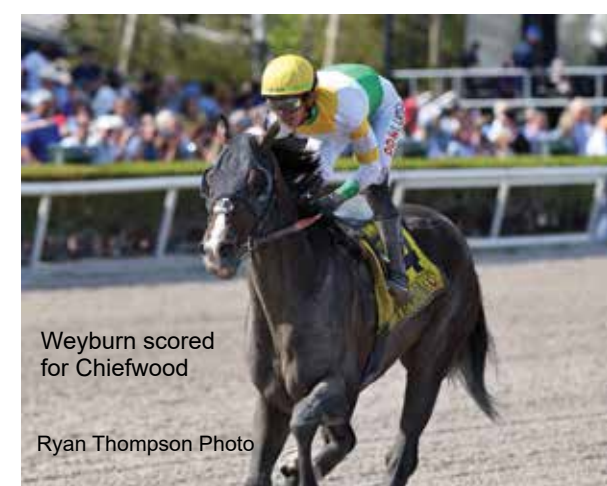
If you haven't heard about Ailsa Morrison, well now you have. The Canadian born rider scored 2 wins on this card. The 5<sup>th</sup> race was a maiden special weight at 5 furlongs on the Tapeta, and legendary trainer Bill Mott gave his seal of approval by putting Morrison on the favourite, Sand and Sea, a 4-year-old filly. Morrison can count on more Mott horses to ride after giving Sand and Sea an ideal trip, hugging the rail to the top of the stretch, and punching through a tight hole to get the lead. Sand and Sea romped to a win by 3 lengths in the very fine time of :57.14. The filly is owned by James Karp, and she paid \$6.40.

Backchat gave Morrison her first racetrack double



In the 10<sup>th</sup> race, Morrison was aboard an 11-1 shot named Backchat in this maiden race at 7 ½ furlongs on the grass, and Backchat was extraordinary. The 4-year-old gelding was pushed 5-wide on the first turn and rallied 6-wide into the stretch. Despite the extra ground covered, Backchat swept to the lead and won by over 2 lengths for trainer J Kent Sweezey. Owned by Rustlewood Farm, Backchat paid \$24.40. This was Ailsa Morrison's first racing double and her cut of the two wins came to over \$5,000 U.S.

## Gulfstream, April 2:



Weyburn scored for Chiefwood

Ryan Thompson Photo

On a huge 14 race card at Gulfstream, a pair of Canadian-owned racehorses captured Stakes events. The 10<sup>th</sup> race in Hallandale was the \$100,000 Sir Shackelton Stakes at 7 furlongs on the dirt. Chiefswood Stables sent out Weyburn for his 2022 debut and under Tyler Gaffalione, Weyburn surged from 7<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch to pass several rivals and win by a commanding 2 ½ lengths in 1:23.01. Weyburn, the 46-1 upset winner of the 2021 Gotham Stakes at Aqueduct, won for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in 9 assignments. Now 4 years old, Weyburn is trained by Brendan Walsh and owned by his breeders, Chiefswood Stables. He paid \$10.60 to win.



Phantom Currency

Race 13 on April 2 was the \$100,000 Kittens Joy Appleton Stakes in which 8 horses went a mile on the turf. Phantom Currency, under Irad Ortiz was the 5-2 favourite and he did not disappoint, leading pretty well all the way and winning by half a length in 1:34.48, less than a second off the course record. Phantom Currency is owned by Susan and Jim Hill of Foothills, Alberta. The 6-year-old gelding is trained by Brian Lynch and the win ticket was worth \$7.40.

## Gulfstream, April 3:



Tharrenos won with Amazin Grace

Adam Coglianese Photo

The 4<sup>th</sup> race, an optional claimer, required eight 3-year-old fillies to go a mile and 70 on the Tapeta. Irad Ortiz was



aboard Amazin Queen and, typically, he rated her towards the back of the field early, reserving her energy for the final quarter mile, in which she passed all her rivals to win by 1 ¼ lengths in 1:43.48. Woodbine trainer Bill Tharrenos claimed Amazin Queen out of a \$16,000 claim race at Gulfstream last December 31, and since then, the filly has earned \$23,780. Owned by Bull and Bear Racing Stable, Amazin Queen paid \$10.20.

**Tampa Bay April 8:**



Nothing Sneaky about Sutherland's 1st win

Trainer Jorge Delgado must have told Chantal Sutherland that he was very live with 3 horses at Tampa Bay, because Sutherland crossed the peninsula from Gulfstream to ride for him. Good decision. After delivering Hard Ten to a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish in race 2, Sutherland delivered Sneaky Cheeky in the 5<sup>th</sup>, a mile and 40 yards for \$20,000 claimers. Sneaky Cheeky, a 3-year-old filly, found the finish line by ¾ of a length for her 2<sup>nd</sup> win in 9 tries. She is trained by Delgado and owned by Lea Farms. The same jockey, trainer and owner combined to win the next race, an optional claim at 6 furlongs. Sutherland figured the 4-year-old Willy Boi was the best and rode him that way, grabbing the lead shortly after the break and running away to win by over 7 lengths in the fine time of 1:09.75. Willy Boi improved to 4 wins in 10 races and paid \$4.60.

**Gulfstream, April 8:**

Frankly My Dear, a 4-year-old filly didn't get much respect from the bettors in the 8<sup>th</sup> race, a 7 furlong allowance test, but jockey Ailsa Morrison clearly gave a damn. Morrison gunned Frankly My Dear into contention early, battled with the favourite, American of Course from the half mile pole and refused to give up along the inside all the way down the stretch. Frankly My Dear was a neck the best at the wire in 1:25.41, winning for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 12 tries. The filly is trained by Garry Lee for Tundra racing and the win ticket was worth \$24.80.

**Laurel, April 14:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> race had a field of 7 maiden special weights going a mile on the dirt (it was taken off the grass). The rail horse was Pharaoh's Triumph, a son of American Pharoah and he was ridden confidently by Denis Araujo. Pharaoh's Triumph had the lead by the quarter, went past 6 furlongs in a comfortable 1:13, carried a 3-length lead into the stretch and got to the wire 4 ½ lengths the best in 1:39.99. Pharaoh's Triumph was bred in Ontario by Adena Springs and is owned by Stronach Stables. He was 8<sup>th</sup> last fall in his only race at Woodbine and he broke his maiden on the third try, paying \$10.80.

**Keeneland, April 17:**

The 9<sup>th</sup> race was the \$600,000 Maker's Mark Mile on the turf and Shirl's Speight, under Luis Saez didn't get much respect



Shirl's Speight (#2 by a nose!)

from the bettors, going off at 9-1. Coming into the stretch, Shirl's Speight did not look like the winner, trailing by at least 5 lengths, but with a furious gallop, he began to pass horses extremely late and appeared to hit the wire simultaneously with the race favourite, Masen (Flavien Prat). The photo revealed that Shirl's Speight was the winner by maybe an inch. This made the 5-year-old horse 3 for 3 in 2022, following a pair of wins at Tampa Bay. Shirl's Speight is trained by Roger Attfield for owner Charles Fipke and those who believed got paid \$20 for each \$2 win ticket.

**Gulfstream, April 23:**

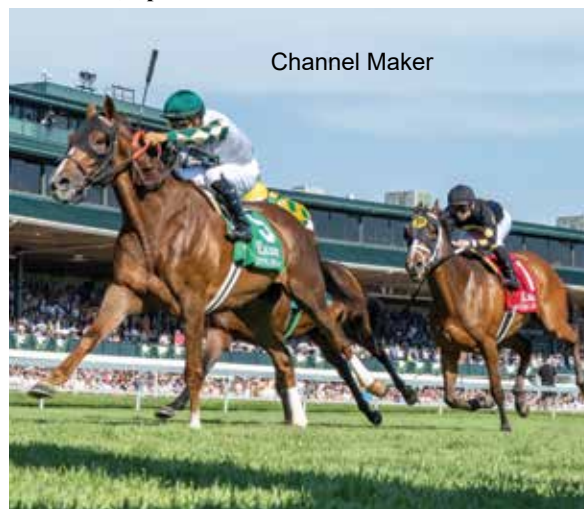


Sutherland delivered a Gift to the bettors

Adam Coglianese Photo

Chantal Sutherland was the rider on Sade Purse, a 4-year-old filly in the 3<sup>rd</sup> race, a 6 furlong sprint for \$12,500 maiden claimers. Sutherland was patient, keeping Sade Purse in mid-pack down the backstretch, then making a 3-wide move on the turn to pass rivals. In the final furlong, the pair surged to the top and won by 1 ½ lengths in the sluggish time of 1:14.38. This was the first win in 7 tries for the filly, who is trained by Gerald James who co-owns with Arturo Wallington. As the second choice, Sade Purse paid \$8.10.

**Keeneland, April 23:**



Channel Maker

The 8-year-old Channel Maker captured the \$350,000 Grade 2 Elkhorn Stakes, which had a field of 8 going 1 ½ miles on the turf. Under Luis Saez, Channel Maker was close to the pace throughout, got his head in front early in the stretch, and persevered to the wire to win by 1 ¼ lengths in 2:27.10 – the fastest time ever for this Stakes race. Channel Maker is trained by Bill Mott and was bred in Ontario by Ivan Dalos' Tall Oaks Farm. The win ticket was worth \$9.

**Gulfstream, April 14:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> race was a maiden special weight with a purse of \$50,000. Eleven 3-year-old fillies were required to run a mile and 70 on the Tapeta, and it was Linda's Gift with Chantal Sutherland who ran it the fastest. Linda's Gift stalked the pace from 5<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch, had to go 4-wide into the lane, and powered past rivals late to win by a length. The daughter of Arrogate won on her second try for trainer George Weaver, and Linda's Gift to the bettors was a \$13.20 payoff.

**Gulfstream, April 28**



Phantom Currency

The 8<sup>th</sup> race was 5 furlongs on the grass an allowance race with a purse of \$52,000. Chantal Sutherland burst out of the gate with the 3<sup>rd</sup> favourite Warriors Pride and had a 5-length lead coming into the stretch. Warriors Pride slowed down approaching the wire, but was a good length the best in :55.27, the fastest time ever recorded at this distance at Gulfstream. This was Sutherland's 16<sup>th</sup> win of the year and the 1,182<sup>nd</sup> of her career. The 4 year-old colt is owned by Just for fun stable and trained by Antonio Cioffi. The win ticket was \$7.60.

**Gulfstream, April 30:r**



Ailsa Morrison was aboard The Distractor in the 9<sup>th</sup>, a 5 furlong sprint on the turf. Off at 5-1, The Distractor was 5<sup>th</sup> at the quarter, and 4<sup>th</sup> coming into the stretch, but Morrison took the 3 year-old gelding 4-wide into the stretch and got up late to win by a neck. The Distractor is owned by Frank Argane and trained by Saffie Joseph. With his 3<sup>rd</sup> win in 12 races, he paid \$12. This win gave Morrison 9 in the money finishes from her last 13 mounts.



# Opening Day at Woodbine



Lots of reasons to celebrate Opening Day at Woodbine

Michael Burns Photo



Race 1 was underway

Michael Burns Photo

It was like finding Doc Brown and going back into the past in his DeLorean. A huge crowd gathered on opening day. To avoid bumping into others, people had to carefully navigate from one destination to the next by seeking openings in the crowd.

It seemed appropriate that not only was Opening Day on Easter Weekend, but Saturday, April 16 was also the first day of Passover. I tested Woodbine CEO, Jim Lawson with my limited Hebrew.

“Jim, the traditional Hebrew question during the Passover Seder is, “Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?” I offered. (“Why is this night different from all others?”) So why *is* this Opening Day different from all others?”

“It’s definitely different from all other opening days,”

replied Lawson. “It is really special because it is a time of hope. We’ve been through a very difficult couple of years together. There’s a good feeling here today. It’s all about hope, whether you’re wagering or owning a horse. We know we’re going to have a good year. It feels like a maiden day –

when you’re excited to get that horse out on the racetrack for the first time. The energy in the air today is really positive.”

Even before the first race, we found Jennifer Morrison signing copies of her book, *Run With a Mighty Heart*. The owner of the one-eyed winner of the 2020 Queen’s Plate, Larry Cordes was there, as well as trainer Josie Carroll.

“There’s lots of interest, no question,” said Morrison, who seemed to notice that the bettors were more concerned with the daily double than an author selling books. Two days

earlier, at the Sovereign Awards, *Mighty Heart*, the subject of Morrison’s intriguing book, was named Horse of the Year in Canada. We had to ask her – was she cheering for *Mighty Heart* to win so that she could sell more of her books?

“Well, yes,” answered Morrison sheepishly. “But also, he deserved it. He ran so bravely each race and always gave it all he had.”

For race caller Robert Geller, this was the first time in 3 years, he’d been required to work at Woodbine during April.

“I’m fit, but how ready, we’ll find out,” he said. Geller’s workload wasn’t very oppressive on day one. 8-race card with a total of only 54 horses.

“I hope the fields do start to pick up,” said Geller. “Last year, we had the biggest field size on the continent.”



Race caller Robert Geller



Larry Cordes and Jennifer Morrison





Woodbine CEO  
Jim Lawson



Emma-Jayne Wilson  
coming out for race 2



Emma-Jayne Wilson was on the cover of the first issue of this paper back in 2008, and it's a tradition to interview her on the first day.

"It's a bit surreal," said Wilson. "To get into the swing of things on time – it's normal. It's nice to get back to a normal that we know and love. I'm excited to get started."

Wilson comes into her 19th season with more than 1,700 wins and more than \$81 million in purse earnings. What kind of goals has she set for herself this year?

"I always want to be on the top of the chart," she said. "I love this place and I have been leading rider before, and I want to get back up there again. Kazushi, here I come!"

Did you catch that? *Kazushi here I come!* Well, in the first race, Kazushi Kimura, the defending champion and Sovereign

Award winner as Canada's Outstanding Jockey was on the 1-9 favourite, Lime in the first race. It was a 4 1/2 furlong dash for fillies and mares with a \$7,500 claim price. Kimura did not put the Lime in the coconut, but he fired the 4 year-old filly right to the lead and appeared comfortable after passing the half-mile pole in :45.33. Wilson was the pilot on My Final Trick and with less than a furlong to go, that pair was closing in on Lime. Perhaps Kimura head Wilson calling,

"Kazushi, here I come!"

In mid-stretch, My Final Trick pulled away to win by 2 1/4 lengths in :51.75. The filly broke her maiden on her 20th attempt for owner Silver King Racing and trainer Daryl Hasmatali. The first win ticket of 2022 was worth \$11.20 and we can assure you that was anything but Wilso

Racing fans were pleased to see that Patrick Husbands' retirement was short lived. Husbands had just 3 assignments on opening day, and he won with two of them. This was a \$103,000 allowance race at 5 furlongs, with Husbands on Beautiful Empire. Beautiful Empire, a 3-year-old filly with her 2nd win in her 6th race paid \$5.50 for trainer Mark Casse and owner John Oxley The 7th race was the Long Branch Stakes, with \$120,000 as the purse. Husbands showed he's still a premier rider. Dreaming of Drew, a 4-year-old filly won, despite being off for 18 months. Barb Minshall trains and Hoolie Racing Stable owns Dreaming of Drew, who is now 3 for 6 and paid \$7.90.

After day one, Patrick Husbands was the leading jockey at Woodbine.



Good crowd for Opening Day



In the 4th race, Ol' Blondie (outside, purple cap) and David Moran would prevail over Forest B (orange cap) and Rafael

Michael Burns Photo



# Focus on the Fort

It is essential for horse racing in Ontario to have more than one thoroughbred racetrack. Fort Erie is fundamental, as it gives horse people options that might not exist for them at Woodbine. Antonietta Culic manages media for the Fort.

“We’re really excited about the season coming up,” says Culic. “Opening day is May 31. Obviously, we’re hoping that things continue with Clover the way they have been, and we can be fully open to fans. We’re bringing back our Twilight Tuesday racing again and a lot of people look forward to that. We’re also racing primarily on Mondays through the season, but we do have some Sundays such as Father’s Day. We’re bringing back Basset Hound and Wiener dog races, because those are really popular events in our schedule. And of course, we have the Prince of Wales Stakes, which is coming up on September 13th. This is our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary season at Fort Erie racetrack. So we’re really looking forward to getting people back to celebrate with us.”

In the past 20 years or so, there have been multiple crises around horse racing at the Fort, but somehow, the racing community figures out a way to keep the game alive at the border oval.

“We have some of the most passionate horse people around,” says Culic. “People love being at the Fort. Our fans love coming to Fort Erie. Through social media, I’m constantly seeing fans from all over the place who have very fond memories of Fort Erie Racetrack. The kids coming with their dad, coming for the Prince of Wales, being there when Puss and Boots actually jumped into the pond. People have a lot of fight in them and we’re happy to come back every season.”

One of the more interesting twists this year is that Fort Erie will have a new race caller. After 6 years, the legendary (I’ve been everywhere) Frank Salive retired and the new guy will be 26-year-old Doug McPherson.

“We’re really excited to bring him on,” says Culic. “He’s a young guy, but he’s very well established in the industry. A lot of people know him from his handicapping journals and guest appearances calling at Woodbine. This will be his first official full-time announcing job.”

Culic missed her work at Fort Erie last season because she gave birth to a daughter, Lorelei.

“She’s almost 11 months old now,” says Culic. “She’s a fun addition to our family.”

*Down The Stretch* wondered if Lorelei has been breezing a quarter mile on the track yet.

“Yes, we’re stretching her legs,” says Culic, playing along with the gag. “She’s a pretty fast crawler. She’ll be tough in her first maiden special weight!”

Culic gave *Down The Stretch* the number for Doug McPherson and our first question to him was, “How did you get this job?”

“My suspicion was that somebody was drinking during the hiring process,” answered McPherson, fulfilling the sense of humour quota we look for in a race caller. “I don’t know what set me apart from the other candidates. I am a little green on the race calling side of things, but I do have a lot of experiences, as handicapper and as an analyst. I think I definitely have the fundamentals of a potentially good race caller.”

We agree with that assessment. We looked up his guest call of the 10<sup>th</sup> race at Woodbine last November 28. It’s solid – accurate, well paced with good energy.

McPherson’s father is Alexander McPherson, whose training stats on Equibase go back to 1977. The elder McPherson started 2022 with 895 wins from 5,579 horses – an excellent strike rate of 16%.

“I’ve been grooming horses at my dad’s barn at Woodbine,” says the son. “And I write the handicappers journal for the Woodbine program. It’s not so much that I want to be a race caller specifically, but I think it’s important to do at this point in my career. I’ve been very multi-faceted. I’ve done a lot of things, and I think this is another really good opportunity and another good skill to have, and who knows where it could lead down the road?”

So what other race callers have inspired McPherson?

“Dan Loiselle is forever going to be my favourite,” he says. “That’s the voice of my childhood. Of the active race callers, I’m a big fan of Peter Aiello at Gulfstream and Jason Beam at Tampa Bay. I also really like John Dooley at the Fairgrounds. He’s very good. He’s got a very smooth delivery.”

We prompted him on the extraordinary Tom Durkin.

“Durkin is a legend,” agrees McPherson. “He deserves all the accolades. He was absolutely tremendous for the sport.”

Frank Salive had that deep velvety controlled demeanor on the mic. Does McPherson feel he has big shoes to fill?

“Unfortunately, I never got to meet Frank,” says McPherson. “I’m hoping that I’ll be able to talk to him sometimes and maybe get some advice from him because he did this for so long.”





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## 2022 Race Schedule

May							June							July							August							September							October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1:05 pm post time							1	2	3	4						1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3							1		
		Twilight Racing 4:05 pm post time					5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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# Ailsa Morrison – Off and Winning!



It's very early in the career of 23-year-old jockey Ailsa Morrison, but already, she can point to her "best day ever." On Sunday, March 27, Morrison was sitting on just 6 wins from her first 124 professional rides. The 5<sup>th</sup> race at Gulfstream had a purse of \$60,000, and a field of 6 maiden fillies and mares going 5 furlongs on the all-weather track. Despite her thin resume, Morrison's assignment, the 4-year-old filly Sand and Sea was made the 2-1 favourite. It was one of 2 horses in the race trained by Bill Mott.

And Mott had to like what he saw. Morrison had Sand and Sea comfortable early, 4<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch, about 4 lengths from the leader. As Sand and Sea upped the ante, Morrison was able to save ground on the turn, split rivals in mid-stretch and the pair were much the best to the wire, winning by 3 lengths in :57.14. Owned by James Karp, Sand and Sea paid \$6.40.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> race, another maiden heat at 7 ½ furlongs on the turf, Morrison got little love from the bettors, as the 4-year-old gelding, Backchat went off at over 11-1. Again, Morrison was patient. Backchat was 7<sup>th</sup> at the half, spent most of the race on the outside, but rallied strongly in the final 8<sup>th</sup> to win by over 2 lengths. Backchat, trained by J. Kent Sweezy for Rustlewood Farm returned \$24.40.

The city of Moncton, New Brunswick, where Morrison was born, is not especially famous for producing jockeys (the great Ron Turcotte grew up in Drummond, New Brunswick). But from the start, it was obvious that Morrison was going to do something special on a horse.

"I moved to Ontario at a young age, and I competed with event horses and then I started galloping just to

supplement my event riding and become a stronger rider," she says. "I was breaking babies, going around the track and I fell in love with it more and more every day. And people took one look at me and said, 'You're small enough to be a jockey.' That planted the seed and I just never really looked back."

What's unusual about Morrison is that she seems to have jumped into the major leagues with very little time in the minors. Her Equibase stats show just 4 races in 2019 at Fort Erie, where she registered her first win. She went winless that year in 45 other rides at Woodbine. All the rest of her work has taken place at Aqueduct and Gulfstream. From the middle of November to late February, she took assignments at Aqueduct. That's a brutally difficult place to get live horses and, historically, lady jockeys have not put up significant numbers. But Morrison did win 4 times from 52 mounts.

"I've had some really great people in my corner," she explains. "I galloped for Bill Mott for two years and that's a great connection to have. Then I met my agent Mike Sellitto and I have full faith in him. I asked him, 'Where do you think the best place for me is to start?' And Mike said the winter meet at Aqueduct. I had to wait for Covid to subside a bit before I started up in the States. Mike said the Gulfstream summer meet would also be a good spot for me, once the bigger jockeys head north, which would open up more opportunities."

Winning a race for a legendary trainer like Bill Mott, who has over 5,000 wins on his resume, goes a long way in establishing riding credibility. In the case of Sand

and Sea, Morrison did what previous jockeys Junior Alvarado and John Velazquez couldn't do – get the horse in the winner's circle. Imagine Mott's thought process, switching from Velazquez to Morrison.

"It's a huge confidence boost," she says. "Just to have such a class act trainer have that faith in me – it means the world. I worked for him for 2 years and he saw the work I put in and watched me progress. I think he felt that he had prepared me as a rider enough to give me the opportunity and I'm grateful for it."

Here's a roll call of the 6 previous jockeys on Backchat, who broke his maiden under Morrison – Javier Castellano, Edgar Prado, Paco Lopez, Samy Camacho, Wilmer Garcia and Edwin Gonzalez.

"Maybe the weight allowance made the difference," she laughs. "The horse was so well-prepared by Kent Sweezy and was coming off a little bit of a layoff. So he was fresh, feeling good. I had a ton of horse and maybe that time just gave him a moment to really digest things and have that winning mindset."

It's natural when talking to a female jockey riding at Gulfstream to wonder if she bounces things off Chantal Sutherland.

"Yes, I know Chantal from the room, and we talk strategy," she says. "She's helped me out and she's very supportive and positive, which is a very nice environment to have in the jocks' room."

Part of Morrison's preparation for the big stage that she's reached has its roots with a couple of experienced Ontario horse people. On October 10, 2019, in her 3<sup>rd</sup> career race, she notched her first win aboard the 3-year-old gelding Dot's Last Call in a \$3,000 claim race at a mile and 70 yards. That day she weighed in at just 106 pounds. Dot's Last Call was trained by Scott Fairlie, whose partner, jockey Michelle Rainford provided some up-close and personal professional advice.

"Scott and Michelle gave me the opportunity to really start breezing horses the year before I started race riding," she says. "Michelle was right beside me, breezing in company telling me to turn my stick over and just practice. They really supported me. They're like family to me. When I started my bug, they put me on a lot of horses. They are a very important aspect of the rider that I am today."

The first time that *Down The Stretch* noted Morrison was when we wrote about trainer Bill Tharrenos winning with a horse named Summer Shandee. It was a maiden race with 12 runners and Morrison delivered Summer Shandee to win at a mile and a 16<sup>th</sup> at odds of 26-1.

"I believe I rode for him in 2019 when I was in Canada," she says. "So then when he heard that I was here in Gulfstream, he put me on some horses. It was very special to get my first win at Gulfstream for him with the Canadian connections."

Ailsa Morrison is certainly carving out a terrific career. But for a Canadian-born rider, it's notable that she hasn't yet won a race at Woodbine.

"That is true," she agrees. "I would love to be there. I plan on spending my summer here in Gulfstream. But if I could make the trip for a race or two, I would definitely take that opportunity. I'd love to come visit the homeland."



# Soccer Hero Has a Horse Racing Past



On September 5, 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> race was a maiden optional claim at 6 furlongs. A 3-year-old gelding with the catchy name of Kawacatoose was ridden by Stephen Bahen and, though it had appeared to be improving through its 4 previous races (7<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>), Kawacatoose went off at over 10-1. Bahen gave Kawacatoose a fine ride, moving from 3<sup>rd</sup> after a quarter to the front and repelling any serious challenges to win by 1 ½ lengths in the good time of 1:10.89. The horse is trained by Devon Boreland, who we are told is the uncle of Prentice Boreland. Prentice shares ownership of this horse with his son, Cyle Larin.

That was an exciting family event – seeing their horse break its maiden. The winner’s cheque was almost \$50,000 U.S. Even so, a sporting outcome much more thrilling was to happen for these folks. That’s because on March 27, in front of more than 29,000 at BMO field, Larin scored the first



goal in Canada’s 4-0 triumph over Jamaica, a result that assured Canada’s berth in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Prentice Boreland is 58 and still exercises his horses in Woodbine’s backstretch. Cyle spent a lot of time with his father at the track and for a short period, worked as a hotwalker. According to Boreland, soccer wasn’t even Cyle’s first sporting experience.

“He was in hockey,” says Boreland. “His mother put him in.”

Cyle’s interest in soccer was stimulated from a series of “barn against barn” matches that took place among the horsemen.

“A long time ago, when he was small, I used to take

him to the track,” says Boreland. “At the east gate they used to play soccer. There would be a tournament. He liked this sport so much, he forgot about the hockey thing.”

Kawacatoose won at Woodbine in the afternoon. That same evening, in a World Cup qualifying match, Larin scored for Canada against the U.S., converting a perfect pass from Alphonso Davies into the net. Larin’s goal gave Canada a crucial 1-1 draw.

Boreland was born in Jamaica, but even so, you can bet he was cheering for Canada the night his son scored the game winner. And when your boy is one of the stars, you get first class treatment.

“We were in the suite at BMO Field,” says Boreland. “With his mother [Patricia Larin] and my other two kids. It was emotional. It was very exciting. They turned the place upside down.”

Larin is having an extraordinary career with Team Canada. His goal in the clinching match was his 25<sup>th</sup> in 51 games – the most by any player in Canadian men’s history. The World Cup begins for Canada on November 23<sup>rd</sup> against Belgium. It’s going to compromise the racing schedule for Dad, but Boreland isn’t passing on the opportunity to be in Qatar for such an historic event.

“There will still be two weeks of racing at Woodbine,” he says. “Cyle told me, ‘Pack it up, ‘cause you’re going to the World Cup.’ It’s mind blowing to think this is happening. I still can’t believe it.”

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### Cause and Effect, or How we Choose Our Owner of the Month

The 4-year-old Anarchy, in his first lifetime start won the 6<sup>th</sup> race at Woodbine on April 24. Trainer Dale Desruisseaux posted the win on Facebook, complimenting jockey Gary Boulanger for a fine ride. *Down The Stretch* likes Gary Boulanger. We decided to see who owns Anarchy, and his name is Bernie Kooner. Desruisseaux, part of Kooner's team, took over training temporarily because Kooner's long-time friend and trainer, Steve Bryant stepped back for awhile after his mother died. We contacted Desruisseaux. He gave us Bryant's number. Bryant hooked us up with Kooner.

Kooner, born and raised in Vancouver, tells us he is 64 years old. His parents are from India, but "my grandfather came over like a 100,000 years ago."

"When I was 25 or 30 years old, we would go to Hastings Park, and we liked handicapping," he says. "And Steve Bryant and I thought owning a horse would be a great idea. Steve was only about 20 at the time. Our first horse was Bye Bye Mexico."

Bye Bye Mexico was a decent animal. His Equibase stats show 11 wins in 90 races and \$160,203 in earnings. Kooner has a nice memory of Bye Bye Mexico recording his first win for him.

"He was the second favourite at 9-2," he recalls. "And somebody came over to us and said, 'Your horse doesn't have a chance today because this other horse is going to really run well.' But Steve said, 'Don't worry – the horse is going to run his race.' And Bye Bye Mexico shot up the rail and won by a couple of lengths. I believe that Sam Krasner was the jockey. That was very exciting."

We looked it up. On May 22, 1992, at Exhibition Park in Vancouver, it was the veteran Sam Krasner delivering Bye Bye Mexico to the winner's circle in a claim race with a purse of \$10,700.

Although Kooner has been in horse racing since the 1990s, he doesn't have enormous numbers – as of this story, Equibase shows just 58 starts and 9 wins from the last 6 years, numbers that won't threaten Stronach, Dalos or Barber.

"We generally have 2 or 3 horses at a time," he says. "We're a small group. My brother Tar and I are involved. We've got a couple of horses in California. We've decided to send some horses to Woodbine."

There's a horse called Above All Names. On May 18, 2019, the filly finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the \$150,000 Grade 3 Selene



Bernie Kooner (r) with longtime friend and trainer Steve Bryant

Stakes. At the time, it was owned by Bonnie Eshelman and ridden by her daughter, Skye Chernetz. Three weeks later, it won a \$100,000 optional claim race at a mile and a 16<sup>th</sup> under Luis Contreras. On that date, Kooner was the owner. How did the horse change hands?

"We went over to her and asked if she was interested in selling it," says Kooner. "Don Brauer and Steve Bryant did the purchasing for me. We paid \$80,000. She was sad to lose the horse. And I don't blame her. Above All Names has been a wonderful horse for us."

Above All Names made back more than her purchase price for Kooner. In the span of the next 30 months, she would win 5 times and earn about \$200,000.

Then there's the horse with the American patriotic name of U.S. Army Corps.

"We only had that one for one season," says Kooner. "Then he got claimed from us."

U.S. Army Corps broke his maiden on September 12, 2020, carrying Luis Contreras to victory by over 3 lengths, beating 11 rivals at a mile and a 16<sup>th</sup> on the inner turf at Woodbine. The purse was \$51,000. U.S. Army Corps won a second battle on November 11, 2021. This time it was Gary Boulanger as the pilot, and the margin after 7 furlongs on the Tapeta was 8 intimidating lengths. That's where U.S. Army Corps was claimed for \$5,000.

Anarchy, the winner on April 24, is a horse that Kooner has owned since purchasing it for \$13,667 at a yearling sale in Vancouver.

"It took me a long time to get him in his first race," says Kooner, explaining why Anarchy didn't race as a 2 or 3-year-old. He had a few issues, and we gave him a lot of time off and it worked out well for us."

Anarchy laid down the law to 7 other maidens, taking the lead after a quarter and pretty well increasing his advantage past each pole, winning by 2 ¼ lengths in the excellent time of 1:10.02. Anarchy had to cover 6 furlongs. Kooner watched the race from Vancouver, 4,317 kilometres from Woodbine.

"I was in my car, watching on a laptop," he says, laughing. "It was in the parking lot of a golf course. My tee time was supposed to be 12:46 and the race went off at 12:51 west coast time. I was thrilled with the race, then I had to go rush to meet the rest of my foursome. I got about 6 phone calls from friends."

Turns out the day was doubly sweet.

"I hit the ball pretty well that afternoon," Kooner adds.

Kooner can afford his modest investment with thoroughbreds thanks to a career in the medical logistics business.

"We move packages between hospitals and doctors, and we do biomedical waste as well," he explains.

There's a powerful thread of loyalty that runs through Kooner's life. Steve Bryant has always been his trainer. And Kooner makes a point of giving props to Ballycroy Training Centre.

"I'd like to thank Steve Kemp," he says. "His family does a great job with the horse in the off-season, and they take care of my horses when they're not racing. They do a wonderful job, and they are great people."

As for what he loves about the thoroughbred sport:

"I don't think people outside of horse racing realize how much work goes into getting a horse to the starting gate," Kooner says. "To get a horse ready to race, it's so challenging. So when something does come to fruition it's very rewarding. A race can be the longest minute and 20 seconds but it's over in a heartbeat."

We've saved the most extraordinary thing about Bernie Kooner to the end. He's been in Canadian horse racing for 30 years, but he has *never* been to Woodbine. Horses he has owned have won 9 races at the Rexdale plant, but he's never been there in person to witness those wins.

That will change. Kooner has booked a flight to Toronto for the weekend of May 14. His timing is sublime. The latest copy of *Down The Stretch*, including this story about him, will be available at the track.

"Ok," says Kooner. "I'll tell everyone I came east just to get the paper!"





**B**ill Rogers credits his success and enjoyment in the harness racing game to one man.

“Any story about owning horses has its roots with my father, Joe,” says Rogers. “He’s been my partner since we got involved back in 1992. I used to go to the races with my dad when I was a kid. I remember being at Greenwood in the seventies when I was like 7 or 8 years old. We always talked that we would get involved, and actually, we went to a new ownership seminar at Greenwood Raceway. That’s where we met our first trainer, Bill Sharp.”

The Rogers’ first purchase was a yearling named Noble Ambition. While their ambition to be horse owners might have been noble, the results were not.

“Noble Ambition never made it to the races,” says Rogers. “But then we bought a filly called Bridal Shower. She was a 2-year-old pacer who had had one start. After we bought her, she won her first race. It was at Greenwood. Doug Brown was driving.”

Bridal Shower went on to win her next two races and posted a 2<sup>nd</sup> and a 3<sup>rd</sup>. Then on January 16, 1995, she won the Miss Vera Bars Final for Steve Condren in 1:58.4 at odds of 9-1.

Rogers speaks of two racehorses that were fundamentally important to him and his dad.

“We had a horse called Rock Music with Doug Arthur,” he says. “That horse made just over \$550,000.”

Rock Music won 18 times and hit the board 66 times in 124 races. Not once did he compete in a claim race – his comfort level was in non-winners of \$27,000 or

\$30,000 in their last 6 races, and he often cashed cheques at the free for all level.

“Rock Music allowed us to step deeper into the water,” says Rogers. “During that time, we met Anthony Montini, who is still our trainer to this day. Then we ended up getting involved with Primetime Bobcat. Everybody knows about that horse because of the connection to Bob McCown.”

McCown was the host of Prime Time Sports on The Fan. McCown’s nickname is “The Bobcat,” hence the name of a horse that he owned, but only for its first 5 starts.

On December 31, 2005, Casie Coleman claimed Prime Time Bobcat for \$50,000. Less than 2 months later, when the horse was entered for \$100,000, Montini convinced the Rogers to dig deep and put in a ticket for him.

“Anthony and I had talked about it and we both agreed



that this was the best horse on the racetrack,” says Rogers. “So my dad and I, Anthony, and his brother-in-law put up \$100,000 and we claimed the horse. After that, we probably had 10 months of the biggest highs and the lowest low you could ever have.”

The low?

“So we claim the horse and in his first start for us, he flipped his heart.”

Flipped his heart?

“He choked down,” Rogers explains. “His heart started beating too fast and he was in distress. We paid \$100,000 for him and he was beaten by about 50 lengths.”

The highs?

“We rested him for three weeks and then we entered him in the Spring Pacing Championship at Woodbine which went in April.”

Prime Time Bobcat finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in each of the first two legs of that series, timed in 1:52.2, then 1:51.

“He raced ok in the two legs, which was fine because he was just coming back,” says Rogers. “In the final is when he got paired with Jody Jamieson. At the time, Jody was just a young guy, starting out, and I think he would say this was his first big break.”

With Jamieson steering, Prime Time Bobcat roared from 3<sup>rd</sup> at the head of the stretch to win by nose at odds of 18-1. He was timed in 1:49.4, one of 5 victories he would record under 1:50. One of those wins was historic. On May 13<sup>th</sup>, with Jamieson in the bike, Prime Time Bobcat crushed an open field of pacers to win by 4 lengths in 1:47.2, a world record for a pacing mile.

“I still have a big picture of him on that day in my house,” smiles Rogers.

There would be many more great moments for Prime Time Bobcat. On June 3, 2006, he won a \$120,000 Stakes at Rockingham Park in New Hampshire. Four months later, he knocked off a \$100,000 Invitational at Woodbine. Later that year he was the best in a pair of \$45,000 Open Pace events, also at Woodbine.

Prime Time Bobcat raced 201 times for various owners, won 48 races, hit the board 104 times, and earned more than \$740,000. Now 25 years old, he’s enjoying a comfortable post racing life.

“He’s retired out in Nova Scotia,” says Rogers. “We’re often in contact with our friends who have him. He’s living with 2 people who adore him and treat him like

a pet.”

There was a period in Rogers’ life when racing horses was not his highest priority. Regaining his health mattered more.

“I had a major illness called Guillain-Barre Syndrome,” he says. “I woke up one day and I was paralyzed from the neck down. My nervous system had shut down. So ownership had to take a back seat. I was in the hospital for parts of three months. I had to learn to walk again. So the early 2010s were very quiet in the Rogers’ horse ownership.”

Back in the game now, Rogers owns a horse with the quaint name of Harry.

“We bought him off of Paul Walker last year right before the Grassroots final,” he says. “He finished up the track in the semi-final. We bought him right before the semi-final, so now we’re just racing him.”

Harry won’t make anyone forget Prime Time Bobcat, but he did produce a win on February 5 in a \$20,000 trot. James MacDonald rallied the 4 year-old from out of 6<sup>th</sup> down the backstretch to a half-length verdict in 1:57.2. It was Harry’s 4<sup>th</sup> career win in his 30<sup>th</sup> race.

Rogers calls himself a “serious” bettor, and when pressed for his most memorable wagers, he can cite some impressive scores.

“Back in the day when they had the Pick-7, there was a carry-over and we were one of the winners,” he says. “We cashed \$75,000. On another night, I hit one superfecta in the 5<sup>th</sup> race for \$15,000, and then I hit another superfecta in the last race for \$32,000. The worst thing they ever did for serious gamblers was to put the 20-cent ticket in there, because back in the day my goal was to take down the whole pool. Now I don’t even bet superfectas anymore because I’m not able to take down a pool for \$35,000.”

Rogers’ love of harness racing has very much to do with the down to earth people he associates with.

“I go to Mohawk twice a week and I love the people who work at the facility,” he says. “Some of my best friends are the restaurant staff because I’ve known them for 10 or 15 years, and they have become friends. The one thing you’ll notice – if there’s a Rogers in the winner’s circle, there will be somebody from Mohawk staff customer service or wait staff in there with us. It’s the people in the game that are fantastic.”



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## Portuondo Changes Jobs



On May 4, Woodbine Entertainment announced that long-time on-air simulcast host, Jason Portuondo is leaving the organization to pursue a new opportunity. Jason's last broadcast show will be on June 26, 2022.

"I'm going to be a racing official," says Portuondo, who has been involved in horse racing since 1985 when he was a groom on the backstretch. He eventually joined Woodbine Entertainment's coverage of Thoroughbred racing in 1999 before moving to Sportsnet in 2002. Porty would return to Woodbine in 2014 where he would be a main fixture in simulcast coverage for both Standardbred and Thoroughbred racing.

"Jason has been a big part of our racing product over the years and represented our brand, our sport, and our industry with professionalism, enthusiasm, and integrity," said Jim Lawson, CEO, Woodbine Entertainment. "Although we will certainly miss Porty, it's comforting to know he will remain in our industry, and we will all continue to see him around our racetracks. On behalf of our industry and our fans,

I would like to thank Jason for all of his contributions throughout his years at Woodbine and wish him good luck in his new endeavour."

To many, horse race broadcasting would seem to be a glamorous and exciting occupation, but Portuondo seems relieved about one aspect of it.

"I love broadcasting, but the handicapping is so time-consuming," he says. "Every time you come home, you open up the laptop to look at past performances, pedigrees, and replays, and sometimes it's just too much. As much as I love racing, this will give me a fresh look at it. I'll miss the broadcasting. I'll miss working with Jeff and Chad and Monique and Laura, but this is just going to be reinvigorating."

Historically, being a retired jockey has always been the typical way to get to the judges' booth. It makes sense. Who knows better what goes on in a race than someone who has been there? Portuondo was once an exercise rider, but we had to wonder, what qualifications does he bring to this new job?

"Just consider the amount of races I've watched over the years," he responds. "I've worked with all three breeds and I'm a bettor, so I understand the bettors' point of view, and I know what horse people want. I never rode professionally, but I have qualified horses, ridden babies. I have worked horses in the morning and, at one point, was going to be a quarter horse jockey. I've been coming at this from all different points of views and now I get a chance to put it all together into one nice little package. I won't let anyone involved in racing down."

The most challenging aspect for a racing official is determining when a horse should be disqualified. No matter what the decision, some people are certain to be angered. Portuondo agrees that for a horse to be taken down, an in-race infraction must be egregious and have

an obvious impact on the result.

"If it had no effect on the outcome of the race, I don't think we should change the finish," he says. "I really have to see something that's made an impact to take it down. Remember, we're dealing with a 1,000 pound animal and split-second decisions. Stuff happens out there and sometimes it's incidental. It's a lot to digest, but don't forget, there are three of us there and it will take two opinions to issue a disqualification."

In the past, the term for an authority at a thoroughbred race was "steward" and at the harness races, they were called "judges." Now those designated by the AGCO to make these important decisions are simply called "officials", and Portuondo is ready to be sent to wherever his judgement is deemed most appropriate.

"I could be at Georgian. I could be at Ajax, and I could be at Woodbine, as long as it's in this province," he says.

Like many horse-players, this writer suffers from a certain level of paranoia, especially when my horse hits the board and then there's an inquiry. I feel certain that somehow the guys peering over the finish line know what I've bet, and they factor that into their decision.

"Here's the beauty of being an official when the inquiry sign goes up," says Portuondo, obviously riffing on my unwarranted psychosis. "We quickly scan through all the tickets and see who purchased what different combinations and when we get to the letter 'G' and we see 'Gross' and observe that you had the 2-4 exactors, then we're going to take the 2 down. By the way, keep that between you and me."

Portuondo will probably need his bright sense of humour in his new position. His last day of broadcasting at Woodbine will be June 26.

## Reigning Queen's Plate Champion Conquers Belmont



Safe Conduct, the winner of the 2021 Queen's Plate found himself in a \$96,000 allowance race at Belmont on May 5. The 4-year-old colt was eligible for this mile and a 16<sup>th</sup> turf test which invited horses that had not won 4 times in their career. Safe Conduct's Plate win was his 3<sup>rd</sup> victory – he had gone winless in 4 subsequent tries.

The hardened New York bettors must have been unimpressed with a Queen's Plate winner in their midst, and they paid the price for that. Safe Conduct went off at 6-1 and got a terrific ride from Jose Lezcano. Safe Conduct was on top at the quarter and he and the 2-1 favourite, Forty Under (Dylan Davis), pulled away from 4 others for most of the race. After ¾ in 1:11.64 and a mile

in 1:34.78, Safe Conduct pulled away from a tiring Forty Under and hit the wire a length the best in 1:40.77, more than 2 seconds off the course record.

This was Safe Conduct's 4<sup>th</sup> win in his 12<sup>th</sup> try and he boosted his career earnings to \$700,464 (U.S.). He is trained by Phil Serpe and owned by WellSpring Stables, and he paid \$14.50 to win.





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## How Trainers Save Themselves From Grief With Stable Hub



No matter how large or small a piece one owns of a racehorse, there's a profound interest from all owners in the status of their investment. When's the next race? How are the workouts going? Has that problem been resolved? Who's driving? What level? For a trainer with multiple owners, the time spent on phone calls and e-mail can be overwhelming.

Enter this guy from New Zealand named Paul Court. He's produced an app called

Stable Hub designed to make a trainer's day more efficient. It provides the capability to communicate with all the owners, while saving valuable minutes and hours.

Court certainly comes to Canada with an impressive harness racing resume.

"Training standardbreds has been in my family – my grandfather and father," he says. "As soon as I left school, I trained in partnership with my dad. We trained a very good horse called Terror to Love. He won 3 New Zealand Cups and won almost \$3 million."

Harness racing is far more popular in New Zealand than it is in Ontario.

"There's as many as 30 harness tracks there," says Court. "Our population is around 4 million."

The creation of Stable Hub grew from Court's difficulties juggling his training requirements with his personal life.

"When I was training, I had a young family," he says. "I found that when I was finished working the horses, I was on the phone dealing with owners, keeping them happy, filling them in on the horse, and that can go well into the night. What makes it worse too, is if you've got multiple owners in one horse, you've got to have that same conversation time and time again and it sucks up a huge amount of your time. Hence, Stable Hub – very easy to use, and it's a huge time-saver."

The trainer downloads the app and creates an account. He/she puts in all the horses, then attach the owners of all horses with appropriate e-mails.

"To send an update. I'd select your horse and the app gives me the option of sending up to five photos, a minute long video, a minute-long audio, and a brief message," says Court. "It automatically goes to all the owners of that

horse, regardless of how many there are. It's not a group e-mail. It's all personalised. And every message comes with the trainer's branding, the logo, or the stable banner."

Court emphasizes that trainers will still have many reasons to talk one on one with the owners. Stable Hub simply maximizes an individual's ability to provide information and does so in much less time.

"If you've got owners that live far away and don't get to see the horses much, you're able to send photos or videos of the horses with just the click of a couple of buttons," he says. "They're going to be happy. And if they're happy, they're going to be more inclined to spend more money or have more horses with you."

Court is presently living in Orillia, thinking about getting his Ontario trainer's license. For the past few months, he's been assisting a local guy, helping him with his thoroughbreds.



Paul Court (2nd from right) with Graham Court (far left) driver Ricky May and owner Terry McDonald after Terro to Love won the New Zealand Cup



# 4,000 for McNair



The terrific career of harness driver Doug McNair reached another impressive level on Friday, April 16 at Mohawk Park. The 6<sup>th</sup> race was an \$18,000 pace, and when McNair delivered Julerica to the winner's circle, it was his 4,000<sup>th</sup> career victory.

Sent off as the even-money choice, Julerica was moved to the lead by McNair on the way to the half, and easily repelled rival Legal Bettor in the lane to collect the victory. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> win of 2022 for the 10-year-old gelding, and his 43<sup>rd</sup> in 194 career starts.

An O'Brien Award winning driver, McNair began his career in 2008 by winning his first career drive and has never looked back. Now in his 15<sup>th</sup> season of driving, McNair has surpassed \$1 million in earnings in every one of his 15 seasons. His career high for wins in a year is 518 in 2010, while his top season for earnings was \$6.5 million in 2017

# MacKenzie Hits 9,000



A landmark win for Paul MacKenzie

Paul MacKenzie has been steering horses since 1977 and on April 16, in race 7, he took the 4-year-old mare, Dilly Taryn to a front-running win in a \$9,300 pace at Flamboro. That gave MacKenzie his 9,000<sup>th</sup> win. MacKenzie has amassed some eye-popping numbers in his career – more than 64,500 drives and more than \$53 million in purses. This is even more remarkable because MacKenzie drives almost exclusively at the “B” tracks: Flamboro, Western Fair and Georgian Downs, with only occasional forays to Mohawk Park. MacKenzie has had

36 seasons in which he produced at least 100 wins. From 1996 through 2017 – a span of almost 22 years – he drove the winners of 6,656 races. That's an average of 303 a year. Dilly Taryn's win was his 5<sup>th</sup> in 53 tries and he paid \$5.40.

It didn't take MacKenzie long to start working his way to 10,000. Right after winning with Dilly Taryn, he guided the 11-year-old mare, TC Scandal to a win in Flamboro's 8<sup>th</sup> race, a \$7,100 pace. It was TC Scandal's 30<sup>th</sup> conquest in her 163<sup>rd</sup> race, and she paid \$8.10.



## AJAX DOWNS RACETRACK LIVE QUARTER HORSE RACING WEDNESDAYS, ONE SUNDAY A MONTH & THANKSGIVING MONDAY

Race days: ■ First Race: Summer Wednesdays at 1:30pm  
Sundays & Fall Wednesdays at 12:55pm

MAY						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

JUNE						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

JULY						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

AUGUST						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

SEPTEMBER						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

OCTOBER						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### Events For The Whole Family!

#### WEDNESDAY RACE DATES 2022

Wednesday  
May 11 & 18  
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday  
June 1, 8, 15 & 29  
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday  
July 6, 13, & 27  
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday  
August 3, 10, 17, & 31  
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday  
September 14, 21, 28  
12:55pm First Race

Wednesday  
October 5, 19, & 26  
12:55pm First Race

#### SUNDAY RACE DATES 2022

Sunday May 22  
Fan Appreciation Day  
12:55pm First Race

Sunday June 19  
Father's Day  
12:55pm First Race

Sunday July 17  
Craft Brewery Day  
12:55pm First Race

Sunday August 21  
Family Fun Day  
12:55pm First Race

Sunday September 4  
United Way Day  
12:55pm First Race

Monday October 10  
Pumpkin Day  
12:55pm First Race

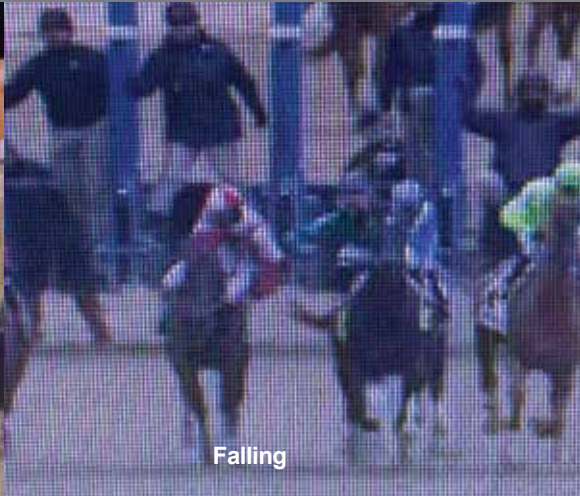


# ODDITIES & ENTITIES

It was the 4th race at Aqueduct on April 2, a maiden special weight at 6 furlongs. When the gates opened, Patient Capital hit the side of the stall and jockey Manny Franco was lunched out of the saddle. Right beside him, Eric Cancel on Smoke and Heat reacted instinctively, leaning into Franco and pushing him back into the saddle. Incredibly, safely back on the horse, Franco ended up winning with his saviour, Cancel coming in second. Someone is owed a dinner.



Falling



Falling



Caught!



Lennon, the daughter of Curtis MacDonald, filing a report for HRU about another three-bagger by her uncle James



## Thoroughbred obstacle course?

The 3rd race at Gulfstream on March 23 was a maiden optional claiming with a field of 8 going a mile and 70 yards on the grass. The winner was Z First (which is interesting enough) ridden by Javier Castellano, but it was Proton Pack, the last place finisher that had the best story to tell. Early in the race, under jockey Emisael Jaramillo, Proton Pack was forced to jump out of the way of one bird and could not avoid a second one moments later. According to the Equibase charts, Proton Pack leaped while grazing a goose heading into the first turn, then trampled an ill-fated flamingo. Wisely, Jaramillo elected not to persist with the traumatized horse.



## Classic photo of great jockeys from 1957:

Front row: Willie Shoemaker, Walter Blum, John Ruane, Manuel Ycaza

Back Row: William Hartack, John Sellers, Jonny Nichols, Esoquiel Dominquez, Donald Oldham, Steve Brooks.



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