

DOWN THE STRETCH

CANADA'S MOST INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING HORSE RACING NEWSPAPER

Scott Zeron sweeps at Mohawk

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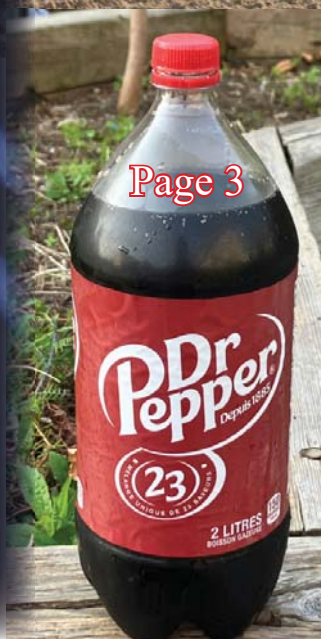
Vitality in the Prince of Wales

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Woodbine's new Homestretch Bar and Suites

We caught CEO Michael Copeland drinking on the job!



Down The Stretch was invited to the opening of the Homestretch Bar and Suites, a revitalized section in the Woodbine grandstand offering patrons a great view of the finish line, with the last furlong of the grass course right under their noses.

Beer and food were abundant as Woodbine CEO Michael Copeland declared the new amenities another benefit to the racing fan.

"This is a new space we've created right at trackside, right by the E.P. Taylor Turf course so that people can come and have great food and great drinks right by the action," said Copeland. "The way that people are engaging in sports is to mix the viewing with the socializing, and I can't think of any better place to do that than right here."

We wondered if this was an investment designed to bring more affluent players to the track.

"I don't think so," responded Copeland. "This is an affordable place to be. When people come out, they expect to have a bite to eat and a drink. It's really for people who want to be social, get some sunshine and be 20 feet away from the thoroughbreds as they pound down the stretch."

Since the Homestretch Bar is so close to the E.P. Taylor grass, Copeland was asked to consider what Edward Plunket Taylor, the man who built Woodbine in 1956, would think about all the changes at his track.

"I think he would love it," said Copeland. "I never had the good fortune to meet E.P. Taylor, but I think the thing that all of the racing icons that preceded us had in common was they wanted people to love the sport as much as they did. What we're doing is finding new ways to help fans to fall in love with it. This is the way you do it – by bringing it to people in a way they want to spend their time. It makes for an unbelievable afternoon or evening."

We've printed the menu for you to peruse and decide if the price is right. I can tell you that the foot long Wagyu hot dog and the pork tacos are highly recommended, and since I attended this event a few days after plunging \$36 at the CNE on chicken wings and soggy fries, this fits the budget much better.



Homestretch

BAR & SUITES



THE EDITOR GUZZLES THE FACTS



Pari-mutuel wagering is the Dr. Pepper of gambling – so misunderstood.

Here's something weird to ask. How does a racetrack make money?

Well, a little is made through food and beverage, but almost all of it is raked in through a share of the betting.

A racetrack's product is horse racing, but its business model – *the way it generates income* – is through its betting.

But racetracks never promote their wagering.

Imagine if McDonalds never advertised how good their hamburgers were, or if General Motors never told us how safe, economical and fast their cars were.

There's some disagreement about the origin of the word "pari-mutuel."

Some say it comes from the phrase "Paris Mutuels," indicating that it was horse racing in France that first created a system where the bettors created the odds through their wagering.

The more popular opinion is that pari-mutuel comes from the French "pari" which means "gamble," and "mutuel" which means "common interest." All the people at the track have a common interest in the payoffs because they have all bet into the same pool (or pools).

Old horse players (like me) worship pari-mutuel wagering. When you bet a game on-line, or buy a lottery ticket or enter a casino, you will find yourself betting against a dictatorship, because the odds have already been *dictated*. You're playing against Amin and Gaddafi. The racetrack is the definitive example of democracy in sports – every payout is determined by the people. The track is

just the holder of the cash.

As much as I revere pari-mutuel betting, there are perils and occasional mousetraps ready to snap as you go for



the cheese. Online sports houses rarely change the odds. When you bet at 2-1, that's what you get. But in this computerized age, the nerds at their keyboards can funnel in huge bets just before the gates open; you bet at 5-1, then suddenly see your horse at 7-5.

Then there's the "lemmings to the sea" problem. Many gamblers get swayed when they see one horse getting

all the play. "It must be a sure thing," they surmise, and accordingly, bet with the crowd. There are examples in this issue of that turning out badly. In our report on the Canadian Trotting Classic (page 10), we note that Highland Kismet broke stride and took down thousands of dollars of the bettors' cash. And when Princess Mayfair faltered at Fort Erie on September 17 (page 12), those who gambled at 1-4 were crushed. But that wasn't so for those who took a shot on Gambler's Pose who won and paid \$207.20, the largest win price registered in North America thoroughbred racing in 2024.

We could almost have made a full-length theme of heavy favourites flopping. On September 19, 2 of Casie Coleman's pacers went off at prohibitive odds in Little Brown Jug heats (page 10). At 2-5, Nijinsky staggered home last in the first elimination and, in the next runoff, Legendary Hanover at 1-5 could do no better than 3rd.

And, as befits the theme of this editorial, I am posting the odds of your enjoyment for other stories or moments in this issue: (odds sponsored by Dr. Pepper)

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Vitality in the Prince of Wales



Michael Burns Photo

The 89th Prince of Wales Stakes at Fort Erie on September 10 offered a challenge to the bettors. Of the 10 entered, 5 had run in the King's Plate, though the winner, Caitlinhergrtness and the 2nd place horse, My Boy Prince did not come to the border track. Midnight Mascot, 3rd in the Plate was in the field, as were Pierre (4th), Jokestar (5th), Vitality (6th) and Essex Serpent (10th). Trainer Kevin Attard had 4 in the Prince of Wales, and Mark Casse sent out a pair, but none of those 6 would win.

Attard's filly, Airosa, inspired by the other filly, Caitlinhergrtness, gave a significant effort on the front end for Rafael Hernandez. After good fractions of



Michael Burns Photo

1:11.40 and 1:36.40, that pair looked to go all the way in the mile and $\frac{3}{16}$ th race. As the field turned for home, the lukewarm 3-1 choice, Essex Serpent was fully cooked and going backwards to a second straight 10th place finish, and the 2nd choice, Midnight Mascot (7-2) was flailing away in 7th. With a 16th of a mile to go, it was Airosa still in the lead, but Vitality and Jose Campos were surging after a dynamic 6-wide move into the stretch. Fifty yards from the wire, Vitality overtook Airosa and continued his momentum to win by 4 lengths in 1:55.72.

Vitality had entered the race with just one win – that one in maiden Special Weight company, but obviously trainer Harold Ladouceur had the gelding ready. This was significant because Ladouceur is a member of the Moosomin and Kikino Métis settlement and as such, became the first Indigenous trainer to win this race. Last year, Ladouceur was inducted into the Canadian Indigenous Sports Hall of Fame.

"I'm so proud to be Indigenous," said Ladouceur, "I'm just a kid from tiny little Lac la Biche, but I feel like I've joined a very elite group, and to do that as an Indigenous man, it feels amazing."

The winning jockey, Jose Campos gave Ladouceur appropriate credit for the horse's winning effort.

"This is a nice horse," said Campos. "So going in, I just listened to everything the trainer told me and tried to keep that in mind."

Vitality improved his record to 2 wins from 9 races and paid \$20.10.

Fort Erie suits were pleased with the wagering on Prince of Wales day. The handle for the 2nd leg of the Canadian Triple Crown exceeded \$700,000 and the \$3.03 million pushed through for the whole card represents the 2nd highest handle in Prince of Wales history.

Travis Kelce, Taylor Swift, and a Woodbine Horse

There was a little extra buzz at Woodbine on August 31. The Toronto Cup Stakes is hardly a "major" race on the Canadian calendar. It's a mile on the grass for 3-year-olds and the \$125,000 purse, while attractive is just slightly more than many allowance and maiden special weight races.

However, the even money favourite in this year's Toronto Cup was Swift Delivery, trained by Mark Casse. Earlier in the week, it was revealed that Kansas City Chiefs' tight end, Travis Kelce

thoroughbred racing. He was an obvious attendee at the 2024 Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, and we are led to believe he bet heavily. The proof is from a quote he gave after the closest finish in the 150-year history of the Run for the Roses. Mystik Dan at 18-1, ridden by Brian Hernandez won a by nose over the 9-2 favourite, Sierra Leone who was just a nose better than 7-1 shot, Forever Young. After the race, Kelce was proclaiming,

"I was a nose away from winning that fucking thing! I almost won \$100,000 off a fucking Japanese horse in the Kentucky Derby!"

According to some evidence, Kelce bet exactors on Sierra Leone and the Japanese runner, Forever Young. Had those two run 1st and 2nd, that might have produced a \$75 exactor which suggests Kelce bet about \$25,000 each way on that combination. Not to worry, he makes about \$17 million per season with the two-time defending Super Bowl champions.

Despite that agonizing loss, Kelce's interest in the thoroughbred game led him to approach Team Valor and offer to buy into the 3-year-old, Swift Delivery. That's a pretty good piece of handicapping for a horse racing rookie. Swift Delivery went winless in his first 6 races, but on June 23, in a \$111,300 maiden special weight at a mile and a 16th at Woodbine, he stunned all who were watching by rallying from 5th down the backstretch for jockey Patrick Husbands, passing rivals as if they were standing still and ripping through the stretch to win by over 16 lengths. To prove that was no fluke, 27 days later, Swift Delivery and Husbands crushed 10 others in a \$110,700 allowance race at a mile and a 16th on the grass.

That brings us to the Toronto Cup and just like she did for the NFL, Taylor Swift is doing something similar for horse racing.

Ok, maybe not the same dynamic impact, but that Saturday card at Woodbine seemed to have more fans in attendance, and the \$700,000 wagered on the race was more than was bet on any of the 5 Stakes offered at this track 6 days earlier.

Swift Delivery went off at even money and was not enthralled with the yielding turf. Husbands had him last of 6 halfway through the race as Babbo (Eswan Flores) led the pack through fast fractions of :47.02 and 1:10.99. As Babbo retreated, it was Piper's Factor under Sofia Vives surging to the lead with Swift Delivery starting to get interested while passing tiring rivals. In the stretch, however, Swift Delivery could not catch Piper's Factor who won by almost 2 lengths in 1:36.09. Piper's Factor is trained by Katerina Vassilieva and his owner is Chiefswood Stables. The 3-year-old colt won for the 3rd time in his 10th race and paid \$16.60. This was Sofia Vives' 7th Stakes win at Woodbine this year – an impressive figure for an apprentice rider.

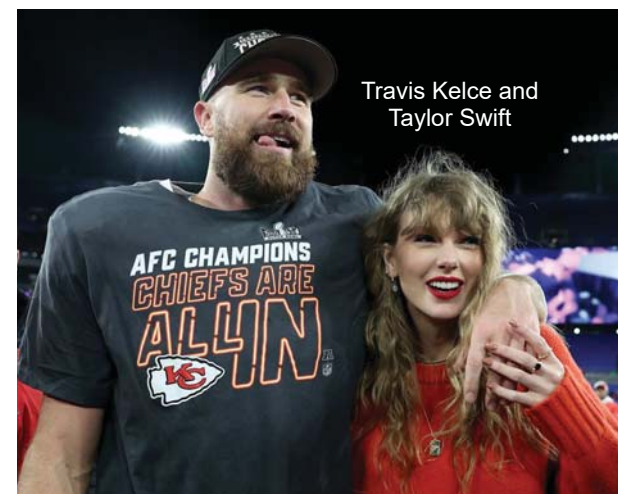


Michael Burns Photo

had purchased a share of the horse from Gary Barber and Team Valor International.

It is strictly coincidental that Kelce is Taylor Swift's boyfriend, and the horse is named Swift Delivery. We're told that Swift Delivery was not named after the internationally famous superstar. Swift Delivery's sire was named Not This Time, which perhaps lent itself to the foal's name.

Kelce appears to have recently developed a passion for horse racing.



Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift

Turf Champions Day:

With spectacular late summer weather blessing Woodbine on September 14, Turf Champions Day produced some great racing, memorable story lines, and healthy wagering. All 4 of the grass races were “Win and You’re In” for the Breeders’ Stakes and there were two other Stakes races on the card that produced spirited talking points.

\$601,000 Natalma Stakes:



And One More Time

Michael Burns Photo

A field of eleven 2-year-old fillies went a mile on the turf, and for those who understand that trainer Mark Casse always has his animals ready for the big races, there were cashable tickets. And One More Time, ridden brightly by Rafael Hernandez split two stablemates late to win by a neck in 1:33.90. In 2nd place was Vixen (John Velazquez) and in 3rd, Nitrogen (Sahin Civaci). All 3 of those fillies are trained by Casse and none of them were favoured. And One More Time is owned by Live Oak Plantation and with her 2nd win in 3 tries, she paid \$35.40. The all-Casse exactor returned \$86.25 for a \$1 bet and a \$1 all-Casse tri was worth over \$1,100.

\$900,000 E.P. Taylor Stakes:



Full Count Felicia

Michael Burns Photo

That much money and only 5 entered in this mile and a quarter on the grass for fillies and mares. Welcomed back from Del Mar was Kazushi Kimura. Kimura gunned Full Count Felicia to the lead and had the grandstand buzzing by opening up 18 lengths down the backstretch. If the other 4 thought that Full Count Felicia would be taking a 3rd strike and stopping badly, it was poor strategy – the 5-year-old mare scampered to the wire a very relaxed 3

½ lengths ahead of a late moving Moira. The time was excellent – 1:59.29, merely .41 off the course record. Kevin Attard trains and Gold Squares LLC owns. Full Count Felicia improved to 7 for 18 and paid \$17.60.

\$500,000 Summer Stakes:



New Century

Michael Burns Photo

Two-year-old colts and geldings went a mile on the turf, and jockey Oisin Murphy rallied New Century from 8th at the half to first by a widening length in 1:32.90. Andrew Balding is the trainer for Qatar Racing. New Century may have been born 21 years too late, but his 3 for 5 record was worth waiting for. He paid \$8.10.

\$1,200,000 Woodbine Mile:



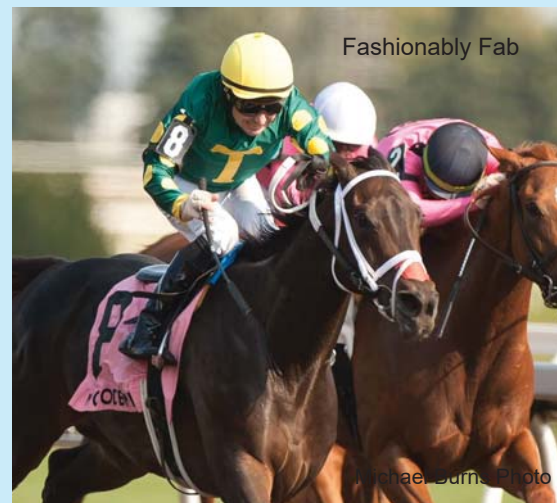
Win for the Money

Michael Burns Photo

How many examples have we had in 2024 of Mark Casse/Patrick Husbands horses winning stakes races at a price? Well, here’s another. Husbands gave a master class ride on Win for the Money, bidding time in the back of the field early in this mile race, then scooting up the inside all the way down the stretch to surge to the lead and win by 1 ½ lengths in 1:32.11, just .38 off the track record. This was another win for Live Oak Plantation and the \$29.30 win ticket is remarkable for a horse that is now 5 for 16, not to mention its rider/trainer connections. This was Casse’s 24th Stakes win this year at Woodbine, and it was Husbands’ 13th Stakes winning ride.

\$183,000 Ontario Matron Stakes:

Although the purse money was modest by comparison, this mile and 1/16th race on the Tapeta for fillies and mares



Fashionably Fab

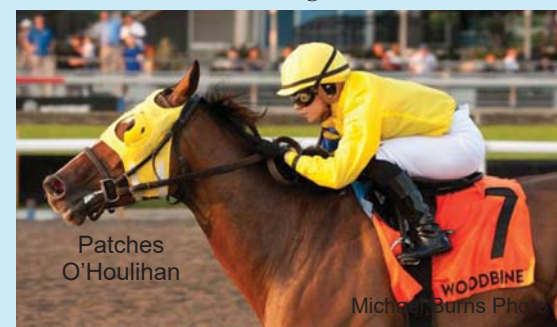
Michael Burns Photo

had the best story line of the day. A huge field of 14 contested this one, and the 3-1 choice, Sabatini (John Velazquez) never factored, tiring late in the game to finish 9th. It was Fashionably Fab, 12th halfway through the race under David Moran, who had the best stretch kick, passing rivals aggressively and hitting the finish line a length the best in 1:45.84. The trainer is Kevin Attard. Fashionably Fab is owned by Terra Racing Stable. The regular rider for the 5-year-old mare is Pietro Moran, who in June won the Belle Mahone Stakes with her. But Pietro suffered a fall on Prince of Wales day in Fort Erie and required surgery to fuse a damaged vertebra. Trainer Attard made the generous call to put his dad, David, on the horse.

“I was riding this for Pietro,” said an emotional Moran in the winner’s circle. “He called me before the race, told me exactly how to ride the horse, so it was basically him riding. I was just there to steer.”

Fashionably Fab won for the 9th time in her 15th race and paid \$15.80.

\$180,000 Vigil Stakes:



Patches O’Houlihan

Michael Burns Photo

The only favourite to win from the 6 Stakes races on this day was the 4-year-old Patches O’Houlihan. He faced 6 others in the 6-furlong dash, and they never really had a chance. Sofia Vives had Patches in front from the moment the gates opened, cut out intimidating fractions of :44.86 and :56.56 and was never threatened down to the finish line, winning by 1 ¾ lengths in the sharp time of 1:08.88. This was the 10th win in just 12 races for Patches O’Houlihan who is owned by Frank Di Giulio Jr. and trained by Robert Tiller. The win ticket was \$3.60.

Woodbine Stakes

August 25, \$100,000 Algoma Stakes:



Just Follow Me

Michael Burns Photos

This was for 3-year-old fillies, and 7 of them went 7 furlongs. Just Follow Me did it the fastest as Emma-Jayne Wilson timed it perfectly, rallying the daughter of Old Forrester from last at the half to a win by $\frac{3}{4}$ of a length in 1:24.70. Just Follow Me won for the 3rd time in 7 tries for trainer Bill Tharrenos and owner Mike Coll. The win ticket was a nice \$20.10.

\$100,000 Elgin Stakes:



Junior Hot Shot

Michael Burns Photos

The 3-year-old -boys went 7 furlongs and it was Junior Hot Shot under Justin Stein getting the better of 7 others. Stein had Junior Hot Shot in 2nd place until they turned for home, when the 3-year-old colt ripped away from his rivals and made it comfortably to the wire, best by almost a length in 1:24.35. Male horses feeling sad about a filly winning the King's Plate can rejoice that Junior Hot shot ran the distance faster than Just Follow Me. Junior Hot Shot is trained by John Ross and owned by T and T Stable. The winning bettors got back \$6.90.

\$150,000 Vice Regent Stakes:



Outlaw Kid

Michael Burns Photos

A field of 7 went 5 furlongs on the inner turf. The 6-5 favourite, Outlaw Kid, ridden by Sahin Civaci, was well rated in 4th after 3 furlongs, but was moving nicely 4-wide into the turn and gained the lead at the 16th pole and won by over 2 lengths in :55.83, just .40 off the course record. Outlaw Kid is trained by George Weaver and owned by R.A. Hill Stable and SGV Thoroughbreds. This was his 6th win in 16 races and he paid \$4.50.

\$201,000 Muskoka Stakes:

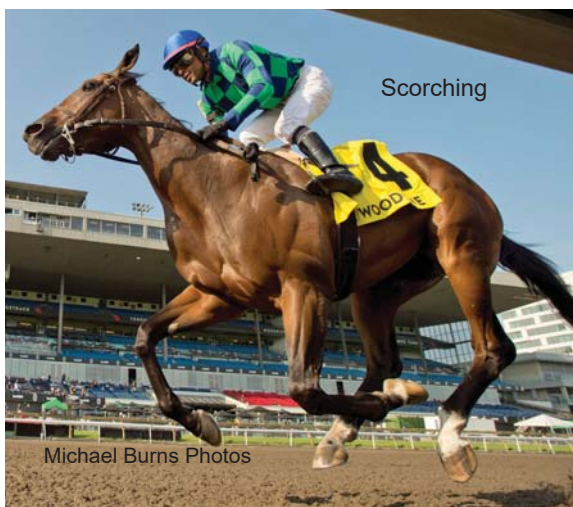


Souper Supreme

Michael Burns Photos

There were ten 2-year-old fillies trying 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs, and what would a Stakes filled Sunday be without Patrick Husbands and Mark Casse winning something? Husbands gave Souper Supreme an aggressive ride, tasking the filly straight to the top, getting reasonable fractions of :46.63 and 1:11.58 and simply galloping away in the stretch to win by 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ lengths in 1:18.20. Souper Supreme won for the 2nd time in 3 tries. She is owned by Michale Langlois and Gary Barber. This was the 42nd Stakes race of the year at Woodbine and the 23rd time that Casse has won. It was Patrick Husbands' 12th Stakes victory at Woodbine this year, the most of all jockeys.

\$201,500 Simcoe Stakes:



Scorching

Michael Burns Photos

A field of 11 travelled 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs in this one, and Patrick Husbands, believing that Scorching was the best, put the 2-year-old on the lead early and dared the rest of the field to catch up. Through strong fractions of :45.63 and 1:10.80, Scorching was not challenged as he won by 5 in 1:17.57. Following his debut 2nd place finish in a maiden special weight, Scorching won for trainer John Charalambous and owner Paul Braverman and Timothy Pinch. The win price was \$6.

August 31, \$150,000 Toronto Cup:

Only six 3-year-olds lined up for this one at a mile on the turf and Piper's Factor got a great ride from Sofia Vives.



Piper's Factor

Michael Burns Photos

Vives had her colt close for the first half, began to circle rivals as the gang turned for home. Down to the wire, Piper's Factor was too good, winning by almost 2 lengths in 1:36.09. Katarina Vassilieva trains for Cheifswood Stables and Piper's Factor won for the 3rd time in his 10th race and paid \$16.60.

September 7, \$100,000 Niagara Stakes:

It was a patient Pietro Moran who was responsible for the win by Lac Macaza in this mile and a quarter test



Lac Macaza

Michael Burns Photos

on the E.P. Taylor Turf. Through 6 furlongs, Eyes on the King (Patrick Husbands) and Stone Age (Leo Salles) were having their own private party some 8 lengths ahead of Lac Macaza who was galloping easily in 3rd. When the two front-runners collapsed just before the field turned for home, Lac Macaza surged to the front and maintained a comfortable lead all the way to the wire, winning by almost 2 lengths in 2:01.10. Lac Macaza is trained by Julia Carey for Goldie Stables and Discovery Racing. The 5-year-old gelding won for the 7th time in 24 races. Named for a small village in Quebec's Laurentian Mountains, Lac Macaza paid \$11.90.

September 21, \$100,000 Zadracarta Stakes:



Owen's Tour Guide

Michael Burns Photos

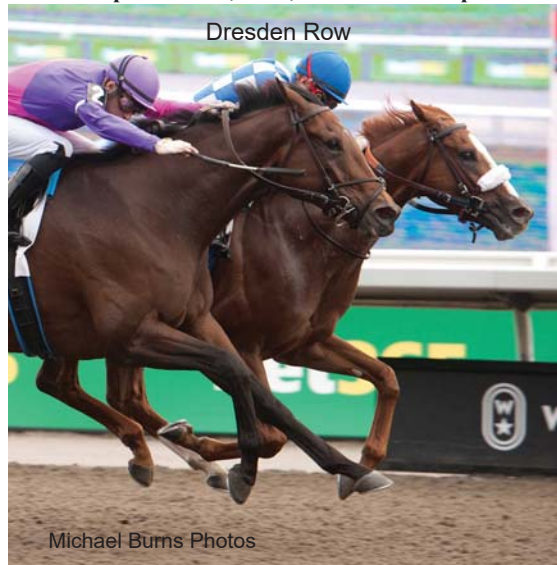
Seven fillies and mares went 5 furlongs on the inner turf, and it was a patient Jose Campos who rated Owen's Tour Guide perfectly. The pair watched things develop from 6th early as Cara Cara (Eswan Flores) and Olivia Rose (Rafael Hernandez) duelled to the half in :45.06. As the leaders started to falter, Owen's Tour Guide came off the hedge, gained momentum with a 4-wide move into the stretch and made it to the wire the best in :57.25. Willie Armata is the winning trainer for Tequesta Stable. Owen's Tour Guide is a 6-year-old mare winning for the 7th time in her 37th race and she paid \$16.70. Jockey Campos added another Stakes victory to the Prince of Wales he captured earlier in the month with Vitality at Fort Erie.

September 29, \$400,000 Breeders' Stakes:



Only one horse – Jokestar – in the 7-horse field for the 3rd leg of the Canadian Triple Crown had run in all 3 races. Hurricane Clair (Sahin Civaci) had performed in each leg of the fillies' Triple Tiara (3rd in the Oaks, 2nd in the Bison City and 1st in the Wonder Where) and the bettors figured she was much the best, pounding her down to 4-5. That didn't work out too well. Thor's Cause (Jeffrey Alderson) led for the first mile of this 1 ½ mile turf test, with Hurricane Clair close. As both of those tired badly, a well-rated Roscar (Justin Stein) found his best stride in the drive for home. Roscar benefitted from an efficient inside ride from Stein and burst away late in the stretch to win by 1 ½ lengths in 2:34.72. Rachel Halden trains for Chiefswood Stables. Roscar's only other win was in maiden special weight company. He improved to 2 for 7 and paid \$8.50.

September 30, \$135,000 Durham Cup:



There were just 5 horses in this mile and a 16th race. Were the others afraid of Paramount Prince? The 2023 King's Plate Champion came in off 2 straight Stakes wins this year – the Dominion Day and the Seagram. Accordingly, Paramount Prince left the gate at 3-5. It turns out the other 4 had no fear. Ryan Munger gave the 3-year-old Dresden Row a perfectly rated ride, galloping easily in 3rd for the first 6 furlongs, coming outside as they turned for home, then outlasting a very game Ron's Gizmo (Sahin Civaci) to win by a head in 1:42.04. Paramount Prince led most of the way, but tired badly late to finish last of 5. Lorne Richards is the winning trainer for True North Stable and Bloom Racing Stable. Dresden Row, the youngest horse in the field paid \$22.50.

October 5, \$210,000 Algonquin Stakes:



This was the first of 4 Graded Stakes races this day at Woodbine. It was 5 furlongs on the turf featuring a field of 8. Sahin Civaci was aboard Mi Bago, and he rallied the colt from 5th early to victory by a neck. This was Mark Casse's 26th training Stakes win at Woodbine in 2024. Casse also trained the runner-up, Dare to Breeze (Vincent Cheminaud) and the 3rd horse, Bullet (Patrick Husbands) is also trained by Casse. Mi Bago, owned by Gary Barber has won 2 of 3 and he paid \$13.80.

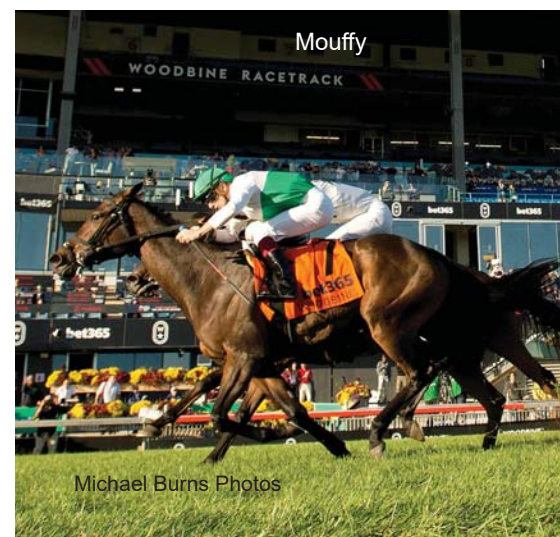
\$212,500 Singpiel Stakes:



A field of 13 went a mile and 3/8th on the lawn and the favourite, Truly Quality was 12th after a mile. Jockey Vincent Cheminaud wasn't worried – he asked, and the 4-year-old responded, passing 11 rivals from the top of

the stretch and hitting the wire ¾ of a length the best in 2:17.47. Truly Quality is trained by Jonathan Thomas and owned by Augustin Stable. With his 4th win in 12 tries, he paid \$5.70.

\$242,000 Dance Smartly Stakes:



This Grade 2 was for fillies and mares, and it attracted 12 to go a mile and a 16th on the lawn. Again, a deep closer prevailed as Mouffy erupted from 11th after 6 furlongs, sizzled past all the others in the stretch and won by a head in 1:47.27. This gave Cheminaud, Thomas and Augustin Stable the double. Mouffy won for the 6th time in 14 races and paid \$30.80.

\$250,000 Nearctic Stakes:



The question here was: "Could Patches O'Houlihan, who is virtually unbeatable on the Tapeta, beat a powerful field on the grass?" The answer was emphatic – Sofia Vives gunned Patches to the lead and though he drifted wide in the stretch, he still got to the wire more than a length the best in 1:09.49. This was an 11th win in 13 races for Patches O'Houlihan. Trainer Bob Tiller admitted after the race that he tried to talk owner Frank Di Giulio into scratching Patches from the race. Fortunately, Di Giulio prevailed as did Patches O'Houlihan, who paid \$6.30.

Mohawk's Grand Circuit Night:

On Saturday, September 7, there were 6 Grand Circuit stakes races at Mohawk – 4 divisions of the Champlain and 2 of the Simcoe. If the longshot bettors were looking for life-changing payouts, they were bitterly disappointed, as favourites and 2nd choices got the job done.

\$83,622 Champlain Stakes for 2-Year-Old Pacing Fillies:



Perfectly Chic and Bob McClure went postward as the 1-2 favourite, but James MacDonald tracked that one from 2nd, and in the stretch came out with Nice Buns. In the final 50 yards, Nice Buns overhauled Perfectly Chic to win by a head in 1:53.3. Tony Beaton trains this one for Casie Coleman and Dumain Haven Farm. Nice Buns won for the 2nd time in 3 career races and returned \$5.70.

\$81,642 Champlain Stakes for 2-Year-Old Pacing Colts and Geldings:



Sterling Choice, the peoples' choice at even money pulled James MacDonald to the front from post 6 and led until mid-stretch when D A Love Boat (Tyler Jones) went by and appeared to be the winner. However, Sterling Choice clawed back along the inside as D A Love Boat flattened out. Sterling Choice was the best at the wire by a long head in 1:52.1. The winning trainer is Blake MacIntosh who shares the 2-year-old colt with Gilles Landry, and Ozzie and Tammy Lynn MacKay. This was a maiden breaking win for Sterling Choice in his 8th race and he paid \$4.20.

\$82,643 Champlain Stakes (2nd Division) for 2-Year-Old Colts and Geldings:



Century Lucifer (James MacDonald) at \$1.35 and Boxer Seelster (Trevor Henry) at \$1.25 took most of the money and the two hooked up as the field turned for home. Late in the lane, Boxer Seelster put away Century Lucifer as 65-1 shot, Twin B Courageous (Bob McClure) came late for 2nd. Boxer Seelster scored for trainer Scott McEneny who shares the horse with Aristi Varsakis, Martwest Racing and Cantucky Farm. Boxer Seelster won for the 3rd time in 6 tries and paid \$4.50.

\$83,623 Champlain Stakes (2nd Division) for 2-Year-Old Fillies:



Can't See Me and Bob McClure went off as the 2nd favourite at 5-2, and unlike her name, she could be easily seen on the lead right from the start. Can't See Me cut out very relaxed fractions of :29.1, :58.1 and 1:26.2, and with 5 rivals behind sedated by the slow fractions, Can't See Me scampered home with a :26.4 final quarter for the easy 2-length win in 1:53.1. Trainer Sean Steacy sent out Can't See Me for Hudson Standardbreds. The filly won for the 3rd time in 5 races and paid \$7.60.

\$167,000 Simcoe Stakes for 3-Year-Old Colts and Geldings:



This was the glamour race of the night, pitting Meadowlands Pace and Cane Pace Champion Legendary Hanover against North America Cup winner, Nijinsky, and the pair put on a great show for the crowd. Legendary Hanover and James MacDonald went off at 1-2 and led by 2 lengths at the top of the stretch. But Louis-Philippe Roy had a ton of horse, and when he right-lined in the final 8th, Nijinsky powered past and won by over a length in 1:48.4. Both Nijinsky and Legendary Hanover are trained by Tony Beaton. The winner is owned by West Wins Stable, John Fielding and Mark Dumain. Here's a question – how does a horse that wins for the 9th time in 10 races in 2024 pay \$7.70 to win?

\$152,000 Simcoe Stakes for 2-Year-Old Fillies:



The theme of low-priced winners continued in this heat. Doug McNair put Pass Line (3-2) on the lead early and set appropriate fractions of :28.2, :56.3 and 1:24. Odds On Platinum (Sylvain Filion) was the even-money choice, but he could not catch the leader in the stretch as Pass Line prevailed by a comfortable length in 1:51. Dave Menary trains for Burke Racing Stable and Weaver Buscemi. Pass Line improved to 12 for 25 in her career and she paid \$5.10.

Military Appreciation Day

Saturday, September 21 at Woodbine was Heroes and Horses Military Appreciation Day. And the track showed its appreciation for all the enlisted guests by offering an irresistible hunch. The 1st race was a mile and 16th on the inner turf with a purse of \$28,600. There were 6 in the field, all of whom could be claimed for \$7,500, but how could anyone in uniform resist betting on # 5, Good Soldier? That's as good a hunch as you will ever get and Keveh Nicholls rode the 5-year-old gelding with military precision, rallying from 5th around the far turn and parlaying a 5-wide move into the stretch into victory by a neck. Good Soldier is owned and trained by Andrew

Smith and this was the horse's 2nd win in 26 starts. He paid \$12.70





RACETRACK HUMOUR

Perry & Mooch



The tale of the 3 Gambling Pigs

This little pig bet only on favourites



This little pig bet only on longshots



This little pig bet only on the Maple Leafs and Blue Jays to Lose



Dexter Likes to get it Dunn

Dexter Got It Dunn:

On September 21, Mohawk Park offered 5 lucrative Stakes races with a total of \$3,592,000 in purses, and New Zealand's Dexter Dunn was responsible for much of that cash getting into his owners' bankrolls.

\$347,000 Elegant Image:

Dunn provided a sensational piece of driving in this



Dexter Dunn

New Image Media Photo

race for 3-year-old trotting fillies as he brought French Champagne up the inside in the stretch with maybe 2 inches to spare on either side. French Champagne got there by a head in 1:52.1. She is trained by Åke Svanstedt and owned by Marvin Katz and Al Libfeld. A good bottle



French Champagne

New Image Media Photo

of French Champagne costs about \$50, so \$10 to win on French Champagne who paid \$12.40 to win just might pop the cork for you.

\$713,000 Canadian Trotting Classic:



Amazing Catch

New Image Media Photo

Highland Kismet was bet down to .70, but when that one broke stride just past the half, it was game on for the longshots. Dunn provided another sensational inside driver with Amazing Catch who overcame post 10, saved all the room in the stretch and won by an expanding length in 1:51.4. This gave Åke Svanstedt his 2nd training win of the night. The owners are Al Libfeld, Marvin and Lynn Katz, and Sam Goldband. Amazing Catch improved to 3 for 16 and paid \$41.30.

\$1,000,000 Mohawk Million:



Maryland

New Image Media Photo

Dunn completed his heroic night with a relatively routine victory in the bike behind Maryland in this annual race for 2-year-old trotters. Dunn rated Maryland patiently and picked up cover around the far turn. Maryland was full of trot in the final 3/8^{ths}, steamrolling past rivals and finding the wire an expanding 3 lengths the best in 1:52.3. The trainer is Marcus Melander, and the owners are Courant Inc., PCW

Racing and Lane Stud East. Maryland improved to 4 for 7 and pushed his earnings past a million dollars, while paying just \$3.90.

\$1,000,000 Metro Pace:



Fallout

New Image Media Photo

Wherever stallion Captain Treacherous was that night, he was triple proud. Tim Tetrick gave Fallout a perfectly timed drive to win this 7-figure race for 2-year-olds in 1:49.1. Fallout is a son of Captain Treacherous, as are Prince Hall Hanover and Captain Optimistic, the 2nd and 3rd place horses. Tony Alagna is the trainer, and the owners are Robert LeBlanc, Pryde Stables and Caviart Farms. Fallout paid \$5.30.

\$532,000 She's a Great Lady:

Chantilly entered this heat for 2-year-old pacing fillies with a perfect 6 for 6 record and accordingly was pounded



Chantilly

New Image Media Photo

down to 1-4. That proved to be a risk-free investment from the gamblers as James MacDonald got cover for his filly and she was much the best down the lane, pacing away to win by over 3 lengths in 1:50.2. Now 7 for 7, Chantilly is trained by Nick Gallucci for Millar Farms and she paid \$2.50.

The Little Brown Jug: (Canada Settled for Smaller Cheques)



Captain Albano

© GONRAD

It was a sumptuous buffet of harness racing at the Delaware Fair Grounds on September 18 and 19. There were 22 races on Jugette Wednesday, and 21 on Little Brown Jug Thursday. If trainer Tony Beaton and owner Casie Coleman were very optimistic about their chances in the Jug, they had a right to be. In the first elimination, they sent out Nijinsky, this year's North America Cup champion and a winner of 9 of his last 10 races. In the second heat, Beaton and Coleman had Legendary Hanover, the Meadowlands Pace and Cane Pace winner. Nijinsky

was crunched down to 2-5 in race 17 on Thursday but looked uninterested early. After the first quarter, Louis-Philippe Roy had him in 3rd and briefly considered going to the outside but changed his mind. Captain Albano led from start to finish for Todd McCarthy, and Nijinsky tired badly to finish last of 6. With that off-the-board finish, some mentally impaired gamblers took an unpleasant bath – there was so much bet to show on Nijinsky, that his absence from the tote board resulted in inflated prices for the 3 horses that did come in – Captain Albano paid \$8.10 to win and \$6.10 to show. The 2nd and 3rd place horses paid \$6.50 and \$7.80 respectively for third.

Legendary Hanover was a prohibitive 1-5 in the second heat, but he was never a factor. Jody Jamieson put Captain's Quarters on the front end and controlled the race, hanging on by a head. Legendary Hanover came a little too late for James MacDonald to finish 3rd.

In the final, Captain Albano took most of the money, going off at 3-5. Todd McCarthy made an aggressive move out of 2nd down the backstretch just past the half to swallow up early leader Captain's Quarters en route to a convincing 3-length win over Mirage Hanover (Dexter Dunn) and a 3rd place Legendary Hanover.

This was the first Little Brown Jug for both the driver, Todd McCarthy and the trainer, Noel Daley. The win price was \$3.40.

Canadian interests picked up nice cheques the day before in the Jugette. Soft Shot had a perfect day at the plate, winning her elimination for David Miller and taking down the final with a 2-length win in 1:51.0. Soft Shot improved to 13 for 20 for trainer Jessica Roegner and paid \$5.80. The 2nd place filly, A Few Choice Words is trained by Blake MacIntosh and owned by Clancy Farms of Severn Ontario, and that result was worth \$175,676. Third place went to Odds on Platinum, trained by Dr. Ian Moore.

The 3rd place cheque was \$42,182.

Jose Campos is Climbing the Charts



With a couple of recent Stakes wins, jockey Jose Campos got our attention, but there was a perplexing mystery. We like to check out stats on Equibase, which is usually very reliable when one wishes to see a rider's lifetime stats. But when searching the name, Jose Campos, all it shows is two races from 2007 – one at Santa Rosa and one at Bay Meadows. Both were in California, then nothing shows until 2022 when he started riding in the fall at Woodbine. Fifteen years out of the saddle – can that be right?

“No,” says Campos flashing his charismatic smile. “I was riding when I was an apprentice in California, and I think Equibase made a mistake with my name. I won 138 races in California. Then I went to Mexico for a couple of years. In 2014, I went to France, then back to Mexico. Then I went to Saudi Arabia from 2016 to 2018.

So now we wondered, why did the world traveler settle on Woodbine?

“I had two choices,” he said. “Saudi Arabia again or Woodbine. Saudi Arabia is a nice place, but I wanted to bring my family with me. That would have been more difficult in Saudi Arabia, so I made the decision to come to Canada.”

Campos has a wife, Giovanna and 3 young children. He began riding at Woodbine in October 2022. His first win in Canada came with his 13th ride, on a 5-year-old mare named Ima Daredevil, trained by Zeljko Krmar. Campos finished 2022 with 16 wins from 192 assignments.

He was doing much better in 2023 with 31 wins from his first 289 horses – that's a very good strike rate of 11% – but then he had the all too typical jockey experience.

I had an accident on September 14, and I lost all my good horses,” he says with a shrug.

It's the cruelly bizarre reality of professional riders. If you can't get on the horse, someone else will. After almost 2 months out of action, Campos came back and was able to win just 7 of his next 140 bookings, ending the year a frustrating 0 for 27.

But Campos is a good rider, and the proof jumped out at us during a great 4-week span in late summer.

On August 23, he rode Cairo Caper to victory at 5-1 in the \$180,000 Soaring Free Stakes. At 6 ½ furlongs, Campos rallied the 2-year-old from 3rd at the head of the stretch, sweeping past all the favourites to win by ¾ of a length in 1:16.25 for trainer Nathan Squires.

On September 10, Campos won the Prince of Wales Stakes at Fort Erie with Vitality. With that, Harold Ladoueur became the first Indigenous individual to train the winner of any Triple Crown race in Canada. The purse was \$400,000, so the cheque with Campos' name on it was worth \$20,000, the largest payday of his career.

Campos was very encouraged by the response he got from the racing community.

“Everybody started to look and say, ‘Who is this guy Campos?’” he laughs.

And just two weeks after that terrific win, Campos had another Stakes victory under his belt by delivering Owen's Tour Guide to the winner's circle in the \$100,000 Zadracarta Stakes for fillies and mares. After 5 furlongs on the inner turf, Owen's Tour Guide was a length the best at the wire for trainer Willy Armata. Owen's Tour Guide paid \$16.70.

Campos was a little surprised to have won that race with a horse that might have preferred a longer race.

“We thought the race was too short for the filly,” he says. “But we got lucky. The speed was too fast the first part of the race and when I asked my filly, she responded so well.”

Campos, with 31 wins through October 3, is well ahead of his pace in 2023 when he won 38 races, and as you are reading this, it is most likely he has soared past the \$1,661,920 in purses won last year by horses he rode.

Not to disparage other racing locations, but Woodbine has proven to be the place where athletes from anywhere in the world are welcomed and encouraged.

“Everybody is so friendly to me,” confirms Campos. “The Latino people here, like Luis Contreras, are especially nice. So are Emma, Patrick, Raffi, Justin – they all help me to feel good in the jocks' room.”

Longshot Makes a Splash in the Puss N Boots



It's one of the best traditions in all of sports – the obligatory jump into the infield pond by the connections of the winning horse in the Puss N Boots Cup at Fort Erie. On September 2 at the Fort, not even the connections of Society Joe thought they'd be getting wet.

The one-eyed, 7-year-old gelding came into the mile and a 16th turf race with 5 races from 40 tries and just one victory from his last 18. His jockey was Amanda Vandermeersch, who had ground out 9 wins from her first 94 rides this year.

And Vandermeersch gave Society Joe a perfect trip. The pair started well, galloping easily in 3rd as Quarky (Terry Husbands) and Four Aces High (Melanie Pinto) exchanged blows on the lead and into the stretch. Coming down to the wire, it appeared that Society Joe would have to settle for 3rd, but in the final 50 yards, Vandermeersch guided her horse between the two front-runners and Society Joe got enthused enough to hit the wire almost 2 lengths in front. At 40-1, Society Joe paid \$86.10.

Trainer/owner Gary Chudobiak didn't need a push. He was so thrilled that he immediately threw himself into the infield pond.

"He wasn't supposed to win," admitted Gary Chudobiak. "Once I looked at the field, I thought, 'well, we're not totally out of our class here,' but I still knew it was going to

be tough, so we made a few tweaks, a couple little changes, and it worked out. Now everyone is calling him the one-eyed wonder horse."

Back in 1961, a horse named Puss N Boots was leading a race at the top of the stretch, when he decided to veer inward and take a refreshing dip in the infield pond. Years later, owner Robert Elkins boasted that he'd jump into the infield lake if his horse Dancing for Beans won the race. Rider Francine Villeneuve brought her horse from last to first, sending Elkins for a swim. Each year since, the winning connections take the traditional jump into the infield pond.

The winning jockey, Vandermeersch was so focused on getting her horse up, going for a dip wasn't her most pressing thought.

"Actually, when I was being ponied back by Helen, the outrider, I asked her, 'I gotta jump in the pond, don't I?' said Vandermeersch. "And Helen's like, 'Yes, Amanda. Yes, you do.'"

Like Chudobiak, Vandermeersch didn't have high expectations of Society Joe.

"Honestly, I still didn't expect him to win it," she said. "I knew I was sitting on some horse by the half mile. I'm watching the two horses in front of me and they're both sitting quite nicely, and the favourite sitting right in front of me looked like she still had a ton of horse. So, I'm like, 'ok, well, maybe I can bring home a 3rd or a 4th'. And when I realized that I was sitting on way more horse than I thought, I was like, 'I gotta find a hole and I gotta get him through it because he wants to run.'"

Was this a race that Vandermeersch got to check off her bucket list?

"It was in my top three races," she said. "I rode in it last year and I came third on Doctor Uptown for Radcliffe Stables and that was a cool feeling. Just when entries came out to know I was riding in it, it felt pretty good. To be part of a historical race is pretty special just in itself, but then to win it is something else."

The legendary Frank Merrill was the trainer of Puss N Boots, and it was his daughter, Kim who presented Chudobiak and Vandermeersch the Puss N Boots Cup.

"My dad would be so proud to know that Fort Erie is still doing this, all these years later," said Kim "This is such a lovely tradition."

Four-Year-Old Filly Blows Up the Tote Board

It was just a routine \$24,000 allowance race at Fort Erie on September 17. Eight fillies and mares in the field were asked to go 7 furlongs on the turf. None of them had ever won 2 races, but the result was mind blowing (not counting the damage to the tote board).

The bettors pounded Princess Mayfair (Jose Campos) down to 25 cents on the dollar, obviously not dissuaded by the horse's 8 race losing streak. Kindly and Nice (Kirk Johnson) took the lead early and was clear by almost 2 lengths as the field turned for home. But Gambler's Pose (Leo Salles) had started an impressive rally from the back, and even though he drifted 6-wide into the stretch, he was able to swallow up the long-time leader and win by 1 1/2 lengths in 1:26.55. Gambler's Pose went off at odds of 102-1, but those who bet him had to sweat an inquiry – Melanie Pinto who rode the 5th place horse, Awesome Spirit Gal, alleged interference in the stretch. The stewards did see that Gambler's Pose came in slightly in mid-stretch but saw no reason to change the outcome. The win price was \$207.20. The trainer is Ken Albu for Six Brothers Stable.

Shortly after this race was declared official, Equibase, which scrutinizes all thoroughbred race results in North America, declared that \$207.20 was the most any horse had paid to win this year.

"From the 3/8 pole, you could see her starting to make a move," says Albu. "Leo and I discussed her just making one run from behind and when he pulled her out, from that point, I knew she was going to be right there."

That Gambler's Pose was over 100-1 in an 8-horse field made no sense. Three races previously, she had shown her affinity for the grass by winning a 5-furlong maiden special weight at the Fort. When Albu saw the tote board post the maximum 99, he did what any reasonable person would do.

"I thought the odds were quite ridiculous," he says. "I ended up betting 25 to win and place. I couldn't let her go off at that price."

We did the math – Gambler's Pose paid \$60.70 to place, so Albu cashed over \$3,300. If you add his 10% cut of the \$14,700 winner's cheque, it was a very good day at the track for him.

Gambler's Pose improved to 2 for 11 in her career and will not go off at 100-1 in her next race.

"She definitely doesn't want any part of the dirt surface," says Albu. "She favours the turf and that's probably what we're doing next. She did run at Woodbine as a 3-year old and she runs well on the synthetic surface, so that's always an option."

Youth Literary Derby

The winners of the Bill Galvin Alliance Literary and Art Youth Derby were revealed at Mohawk on October 5.

This drawing by Alexandra Homorcean of Burlington was the winner in the Senior Art Division. It is called *Chasing The Wind*. Alexandra is 15 years old.



Youth Literary Derby

Junior Poem:

- 1st - Sarah Moore, Amherstburg, ON
- 2nd - Ian McLaughlin - Woodstock, ON
- 3rd - Paige Daniels, Thornbury, ON

Intermediate Poem:

- 1st - Sophia Zheng, Richmond Hill, ON
- 2nd - June Ibbotson, Hanover, ON
- 3rd - Lauren Scott, Brinston, ON

Junior Short Story:

- 1st - Katherine Scott, Brinston, ON
- 2nd - Anna Dennis, Embryo, ON
- 3rd - Sadie Follings, Hanover, ON

Intermediate Short Story:

- 1st - Perina Baklinski, Combermere, ON
- 2nd - Eda Baklinski, Combermere, ON
- 3rd - Mikalia Acton, Woodstock, ON

Junior Art:

- 1st - Mila McLean, Combermere, ON
- 2nd - Korbin Stock, London, ON
- 3rd - Brielle Zonnekeyn, Peterborough, ON

Intermediate Art:

- 1st - Clara Baklinski, Combermere, ON
- 2nd - Hailey Jeffery, Rodney, ON
- 3rd - Calissa Curry, Owen Sound, ON

Senior Art:

- 1st - Alexandra Homorcean, Burlington, ON
- 2nd - Deanna Packet, Wyoming, ON
- 3rd - Olivia Brosseau, Kitchener, ON

Zeron's Huge Night at Mohawk



Scott Zeron loves to drop into Mohawk for the big races. It's where he grew up watching his dad, Rick carve out a great career. On August 31, the younger Zeron was in the bike for Its My Show in the \$540,000 Canadian Pacing Derby. Its My Show had a sensational 2023, winning the North America Cup, the Little Brown Jug and the Breeders Crown, but came into the Pacing Derby winless in 8 races. The streak looked as if it would be extended to 9, because as the field turned for home, Abuckabett Hanover surged to the top, and Its My Show was pinned in 6th along the inside, with live horses on his outside. But Zeron has an amazing history of turning hopeless situations into winning opportunities. In the final $\frac{3}{8}$ ths, rivals moved to the center of the track, giving Zeron a narrow opening. He moved Its My Show off the pylons and did a remarkable job of stickhandling in and amongst rivals, darting back to the inside and gaining with each stride on the leader, Abuckabett Hanover. It was very close at the wire, but the photo showed that Its My Show had found the finish line a nose quicker. The winning trainer is Linda Toscano for the owners and breeders, Joanne and Richard Young. Its My Show is just the second horse to win both the North America Cup and the Canadian Pacing Derby. The other was Gallo Blue Chip who pulled off that daily double in 2000 and 2001.

Despite his less than favourable location after $\frac{3}{4}$, Zeron didn't think his situation was hopeless.

"I was sitting here. I wanted to," he said. "I just needed to have a little luck to get loose. Anyone in the grandstand could drive this horse. He's so handy and when he zipped through, he got excited. It was an amazing finish from him."

It was so close at the wire, not even Zeron knew he had won.

"It would have been an awful tough beat," he said. "He was pacing hard to the wire, but I didn't think we got there."

The win improved Its My Show's record to 11 wins from 35 starts.

Its My Show paid \$16.30.

Two races later, Zeron demonstrated great patience with Periculum in the \$600,000 Maple Leaf Trot. Leaving from post 5, Periculum was unable to find a seat along the pylons, but Zeron saw some hot fractions being sliced out by M-M's Dream (David Miller), who led the field to the half in a gasping :54.1. Bettors who had crushed Periculum down to 3-5 started to breathe easier when Zeron was able to get cover behind Hillextotic (Jody Jamieson) and though Logan Park (Doug McNair) briefly had a 3-length lead in the long Mohawk stretch, Periculum was trotting furiously in the middle of the track. He collared Logan Park with maybe 50 yards to go as Oh Well (Dexter Dunn) came late for 2nd. At the wire, it was Periculum by over 2 lengths in 1:50.4, just a tick off his fastest mile of 1:50.3 trotted 2 years ago on the faster Red Mile in Lexington.

Post-race, Zeron explained that not getting to the pylons wasn't really an issue for him.

"I felt like I had options no matter what," he said. "I could see the writing on the wall that there was going to be a lot of speed. I just didn't want to be that one first up early. I was happy with where I was situated."



As for winning the two big races at Mohawk Park:

"This is where I grew up racing. To come here and do this with some good horses and for good connections – it's a fun experience."

Those good connections are trainer Marcus Melander and owners Brixton Medical and Holly Lane Stud.

Periculum paid \$3.30, and Scott Zeron is the first driver to win both the Canadian Pacing Derby and the Maple Leaf Trot when those two races are held on the same night. And just to impress your friends, Periculum is a Latin word meaning danger, hazard, or risk. In the Maple Leaf Trot, the hazard for 9 other trotters was simply being in the same race as Periculum.

How to Win... Without Winning

One of the important functions of a racing secretary is to create a variety of races that give opportunities to the widest range of horses, trainers and owners. Tony O'Sullivan is to create a variety of races that give opportunities to the widest range of horses, trainers and owners.

Thus, Woodbine created the Turf Sprint Series – 3 races to attract horses that want to go short on the lawn. The first was on June 30. The distance was 5 furlongs and the purse was \$55,000. Jockey Eswan Flores orchestrated a huge upset by riding True Belief to victory in :57.36. The 7-year-old horse is owned by Centennial Farms and trained by Ravendra Raghunath. True Belief earned 10 points for the win

and paid \$51.40.

The 2nd leg of the Turf Sprint Series happened on August 16. It was the same purse money – \$55,000. This time the distance was at 6 furlongs on the turf. The winner was Red River Rebel, ridden by Sahin Civaci. Forester's Fortune (Da Sean Gaskin) came 2nd. Red River Rebel, owned by A. Bianco Holding and trained by Martin Drexler paid \$5.30. So, that made 10 points for the 6-year-old gelding and 7 points for Forester's Fortune.

Then it got interesting. The 3rd and final leg had to be taken off the turf and run at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs on the Tapeta. Rafael Hernandez steered the favourite, Souped Up to a resounding win by 8 lengths in 1:16.20, with Forester's

Fortune coming 2nd again. Souped Up is trained by Ron Sadler for Linda Theil and Harri Hosein, and the 4-year-old gelding produced a \$5 win ticket. But none of the winners of the 3 legs managed to earn sufficient points in subsequent races, so Forester's Fortune, with the 14 points earned for 2 second place finishes ended up being crowned the Turf Sprint Series Champion. Rodney Barrow is the trainer for the owners, Claudia Silvera and Archie Lee, and those parties get to celebrate the pleasure of coming in 2nd because the Sprint Series offered a \$5,000 bonus to the successful trainer and \$10,000 to the owners.

Some famous football coach said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." I guess that guy never

2024 AJAX DOWNS RACETRACK

4 LIVE QUARTER HORSE RACING

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
						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
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
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
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 2024

Wednesday
May 8, 15, 22, 29
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday
June 5, 12, 26
1:30pm First Race

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

Wednesday
August 7, 14, 21
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday
September 11, 18, 25
12:55pm First Race

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October 2, 9, 23
12:55pm First Race

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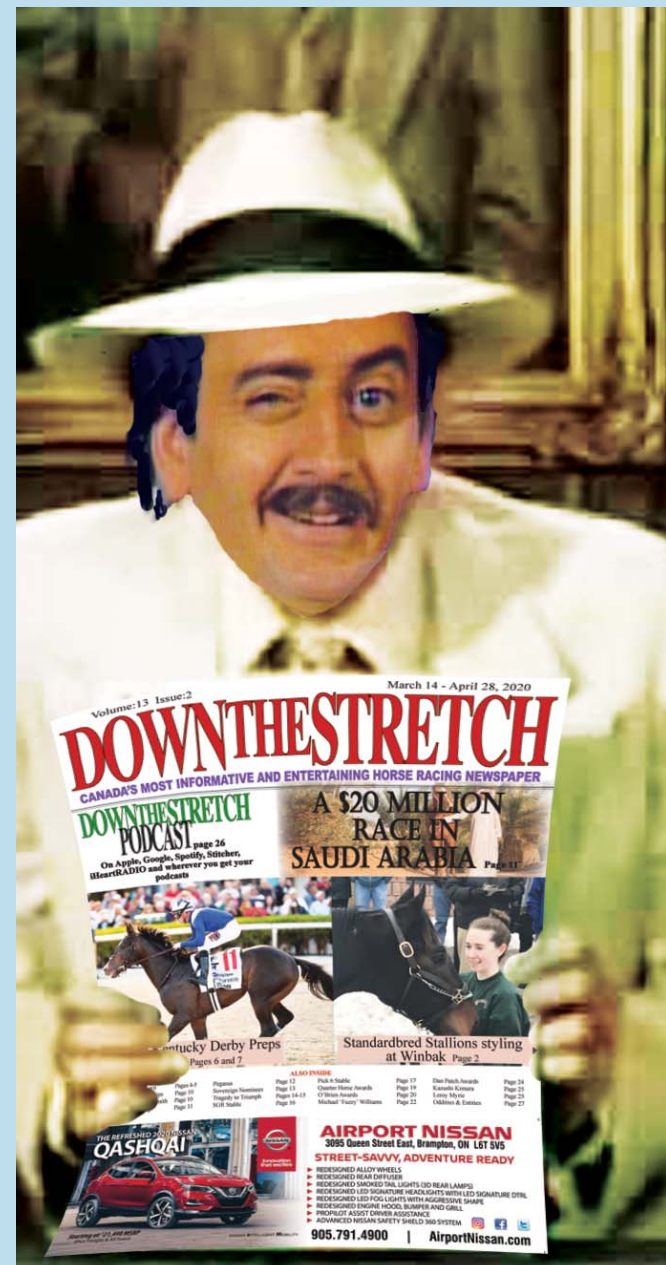
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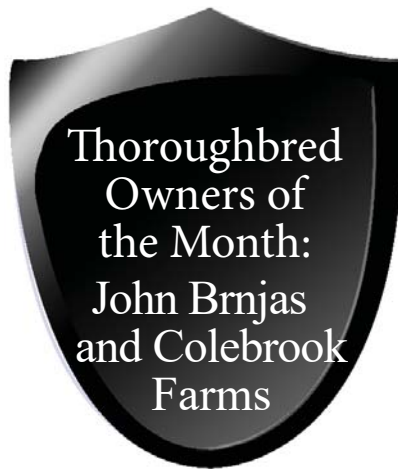


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The question was, “When was the last time a Canadian-owned horse won a \$2 million race?” That was the issue pondered when Simply in Front, owned by Colebrook Farms came from last to win the \$2 million Music City Stakes at Kentucky Downs on September 7.

In fact, John Brnjas, founder of Colebrook Farms was in a unique circumstance when the gates opened for the Music City.

“I was never in a \$2 million race,” he said.

Simply in Front was sent to Kentucky Downs after a 2nd place result in the \$135,000 Ontario Colleen Stakes at the end of July. The distance was a mile, and Simply in Front, under Justin Stein finished 4 ½ lengths behind a sharp winner, Time to Dazzle. This was Simply in Front’s only race at Woodbine in 2024 – she raced 4 times at Woodbine in 2023. In the Ontario Colleen, she was bumped coming out of the gate and lost ground in a 5-wide move. What was the reason for entering her in a \$2 million race?

“We thought she had a hell of a shot of winning it,” says Brnjas.

About 5 seconds into the 6 ½ furlong grass race, most of Brnjas’ confidence was leaving. Simply in Front came out of the gate last.

“She definitely did not break,” he says. “She walked out of the gate,”

After a quarter mile, Luis Saez and Simply in Front had passed 3 horses, but were still 9th about 6 lengths from the leader. Kentucky Downs has a very long stretch, and as Simply in Front was gaining momentum, Saez elected to take the filly 6-wide. That also did not thrill Brnjas.

“I was a little bit concerned giving up that many lengths on the turn,” he says. “I thought maybe he could have sat back a little bit longer and then went on with it. But obviously he made the right decision.”

Simply in Front gained the lead in mid-stretch and was a half length the best of 12 at the wire in 1:15.63 for the 6 ½ furlongs. Even in that moment of victory, Brnjas had a horrifying thought.

“What was going through my mind was if the guy holding her at the gate didn’t release her in time, would they declare her a non-starter?”

(There have been cases of horses finishing 2nd or worse, who were considered non-starters for wagering because of issues in the starting gate). Brnjas didn’t have

to worry. The stewards did not even consider looking at the filly’s awkward start.

“She had to be much the best to overcome the shitty start and being so wide on the turn,” says Brnjas.

Brnjas has been running Colebrook for over 25 years and obviously, this was the biggest win in the stable’s history. There was a great run with a horse named Johnny Bear, which Colebrook shared with Danny Dion’s Bear Stable. Johnny Bear raced 43 times from 2014 to 2019. He produced 8 wins and over \$700,000 in earnings.

Johnny Bear won 5 of his first 32 races, not really making headlines while picking up cheques. But on August 30, 2017, with Luis Contreras aboard, the 6-year-old gelding came flying through the stretch to win the \$125,000 Halton Stakes at a mile and a half on the E. P. Taylor Turf. Johnny Bear paid \$11.40 to win and just 17 days later, topped himself with a stunning upset win in the Grade 1 \$300,000 Northern Dancer Stakes, also 12 furlongs on the grass. Contreras rode this one perfectly, sitting in 3rd most of the way, then unleashing Johnny Bear in the stretch to overhaul the 3-5 favourite, Hawkbill en route to victory by a head in 2:27.30. Johnny Bear paid \$20.20 to win. That win was especially satisfying for Brnjas because Hawkbill came into the race as the best long distance grass horse in the world.

“Hawkbill went on to win the \$5 million Sheema Classic turf race in Dubai after we beat him at Woodbine,” adds Brnjas.

Strangely, Johnny Bear would win just once more in his career, but his timing was sublime as he repeated in 2018 in the Northern Dancer. There was very much déjà vu material here – once again, Contreras had Johnny Bear close to the pace and, once again, the horse was powerful in the last quarter, passing rivals and winning by a half length in 2:25.74, just 6/10^{ths} of a second off the course record. This time around, Johnny Bear paid \$35.80.

Brnjas also mentioned Seen it All Before. Born in 2009, Seen it All Before won over \$328,000 from 5 wins

in 24 races. He captured both the 2012 \$125,000 Vice Regent and the 2015 \$125,000 Bunty Lawless Stakes.

Another horse Brnjas won’t ever forget is Reconnect, a mare who ran 22 times from 2011 into 2014. She won 5 races, the most stunning coming in the \$126,600 La Prevoyante Stakes at Woodbine on September 10, 2011. She was a 3-year-old at the time and under Omar Moreno, Reconnect erupted from 11th down the backstretch, took a 6-wide path into the stretch and got up late to win by a neck at the end of a mile on the grass. Very few saw this coming – Reconnect paid \$142.90 to win.

It was Brnjas’ daughter, Ashlee who trained Reconnect, and on the day that the filly was running in the Stakes race, Ashlee was getting married to Jack Boem.

Apparently, many in the wedding party were watching the races on a TV while a photographer was taking shots of the couple. Suddenly all the bridesmaids came running out of the house screaming.

Sadly, Ashlee passed away unexpectedly in September 2021. She was just 40 and understandably, this was a blow that her father has not yet recovered from.

“It still affects me,” he says. “It was very hard not to have her around and it affects me every day. There was a point where I wasn’t sure I was even going to stay in this game. My wife and the family said that she wouldn’t want me to give it up.”

Brnjas has seen dramatic change in horse racing since he first got into it.

“In my 20’s, I enjoyed it,” he says. “It was definitely a lot more fun back then. The track was a lot more friendlier place. Now the attendance is down, and you don’t have the characters that used to be around. They’re all basically gone.”

And here’s the answer to the question posed at the top of this story. Before Simply in Front won the Music City Stakes, the last time a Canadian-owned horse won a \$2 million race was November 4, 2011, when Charles Fipke’s Perfect Shirl (trained by Roger Attfield) scored at 27-1 in the \$2 million Filly and Mare Turf on Breeders’ Cup Day at Churchill Downs.



The filly's name is Pick Me Up Hanover and the question is, "How did this one go for only \$3,000 at the Harrisburg Yearling sale in the fall of 2023?"

On September 28, with James MacDonald in the bike, Pick Me Up Hanover moved from 5th after the first quarter, swooped to the lead and repelled all the others to win by over a length in 1:53.3. This was a \$75,000 Ontario Sires Stakes Grassroots Final pace and the win improved Pick Me Up Hanover to 6 for 8 in her rookie year with over \$76,000 earned. Most people who pay \$3,000 for a horse don't get that spectacular instant gratification.

Dave Byron, 65, has been in harness racing since he was a teenager. Even he was a bit stunned at how little he paid for a daughter of Bettors Delight, and a yearling whose mare was a daughter of Somebeachsomewhere. Turns out there was a reason no one wanted her.

"I was at the sale with my son Jeff," explain Byron, "just looking at Ontario-bred Yearlings, basically fillies, and I noticed her, and she wasn't getting a bid. So, we kind of looked at each other and I said, 'I don't think she's got any legs on backwards.' So, we did one bid, and we got her."

The Byrons were curious about the low price.

"So, then we get thinking," adds Byron. "We better go back to the consignment and see what we missed. And we walked back, and the girls were saying, 'Did you get her?' I said, 'Yeah.' And they said 'Good luck. But she's a real witch.' They told me she was very hard to get along. She liked to kick and carry on."

Pick Me Up Hanover was a handful. Just ask her blacksmith who had a challenging time shoeing her. But when it came to racing, her demeanor did a 180.

Her first 3 races were at Tioga Downs, about 100 kilometers southeast of Rochester in New York State. With Dave's nephew, Aaron Byron driving, she won them all. In August of this year, the filly was brought up to Mohawk to race for larger purses. The first time out was a \$20,000 leg of the Ontario Sires Stakes Grassroots and Pick Me Up Hanover got a nicely timed steer from Bob McClure, circled rivals out of mid-pack and won by a half-length in 1:54. Two weeks later, she may have been in a little too deep. She finished 6th in a \$140,000 OSS Gold. The next time out, she led all the way in easier allowance company, winning by a head for McClure. And 11 days later she won the Grassroots Final.

Dave Byron with his granddaughter, Cecilia



"All the credit should go to my son, Jeff," says Byron, "When he was training her, she took a little more patience than others."

Byron is certainly enjoying this unexpected success with an inexpensive filly.

"I've actually been in the business awhile," he says. "I started as a groom when I was about 16 years old. And I've trained horses right up to the last few years. I had a farm up towards Barrie, and then I sold the farm, retired this year and I just kept a couple of horses with my son."

Like many in the sport, Byron inherited the passion from his father, Charles.

"He was a car dealer, and he grew up around the Greenwood Racetrack," he says. "He always went to the track when he moved up to Barrie and opened a car lot. And then myself and my brothers, Stephen and Bill, we got into it at a young age."

Pick Me Up Hanover, of course, is not the first horse to win a big one for Byron.

"I had a trotting filly a few years ago called Alexis Eh," he recalls. "She won a Gold down there at Mohawk going for \$94,000, which was exciting."

It was June 4, 2018, and Byron was the trainer at the time. His brother Stephen was driving, and he did so knowing he had the best horse in the race, shooting the filly to the lead before the quarter pole and never relenting, winning by a length in 1:57.4 That was Alexis A's 7th lifetime race. In 71 subsequent tries, she never won more than \$9,000 in a single race.

Sometimes, a good one can get away from you. It happened to Byron.

"I remember one horse we bought, then sold to Ron

Burke," he says. "He was called Here We Go Again. He went on to make almost a million dollars for Burke."

Here We Go Again won 4 of 34 races for the Byrons. In the hands of Burke, the pacer raced 269 times and won 33 of them.

Byron also remembers a horse bred and owned by his mother, Ruth.

"It was a trotter named Spud Blue," he says. "He raced in the Open Trots at Greenwood. Scott Rowe used to drive for us."

Spud Blue got behind the starting gate 116 times and got his picture taken 25 times while earning \$137,176.

Then there's a horse called Roulette Hanover.

"I bought her 2 years ago at Harrisburg and I ended up selling her to a fellow out west," says Byron.

Roulette Hanover, now a 4-year-old mare, was a \$17,000 purchase. She raced 21 times with Byron listed as the trainer. Standardbred Canada shows that she won 3 times during that ownership and has since raced another 25 times with 5 wins at Century Downs and Century Mile in Alberta.

We like to ask all our Owners of the Month, "What keeps you in the game?"

This question really matters to a guy who is approaching half a century with standardbreds.

"It doesn't matter what race you're in. If you win you always get that adrenaline rush," says Byron. "There's always that thrill of competing and winning. It could be a cheap claimer at Flamboro Downs, and you get the same feeling and enjoyment as if it were a Stakes race at Mohawk. I was never going to be a driver, but I always enjoyed the training part of it."

ODDITIES & ENTITIES

Three legends:
Frank Mirahmadi, Dan Loiselle
and Tom Durkin in the Saratoga
race call booth



When betting on children, it's
obvious the inside lane is
preferential



Probably the last time he will be
at the races!

Random Facebook message...
"Until you have seen a racehorse trainer cry
when their horse breaks down, or have
knock-out drag-out fights with owners who
want to "dump" their horses; until you have
seen them spend hours going over legs,
feeds, equipment changes, and every inch of
their horses body; until you have seen them
smile when they say goodbye to a horse
going to a home with a young girl, or the joy
they get from walking into the winners circle
with a homebred- Do Not Judge my
Industry!" ~ via Running B Stable

DOWN THE STRETCH PODCAST

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Episode 238 August 19:

It had never happened before. **The King's Plate** got rained out! Woodbine CEO, **Mike Copeland** announces when it will be run. **Kevin Attard** says Woodbine made the right decision. Attard is also in this podcast talking about his great mare, **Moira** winning the \$500,000 Beverly D Stakes in Virginia. Trainer **Blake MacIntosh** gets our props for crashing over the \$20 million mark with a horse named **Mamba**. The classy pacer, **Nijinsky** returned to Mohawk and bossed a field around. Jockey **Diego Benitez** was the star last week at Ajax Downs, winning 3 races, including the feature. Garnet **Barnsdale** gives us the Gold Cup and Saucer race from Charlottetown. And just how sensational was **Yannick Gingras'** Friday afternoon at Harrah's Philly? The great Blues singer/guitarist **Sister Rosetta Tharpe** and Mambo Number 5 performer, **Lou Bega** help this podcast along.

Episode 239 August 26:

The first **King's Plate** ever to be run on a Friday and for **Kevin Attard** and **Rafael Hernandez**, it was worth waiting for as the only filly in the race knocked off the boys. We have several other Stakes races from Woodbine and the mid-summer classic, the Travers from Saratoga, which was almost won by another filly. Harness driver **Jordan Stratton** may be American, but he tells us how he helped write two very big Canadian stories. Ajax Downs had 6 races last week and we have the call of each one, and 10 year-old **Clara Smith** shows us why she has a Stakes level talent when it comes to writing about race horses.

Episode 240 September 2:

Lots of **Taylor Swift** in this podcast – her main squeeze, **Travis Kelce** bought into a share of **Swift Delivery** who went off as the favourite in the Toronto Cup. **Scott Zeron** is not quite as famous as Taylor Swift, but he produced two huge hits at Mohawk, winning the Canadian Pacing Derby and Maple Leaf Trot on the same night. Trainer **Kevin Attard** talks about his King's Plate winning filly, **Caitlinhergrtness** and one of her owners, **Elliot Walden** of Winstar Farm, tells us why the filly won't run in the Prince of Wales and how she was named after basketball star, **Caitlin Clark**. Teenage jockey **Pietro Moran** had a mixed bag Friday at Woodbine – 3 straight wins, then a DQ. Very similar to the 2-win, 1-DQ afternoon by **Rachel Isaacs** at Ajax Downs. And the cheesiest of stories – how a screwup at Mohawk resulted in a horse winning a race and paying... nothing to win.

Episode 241 September 9:

A busy week in horse racing is reflected in episode 241. We have the Niagara Stakes from Woodbine as apprentice jockey **Pietro Moran** continues to pile up the wins. Mohawk had 6 Grand Circuit races Saturday night and earlier that day, Colebrook Farms' **Simply in Front** won a \$2 million race in Kentucky. The Saratoga meet ended on Labour Day, but not before 89-year-old **D Wayne Lukas** gave himself a birthday present and **Flavien Prat** put a cherry on his record-breaking exploits. Jockey **Amanda Vandermeersch** tells us what it was like winning the Puss N Boots Cup at Fort Erie, then jumping into the infield pond. And the Fort's race caller, Doug McPherson handicaps the upcoming Prince of Wales Stakes. Host **Peter Gross** got fed at Woodbine when the new Homestretch Bar and Suites was debuted and just to confuse you, we document how it was Saturday on Thursday.

Episode 242 September 16:

We have a 6-pack of Stakes races from Woodbine; the 4 Breeders' Cup Win and You're In turf races and two others – **David Moran's** emotional win in the Ontario Matron Stakes and **Sofia Vives** delivering the white hot, **Patches O'Houlihan** in the Vigil. Then we're off to Mohawk for the Milton Stakes and eliminations for the Metro Pace and the Canadian Trotting Classic. **John Burness** of Colebrook Farms revealing that **Simply In Front's** win in the Music City Stakes was the first time he had ever had a horse in a \$2 million race. At Fort Erie, **Vitality** won the **Prince of Wales Stakes** making **Harold Ladouceur** the first Indigenous person to win a Triple Crown race in Canada. As usual, we cover the card of racing from Ajax Downs, but not as usual, when a heavy favourite self-destructed at Pocono, the show prices went nuts. And how many bettors wondered where their money went when a 1-5 shot lost the Wonder Where Stakes?

Episode 243 September 23:

It was the most lucrative night of harness racing this year at Mohawk and we have the Metro Pace, the Mohawk Million, the Canadian Trotting Classic, the Elegant Image and the She's A Great Lady. Let's just say it was a great night for **Dexter Dunn** and **Captain Treacherous**. At Woodbine, **Jose Campos** added another Stakes win to his Prince of Wales triumph, winning the Zadracarta with **Owen's Tour Guide**. We document Canadian outcomes in the **Little Brown Jug** and the **Jugette** at the Delaware fair Grounds. **Harold Ladouceur** speaks with **Down The Stretch** about becoming the first indigenous trainer to win a Canadian Triple Crown race and **Ken Albu** reveals he was one of the very few to bet on **Gambler's Pose**, the horse he trains that produced the largest win price in North America this year. And a great moment at the Shenandoah Fair race course in Virginia as 95-year-old trainer, **William Fletcher** sent out his first winner in 4 years.

Episode 244 September 30:

The \$400,000 **Breeders' Stakes** assured we would have 3 different winners in the Triple Crown. A night of Stakes racing at Mohawk and we focus on the great work of **Louis-Philippe Roy** and **Doug McNair**. What's the profit situation in horse racing books? We find out from **Perry Lefko**, **Jennifer Morrison** and **Curtis Stock**. This podcast also features 7 race calls from Ajax Downs and on Military Appreciation Day at Woodbine, did the special guests get a huge tip?

Episode 245 October 7:

There were 4 Graded Stakes races - all on the grass – at Woodbine Saturday. **Patches O'Houlihan** won the Nearctic, so we're touting him as the Sovereign Award winner as the next Canadian Horse of the Year. Owner **Frank Di Giulio** and trainer **Bob Teller** disagreed about Patches being in the race. Last Thursday, the final leg of the Woodbine Turf Sprint Series was run, and the overall champion was a horse that didn't win a single leg. Jockey **Jose Campos** is from Mexico and he tell us what it was like winning the **Prince of Wales** in Fort Erie. Harness horse owner **Dave Byron** talks about buying a filly for \$3,000 then winning the \$75,000 Grass Roots Final at Mohawk We have 7 races from Ajax Downs this week as we try and figure out who the leading jockey and trainer will be and **Garnet Barnsdale** turned 60 last week, so instead of co-producing this podcast, he went to Las Vegas; we do get to participate vicariously as he sends us his breakdown of a day in Sin City.

ON AIR

DOWN THE STRETCH



A Podcast with Peter Gross