

DOWN THE STRETCH

CANADA'S MOST INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING HORSE RACING NEWSPAPER

The Top 50 Stories of 2023

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Photo by Dave Landry



THE EDITOR WEIGHS IN



It was a rags to riches story of epic proportion (well, sort of). On December 16, I was reluctant to gamble because of seasonal expenses, a higher heating bill, and an expensive family cruise coming up in February. However, upon landing on my HPI page, I noticed that I was entitled to \$1.93 in rewards. When added to the .26 already in my account, I had enough for one bet. If I lost, that would be it for the day.

I didn't lose. I bet the entire \$2 on race 1 at Woodbine, #7, Valley Girl to show. When Fraser Aebly rode her to a 3rd place result, my account had swollen by \$3.60. Then I let \$2 ride on Sweetie in the 4th race at Aqueduct. A fine 3rd place ride by Manny Franco rendered me another \$4.60. In the 2nd race at Woodbine, #8, Candy Street for Sofia Vives hit the board and my \$2 show ticket cashed \$4.70. Then it was on to Gulfstream race 8. Now that I was unstoppable,

I bet \$3 to show on #8, Joyful Lass, and I was a joyful lad, cashing \$8.85. Nine minutes later, #3, Big Bolt came in for me at Oaklawn, good for \$6.15. I got even braver for the 9th at Aqueduct, throwing \$5 to show on the 7, The Big Torpedo, but the best Javier Castellano could do for me was 4th, except the 2nd place horse was disqualified and placed last, so The Big Torpedo was promoted, and I got back \$15.50.

A \$5 show bet at Dayton Raceway (no track was too obscure on this historic day) earned me \$11.25. Emboldened, I poured \$7 into the 8th at Oaklawn and a 3rd place finish by #10, Vulcan cashed me \$16.10.

Los Alamitos was next – \$5 to show on 4. That fluffed me up by \$9.25.

OK, there were some losing bets along the way, but from 1 p.m. to 6:30, I was able to make 18 wagers and had

5 ½ hours of entertainment, all stemming from the \$1.93 rewards deposit. I built my bankroll to \$42, cashed out for \$25, and lost the remainder. My profit, though, from the original \$2 bet was 2300%.

The point here is that *points* matter. For example, having not cashed in for 5 years, I now have 120,000 Petro Points. I can also claim almost \$48 in groceries based on my President's Choice points. Don't tell the cats, but my 6,942 Pet Smart points could be redeemed for \$15 worth of Whiskas. It looks as if I'm good for 1,200 "Dream" Miles on my Air Miles Card. If I had any idea what that meant, I'd feel more enriched. The problem is, I can't use any of these points for betting on the horses, so what good are they?

At this point, you're asking, "What's the point of pointing out my points?"

Sorry, I got distracted by my epic wagering coup. Let's talk about this reading material: It's our annual Top 50 Stories issue (pages 4-8) and you can debate our order, or the stories we left out, but there was one overwhelmingly obvious #1 story. And be advised, we went with Cody and Cody's Wish before the wonderful animal was named Horse of Year at the Eclipse Awards (page 22), which means people more informed and influential than we are agree with our choice.

The annual O'Brien Awards were held in Charlottetown, P.E.I. and we have complete coverage on page 15. It was nice to see that Sylvia Hanover was named Horse of the Year. That works well with the Sylvia Hanover sneakers by Jessica Hallett that we feature in our Oddities and Entities on page 26.

And we have lots more in this issue. On pages 10-11, there's a great story by Chris Lomon on how Fraser Aebly's sister inspired him. There was a huge night at Mohawk by veteran driver Phil Hudon (page 14). On page 18, we find out from Harold Ladouceur how he felt about his induction into the North American Indigenous Athletic Hall of Fame. Ken Middleton had that awful accident last June but is back calling the races at Mohawk. On page 20, he tells us it's just like riding a bike. Our Thoroughbred Owner of the Month Chris Nolan (page 23) is an American, but because he has such affection for Woodbine, we're not holding it against him. Standardbred Owner of the Month, Patrick Dillon (page 24) owns the horse, Dontpokethedragon that won the first race of the year at Mohawk, and just to emphasize our good judgement, the horse went out and won the next two times.

We talked with rising jockey, Rachel Slevinsky (page 14). An international company, Iron Horse Global, figured she was a perfect fit to endorse their line of horse racing apparel.

And in this, our 141st issue in our 17th year, once again we have compiled in Oddities and Entities (pages 25-26) the most head-scratching, mind-bending and logic defying items of the past few weeks. Ever see a sulky disintegrate mere steps before the wire?

So, here's the point. There's no gamble at all, and no financial risk to you. This issue of *Down The Stretch* delivers a profitable payoff and all you have to do is read it.

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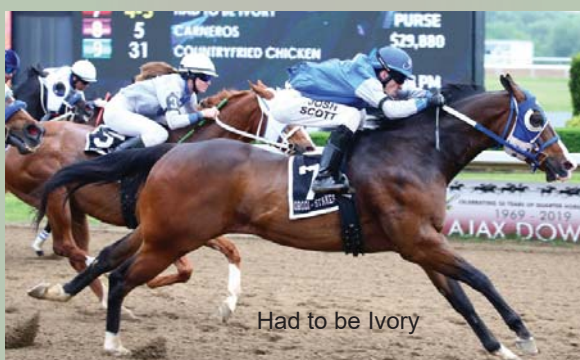
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The Top 50 Stories of 2023

50

Woodbine introduced their new bet – the Swinger. It looked promising. All a bettor had to do was pick 2 horses that finished in any order in the top 3. This was a very popular and heavily played wager in Great Britain and Australia. But the Swinger never resonated among local horse players. The pool rarely broke the \$1,000 mark and since there were 3 different solutions in each race, too many of the payoffs were under \$4. Prediction: by this time next year, there will be no Swinger bet.

49



Had to be Ivory

Had To Be Ivory was named the 2022 Horse of the Year at the annual Quarter Racing Owners of Ontario Awards night on February 14.

48



Steve Chircop

Trainer Steve Chircop was sizzling in January at Penn National. From the first 16 horses he sent out, he had 6 winners.

47

You've heard of stupid people tricks – at Sunland Park on a quarter horse racing day in March, we had stupid judges' tricks. In the 7th race, Separate Star finished 2nd by a neck, and as far as anyone watching the race was concerned, the horse had done so without committing any infraction or without interfering with any other horse. Moments after the field crossed the finish line, the inquiry sign lit up and several minutes later, Separate Star was disqualified and placed 4th. The next day, the stewards admitted that in making their decision, they had watched the replay – of another race. That

was not consolation to anyone holding a place or exactor ticket on Separate Star.

46



So Suave

On January 29 at the Garrison Savannah Racecourse in Bridgetown, Barbados, Patrick Husbands rode So Suave to a convincing 2 ½ length win in the Group 1 Coolmore Stakes. Husbands had So Suave close to the pace from the beginning, angled his horse out for the stretch drive, and So Suave was much the best down the lane, stopping the clock in 1:51 for the 1,800 metres on the grass. Woodbine trainer Tedson Holder had claimed So Suave for \$25,000 out of a race at Woodbine just 12 weeks earlier after which the horse was transferred to trainer Jean-Marc Cozier. So Suave went off as the 6-5 favourite in the Coolmore.

45

Harness trainer Teesha Symes had a night to remember. On April 8, she sent out 3 horses at Flamboro Downs and all 3 won. Come Out and Play (\$21) captured the 2nd race for driver Beau Brown, then Brown doubled up with Theory Seelster (\$5.40) in the 3rd and Bret MacDonald drove Insanity (\$5.70) to the winner's circle in the 9th race. That same night, Symes had entered Casimir Richie P (\$4.30) in the 7th at Buffalo raceway and Casimir Richie P for driver James Morrill also got the job done. As of this publication, Teesha Symes has 144 career training wins.

44

Was it a "tip" from God himself? It was Easter Friday, April 7 and the 6th race at Aqueduct had a purse of \$82,000 and 7 horses were going a mile on the grass. Late in the stretch, the 5-year-old, Easter came barreling down the stretch passing the leader to win by almost 2 lengths for jockey Trevor McCarthy. Easter paid \$6.90, causing some fans to grumble, "Jesus Christ! Why didn't I bet that?"

43

On September 12 at Fort Erie (the same day as the Prince of Wales Stakes), jockey Helen Vanek rode the 6-year-old gelding, Striking Moon to a one length win in an \$8,000 claim race at 6 ½ furlongs. This was Vanek's 791st career win and she had announced earlier that this would be her last pari-mutuel race at a thoroughbred track. Vanek intends to



Helen Vanek

become an outrider on her own horse, Chumlee.

42



Amanda Vandermeersch

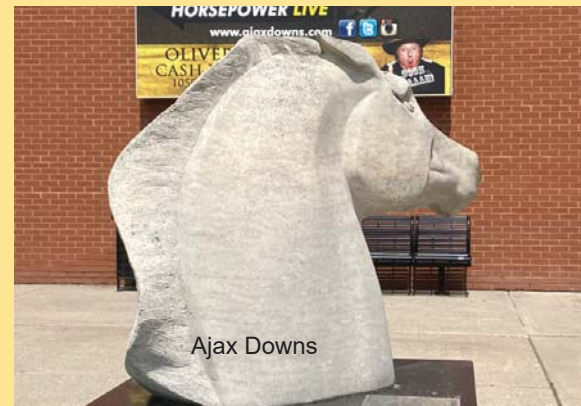
Sofia Vives

Opening Day at Woodbine (April 22) set the tone for the entire season. The first winner was Silver Tunes, ridden by Amanda Vandermeersch and trained by Siddo Barrington. Vandermeersch was one of several apprentice jockeys to perform impressively at Woodbine. Sofia Vives also had a win on Day One, delivering Basalt in the 6th for trainer Kevin Attard. There would not be many days at Woodbine that Vives was shut out as she powered her way to a certain Sovereign Award as Canada's Outstanding Apprentice Rider.

41

The first Stakes race of the year at Woodbine was the Star Shoot on April 29. It was for 3-year-old fillies at 6 furlongs for a purse of \$150,000. Blind Spot, ridden by Tyler Conner hit the wire first, a neck ahead of the even-money favourite, Jill Jitterbug (Sahin Civaci), but the inquiry sign went up immediately. After a few minutes, Blind Spot was disqualified for bearing out in the stretch and interfering with Jill Jitterbug. The winning trainer is Ryan Walsh and after Jill Jitterbug paid \$4.20 to win, all the jockeys were reminded to check their blind spots during the race.

40



Ajax Downs

Ajax Downs' Opening Day (May 10) set the tone for a strong season as the players wagered \$127,643 through 7 races, more than twice what was bet on Opening Day in 2022. The first winner was Power Oak ridden by JB Botello. The trainer is Jason Pascoe and the owner of the 3-year-old filly is Milena Kwiecien. Pascoe and Kwiecien would lead all season long in their respective categories.

39



Kazushi Kimura

There were few surprises at the 48th Sovereign Awards on April 14. Moira, the 2022 Queen's Plate champion was

named the Horse of the Year. Mark Casse took the trainer's trophy for the 15th time and Kazushi Kimura repeated as Champion Jockey.

38

On October 30, Woodbine conducted a \$16,000 pace restricted to women drivers. Julie Walker surprised the bettors by winning with the 5-year-old gelding, Angelo. Even though Angelo had lost his previous 14 races, Walker timed it perfectly and came flying through the stretch to pass tiring foes, winning by 1 ¼ lengths in 1:54. Angelo is trained by Herbert Holland, and he paid \$50.30 to win. This was just Walker's 15th parimutuel race in 2023 and her first win since she scored twice on July 15 at Hanover.

37



Bulldog Hanover

On February 4, Bulldog Hanover dominated the O'Brien Awards, winning in the Older Horse category, as well as taking down Horse of the Year honours and the Cam Fella Award. For the 2nd year in a row, James MacDonald won the Keith Waples Driver of the Year trophy.

36



Sandy Lane Barbados Gold Cup

It's a Gamble won the Sandy Lane Barbados Gold Cup on March 4. Although the horse's official trainer is Romell Lovell, the owner, Mark Goodridge asked Tedston Holder, a Woodbine trainer, to prepare the horse in Florida.

35

There was an afternoon card at Century Downs on Friday, June 23. The 10-year-old mare, Entitled Star, under apprentice Megan Fraser won the 2nd race and paid \$62.70. His trainer is Red McKenzie, who, at the time, was 96 years old. McKenzie became the 2nd oldest person to train a thoroughbred winner. (Jerry Bozo was 97 when he won a race at Gulfstream in 2018.)

34

In 2021, it was highly likely that Weyburn, owned by Cheifwood Stables, would have been the favourite in the Queen's Plate. But Weyburn was unable to run in the big race that year. As a 5-year-old he won just one race, but it was a good one. Under José Ortiz on April 1 at Gulfstream, Weyburn erupted from 6th at the half to win the \$145,000 Sir Shackleton Stakes by a neck in 1:22.15 for the 7 furlongs. Weyburn, trained by James Jerkins paid \$6.40 to win. The horse managed only 2 wins from 2022-2023, but both were in the Sir Shackleton.

33

On February 25, a 6-year-old mare named Perfect Mia became a candidate for most inspirational race of the year when she won a \$7,500 pace at Flamboro Downs. She was driven to the neck victory by Scott Coulter for trainer Kelly Duval Lacaille. She paid \$5.30, which might strike you as low, considering that in winning, Perfect Mia ended a 78-race losing streak that had lasted almost 3 years. Perfect Mia then reverted to her typical form, losing her next 17 races.

32

On March 12 at Tampa Bay Downs, My Eagle Soars, ridden by Antonio Gallardo won the 5th race, a 6 furlong dash for maidens. My Eagle Soars (\$14.40) is trained by Kathleen O'Connell and with her 2,386th win, she became the all-time leading female trainer in North America. At year's end, O'Connell had 2,445 wins. Canadian Josie Carroll finished 2023 with 983 victories.

31

On February 8, jockey Irad Ortiz won 7 straight races at Gulfstream. He brought in Dignified (\$7.20) in the 2nd, Little Jewel (\$4.20) in the 3rd, Lakota Territory (\$5.60) in the 4th, Riveting Spirit (\$7) in the 5th, Tape Top Tape (\$4.20) in the 6th, Rhymes Like Dimes (\$4.20) in the 7th and Six Minus (\$7.40) in the 8th. At year's end, Irad had 365 wins, a strike rate of 23% and purse earnings of \$39,124,795 – the most in North America.

30

On March 4 at Santa Anita, reigning Woodbine riding champion, Kazushi Kimura rode Gold Phoenix to victory in the \$500,000 Grade 1 Frank Kilroy Mile for older horses. Trained by Philip D'Amato, Gold Phoenix gave Kimura his first Grade 1 win. The 5-year-old gelding won for the 4th time in 11 races and paid \$23.60.

29

Driver Matt Kakaley had an amazing night at Yonkers on June 24. He won the first 4 races, finished 2nd in the 5th, then took down the 6th, the 7th, the 8th, and the 9th. When he steered Magical Journey to victory in the 10th race, he joined Luc Oulette, Walter Case and Stephane Bouchard as drivers with 9 wins on the same card. Kakaley's horses paid \$2.50, \$2.50, \$6.60, \$3.00, \$2.20, \$2.50, \$4.60, \$4.60, and \$6.70.

28

James MacDonald was no fool on April 1 at Mohawk Park. He delivered 6 winners. His horses paid \$17, \$3, \$15.20, \$5.10, \$6, and \$8.10. It wasn't even the most wins MacDonald had ever produced on a single night. On December 5, 2022, he brought in 8 winners on the same card. Just to be repetitive, MacDonald also won 6 races on the November 3 card at Mohawk.

27



Sylvain Filion

On October 23, the first race at Mohawk was a \$17,000 leg of the Harvest Series, and driver Sylvain Filion harvested his 10,000th win by steering the 1-2 choice, One More Bet to a convincing 5-length victory. Filion is the only regular Mohawk driver to hit that figure, and the 24th in racing history to do so. From 1992 through 2023, Filion had recorded at least 100 wins in 32 consecutive years.

26



Natasha Day

It was Monday, November 13, and a night drive that Natasha Day won't forget. In the 2nd race at Western Fair, she rated the 3-year-old trotting filly, Lolita Hanover perfectly, coming out of the pocket in the stretch to wear down the leader to win by 1 ½ lengths. Lolita Hanover is trained by Brittany Kennedy for owners Dean and Ashley Wilson, and she paid \$7.50. After driving in the 6th race at the London track, Day jumped in her car and drove 80 minutes to Mohawk. Her assignment there was in the 8th race, and her drive with the 25-1 shot, Taylor's Credit deserves some kind of award. Day

and her horse were hopelessly pinned in as the field turned for home – with too many horses in front and beside her, but Day made a great move to get out from behind a tiring rival, found clear road and urged Taylor's Credit to a stunning victory by a neck in 1:53. That was a flashy :26.3 final quarter from the 6-year-old gelding. Making the night even more remarkable is that in the winner's circle, an antsy Taylor's Credit did a complete rollover before regaining his feet and moving out as if nothing unusual had occurred. The win ticket was \$52.60.

25



Ken Middleton

On April 24, the 7th race at Mohawk went off at 9:47. Race caller Ken Middleton, a devout Boston Bruin fan was watching the Maple Leafs, who, at that moment, were losing 4-1 to Tampa Bay in the 3rd. When a horse named Toronto came storming home late to win, Middleton could not resist the creative brainstorm to give the high stick to Leafs fans.

"Toronto will win," announced Middleton. "And that's the only time you'll hear that tonight!" To Middleton's shock, the Leafs came back to win, and social media had a picnic at his expense.

"I'm a motivational speaker for the Maple Leafs," he quipped. "I lit a fire under their underachieving asses!"

24

Middleton suffered no serious consequences from a tsunami of responses to his playful jab, but he was very badly hurt in a training accident. Middleton works his own harness horses and on the morning of June 29, a horse reacted badly, bolting on his driver, and throwing him to the track. Middleton suffered 3 fractured vertebrae in his neck and required 43 staples from the back of his head to the middle of his shoulder. He was unable to return to the booth for the remainder of the year. And how hard was it to replace Middleton? In the next 6 months, at various times, harness racing fans heard, Mark Mckelvie, Chad Rozema, Robert Geller, Doug McPherson, Greg Blanchard, Frank Salive, Shannon Doyle, Gary Guy, and Evan Loucks.

23

When Doug McNair was ejected from a sulky on June 17 – the night of the North America Cup – he fortunately suffered no damage. McNair was driving a longshot, Wheels On Fire in the \$100,000 Mohawk Gold Cup. At the head of the stretch, Wheels on Fire and Whichwaytothebeach (Travis Cullen) got tangled up, fell, and tossed their drivers to the track. Neither McNair nor Cullen were injured, and both horses were fine. Three races earlier, McNair had delivered the upset in the \$210,000 Armbro Flight with Refined, a 7-year-old mare who paid \$16.30. And then, just minutes after being smashed to the track in race 8, McNair decided he was fit enough to team up with Grace Hill in the Roses Are Red Final. Grace Hill crushed by 2 ½ lengths in 1:47.4, a Stakes, track, and Canadian record.

"Fifteen minutes ago, I was lying on the track," said McNair after the Roses Are Red. "Next thing you know, I am standing the winner's circle with one of the greatest mares to ever look through a bridle."

22

It wasn't Father's Day at Ajax Downs, but on August 2nd, there were some particularly good genes posing in the winner's circle. Alexis Sanchez encouraged Snow Magically Sweet (\$16.50) to a nose victory in the \$58,095 Ontario Bred Futurity for 2-year-olds. This was Sanchez's 3rd win on the card, while Ramiro Castillo, his father won twice.

21

The most unusual superfecta of the year (really, of all time!) occurred at Saratoga on September 3. The 2nd race had a purse of \$43,000 for maidens going 7 furlongs. Katie Davis rode Bon Adieu for trainer Danny Gargan, and she took the lead early and never gave it up, winning by a length. The 2nd place horse, Mim was ridden by her brother, Dylan Davis. The 3rd horse, Embraceable Gal carried Katie's husband, Trevor McCarthy, and the horse in 4th place, Sweet Liberty was ridden by Jacqueline Davis, Katie's sister. The all-Davis household superfecta paid \$263.50 for a \$1 bet.

20

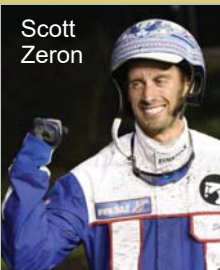
The 40th North America Cup featured a near perfect drive from Scott Zeron as he manoeuvred Its My Show to victory in 1:47.4. Zeron settled Its My Show in second through a scalding first quarter of :25.4, then right lined down the backstretch to take the lead. Its My Show led the field to the ¾ in 1:20.4 but had to contend with a late charge from the 7-5 favourite, Confederate (Tim Tetrick) in late stretch. The wire came just in time – Its My Show prevailed by a head. The winning trainer is Linda Toscano for Richard and Joanne Young. Its My Show, who recorded his 6th straight win, paid \$5.60.

19

Apprentice rider, Sofia Vives won a race (Basalt Street, \$8.80) on Opening Day and she won (Home for a Rest, \$5.50) on the final day of racing at Woodbine, and she found the winner's circle many times in between. During a year in which many apprentices flourished, Vives was awesome. She finished the campaign with 88 wins, good for 4th in the standings. Her trips to Fort Erie and Parx swelled her 2023 numbers to 122 wins, making her a cinch to win the Sovereign Award as the Outstanding Apprentice in Canada.

18

Can you be the Dan Patch Driver of the Year if you don't win the most races or if your purse earnings don't top the field? Yes, you can, if you do what Scott Zeron did. After taking down the N.A. Cup, Zeron pulled off one of the most amazing drives of the year, winning the August 5 Hambletonian at the Meadowlands from post 10 with Tactical Approach. On September 20, Zeron captured the Jugette at the Delaware Fair Grounds with Ucandoit Blue Chip. The next day, it was Zeron and Its My Show who won the Little Brown Jug. Then on October 8 in the Kentucky Futurity at the Red Mile, Tactical Approach was hopelessly locked in as the field turned for home, but Zeron skimmed the pylons and Tactical Approach surged late for the win. No driver in history has ever won all 5 of those races in the same year, and the members of the United States Harness Writers Association were observant – on December 28 they announced that Zeron, indeed, was the Dan Patch winner as Driver of the Year.



Scott Zeron

17

Kentucky Derby

The 149th Kentucky Derby on June 6 was mired in controversy, though a powerful performance by Mage, under Javier Castellano shone a little brightness on the darkness. Before the Run for the Roses, 5 horses were scratched from the race and during the week, 7 horses died on the track,

2 expiring in races leading up to the Derby. The most impactful scratch was that of Forte, who would have been the favourite. He was diagnosed with a bruised foot. As for the race itself, Mage went off at 15-1 but rallied from 14th down the backstretch to collar Two Phil's with a furlong to go enroute to a 1-length win in 2:01.57. Mage and the 2018 champion, Justify are the only horses since 1882 to win the Derby without racing as 2-year-olds. Trainer Gustavo Delgado celebrated his first Kentucky Derby victory.

16

Ed Hensley

Driver Ed Hensley hit an impressive number at Flamboro Downs on October 29. In the 8th race, he was steering Order One to Go and he ordered it to go straight to the winner's circle, winning by over 4 lengths in 1:54.4. This was Hensley's 6,000th driving win. He shares the 5-year-old gelding with his wife, Ashleigh, who is the trainer. In fact, Order One to Go, who paid \$7.90 was Ashleigh's 499th training victory. Six days later, Ed drove Rosie's War Bonds to a win (\$2.50) at Flamboro for Ashleigh's 500th win.

15

It's not quite the second coming (well, not yet) of Pink Lloyd, but Patches O'Houlihan, trained by Robert Tiller will be the Sovereign Award winner as Outstanding Sprinter in Canada. When he won the Grade 3, \$150,000 Vigil Stakes by a nose over Last American Hero, Patches O'Houlihan ran his win streak to 5, the last 4 of which were Stakes events. The 3-year-old gelding finished 2023 with 7 wins from 9 career races. He is owned by Frank Di Giulio, the point man for Entourage Stable which owned Pink Lloyd (29 wins in 38 races).

14

On October 31 at Western Fair Raceway, Tyler Borth dressed up as a superhero, winning 7 races on the card. Borth swept the first 5 races with I Loved Her First (\$5.30), Seastorm (\$2.40), AJ Bella (\$3.50), Massive Profit (\$7.30) and Chief Editor (\$4.00). Then he won the 8th, getting home with Euchred (\$11.30) and he finished his awesome night by taking down the 10th race with Petro Angel (\$9.30). 2023 was by far the best year of Borth's driving career which began in 2012. He amassed 413 wins and his horses earned more than \$4,135,000.

13

When National Treasure won the Preakness at Pimlico on May 20, it assured there would be no Triple Crown sweep. It was also a day that epitomized "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." Trainer Bob Baffert watched in muted delight as John Velazquez gunned National Treasure right to the lead and was able to orchestrate comfortable fractions of 48.92 and 6 furlongs in a leisurely 1:13.49. That left sufficient fuel in the tank for National Treasure to repel all challenges, though he did have to fight off Blazing Sevens (Irak Ortiz) deep in the stretch to win by a head. The time of 1:55.12 was almost 3 seconds off the course record but was about .80 of a second faster than Justify, who took down the Preakness enroute to his Triple Crown sweep for Baffert in 2016. Casting a shadow on this win was the death of another Baffert horse earlier in the card – the ironically named Havnameltdown broke down in the \$200,000 Chick Lang Stakes and was euthanized on the track. National Treasure paid \$7.80 to win.

12

It was the kind of story that makes horse racing unique. Three years ago, promoter/horse owner Adriano Sorella announced he was putting up \$100,000 for the Jimmy Freight Stakes, a race restricted to sons and daughters of his terrific pacer, Jimmy Freight. On October 7 at Mohawk, 8 of

Adriano Sorella and Jimmy Freight



Jimmy Freight's offspring competed in the race named after their father and it was the filly, Resilience who conquered the boys, winning by over 9 lengths in 1:52 and surprising no one – the win ticket was worth \$2.10. Making this night special though, was the appearance of the sire, Jimmy Freight in the \$36,000 Preferred Pace against a salty group that included Southside Eddy, a recent winner in 1:47.2. Even though Jimmy Freight had not raced since April 10, he brought his "A" game to show his kids. Driver Louis-Philippe Roy had Jimmy Freight in 3rd down the backstretch, then elected to go first over. The crowd gasped as Jimmy Freight went past Southside Eddy and quickly opened up a 4-length lead. The 9-year-old stallion threw a :27 final quarter at his rivals and found the wire 2 lengths the best in 1:50.2 (which means he would have crushed his children). Jimmy Freight paid \$6.50. He finished 2023 with 37 wins in 85 starts and earnings of \$1,983,730.

11

Arcangelo's Belmont

The 155th Belmont Stakes on June 10 featured a history making win by Arcangelo. Under Javier Castellano, Arcangelo stalked the pace set by National Treasure (John Velazquez) for more than a mile, slid inside the longtime leader as the field turned for home, and in gradual increments, took the lead and began to pull away. Forte, the 2-1 favourite under Irak Ortiz came late to secure second by a nose over a tired National Treasure, but Arcangelo was safe by 1 ½ lengths at the wire in 2:29.23, posing no threat to the fastest 12-furlong race ever run by Secretariat when he won this race in 1973 in 2:24. Arcangelo, winning for the 3rd time in just 5 races made his trainer Jena Antonucci the first woman to send out a Triple Crown winner. This was also Castellano's first Belmont victory after 14 futile attempts. Arcangelo paid \$17.80.

10

On the same day that Jena Antonucci became the first woman to send out a Triple Crown winner, several other ladies highlighted the idea that this sport knows no gender boundaries. Skye Chernetz won the 3rd at Woodbine aboard Olympic Fencer (\$9.10). Sofia Vives rode Cahira's Blessing (\$37.10) to victory in the 8th. Emma-Jayne Wilson posed in the winner's circle after delivering Devils' Bit (\$18.80) in the 10th. That night at Mohawk, Christchurch (\$9.50) trained by Nancy Takter won an elimination race for the North America Cup. Fulton (\$5.30) took down the 2nd elimination, and he is trained by Linda Toscano who also trains Its My



Show (\$4.70) who won his elimination as well.

And just a little later that same night, in the \$200,000 Battle of Lake Erie at Northfield Park, Lauren Tritton surprised the bettors by winning with Lochinvar Art who paid \$38.60.

All this proves that horse racing is the only professional sport in which women regularly defeat the men on a level playing field.

9

When the trotter TCI won the \$820,000 William Wellwood Memorial, he not only ran his win streak to 6, but he cashed a free pass to the Mohawk Million. The bettors on September 23 pounded TCI down to 4-5 and were probably horrified when he made a break in stride just as the race began. In amazing fashion, David Miller reset TCI, caught up to the field around the far turn and then the pair simply ripped past all opponents to win by 1 ¼ lengths in 1:54.3. TCI's 10-race win streak was snapped when he finished 2nd to Karl in the Breeders Crown final at Hoosier Park in October. TCI is trained by Ron Burke who shares the horse with Weaver Buscemi, Hatfield Stables, and Knox Services.

8



James Macdonald

December 30 was the final card of racing for 2023 at Mohawk Park and James MacDonald needed 3 wins to hit the 400 mark. That standard seemed out of reach when MacDonald finished 7th, 7th, 2nd, 10th, 5th and 7th with his first 6 drives. But he won the 7th with Stone Carver (\$5), took the 9th with Somewherentuscany (\$3.10) and then he scored in the 10th and final race with Thrilling Times, whose \$28.20 win ticket provided some thrilling times for those who bet the 7-year-old gelding. MacDonald wrapped up 2023 with 400 wins at Mohawk, winning the driving title for the 3rd straight year. This was the 7th time a driver had hit the 400-win mark at the Campbellville track.

7



Master of the Seas

Woodbine is the destination of many of the world's best horses and trainers because it has world class facilities, an internationally acclaimed turf course, and tempting purses. That's the good news – the bad news is invaders took the lion's share of the cash in the most important races of the year. The \$1.2 Million Ricoh Woodbine Mile on September 16 had a field of just 6 horses and the bettors were confident that Master of the Seas was the best, pounding that one down to 2-5. Under jockey William Buick, the 5-year-old Master of the Seas mastered the turf, making a 6-wide move into the stretch and parlaying that momentum into a 3 ¾ length win timed in 1:33.79. Master of the Seas is trained by Charles Appleby for Godolphin and all the bettors got was \$2.80. Some 7 weeks later, Master of the Seas would come flying from 12th to win the Breeders' Cup Turf Mile by a nose and pay \$8.60.

6

Very often, the horse that wins the \$250,000 Coronation Futurity at Woodbine earns the honour of being the Winterbook favourite for the King's Plate, though that may be a curse. Not since Norcliffe in 1975 has the Coronation Futurity winner gone on to win the Plate. In 2023, it was Babbo under Eswan Flores winning the Coronation. That was his 2nd win in 6 races for trainer Sid Attard and owner Lou Tucci. Babbo was timed in 1:52.06 for the mile and an 8th, almost 4 seconds off the course record. The next race was the \$250,000 Princess Elizabeth at a mile and a 16th and the winner, Inudation, ridden by Leo Salles covered the distance in 1:45.33, which mathematically suggests she might have given Babbo a real test in the stretch. Inudation is trained by Kevin Attard for Al and Bill Ulwelling.

5



Nations Price

The Woodbine International on October 8 offered \$900,000 with a field of 8 going a mile and a quarter on the grass. It seems William Buick gets all the great ones. He was riding the 4-year-old Nations Pride and on the yielding turf, he had his horse relaxed in 2nd place most of the way, wore down the long-time leader, Royal Champion in the stretch and prevailed by 2 ¼ lengths in 2:03.65. It was another win for trainer Charles Appleby and Godolphin, who regularly take withdrawals from the Woodbine bank machine. Nations Pride paid just \$2.80.

4



EP Taylor Stakes

The E.P. Taylor Stakes, worth \$900,000 was also won by out-of-towners. Moira, the 2022 Queen's Plate champion went off as the 3-2 choice against 9 other fillies and mares and, under Rafael Hernandez, she ran a nice race to finish 3rd. The winner was Fev Rover, who was one of 4 winners that day under jockey Javier Castellano. Fev Rover moved from 3rd to first as the field turned for home and she won by 2 lengths in 2:04.20. Fev Rover, a 5-year-old mare at the time is trained by Mark Casse for Tracy Farmer and those who backed the winner cashed \$10.10.

3

The Plate Trial and Woodbine Oaks were the 9th and 10th races respectively at Woodbine on July 23. Jockey Patrick Husbands gunned Paramount Prince to the lead in the Trial and none of the other 11 runners got a sniff as Paramount Prince romped by 5 lengths. He is trained by Mark Casse, and he paid \$25.60 to win. Just a half hour later, 14 fillies burst from the gate in the \$500,000 Woodbine Oaks and it was Sahin Civaci rallying Elysian Field from 7th down the backstretch to victory by over 2 lengths. Elysian Field is also trained by Casse and is owned by Gary Barber and Team Valour International. The win price on Elysian Field was \$13.60.

2



Paramount Prince in the King's Plate



The first King's Plate in 72 years produced a regally appropriate winner, as Patrick Husbands took Paramount Prince to the lead early, pampered him with comfortable fractions – 6 furlongs in 1:11.1 and the mile in 1:36.47 – so that when the filly Elysian Field came running late, Paramount Prince had sufficient gas for a :25.46 final quarter and a length and a half win. As if we needed more proof that Mark Casse is the most elite trainer Canada has ever seen, both the winner and runner-up were trained by him. This was the third Plate victory for both Husbands and Casse. Paramount Prince is owned by Gary Barber and Michael Langlois and winning the Plate Trial didn't buy Paramount Prince much love from the bettors. He paid \$18 to win.

and the #1 story of the year Cody Dorman



Traditionally we have chosen a story with Canadian content as the #1 moment of the year, but we're going with something that transcended borders. The Cody Dorman saga was powerful, inspiring, thrilling and heartbreaking all at the same time. Cody was born with Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, which deprived him of the ability to talk and kept him in a wheelchair and required his parents to tube feed him. Despite that, the teenager had a fierce intellect, communicating through a device attached to his head that could pick out words and phrases on a computer screen. Five years ago, Cody met a baby horse at the Godolphin's Gainsborough Farm in Kentucky. There was an instant and remarkable bond between horse and child, so much so that the Gainsborough people named the horse Cody's Wish. And when Cody's Wish began his racing career, he was the embodiment of Cody Dorman's personality – relentless, courageous, and capable of overcoming adversity. As a 3-year-old, the horse won 3 of 6. The next year, in 2022, he took down 4 of his 5 races, completing his season with an emphatic victory in the Big Ass Fans Breeders' Cup Mile, a race witnessed from the winner's circle by Cody and his family. It was determined that 2023 would be the last competitive year for Cody's Wish. He won the Churchill Downs Stakes, then the Met Mile before a 3rd place finish in the Whitney Stakes at Saratoga. After romping home in the Vosburgh Stakes at Aqueduct, Cody's Wish was again entered by trainer Bill Mott in the Breeders' Cup Mile. Once again, Cody, dad Kelly, mom Leslie and sister, Kylie were special guests. And, once again, Cody's Wish was sensational, rallying from last at the half to meet Preakness Champion, National Treasure at the head of the stretch. The two battled all the way to the wire, with Cody's Wish winning by a nose. Some of us wanted to ask Cody how he would deal with the retirement to stud for Cody's Wish, but we never got the chance. On the flight home from California, Cody suffered a medical event and could not be saved.

"He was so happy to get to see Cody's Wish run his last race," his father, Kelly said the following morning.

76 days later, at the Eclipse Awards, Cody's sister, Kylie was asked to open the envelope containing the name of the 2023 Horse of the Year. She looked at the name for a moment, then softly said,


"Cody's Wish"
(more on page 22)

RACETRACK HUMOUR


Perry & Mooch




This amusing image was taken by Clive Cohen (NewImage Media). On January 7, in the 4th race at Mohawk, Trevor Henry (foreground) won by a head with Rock N Zeus over the smiling Pat Hudon who was driving Rock N Bo. We have taken the liberty of supplying captions.




You never know which Hudon is gonna sneak up on you!



Don't feel bad about losing to me by a head, Pat. Both horses are sons of Rock N Roll Heaven



A horse walks into a bar and the bartender says: "Why the long face?"



As per our pre-race wager, you now have to bathe my cat for the next 3 months

“I Am Up for Anything”: Apprentice Fraser Aebly Inspired by Late Sister’s Passion

by Chris Lomon/Woodbine Communications

Fraser Aebly, his late sister Andie, and his parents Derek and Dale



75,000 residents that lies 460 kilometres (265 miles) northwest of Edmonton. “They were at the races that night.”

He was hoping to give them something to cheer about on what was his second day riding at Woodbine.

Although he had won races in Western Canada, namely, Hastings Park, Assiniboia Downs and Century Mile, Aebly, who had moved his tack to Woodbine in October, was looking to record his first victory at the country’s highest-profile racetrack.

Lulu’s Lullaby, who came into the race winless in five starts, was sent on her way in the five-furlong sprint over the inner turf at 7-1.

Aebly kept his filly out of the three-horse tussle up front and settled the bay into fourth. Content with where he was positioned into the turn, Aebly then called upon the Florida-bred for her best run. The duo began to methodically reel in their rivals at the quarter-pole and swung out four wide to seize command at the eighth pole.

When Aebly took a glance at the infield tote board, he liked what he saw.

“It was my first time riding on the inner turf,” started Aebly. “It was a perfect trip with how everything set up for us. You see that wire getting closer and closer, and you start to get this feeling of happiness that comes over you.”

Lulu’s Lullaby crossed the wire a 1 3/4-length winner.

“To see how happy everyone was – Krista, the groom, and everyone associated with the horse – that was amazing,” said Aebly. “My parents had huge smiles on their faces, and you could see what it meant to them. It meant a lot to me too.”

There was, however, one notable absence at the rail on that Friday afternoon.

His sister, Andie, passed away on September 30, 2021,

winning the race.

As he made his way from the Woodbine jockeys’ room to the paddock for the first race on October 13th, Aebly felt, somewhat ironically, a few butterflies of his own as he got a leg up on Lulu’s Lullaby, a 3-year-old daughter of Wicked Tune-Lulu’s Blues, trained and owned by Krista Cole-Simpson.

“My parents [Derek and Dale] had driven, in my car, all the way from Vancouver to Toronto,” recounted Aebly, who hails from Grande Prairie, Alberta, a city of around



Fraser Aebly

Motivation and inspiration are always close at hand for Fraser Aebly.

When he slipped on the sky blue silks featuring an ornate white butterfly on the front, along with white and black hoops, the 19-year-old apprentice rider was, as always, focused on giving his horse the best shot at



Fraser Aebly winning aboard Lulu’s Lullaby

Michael Burns Photo

after injuries suffered in a dirt bike accident. She was 14.

“It’s tough for all of us,” said Aebly. “It’s not something you ever want to deal with. Andie was a great sister and a great daughter. She persevered through so much. She has been and will always be a great inspiration to me.”

Born on January 5, 2007, Andie suffered severe midline complications. She was immediately airlifted to the Stollery Children’s Hospital in Edmonton, where she spent the first 16 months of her life while surgeons reconnected her esophagus and repaired her trachea. Andie spent the first nine of those months unable to swallow even so much as her own saliva.

Andie underwent countless procedures and multiple major surgeries over her 14 years but never wavered in her will to lead a normal life.

She was a hockey player, a gymnast, a soccer player, a wagon driver, and a barn hand, just to name a few.

In her obituary, it was shared that Andie, whenever anyone asked what she wanted to do, always responded with the same line, “I am up for anything.”

That is precisely how Aebly recalls his younger sister and only sibling.

“She really was up for anything. We learned to ride horses together on our parents’ farm. We just did a lot together.”

Andie would no doubt be proud of her big brother.

Aebly went to Vancouver to gallop horses for trainer Steve Henson before beginning his riding career at Hastings Park in 2022.

His first win came that September with Quagmire, a dark bay son of Storm Victory-Yodeling Ann, who sprung an 11-1 upset over 6 ½ furlongs on the Hastings dirt.

Aebly, who won three races from 23 starts that season,

would hit his best stride in the saddle in 2023.

Highlights include a three-length victory in the CTHS Sales Stakes on August 28th at Hastings with Just Jimmy. The pair finished fourth in the BC Premier’s Handicap (G3) in October.

“Winning that stakes race stands out for sure,” said Aebly. “Riding in the BC Derby at Hastings and the Canadian Derby at Century Mile were big accomplishments as well.”

So too is having made a name for himself in one of North America’s most competitive jockey colonies.

Aebly has been getting regular mounts while riding for some of Woodbine’s top outfits. His agent is former rider Gerry Olguin, who also started at Hastings before moving his tack east to Woodbine, where he had a successful career before announcing his retirement in 2017 after winning his 2,000th race.

He made a strong first impression on Olguin.

“Fraser wants to learn. The people that helped him at Hastings Park helped me too. They are good horse people. When they called to tell me to watch this kid ride, I liked what I saw. When I watched him – I think he won three races at Winnipeg on that day – you could see that the horses were running for him. And then I when I talked to him, I just had this feeling that he was going to do well.”

Olguin’s intuition proved to be right on the mark.

This year, Aebly has won 68 races and finished in the top three at a 44 per cent clip. His purse earnings sit at just over \$1.1 million (U.S.).

“I think I have a good sense of what’s going on around me when I’m in a race,” Aebly said, about his riding strengths. “I also have a good clock in my head, which helps me to get the most of each horse.”

“This year has been very good. It exceeded what I thought it would be. I set goals and I was able to reach them. I’ve ridden in a lot of tough places and Woodbine is definitely no different. It’s the goal of every rider to race here, so you have to be at your best every time you go out there.”

With the curtain closed on the 2023 Woodbine season, Aebly will take a short time to rest up before he heads to Florida where he will gallop over the winter at a farm in Ocala.

“Being around the horses is my happy place. I want to take that time to improve myself, to stay connected with the horses, and to be ready for when the new Woodbine season starts. This year was good, but I want it to be even better next year.”

If all goes according to plan and he is granted a winter extension, Aebly will maintain his five-pound apprentice allowance until September 2024.

But he isn’t about to get ahead of himself.

Thoughts of winning a Sovereign Award as top apprentice, riding his first stakes winner at Woodbine, surpassing the number of wins he posted in 2023 – all of that can wait for now.

“I’m so happy with the way things have gone, but you have to continue to work hard and improve in this sport. I have goals just like anyone else, but it’s going to be one step at a time. I want this to be the start of something special.”

Aebly knows exactly where to find inspiration along the journey.

“My parents are amazing people. No matter what I would have chosen to do, they would have supported me 100 per cent. And with Andie, I know she will always be with me every step of the way.”



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It's a Wrap!

The final day of thoroughbred racing at Woodbine on Sunday December 17 was an opportunity for the outstanding performers of the year to give us one last emphatic reminder of their dominance.

Jockey Kazushi Kimura put the exclamation point on his terrific year by winning 3 times on closing day, bringing his meet-leading total to 161 wins.

Kimura wasn't kidding around when he guided Jokestar to victory in the 6th race, a maiden special weight with a purse of \$114,600. The distance was a mile and a 16th and at the end, Jokestar had hung on by a head, breaking his maiden on the 5th try for trainer Kevin Attard and the owners Al and Bill Ulwelling. The successful bettors cashed \$4.60.



The 9th race, with a purse of \$144,000, asked eight \$47,500 claimers to go a mile and a 16th and Kimura delivered J P Hellish, who surged late to win by a neck. The 7-year-old gelding won for the 10th time in his 46th race. He is trained by Martin Drexler for Mad Dog Racing, and he paid \$4.30. This was Drexler's 103rd win of 2023 and his 86th at Woodbine, which had him 2nd only to perennial leader, Mark Casse.

Kimura completed his hattrick in the 10th and final race of the day by cruising home by almost 3 lengths aboard Jimmies Big Day. This is a 4-year-old gelding, owned and trained by Paul Buttigieg and the win ticket was \$10. From what we understand, Kimura cleaned up, had a nap, then jumped in his car, and started the long drive to California where he will be riding this winter at Santa Anita. Expect Kazushi to be back in Ontario by April, in time to accept his 5th Sovereign Award. He already has a pair of these as Top Apprentice of the Year and two for Outstanding Jockey in Canada. In 2019, Kimura won the Eclipse Award as the Best Apprentice in North America.

This year, Kimura won 15 stakes, 7 of them graded, at the Toronto oval, including a quartet of Grade 2 events – the Kennedy Road with Flag Of Honour (AUS), the Bessarabian with Loyalty, the Autumn with Wolfie's Dynaghost, and the Eclipse Presented by Don Julio with



Treason.

"I am very grateful to all the trainers and owners who gave me an opportunity to ride so many great horses this year," said the 24-year-old. "I'd like to thank the grooms, exercise riders, hot walkers, gate crew, outriders, and everyone who makes our sport so great. And I would like to thank all the horses, the stars of our sport and the best athletes you will find." It was a rare day at Woodbine that Casse did not find the winner's circle, and in the 4th race on December 17, Luis Contreras rode Junipero Serra to a 3 ½ length win. Junipero Serra is a 3-year-old gelding who broke his maiden for Gary Barber and Team Valur International. This was Casse's 113th win at Woodbine, which made this the 16th consecutive year that Casse has led all trainers at Woodbine. The man is also a cinch to score his 16th Sovereign Award as Outstanding Trainer in Canada. Among his many wins this year were Elysian Field in the Canadian Oaks, and Paramount Prince, who swept the Plate Trial and the King's Plate. Casse recorded 24 Woodbine Stakes victories, 10 of them graded. The last time we counted, Casse had 3,648 training wins. At Woodbine in 2023, he also had these Grade wins: the E.P. Taylor (G1T) and Nassau (G2T) with Fev Rover (IRE), the Royal North (G2T) and Whimsical (G3) with Our Flash Drive, and the Highlander (G2T) with Lucky Score.

One of the more impressive things at Woodbine this year was the wonderful work of apprentice jockey Sofia Vives. She also won on the last day, bring home the 4-year-old Echo With Laughter by a length in the 4th race, a 5 ½ furlong dash for \$9,500 claimers. Echo With Laughter is trained by Robert Tiller for Frank Di Giulio, and with his 3rd win in 11 races, he paid \$5.70. This was Vives' 88th win at Woodbine in 2023, good for 4th in the standings and assuring that she will be receiving

the Sovereign Award as the Outstanding Apprentice in Canada.

Bruno Schickedanz, last year's Sovereign winner as Canada's top owner, led the way with 58 wins. It is the 10th straight year he has led Woodbine in victories.

Patches O'Houlihan paced all horses at the meet with six wins, followed by Light the Lamp, who recorded five victories.

Once again, the bettors get credit for good work – Woodbine announced that the all-sources handle for the year was \$613,125,180 CAD. That figure is literally *smokin'* even if it's some \$8 million from 2022. Woodbine conducted 18 fewer races this year than in 2022 (1,180 vs. 1,198). There were 5 cancelled race dates because of the oppressive air quality caused by smoke from forest fires across Canada.

With the tsunami of emerging licensed sports betting places, Woodbine Entertainment announced a partnership with bet365 prior to The King's Plate. It includes the integration of pari-mutuel horse racing into bet365's licensed sportsbook platform in Ontario. Woodbine plans to integrate its racing product in additional licensed Ontario sportsbooks in 2024 in hopes of generating increased handle in the province and engagement with a new audience.

Key Highlights:

- Second highest single-season all-sources handle (\$613M) in Woodbine history
- Second highest single-season foreign handle (\$512M) in Woodbine history
- Record-breaking average per-race handle of \$519,597
- Average field size of 8.2 (above North American industry average)
- Woodbine saw the return of the King's Plate for the first time in over 70 years with winner Paramount Prince. The total all-sources wagering on King's Plate Day was a record \$18,127,049
- The integration of pari-mutuel racing into bet365's licensed online sportsbook in Ontario

The 2024 Woodbine Thoroughbred season is scheduled to begin on Saturday, April 27. The 165th running of The King's Plate will take place on Saturday, August 17.



2 YEAR OLD COLT TROT

\$30,000E USD TOMPKINS GEERS

\$75,000E MILLARD FARMS FINAL
TWO \$20,000 LEGS

\$620,000E WILLIAM WELLWOOD
MEMORIAL FINAL
\$30,000 ELIMINATIONS

\$180,800E CHAMPLAIN STAKES

7 RACES **\$975,800**
IN TOTAL PURSES

2 YEAR OLD FILLY TROT

\$30,000E USD TOMPKINS GEERS

\$79,500E PURE IVORY FINAL
TWO \$20,000 LEGS

\$425,000E PEACEFUL WAY FINAL
\$30,000 ELIMINATIONS

\$181,000E CHAMPLAIN STAKES

7 RACES **\$785,500**
IN TOTAL PURSES

2 YEAR OLD COLT PACE

\$30,000E USD TOMPKINS GEERS

\$84,500E DREAM MAKER FINAL
TWO \$20,000 LEGS

\$280,100E NASSAGAWEYA STAKES

\$186,800E CHAMPLAIN STAKES

\$1,000,000G METRO PACE FINAL
\$40,000 ELIMINATIONS

8 RACES **\$1,661,400**
IN TOTAL PURSES

2 YEAR OLD FILLY PACE

\$30,000E USD TOMPKINS GEERS

\$75,500E WHENUWISHUPONASTAR FINAL
TWO \$20,000 LEGS

\$228,700E ETERNAL CAMNATION STAKES

\$179,000E CHAMPLAIN STAKES

\$540,000E SHE'S A GREAT LADY FINAL
\$35,000 ELIMINATIONS

8 RACES **\$1,128,200**
IN TOTAL PURSES

\$1,000,000 MOHAWK MILLION

2 YEAR OLD TROTTERS

TEN \$50,000 CAD SLOTS ARE AVAILABLE
TO PURCHASE



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Hudon Breaks Through



On January 4, James MacDonald steered home 6 winners at Mohawk. You won't see a story in this paper about that because, well, MacDonald brings home 6 winners on the same card with a certain regularity, and we don't want to repeat ourselves. On January 5, Sylvain Filion won 4 times. Same thing. Ho Hum. Filion does that a lot, but on the same night, Phil Hudon delivered 4 winners and *that* got our attention.

Hudon has a great harness driving resume – over 4,700 wins in a career that has spanned over 30 years. He just turned 49, and it may be that his best years are in the past. In fact, going into the January 5 card, Hudon had driven 56 races in a row without a win. He did enter the Friday card with restrained optimism.

"I thought I had some shots, but the way my luck's been the last year or so, you don't expect to win four," he says. "I don't think I won four races in the last six months."

He got that right. There was not a single race card in 2023 when Hudon even won 3 races. We found 3 dates –

February 16, March 24, and September 1, when he did win a pair on the same night.

His terrific Friday started in the 4th race, a \$12,000 pace for fillies and mares. Halfway through the race, Hudon, with the 6-year-old Chiefs Dream Girl was far back in 7th, but those in front were cutting out some sharp fractions.

"The race worked out really good for her," he says. "She's not a bad mare, but she'd been getting a little hot on us, so I've been racing her from off the pace and she's starting to settle down more. The half in :54 definitely played a big role."

Hudon picked up some cover, but right-lined Chiefs Dream Girl just before the field turned for home. In the stretch, she was pacing the best, and opened up a couple of lengths before tiring just before the wire as a 61-1 longshot came flying, reducing the margin at the wire to a head for Chiefs Dream Girl.

"There was one coming hard after she lost her cover," says Hudon. "But I was happy with her." Chiefs Dream Girl is a 6-year-old mare, trained by Jack Moiseyev and she paid \$12.50.

Hudon used a different strategy in the next race, a \$19,000 pace for fillies and mares. He gunned Ultimate Speed to the front from post 6 and got the lead, though they had to go 3-wide to do that.

"Her last two starts since we put a choke plate on her, she's been really good," he says. "The last time she raced, she had bad cover, but she had lots of go that day, so I thought she would have a good chance the next start."

Even with the 3-wide start, Ultimate Speed got the lead in a relatively easy :28 quarter, and after cruising to the half in a benign :56.2, Hudon had plenty of horse left as Ultimate Speed won by 2 lengths in 1:53.2. Trained by Nick Ahern, she paid \$12.70.

Hudon made it 3 wins when he scored with Id Imagine in the 8th race, a \$17,000 pace. Id Imagine got a good start, but

27-1 shot Dance On The Moon (Jody Jamieson) opened up a 4-length lead turning for home.

"Yeah, I needed the stretch," says Hudon. He's kind of a green horse and you have to keep coaxing him, so it worked out good. I had to keep chasing him, but he was in the right class."

Id Imagine, a 4-year-old gelding got the lead just before the wire, winning in 1:55.3 for trainer Derick Anderson. The win ticket as worth \$6.50.

In the 11th race that night, Hudon was behind Yes Im Hungry, a 4-year-old mare in a \$12,000 pace. And the combination of his patience and the long Mohawk stretch spelled his 4th win of the evening.

Hudon resisted the urge to pull from 3rd as the field approached the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark, and in mid-stretch, he found a seam and passed 3 rivals late to prevail by a head in 1:53.2.

"When your luck is good, it works out like that," he says. "She's a nice little filly that (trainer) Blair Burgess picked up and she's been racing good. I just thought if I put her in the race and got luck down the lane, she would be alright."

Yes Im Hungry won for the 4th time in her 18th race and paid \$19.40.

Down The Stretch noted that Hudon must have enhanced his relationship with the 4 trainers that he won for – Jack Moiseyev, Nick Ahearn, Derick Anderson, and Blair.

"Yeah, they're all happy," he says. "Not as happy as me, but they're all happy."

Not since 2019 has Phil Hudon amassed as many as 100 wins in a season. From 1999 through 2006, he piled up 2,666 wins, an average of more than 300 in a season. He admits the losing was starting to affect him.

"The day before I hit for 4, was saying I should be getting out of this business," he admits. "I was just joking, but that's how you get thinking."

The 4-bagger on January 5 most certainly has Phil Hudon thinking he can still deliver winners.

Rachel Slevinsky's Side Hustle



One of the benefits of being a sports superstar is the opportunity to make millions through endorsements. It's said that Michael Jordan made about \$150 million from Nike for the running shoes that bear his name. We've seen Vlad Guerrero Jr. promoting Smucker's jam, Austin Matthews plugging RBC, and Scotty Barnes all over Subway. For jockeys, it's a much more difficult task for their agents to hook them up with a sponsor. But

apprentice rider, Rachel Slevinsky has been hired by Iron Horse Global to help popularize their line of riding equipment.

"They actually approached me for it last November," says Slevinsky, who won 15 races at Fort Erie and Woodbine combined in her first full year of riding. "Then they messaged me at the beginning of this year saying that I was approved for the sponsorship."

According to its website, Iron Horse Global "specializes in the creation of high-quality racing, equine and sporting apparel, equipment and promotional products."

"It's jockey gear," says Slevinsky. They have a lot of new track and racing gear like pants, shirts, jackets. They even have horse tack like blinkers and horse pads. They also have some jockey silks that they custom make. It's actually pretty cool."

Apparently Slevinsky is already reaping a nice benefit from her new relationship with Iron Horse.

"They sent me a couple pair of pants," she says. "They have my name on the side of them and they have their logo as well on the back. They took all my measurements and they fit like a glove."

Down The Stretch asked Slevinsky why she thought Iron Horse chose her.

"I had a pretty successful year but, of course, there's more people more successful than me," she says. "They said that they just like the way that I carry myself. They like my work ethic, and they think I have potential. They also think my personality will also help bring in some more business. They're based in Australia and England, so they want to move into the States and Canada. I guess they're looking for new and friendly faces and they said that they think I would be a good fit."

Nothing is more important in advertising than presenting an appealing message. If Slevinsky can win a handful of races this year, Iron Horse will find her even more attractive. She's not riding this winter but does plan to return to Woodbine in the spring.

"I did have a fall in November," she says. "So, I was in recovery for a little while and then once I started feeling better, I drove down to Florida and now I'm at Palm Meadows working for Saffie Joseph Jr. He's been a huge help with tips. I've been breezing a lot of good horses with a lot of good jockeys, so I'm very excited for the Woodbine meet. I plan to be ready to go by opening day."



Dr. Ian Moore

The 35th O'Brien Awards were held in Charlottetown, P.E.I. on Saturday, Feb. 3, and the big winners were James MacDonald, Sylvia Hanover and anyone connected to Tattoo Artist.

Legendary driver Doug Brown got the longest standing "O" when he strode to the podium to announce the winner of the Keith Waples Award as the country's Outstanding Driver. It surprised no one when Brown read "James MacDonald."

Appropriately, MacDonald became the 1st driver to win this award 3 years in a row since Brown won 4 straight from 1993-1996. In 2023, MacDonald reached the 400-win mark for the 2nd year in a row and for the first time in his career, exceeded \$10 million in seasonal purse earnings. As MacDonald accepted the trophy, it was his 5th trip to the podium that night as he celebrated

O'Brien victories with the owners of 4 horses that he drove last year. So Much More was named the best Older Pacing, Legendary Hanover scored as 2-Year-Old Pacing Colt, Willys Home Run was the best rookie Filly Trotter, Righteous Resolve scored in the 3-Year-Old Filly Trotting class, and Adare Castle was voted the top Older Trotting Mare. All 5 of those pulled MacDonald to Stakes winning wins.

Tattoo Artist parlayed his 9 for 14 season into an O'Brien as the Outstanding Older Pacing Male and this had a ripple effect on other outcomes. Tattoo Artist's trainer, Dr. Ian Moore won as Outstanding Trainer and Tara Hills Stud, which bred Tattoo Artist took away the Armstrong Breeder of the Year Award.

Sylvia Hanover had a spectacular 2023. As a 3-year-old, she won 10 of 13 and banked over \$839,000. She won the Fan Hanover Stakes, the Shady Lady Stakes at the Meadowlands, and the Breeders Crown Final at Hoosier. Those brilliant accomplishments made it easy for the voters. Sylvia Hanover won the O'Brien as best 3-Year-Old Filly Pacer, and she also left the awards with the Somebeachsomewhere Horse of the Year trophy. Sylvia Hanover is owned by Hudson Standardbred Stable of Quebec, and she was trained by Mark Steacy. Bob McClure has driven the filly in all her 22 races, of which she has won 18.

2023 O'Brien Award Winners

All the O'Brien Award Winners:

Two-Year-Old Pacing Filly PASS LINE

Owners: Burke Racing Stable LLC, Fredericktown, PA
Weaver Brusceci LLC, Canonsburg, PA
Frank Baldachino, Harvey Cedars, NJ
Breeders: Burke Racing Stable LLC, Fredericktown, PA
Weaver Brusceci LLC, Canonsburg, PA

Two-Year-Old Pacing Colt LEGENDARY HANOVER

Owners: Eric Good, Davidsonville, MD
West Wins Stable, Wellington, FL
Mark Dumain, Pine Bush, NY
Breeder: Hanover Shoe Farms Inc., Hanover, PA

Three-Year-Old Pacing Filly SYLVIA HANOVER

Owner: Hudson Standardbred Stable Inc., Hudson, QC
Breeder: Hanover Shoe Farms Inc., Hanover, PA

Three-Year-Old Pacing Colt STOCKADE SEELSTER

Owners: Sally MacDonald, Souris, PE
Paul MacDonald, Toronto, ON
Breeder: Seelster Farms Inc., Lucan, ON

Older Pacing Mare SO MUCH MORE

Owners: Don Beatson, Granton, ON
Kenn Beatson, Palgrave, ON



Sylvia Hanover

Older Pacing Horse TATTOO ARTIST

Owners: Cole England, Exeter, ON
Breeder: Doug MacPhee, New Haven, PE

Older Trotting Mare ADARE CASTLE

Owners: Let It Ride Stables Inc., Boca Raton, FL
Bottom Line Racing LLC, Boca Raton, FL
Frank Cannon, Sanford, FL
Breeder: Tara Hills Stud Ltd., Port Perry, ON

TROTTERS

Two-Year-Old Trotting Colt T C I

Owners: Burke Racing Stable LLC, Fredericktown, PA
Hatfield Stables, Columbus, OH
Knox Services Inc., Mt Vernon, OH
Weaver Brusceci LLC, Canonsburg, PA
Breeder: Concord Stud Farm LLC, Cream Ridge, NJ

Two-Year-Old Trotting Filly WILLYS HOME RUN

Owners: Dr. Sara Gatchell, Strathroy, ON
Jake Higgs, Strathroy, ON
Reg Higgs, Strathroy, ON
Yolanda Fellows, Rockwood, ON
Breeder: Reg Higgs, Strathroy, ON

Three-Year-Old Trotting Colt GHOSTLY CASPER

Owners: Ben Baillargeon, Guelph, ON; Teresa Davidson, Milton, ON; Nunzio Vena, Bolton, ON; Santa Vena, Grand Valley, ON
Breeders: Diane Ingham & Harry Rutherford, Mount Pleasant, ON



James MacDonald

Three-Year-Old Trotting Filly RIGHTEOUS RESOLVE

Owners: Bet Max Stables Inc., Casco, MI
Benenati Inc., Clinton Twp, MI
Breeders: Bet Max Stables Inc., Casco, MI
Benenati Inc., Clinton Twp, MI

Older Trotting Mare ADARE CASTLE

Owners: Mark Etsell, Rockwood, ON
Robert Newton, Walkerton, ON
Graham Hopkins, Chesley, ON
Peter Porter, Port Dover, ON
Breeder: Ed Lohmeyer, Cream Ridge, NJ

Older Trotting Horse LOGAN PARK

Owners: Outofthepark Stable, Rockwood, ON
Reg Higgs, Strathroy, ON
Arpad Szabo, Bradford, ON
Breeders: Reg Higgs, Denfield, ON
Donna Higgs, Denfield, ON

Somebeachsomewhere Horse of the Year SYLVIA HANOVER

Owner: Hudson Standardbred Stable Inc., Hudson, QC
Breeder: Hanover Shoe Farms Inc., Hanover, PA

PEOPLE AWARDS

O'Brien Award of Horsemanship MARK EISELL Rockwood, ON

Armstrong Breeder of the Year TARA HILLS STUD LLC Port Perry, ON

Keith Waples Driver of the Year JAMES MACDONALD Guelph, ON

Trainer of the Year IAN MOORE Cambridge, ON

Future Star Award CASSIDY SCHNEIDER Arthur, ON

Cam Fella Award HON. DENNIS KING Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Outstanding Groom Award ANDREW WARD Saint John, N.B.

MEDIA EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Outstanding Written Work CHRIS LOMON

"Felix Marion, Farrier to the Stars." **Outstanding Film/Video/Broadcast**

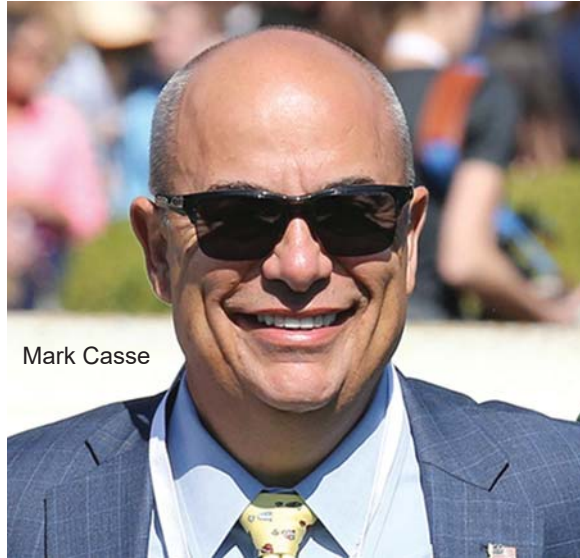
WOODBINE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
"Pepsi North America Cup"

Outstanding Photography CLIVE COHEN *"The Rainbow"*

2023 Sovereign Awards Finalists

On February 5, The Jockey Club of Canada announced the finalists for the 2023 Sovereign Awards honouring Canada's champions and recognizing their outstanding achievements in Canadian Thoroughbred Racing and Breeding.

The winner of each category, along with Canada's Horse of



Mark Casse

the Year for 2023, will be announced during our 49th Annual Sovereign Award ceremony which will be held on the evening of Thursday, April 18, 2024 at Paramount Eventspace in Woodbridge, Ontario.

Please call or email us for more information and to reserve your tickets today! Tickets can also be purchased online at: <https://jockeyclubcanada.com/online-payments/>.

2023 Sovereign Awards Finalists

The finalists in each of the following categories are listed in alphabetical order.



Kevin Attard

Champion Two-Year-Old Female

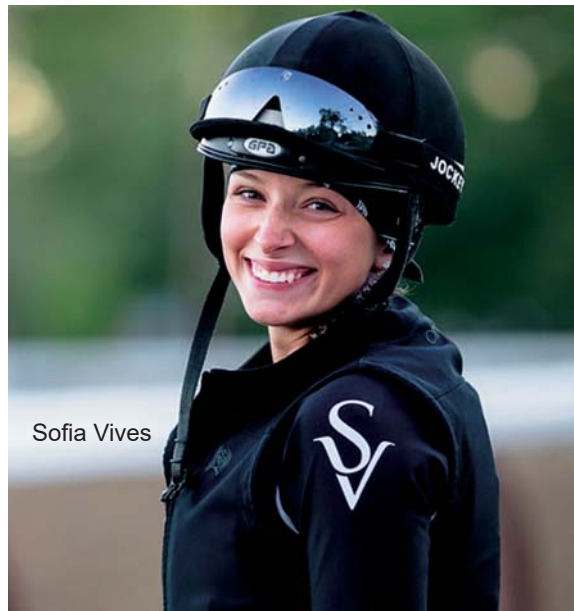
Living Magic
Tripolina
Witwatersrand



Martin Drexler

Champion Two-Year-Old Male

Babbo
My Boy Prince
Two Ghosts



Sofia Vives

Champion Three-Year-Old Female

Elysian Field
Fashionably Fab
Solo Album

Champion Three-Year-Old Male

Paramount Prince
Patches O'Houlihan
Touch'n Ride

Champion Older Main Track Female

Il Malocchio
Infinite Patience
Millie Girl

Champion Older Main Track Male

Treason
Tyson
Wolfie's Dynaghost

Champion Female Turf Horse

Fev Rover (Ire)
Moirá
Our Flash Drive

Champion Male Turf Horse

Lucky Score
My Boy Prince
Palazzi

Champion Female Sprinter

Fashionably Fab
Loyalty
Our Flash Drive



Fraser
Aebly

Champion Male Sprinter

Dream Shake
Lucky Score
Patches O'Houlihan

Outstanding Broodmare

Game (FR)
Mendocino Beano
Sunday Affair

Outstanding Breeder

Adena Springs
Anderson Farms Ont. Inc.
Chiefswood Stables Limited
Sam-Son Farm
Sean Fitzhenry



Rafael Hernandez

Outstanding Owner

Barber, Gary
Chiefswood Stables Limited
Schickedanz, Bruno

Outstanding Trainer

Attard, Kevin
Casse, Mark E.
Drexler, Martin



Kazushi Kimura

Outstanding Apprentice Jockey

Aebly, Fraser
Vandermeersch, Amanda
Vives, Sofia

Outstanding Jockey

Civaci, Sahin
Hernandez, Rafael Manuel
Kimura, Kazushi

Horse of the Year

The Horse of the Year finalists will be announced during the 49th Annual Sovereign Awards ceremony. For more information please contact The Jockey Club of Canada at (416) 675-7756 or jockeyclubcanada@gmail.com.

49th Annual SOVEREIGN AWARDS



Early-bird
tickets

\$225 + HST

until March 18,
2024

Paramount Eventspace

April 18, 2024

TICKETS: \$250 + HST each, tables of ten **\$2000** + HST

For more information and tickets, please visit us online at

www.jockeyclubcanada.com or contact

jockeyclubcanada@gmail.com | 416-675-7756

Honours for Harold Ladouceur



It's hard to imagine that anyone rang in the new year as ecstatically as thoroughbred trainer Harold Ladouceur. It was just before midnight on New Year's Eve that his wife, Jessie revealed a secret she'd been sitting on for several weeks. She told Harold he had been inducted into the North American Indigenous Athletic Hall of Fame

"At first I couldn't believe my wife," laughs Ladouceur. "But then she told me it was serious, and I was like, 'Wow!' It was a great feeling. I'm still taking it in."

Jessie had promised not to let the Hall of Fame cat out of the bag because the NAIAHF wanted to reveal its new inductees on January 2. Ladouceur was part of his third class of inductees for the group that was formed in 2022.

"So, she kept it a secret that whole time nobody was supposed to know," he says.

Of course, the first criterium for this award is that an eligible individual must be Indigenous.

"I was born and raised in a Kikino Metis settlement," he says. "But I registered on the Moosomin First Nations from Saskatchewan."

And of course, Ladouceur's honour comes from his work as a thoroughbred horse trainer. He knew as a young man that horses would be a big part of his life. His grandfather, Alex Poitras trained horses in Western Canada and Ladouceur found involvement early as an exercise rider and groom. He competed in races conducted in makeshift tracks in corn fields. It was at Assiniboia Downs that he met his wife, Jessie and his early career began to blossom with connections he met in Florida.

There was one horse, though, that began a monumental upsurge in the fortunes of the Ladouceurs. She was named Paladin Bay.

"We bought her at the CTHS sale in 2012 and she turned out to be just a beautiful filly. She was such a gutsy, good racehorse. She changed our lives."

Ladouceur paid \$10,139 for Paladin Bay. After a 4th, then a 3rd in Maiden Special Weight races in 2013, the filly produced a pair of 2nd place finishes in the Shady Well and the Muskoka Stakes. She broke her maiden on the 5th try, winning on September 14, 2013, and then just 16 days later, took down the \$250,800 Princess Elizabeth Stakes. Jockey Gerry Olguin rallied her from 7th down the backstretch to a 1-length win at odds of 15-1. Before her 2-year-old season was done, Paladin Bay would come 2nd in the South Ocean Stakes, then 1st in the \$150,000 Ontario Lassie Stakes at a mile and a 16th. As a 3-year-old, she won the \$150,000 Selene Stakes.

Paladin Bay finished her career with 4 wins from 18 starts and earnings of \$607,316. To that total, you can add the \$170,000 the Ladouceurs received when they sold her to Calumet Farms.

"She was worth every penny that she made," says Ladouceur. "The way the world was turning right at that time, it was just meant to be. The stars lined up for me."

In fact, the "stars" continue to line up for Harold Ladouceur. He recently started training for Frank Stronach.

"He got a hold of me and said he wanted to have a meeting with me," says Ladouceur. "He said he wanted a new trainer and he'd heard that I was good with young horses. So, that's how it came about."

One of Stronach's horses in Ladouceur's care is a 3-year-old filly named Shamans Girl, a daughter of Shaman Ghost, who won the 2015 Queen's Plate along with the Woodward Stakes, the Santa Anita handicap, and the Pimlico Special. Ladouceur sent Shamans Girl out for her debut on December 2 in the \$150,000 Shady Well Stakes. Under Ryan Munger, the filly was last of 6 halfway through the 6-furlong trip, but found a superior stride into the far turn, passed all of those in front of her and pulled away to win by 3 ½ lengths. Shamans Girl was 23-1 and paid \$49.30.

As for being in the Hall of Fame, Ladouceur will find himself mingling with some Grade 1 Stakes company. Other members of the North American Indigenous Athletic Hall of Fame include:

- o Bryan Trottier, who won 6 Stanley Cups
- o Jim Thorpe, winner of the gold medal in the pentathlon and decathlon at the 1912 Olympic games. He also played several seasons of major league baseball and professional football.
- o George Armstrong, who played 21 seasons with the Toronto Maple Leafs. As captain he led them to 4 Stanley Cups.

Ontario Bred Snow Moose Voted AQHA Canadian Champion *by Jennifer Morrison*



The popular grey gelding, **Snow Moose**, one of Ajax Downs' top Quarter Horses of 2023, was

voted Canadian Champion at the American Quarter Horse Association's annual Racing Champions Awards on January 17 at Heritage Place Sale Company in Oklahoma City OK.

Owned and bred by **Milena Kwiecien** of Burlington, ON, Snow Moose won five of nine starts as a 3-year-old last year, including the QROOI Derby and the Ontario Bred Derby. The son of Separate Interest, Favorite Pearl by Favorite Cartel was disqualified from two other victories including the \$48,000 Alex Picov Championship in which he was placed third.

Snow Moose, trained by Jason Pascoe of Pontypool, earned \$54,672 in 2023. Four of his victories came with leading rider, Brian Bell, and another had jockey J. B. Botello aboard.

"This is an honour, especially for a small breeder like myself," said Kwiecien at the awards ceremony. "This is very much a family affair. He owes his name to my mom, who we call Moose. He was born on a cold, March day [March 6] and pulled out from his mare by myself and my sister, Anna Rosiak. And my grandmother made our silks."

There were 10 nominees from Ontario and Alberta for the Canadian Champion Award, which is for the top Canadian foaled horse of a racing year. A panel of industry members throughout North America does the voting.

The Quarter Racing Owners of Ontario and Ajax Downs host the 2023 Awards Banquet to honour their champions on February 24, 2024, at the Ajax Convention Centre.

Canada Out of Town 2024

Penn National, January 10-12:

In 2023, trainer Steven Chircop got off to a great start by bringing horses from Woodbine to Penn National. So, in 2024, it's déjà vu as Chircop hit with 3 of the first 5 he sent out on January 10. The 5th race had a purse of \$13,000 for \$4,000 claimers going a mile, and it was Ami's Link, ridden by Julio Hernandez that was much the best, pulling away to win by 7. Ami's Link is an 8-year-old mare who notched her 9th win in her 45th race. She is owned by Chircop and Eric Ross and she paid \$5.20. Two races later, Chircop sent out Brother Belen in a \$10,000 claim race at a mile and 70. Hernandez took the 4-year-old gelding to the front, repelled a mild challenge from one other rival and opened up by 4 lengths at the wire. Brother Belen broke his maiden on the 11th try. He is owned by Donald Whelan and Track West Racing, and he paid \$6.

On January 12, the first race asked 6 maidens to go 6 furlongs for a purse of \$22,628. It was Chircop and Hernandez combining again as Sister Cousin crushed by almost 5 lengths in 1:12.14. Sister Cousin is a 3-year-old filly owned by Chris Nolan. She won for the first time in 7 tries and she paid \$4.20.

Gulfstream Racetrack January 21:



Maybe a change of venue was all the 5-year-old Gav's Dream Girl needed. In her first 19 races, she'd managed just a single win at Woodbine. But in the 3rd race at Gulfstream this day, in her first attempt on traditional dirt, she got it done – though not without a little drama. With Tyler Gaffalione aboard for this 6-furlong dash for \$8,000 claimers, Gav's Dream Girl stumbled coming out of the gate and was suddenly last of 7. Around the far turn, she began passing rivals and after entering the stretch very wide, had more than enough momentum to gobble up 3 horses in front of her to win by almost 2 lengths in 1:11.92. Mike De Paulo is the trainer for Anthony DiPaola and with her 2nd win in 20 races, Gav's Dream Girl paid \$17.80.

Gulfstream Racetrack, January 25:



Race 6 was a mile and 70 on the all-weather. The 7 fillies and mares could all be claimed for \$16,000. Late in the stretch, at least 5 horses seemed to have a chance, but it was Worldly Beauty who got her head in front at the wire for Tyler Gaffalione. This was Marty Drexler's 1st training win of the year with his 15th try. The owner is Glenn Bechtel. Worldly Beauty is a 4-year-old, winning for the 3rd time in 12 races, and she paid \$8.40.

Penn National, January 25:

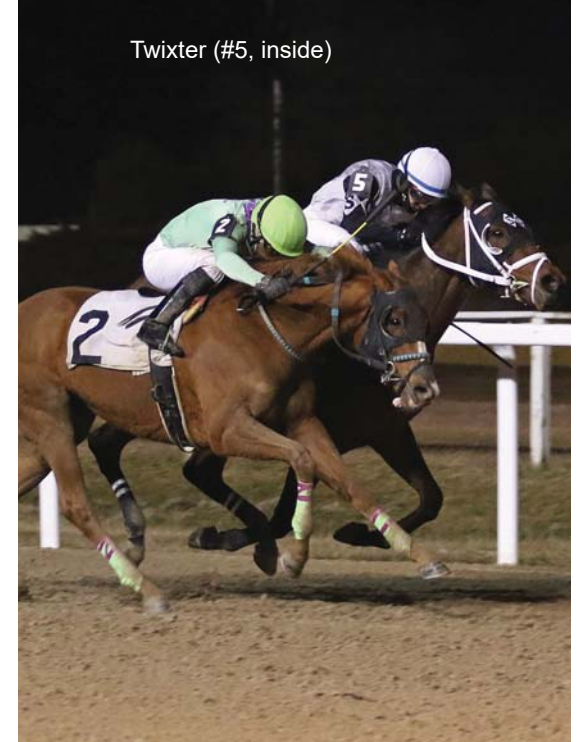


The 4th race had a field of 7 going 6 furlongs. Steven Chircop's nice run continued as Diamond Heist and Julio Hernandez surged late in the stretch to win by half a length in 1:11.5. The winning horse is owned by Premier Stable, and this gave Chircop his 5th win from only 13 starters at Penn. Diamond Heist now has 2 wins in 10 races. Her other victory came last September at Fort Erie. She paid \$7 to win.



Penn National, January 31:

The 5th race that night at Penn was a \$10,000 claim race with a field of 6, and the judges had to examine a photo finish to determine that Ashlee's Ring had won by a nose. The jockey was Maicol Inirio. Ashlee's Ring is owned by Bruno Schickedanz, whose 58 wins and 397 starters were by far the most at Woodbine last year. This was the 3rd career win for Ashlee's Ring, but her 2nd already this year – she won at Laurel on January 6. At Penn she paid \$11 to win.



It wasn't easy, but Twixter, ridden by Julio Hernandez won the 5th race, a mile and 70 for \$5,000 claimers. Twixter came down the stretch with a lead of almost 2 lengths, but Nieuwendyk (Inoel Beato) was skating furiously on the outside. Twixter and Nieuwendyk exchanged a few bodychecks in the drive to the wire, with Twixter winning the photo by a nose. This was Steven Chircop's 7th training win of the meet with his 21st entry. Twixter, a 4-year-old gelding, is owned by Chircop, and with his 2nd win in 12 tries, he returned a favourite payoff of \$5.40.



Back in the Booth for Middleton

Long-time Mohawk Park race caller Ken Middleton missed almost 7 months in the booth after a terrible training spill in June. But on Monday, January 15, he was back calling the trotters and pacers, lending his controlled and authoritative description to all 11 races, and to the listener, it was as if he'd never missed a day.

"As I got back in the booth, I just put my ass in the chair, put the headset on and it just all came back pretty quickly," says Middleton. "The only thing was, there were a couple of new horse names I wasn't familiar with, but that just comes with the territory. You have to expect that and be ready for that."

It certainly was not a pleasant hiatus for Middleton. He was training a horse last June and when the horse uncharacteristically got spooked, Middleton was tossed violently from his exercise bike.

"I fractured three vertebrae in my neck," he says. "I had two surgeries. The first one was to stabilize those fractures with metal hardware. I've lost some mobility in my neck. I can't turn it quite as adeptly as I used to be able to. My surgeon told me I was a very lucky man. I could have been paralyzed or possibly dead. I keep that in the back of my mind every day. I also suffered some nerve damage in my arms as a result of the fall. I was catapulted in the air out of the jog cart when it flipped, and I hit the ground very hard. My right arm is worse than my left arm. It's functional. I can write my name with a pen. I can lift a certain amount of weight off the ground like a feed bag, but I don't have the dexterity in my right hand yet. I have a hard time picking up a coin off of a countertop. But I would say in the last three weeks, I've gone from being 40% of Ken Middleton to 70% of Ken Middleton."

Middleton told *Down The Stretch* that Woodbine



has been very accommodating, making his return to the microphone as comfortable as possible.

"I asked my manager, Rob Platts about a couple of things that I thought would help me be better at work," says Middleton, "one of which was a parking spot closer to where I have to go into the entrance. Sometimes my balance is a little off, so it just enables me to have easier access to the facility. And I asked for a chair that's going to support my posture throughout the night, which is key because that's what wears you down is trying to return yourself to a certain posture, like holding my neck up straight. I still wear a brace at night just to kind of be a crutch. So, Woodbine was more than accommodating in those areas."

We're not sure if Hillary Clinton had Middleton in mind when she wrote her book *It Takes a Village*, but there was a fascinating cast of characters who filed into the booth during Middleton's absence. At various times, harness fans heard the stylings of Mark McKelvie, Chad Rozema, Greg Blanchard, Gary Guy, Shannon Doyle, Frank Salive,

Robert Geller, John McMillan, Fort Erie's Doug McPherson, and Kawartha Downs caller, Evan Louks.

"I felt for Robert Geller," says Middleton, "because he came in and it was a rainy, dirty night. Any track announcer would have struggled with it. But the professional that he is, he mucked his way through it, and he did it. He did an admirable job. So, hats off to them. When I was a young guy, it was a real big freaking deal to go to Mohawk and call a race there because of the magnitude of it. It's like Hockey Night in Canada on Saturday night if you're a broadcaster. And we also got a chance to see how great some of these guys are. For example, Mark

McKelvie – I hadn't really heard a lot of him consistently, but he's an elite race caller. They're all great guys. They all have different personalities. They all have different styles. We're like ice cream. There's different flavours and everybody has a different flavour that they like."

Middleton called all 11 races on his first night back and did so flawlessly. As for the concept of returning on a permanent basis, that's in the cards, but he still has some interesting human resources issues to deal with.

"During my absence, I was on short term disability and a little bit of long-term disability," he explains. "And I was still accruing holiday dates. So, I have to use those dates before the end of March or lose them, which means I'll be taking some days off here and there. I believe it's about 23 actual days of working that I'll still be away from now until March."

And that would be 23 nights at Mohawk that Woodbine will have to spin their rolodex to find an appropriate substitute.

WOODBINE BACKSTRETCH OFFICE RENOVATIONS

Last year over the Christmas break, the HBPA backstretch office at Woodbine experienced an unfortunate pipe burst which caused quite a bit of damage to our office. Luckily the Woodbine maintenance team's quick reaction allowed for the water damage to be contained. The board of the HBPA took this opportunity to update our backstretch office with new flooring and a fresh coat of paint.

2024 DATES FOR ASSISTANT TRAINER / TRAINER TESTING

For those interested in taking the Assistant Trainer or Trainer test this year, here are the application due dates and test dates for the 2024 season. We asked every applicant to please read over the criteria to make sure you are eligible to submit an application. Applications are available at both backstretch offices or online at www.hbpa.on.ca.

The 2024 Dates are as follows:

Application Due Date	Test Date
March 13th, 2024	March 27th, 2024
April 3rd, 2024	April 24th, 2024
June 5th, 2024	June 26th, 2024
August 21st, 2024	September 11th, 2024

IMPORTANT BACKSTRETCH DATES

Woodbine Racetrack's backstretch will be open on Monday February 26th for set up. Horses will only be permitted to ship in on Tuesday February 27th and the training track, along with the sand ring are currently scheduled to open on Wednesday February 29 (Weather Pending). Opening Day for the 2024 season at Woodbine is slated for Saturday April 27th.

Fort Erie Racetrack's backstretch will be open on Wednesday March 27th for set up. Horses will be permitted to ship in on Monday April 1st, Exerciser will be opened on Tuesday April 2nd, and the track is scheduled to open for training on Sunday April 14th (Weather Pending). Opening Day for the 2024 season at Fort Erie is slated for Tuesday May 28th.

HBPA CREWNECK SWEATSHIRT GIVEAWAY

This spring the HBPA will be giving away crewneck sweatshirts to backstretch workers. AGCO licensed Trainers, Assistant Trainers, Grooms, Exercise Riders and Hotwalkers will be able to come to our Woodbine backstretch office to receive a quality sweatshirt. Date of giveaway to be announced soon.



HBPA
of
Ontario

Administrative Office
135 Queen's Plate Drive,
Suite 420,
Toronto, Ontario M9W 6V1
Telephone: 416-747-5252
1-866-779-3067

Woodbine releases schedule for 2024 Standardbred Stakes season

Woodbine Entertainment has released the schedule for its lucrative 2024 Standardbred stakes season at Woodbine Mohawk Park, featuring three \$1 million races for the first-time since 2012.

The Pepsi North America Cup (June 15), Mohawk Million (September 21) and Metro Pace (September 21) will all be contested for a guaranteed purse of \$1 million, headlining a stakes season with more than \$12 million in Grand Circuit stakes.

The 41st Pepsi North America Cup for three-year-old pacers will take place on Saturday, June 15. The \$2.2 million-plus all-star program will again include the \$420,000 Fan Hanover (three-year-old pacing fillies), \$305,000 Roses Are Red (pacing mares), \$210,000 Armbro Flight (Mare Trot), \$250,000 Goodtimes (three-year-old trotters) and \$100,000 Mohawk Gold Cup Invitational.

The Mohawk Million for two-year-old trotters and Metro Pace for two-year-old pacers will be the million-dollar main events on Saturday, September 21. The \$3.5 million-plus card will be Canada's richest night of racing in 2024, with the \$660,000 Canadian Trotting Classic (three-year-old trotters), \$540,000 Shes A Great Lady (two-year-old pacing fillies) and \$375,000 Elegantimage (three-year-old trotting fillies) part of the evening.



Scott Zeron and Its My Show winning the 40th N A Cup

NewImagemedia Photo

New Events

Woodbine Mohawk Park will play host to the Tompkins-Geers Stakes for two-year-olds on Thursday, June 27 (fillies) and Friday, June 28 (colts and geldings).

The Tompkins-Geers Stakes is administrated by The Hambletonian Society and offers an immediate stakes opportunity for two-year-olds to begin their racing career.

The Ontario Graduate Series has been renamed the Canadian Graduate Series and is open to all Canadian sired four-year-olds. The series offers divisions for Open Pacers, Mare Pacers and Open Trotters, with three \$25,000 preliminary legs and a \$75,000 added final to take place on Saturday, May 4.

Major Race Dates

- Saturday, May 4 – Canadian Graduate Series Finals
- Saturday, June 1 – Somebeachsomewhere, Graduate Leg, Miss Versatility
- Saturday, June 8 – Pepsi North America Cup Eliminations
- Saturday, June 15 – Pepsi North America Cup Final
- Saturday, August 24 – William Wellwood Memorial and Peaceful Way
- Saturday, August 31 – Canadian Pacing Derby and Maple Leaf Trot
- Saturday, September 21 – Mohawk Million and Metro Pace Final

Mid-August through September remains the heart of the Grand Circuit action in 2024.

The \$620,000 William Wellwood Memorial (two-year-old trotters) and \$425,000 Peaceful Way (two-year-old trotting fillies) will be held on Saturday, August 24.

The \$615,000 Canadian Pacing Derby (Open Pace) and \$530,000 Maple Leaf Trot (Open Trot) land on their usual spot on the Saturday (August 31) of Labour Day weekend.

The Grand Circuit action in August and September again includes events such as the Champlain, Simcoe, Nassagaweya, Eternal Camnation, Casual Breeze and Milton.

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Eclipse Awards



Jockeys Keiber Coa and Sofia Vives



Irad Ortiz

Year for the 5th time in 6 years and (appropriately, as it would turn out) Bill Mott won for the 4th time as Outstanding Trainer. That was probably



Cody's Wish and Cody Dorman

an easy choice for the voters – Mott trained Cody's Wish, who simply put, was the horse racing story of the year. That was one of two awards for Cody's Wish. We'll get back to that in a moment. The 3-Year-Old Colt of the Year is Arcangelo, who won the Belmont Stakes, making Jenna Antonucci the first woman to win a triple crown race.

Three brilliant thoroughbreds were the finalists for Horse of the Year– Idiomatic, the mare who won the Breeders' Cup, Distaff, White Abarrio, the Whitney and Breeders' Cup Classic winner, and Cody's Wish, who won the Breeders' Cup Mile for the 2nd year in a row. Tom Rooney, CEO of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association was supposed to make the announcement, but to enhance the drama of the moment, he invited Kylie Dorman to open the envelope. Kylie calmly announced, "Cody's Wish."

The place erupted in applause. Cody's Wish is named for Kylie's brother, Cody, who was born with Wolfe-Hirschhorn syndrome, used a wheelchair and was unable to speak. His magical

relationship with an unnamed yearling inspired the folks at Gainsborough Farm to name the horse after the brave young man. As a 3-year-old, Cody's Wish won 3 of 6. The next year he won 4 of 5, finishing his 4-year-old season with a thrilling come-from-behind win in the Big Ass Fan Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile. He was even better in 2023, losing once and winning 4 times, including his sensational nose conquest of National Treasure to defend his Breeders' Crown title. Cody Dorman and his family were guests at Santa Anita for that unforgettable moment, but on the flight back to Kentucky, Cody suffered a medical event and passed away.

Upon accepting the Horse of the Year Award on behalf of trainer Mott and owners, Godolphin, Kelly Dorman, Cody's dad, was clearly emotional.

"You'll never hear Tom Hanks say, 'There's no crying in horse racing,'" said Kelly. "The fans that came up to us and letting us know how much the story behind the wonderful horse means – it puts a smile on our faces day in and day out."

There wasn't much Canadian content at the Eclipse Awards, but we were pleased that Sofia Vives was a finalist for Outstanding Apprentice Jockey. Vives is from South Carolina, but her rookie year at Woodbine not only opened a lot of eyes but it also persuaded the Eclipse voters to put her in rare company. Vives won 88 races at Woodbine, but it was Axel Concepcion who was named Outstanding Apprentice, and there won't be many arguments about that – Concepcion won 199 races and his horses earned over \$5 million.

Sofia did not feel the slightest twinge of disappointment.

"It was incredible," she said. "That's a once in a lifetime experience to be nominated as an apprentice. I was blessed to be there with my family. Even before the nominations came out, with my friends and family, I was a winner. To be top 3 is an incredible thing. Thank God that we were able to have the year that we had."

There was no Eclipse Award for best-dressed couple, but had there been, the image posted by jockey Keiber Coa and his companion Sofia Vives would have attracted a lot of votes.

There will be a "Take 2" of the awards season for Vives. She's an absolute cinch to be named Apprentice of the Year at April's Sovereign Awards, when excellence in Canadian horse racing is honoured.



Bill Mott

Thoroughbred Owner of the Month:

Chris
Nolan



Chris Nolan, 59 is from Jeffersonville, Indiana, close to Louisville, Kentucky. We didn't hold his citizenship against him in choosing him as this issue's Thoroughbred Owner of the Month. Nolan loves racing at Woodbine, has won races at that track, has a deep appreciation of the history of horse racing in Canada, and recently joined forces with Woodbine trainer, Steven Chircop.

Nolan has a formidable resumé in horse racing. Through his Lakeside Farms, he bred Colonial Colony, a son of 1981 Kentucky Derby and Preakness Champion, Pleasant Colony. On June 12, 2004, Colonial Colony, under Rafael Bejarano surprised everyone by winning the Grade 1 \$750,000 Stephen Foster Stakes at Churchill Downs. "Surprise" is the right word – Colonial Colony paid \$127.20 to win.

Unfortunately, about a year after that amazing win, Nolan had a health scare that took him out of the game.

"I thought I had lung cancer," says Nolan. "They found a nodule on my lung. They weren't sure if it was a carcinoma. I had to go through 2 years of testing. They did a study on me and it just kind of rattled us. My kids are the most important thing in my life. So, we moved to our summer home and spent the time with our four children. I decided to put the horses on the back burner because it was not the most important thing in our lives."

It turned out that whatever was going on in Nolan's body was not cancer. Nolan wanted to get back into racehorses, but...

"I had four kids graduating high school and college, getting married, grand babies coming," he said. "I didn't have enough time to mess with the horses again because my family has always been number one. So about 8 years ago, my youngest child, Christopher graduated college and he came to work for us. During the 2016 January Keeneland Sale, I told Christopher, 'We're going to jump in the car and drive down to Keeneland.' When I was in the horse business before, Pat Day rode a lot of our horses. He also rode horses for Sam-Son Farm and Sam-Son had a few mares going through the dispersal sale at Keeneland. And I told my son, 'We're going down there and I'm going to buy one of these Sam-Son mares.' Today we've got about 20 mares and we've got half a dozen horses running around the country and we're racing, and we're trying to have a good time."

Nolan knows what all Canadian horse racing fans know about Sam-Son.

"I have followed the Sam-Son people," he says.



left to right: Chuck Moore, Christopher Nolan Jr., Steven Chircop, Chris Nolan Sr. and Jockey Joe Talamo

"They're Canadian royalty in horse racing. I own a horse called Coastal Dawn, a daughter of Dancethruthedawn, a daughter of Dance Smartly, Years ago, I ran against a horse they had called Strut the Stage. They were always tough. When I entered horses, I'd always get nervous when I saw Sam-Son because I knew they were real. When they showed up at the races, you had to have a horse to beat them."

On January 12 of this year, a 3-year-old filly named Sister Cousin, owned by Nolan, won a maiden claiming race at Parx. The trainer is Steven Chircop, who carved out his best season in 2023 with 45 wins and over \$1.3 million in purse earnings. So how did Nolan hook up with Chircop?

"I kind of do my own thing," he says. "I don't use a blood stock agent. I do my own breeding and I do the same with trainers, I look for the guy that I think is poised to really be up and coming. I want to know he knows my horse and I want to like the guy, so I did a lot of research and I kept coming up with this kid named Steve Chircop and he was at Woodbine."

Last July, Nolan claimed a horse named Financial Advice for \$75,000 out of a race at Belmont.

"My thinking was, 'I'm going to give this Steve Chircop a shot with her,'" adds Nolan. "And he ran her, and she came third and he said, 'Chris, she keeps getting better,' and then he ran her in a maiden special weight, and she won."

Emma-Jayne Wilson delivered Financial Advice by a nose in that \$112,600 MSW. It would have been good financial advice to bet that one – she paid \$10.70. Financial Advice raced 3 weeks later in a \$111,500 allowance race

at a mile and a 16th and with Wilson again, she won by ¾ of a length paying \$16.30. Those two wins in a period of just several days were worth over \$100,000 to Nolan. That's the kind of thing that endears you to a new trainer.

"Chircop is working every day, working hard, paying attention to what he's doing," says Nolan. "He's a top-notch kid and he keeps me informed. I'm going to send a bunch of good horses to him. I told him to get ready. We're going to have a bunch of fun."

It was fun watching Sister Cousin win at Parx and, according to Nolan, lots of fun naming the filly.

"I have two granddaughters, and we were sitting around talking about how we're going to name this horse," he says. "One of my granddaughters is Emily and the other is Avery, and Emily says, 'Grampy, I think you should name her Sister Cousin because me and Avery are cousins, but we're really like sisters. We're really sister cousins.' I said, 'That's a great name.'"

The two cousins who are sisters were ecstatic when Sister Cousin won.

"Oh, yeah. They were all were excited. They were watching it going crazy. It was a lot of fun."

Even though he's not yet 60, Nolan has a plan for the rest of his life that the rest of us can only fantasize about.

"I decided 5 years ago to retire," he said. "My retirement plan is very simple. I want to go to Maine in the summer to spend time with my grandkids there. I have a home in Jefferson where I also have grandkids and I want to stay there in the spring and fall. I also have a home in Islamorada in the Florida Keys. I want to go there in the winter to escape the bad weather and to go fishing. And I want to go to the races. I want to jump on a plane and watch my horses race."



The first harness race of 2024 at Mohawk on January 1 was a pace with a purse of \$20,000. There were 7 in the claiming field, all of whom could be claimed from \$30,000 up to \$40,000. Tyler Borth drove the winner, Dontpokethedragon, circling rivals as the field approached the $\frac{3}{4}$ mark and winning handily by $1\frac{1}{4}$ lengths in 1:53.4. The horse is owned by Patrick Dillon along with his partner Patti Hoskin and friend Steve McGill, and for several minutes, that threesome led the owners race at Mohawk.

That was good enough for us. We decided to install Dillon as our Standardbred Owner of the Month.

Dillon, 64, grew up in Kingston, close to the racetrack and at an early age, acquired a love for the sport.

“One of my dad’s friends was Pat Hunt and he had horses and so I went with my dad to the races,” says Dillon. “I got an opportunity to walk horses for John Renaud when I was 12 or so. I just evolved from hot walking to jogging. And think I got my driver’s license when I was 21 or 22.”

In the early '70s, Dillon got his first horse.

“The first horse I actually owned, her name was Tashée,” he recalls. “And I bought her off Lee Brundige for I think \$1,200. I raced her in \$1,500 claimers. I don’t think I made my money back then. I might have almost broke even with her, so, for us then, that was a success.”

Subsequent acquisitions would work out better for Dillon.

“I claimed a trotter out of Peterborough for \$5,000. His name was Soucy Guy, and he ended up making \$14,000 that year. We raced him at Kingston Park Raceway, sometimes at Flamboro and at old Blue Bonnets Raceway in Montreal. That was quite a big thrill for us to race at Blue Bonnets.”

According to Standardbred Canada, Soucy Guy raced 51 times for Dillon with 6 wins. Dillon drove the horse several times himself, while employing other drivers like Paul Matthews, Richard Simard, Stephane Bouchard, Darrell Colville, Ricky Forgie and even Rick Zeron.

“Another horse that we had lots of fun with was called Smokin Turk,” says Dillon. “We claimed the horse and we raced him down the frozen Rideau Canal in Ottawa. In the final, Karen Fekete drove him. She’s married to Joe Hudon now, so it’s Karen Hudon, but back then Karen Fekete was one of the premier female drivers in Canada.”

Dillon had some memorable experiences in the sport early in his life, but his career dictated that he step away



Patrick Dillon
Patti Hoskin with Ms
Brampton Beach at
Kawartha Downs



Pat jogging at Spring Garden
Ranch in Florida

for some time.

“I’m a pipe fitter,” he says. “In the '80s, I moved up to the Oshawa area to work at Darlington, when they were building the nuclear plant, and I just got out of the horses to focus on work and a new life up in Oshawa.”

Dillon stopped racing horses around 1981, but by 2000, he was back in the game.

“I ran into a fellow named Gary Lance, and he had a horse called Cold Certified that was doing well in the Ontario Sires,” says Dillon. “We would talk horses for an extended period of time, probably past our coffee break allotment. That just fueled the passion that I had for the horses.”

So, Dillon bought a horse named American Rider and approached trainer Rob Fellows.

“I went to Rob to see if he would be interested in training a horse and he said, ‘Absolutely.’ And so, we claimed it, had a little bit of luck and then we lost it in a claimer. And 4 or 5 years ago, I got a couple for myself.”

Dontpokethedragon, the horse that opened the year at Mohawk was claimed by Dillon and his partners for \$40,000.

“We really liked the horse,” he says. “Yes, \$40,000 is, is quite an outlay, but a 6-year-old is still fairly young for the claiming game, but he really had an upside and racing for a purse of \$20,000 is very appealing. It costs the same to pay to train for \$10,000.”

It turns out Dillon watched Dontpokethedragon win from about 2,300 kilometres away.

“My girlfriend, Patti Hoskin and I were in Florida, and we got to watch it on the simulcast. That was a big thrill for us when he won.”

Dillon gave driver Tyler Borth props for perfect execution.

“He gave a great drive second over trip. They all left hard. This horse is a professional. He can do it off the front or off the pace. He’s in good hands with Fellows training him.”

The other owner of Dontpokethedragon is Steve Mc-

Gill.

“I’ve known Steve for maybe 5 years now,” says Dillon. “Steve’s a mutual friend where I have my pontoon boat docked in the summer. Steve was already dabbling in some horses, and he asked me about who in Toronto was a good trainer and I said, ‘You could never go wrong with Rob,’ and from there, he went in with us.”

It should be noted that Dontpokethedragon came right back to Mohawk on January 8 at the same level – a \$40,000 claim. From post 6, Tyler Borth shot right to the front and kept him there with sharp fractions of :26.4, 55.1, and when Dontpokethedragon threw a :27.4 final quarter at his opponents, he was able to hit the finish line a comfy length the best in 1:52.1. This was his 4th straight win and the 37th time he’s prevailed in 125 races.

We asked Dillon if he had ever bet his own horse at a big price.

“I drove a horse that I owned back in the Kingston days. The horse was named Barbara S. I thought she had a good chance. I had wheeled her on top in the tri. It ended up paying \$3,600. Back in the '80s, that was a pretty good cash.”

As for the part of the sport that keeps him in it, it’s multi-faceted.

“It’s more than just the horses,” he says. “It’s the whole environment. There are some really good people in the game. You see a lot of younger people owning and training horses. They’ve got their passion and their horsemanship, and you can see a future for the game. I go to the track, and I see all these people and I enjoy meeting and talking with them. I have a good rapport with the drivers like Bob McClure and Doug McNair and Tyler. I just have a lot of fun going to the track. I continue to have racehorses and babies with Rob and Kyle Fellows as well as some younger horses with Paul Reid in Florida. Fellows and Reid are excellent horsepersons and great people themselves. I hope to always be involved with horse racing in one capacity or another.”

Boom! Huge Longshots at Mohawk

Within the span of 6 nights, two horses surprised the Mohawk bettors by winning and paying over \$100. There was a nice back story in each case. On Monday, January 22, the 5th race offered \$8,000, the same as the claiming price for the 89 pacers. The longest price in the field was the 11-year-old gelding, Ey Cowboy driven by Phil Hudon. The gamblers mostly ignored this one who entered the race with 33 wins from 205 starts dating back to the summer of 2015. Ey Cowboy's recent form was less than inspiring. He'd finished 11th, beaten by 16 lengths and that was his 23rd consecutive loss. Apparently, aged pacers don't read their own past performance histories. Hudon gave Ey Cowboy a good start – they were comfortably 2nd after the first quarter and the plan was obviously to take the most efficient route to the wire. As the field entered the stretch, Ey Cowboy was 3rd along the inside and Hudon kept him there – and when the leading horse drifted just slightly to the middle of the track, Ey Cowboy scooted up with enthusiasm and won by a measured neck in 1:56.4. The win ticket was \$102. The story here, though, is that this was the first training win for 20-year-old Janaya Gallant, and it came just weeks after she purchased Ey Cowboy. "I bought him on Ongait," says Gallant, who shares

ownership with her best friend, Kearston Steele. Both women are from Nova Scotia.

"I paid \$4,500 for him. I looked at his lines and I realized that he hadn't been doing good on a half-mile track. So, I thought, 'Why not take the chance, buy him and try him at Mohawk?' So, it was kind of a shocker how well he came around."

Being that Gallant is from Nova Scotia, a hot bed for harness racing, you could assume she has a family connection to the sport, but that's not so.

"I met an old friend of mine when I was in high school and she took me to the barn," says Gallant. "I was about 15 and I was immediately hooked on it. I just loved it. Then I moved up to Ontario from Nova Scotia and I just found a passion for it. I got my trainer's license, bought some horses, and went from there."

Gallant was at Mohawk when Ey Cowboy supplied her first and greatest thrill in the sport.

"I was totally speechless," she laughs. "I had no idea that was going to happen. He raced for me back in December and I needed to give him some time off and work him a little bit more. It was a shocker. I could not sleep that night."

Aside from paying \$102 to win, there was another unusual aspect to Ey Cowboy's upset win. Gallant and Steele got paid \$4,000 for the win and, as it turned out, that was the largest cheque that Ey Cowboy had ever

earned in his 306-race career spread over 9 seasons.

Gallant also owns a 10-year-old pacing gelding named Trident Seelster that they claimed for \$8,500 at Flamboro on January 18. It seems she likes horses with long resumés – at the time of the claim, Trident Seelster had raced 176 times with 17 wins.

On Saturday, January 27, Mohawk had told fans that there would be a mandatory payout for the Jackpot Hi-5. There was already almost \$170,000 in the pool and the anxious gamblers poured in \$620,000 more. Not too many of them cashed, thanks to Natasha Day. She was steering Taylors Credit, who got little love from the crowd. The 7-year-old gelding had lost his last 4 in lesser company, so he ended up going off at 53-1. From post 7, Day was able to slip Taylors Credit into 6th place as the field turned down the backstretch, and as the field began to negotiate the far turn, Day tipped her horse off the rail to pick up live cover 4th heading for home. In mid-stretch, Taylors Credit had open road and plenty of energy as he hauled down the leader and repelled the late move from Beachin Lindy to win in 1:54.4. That made their tote board work overtime. Taylors Credit paid \$109.40 and topped the Jackpot Hi-5 that was worth \$45,487.19 for every .20 bet.

Day trains Taylors Credit and co-owns with Doug Millard, and she drove the horse to his 14th win in his 93rd race. And maybe the 50-1 price was generous to those who saw Day do something quite similar 2 months earlier when she produced Taylors Credit at the finish line at odds of 25-1.

ODDITIES & ENTITIES



Secretariat in a workout at Belmont Race Track, sometime before he won the Kentucky Derby, then went on to sweep the Triple Crown setting time records in each of the 3 races that have not yet been matched or lowered. Owner Penny Tweedy called this photograph the best photo taken of the horse of the century.

PHOTO BY Bob Coglianese

This should qualify as the bet of the year. The guy posted his Pick 6 wager on the Sunday, January 28 card at Gulfstream. He invested \$345 and cashed \$1,804,431.20. And he deserved the huge payoff; not a single favourite won in the sequence and his six horses paid \$7, \$19.40, \$24.40, \$22.60, \$20.20 and \$52.20.

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3-5,7-9

TODAY

MORE ODDITIES & ENTITIES

When Sulkies Explode



From a bettor's point of view, it can't get much worse than this. It was the 9th race at Maryborough, a 1690 metre pace at that Australian harness track. Park Lane and driver Chris Alford appeared to be sure winners, as they led by 2 with less than 200 metres to go. But suddenly, the sulky under Alford completely gave way and with Alford and his crumbling equipment scraping the ground, Park Lane was passed by the entire field as 40-1 shot Snazola took advantage of the chaos to win.

Seeing your sure winner disintegrate just moments before the wire can be exasperating, especially when something as rare as this happens. But this has occurred before. It was sometime in 1979 at Greenwood Raceway. Ben Wallace was steering a very reliable horse named Black Is Beautiful. Black Is Beautiful would finish his career with a remarkable 48 wins from 96 starts, but on this night, technology failed him.

"I remember it vividly," says Wallace. "Black Is Beautiful was a great old horse that showed up every Saturday night to race. At the time I was training for Wellwood Stables, and whenever Bill wasn't there, I would do the driving. It was a brand-new model of a race bike, almost in the design process and it had a malfunction. What happened was the seat fell off in the middle of the stretch. Fortunately, I didn't get trampled. For sure I had a concussion. I got scared pretty good."

Much like Park Lane, Black Is Beautiful looked likely to cash for his backers.

"He was going to be no worse than second," says Wallace. "He had a great trip. It was right in the mid-stretch at Greenwood. It was the late '70s, but I have had so many people over the years remember that incident. It was right at the wire, and we were very fortunate that there wasn't any damage done."

Wallace points out that the horse, Black Is Beautiful emerged unscathed from the incident. After running off without his human partner, Black Is Beautiful, realizing his work for the night was done, simply paced back to the barn.



We've been using a lot of Jessica Hallett's work in recent issues. She's a photographer, writer and wildly inventive artist. Check this out - These are Sylvia Hanover sneakers that Hallett made and sent to Natasha Steacy, wife of Shawn Steacy, the trainer of Sylvia Hanover.

Sylvia Hanover, now a 4-year-old mare was named Horse of the Year at the O'Brien Awards on February 3. Through 2 years of racing, she is 18 for 22 with over \$1.7 million earned. In 2023, she won 10 of 13, including the \$420,00 Fan Hanover at Mohawk and the \$600,000 Breeders Crown Final at Hoosier Park. In response to the creative gift from Hallett, Natasha Steacy posted on Facebook: "They'll look great on me at the awards!"

Takeout is the slice of the pie that racetracks take to cover their expenses and necessary government taxes. As the chart below indicates, some tracks impose painful takeout on their bettors, but there are some good ones.

Woodbine's takeout of 15.85% for win,place,show is

similar to most other tracks. Hawthorne is very nice at 12% and Assiniboia Downs offers just 14.65. The cut grows with exactor wagering - the industry average is around 20%. You might not want to play exactors on Irish racing which rips you for 30%. Woodbine grabs 20.5, while Aqueduct takes just 18.5. There's a wide range of takeout with pick3s;

Woodbine's cut of 26.3 is more than many others. Sam Houston is appealing with just a 12% takeout on doubles, pick3s, pick4s and pick5s. Gulfstream syphons 20% off pick3s, but you should know that if you're betting through HPI, Woodbine adds a 6% surcharge, so a \$100 payoff at Gulfstream might get you just \$94 if you bet it in Ontario.

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Track (or Specialty Wager Name)	Track ID	WPS	Exacta	Omn	Trifecta	Super	Double	Pick3	Pick4	Pick4 Late	Pick5	Pick5 Type	Pick5 Late	Pick6	Pick6 type	Pick6 Carry	Track ID
Aqueduct	AQU	16	18.5		24	24	18.5	24	24		15			15		24	AQU
Arapahoe Park	AP	17	24		24	25	24	25	25		25						AP
Assiniboia	ASD	14.65	21.95		21.95	21.95	21.95	21.95	15.95		21.95	JP					ASD
AUS- Melbourne	CIA	17	20	17	22	22	17	22	22					23			CIA
Australia B-pool	AUA	18	24.8		27.8	26.3	24.8	26.3	26.3								AUA
Belmont	BEL	16	18.5		24	24	18.5	24	24		15			15		24	BEL
Belmont at Aqueduct	BAQ	16	18.5		24	24	18.5	24	24		15			15		24	BAQ
Belterra Park	BTP	18	22.5		22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5		15			22.5	JP		BTP
California Fairs		16.77	24.02		25.02	25.02	24.02	25.02	25.02		25.02			25.02	JP		
Canterbury Park	CBY	17	23		23	23	23	23	10	23	10						CBY
Canterbury Park Turf Pick 3 (\$3 Min)								14									
Century Downs	CET	14.75	22		25		15	25	25		15						CET
Charles Town	CT	17.25	19		22	22	19	15	15		12			12	JP		CT
Churchill Downs*	CD	17.5	22		22	22	22	22	22		15			15	JP		CD
Coast to Coast P5 (\$1 min)											15						
Colonial Downs	CNL	18	22		22	22	22	22	22		12			15			CNL
Del Mar	DMR	15.43	22.68		23.68	23.68	20	23.68	23.68		14		23.7	23.68			DMR
Delaware	DEL	17	19		25	25	19	25	25		15						DEL
Delta Downs (new 12% takeout on P4 and P5 beginning 12/13/2023)	DED	17	20.5		25	25	20.5	25	12		12						DED
Dubai	DUX	20	25	25	25	25	25	25	25					25			DUX
Ellis Park*	ELP	17.5	22		22	22	22	22	22		15			22			ELP
Emerald Downs	EMD	16.1	22.1		22.1	22.1	10	10	22.1		22.1		22.1	22.1	JP		EMD
Fair Grounds	FG	17	20.5		25	25	20.5	25	25		15			15			FG
Finger Lakes	FL	18	20		25	25	20	25	25		20			25			FL
Fonner Park	FON	18	20		25	25	20	20	20		20						FON
Fort Erie	FE	16.95	26.2		28.2	26.2	26.2	26.2	17.3		26.2						FE
France	VDM	15.05	27	27	30.9												VDM
Golden Gate Fields	GG	15.43	22.68		23.68	23.68	20	23.68	23.68		14		23.7	23.68	JP		GG
Golden Hour Double (\$5 Min)							15										

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Track (or Specialty Wager Name)	Track ID	WPS	Exacta	Omn	Trifecta	Super	Double	Pick3	Pick4	Pick4 Late	Pick5	Pick5 Type	Pick5 Late	Pick6	Pick6 type	Pick6 Carry	Track ID
Golden Hour P4 (\$1 Min)											15						
Gulfstream Park	GP	17	20		26	26	20	20	20		15	Cons		20	JP		GP
Gulfstream Park Turf Pick (\$3 Min)	GP							15									GP
Hastings	HSM	15	21.8		27.3	26.3	15	15	15		15						HSM
Hawthorne (Lowered WPS to 12%)	HAW	12	20.5		25	25	20.5	25	15		15	Cons		20			HAW
Hawthorne added New "Place Pick All" (8% takeout, \$1 Minimum)	HAW																HAW
Hong Kong	HKH	17.5	19.5	17.5	25	25	17.5	25	25					25			HKH
Horseshoe Indianapolis	IND	18	21.5		21.5	21.5	21.5	21.5	15		12			15			IND
Irish Racing (25% P/S)		20	30		30	30			30								
Japan B-pool	JNA	16.8	24.8		27.8	26.3	24.8	26.3	26.3		15			26.3			JNA
Japan NAR B-pool	JPI	20	25		25	25	25	27	27								JPI
Keeneland*	KEE	16	19.5		22	22	22	22	22		15	Cons		22			KEE
Keeneland Turf Pick 3 (\$3 Min)								15									
Increased all by 1% Boycott Kentucky Downs	KD	17	19.25		20	20	20	20	15		16						KD
Laurel	LRL	18	21		25.75	25.75	21	25.75	25.75		12			20	JP		LRL
Lone Star Park	LS	18	21		25	25	21	25	25		12			12			LS
Los Alamitos (TB) (P6 is \$2 min)	LRC	15.43	22.68		23.68	23.68	20	23.68	23.68		14		23.7	23.68			LA
Louisiana Downs	LAD	17	20.5		25	25	20.5	25	15		15			25	JP		LAD
Mahoning Valley	MVR	18	22.5		22.5	22.5	22.5	15	15		15			20	JP		MVR
Monmouth	MTH	17	19		25	25	19	25	15		15			20	JP		MTH
Mountaineer Park	MNR	17.25	19		25	25	19	25	25		25			25	JP		MNR
NYRA Cross Country P5 (\$1 Min)	XCP5										15						XCP5
NYRA Triple Play (\$3 Min)								24									
Oaklawn Park	OP	17	21		21	21	21	21	21		21						OP
Parx	PRX	17	20		25	25	20	25	25		15	JP					PRX
Penn National	PEN	17	20		31	30	20	25	25		20						PEN
Pimlico Race Course	PIM	18	21		25.75	25.75	21	25.75	25.75		12			20	JP		PIM
Prairie Meadows	PRM	17	20		20	20	20	19	15		15	JP					PRM

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Track (or Specialty Wager Name)	Track ID	WPS	Exacta	Omn	Trifecta	Super	Double	Pick3	Pick4	Pick4 Late	Pick5	Pick5 Type	Pick5 Late	Pick6	Pick6 type	Pick6 Carry	Track ID
Presque Isle Downs	PID	17	20		25	25	20	23	23		15			15	JP		PID
Remington Park	RP	18	21		24	24	21	25	25		25			21	JP		RP
Rillito Park	RID	20	20		22	22	20	22	22		22	JP		25	JP		RID
Royal Ascott	ASC	17.5	19.5		25			25	26					27			ASC
Sam Houston	HOU	18	20		25	25	12	12	12		12			12	JP		HOU
Santa Anita (Raised minimum to \$1 for Trifecta and Pick-3)	SA	15.43	22.68		23.68	23.68	20	23.68	23.68		14		23.7	23.68			SA
Santa Anita New Turf Pick 3 (\$3 Min)	SA							23.68									SA
Saratoga	SAR	16	18.5		24	24	18.5	24	24		15			15		24	SAR
Saudi Cup		17.5	19.5		22	25	25	25	25					25			
Sunland Park	SUN	19	21		25	25	21	25	25		25						SUN
Tampa Bay Downs	TAM	17	20.5		25.9	25.9	18	18	18		15			20	JP		TAM
Thistledown	TDN	18	22.5		22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5	15		15			20	JP		TDN
Timonium Fair	TIM	17	19		25	25	19	25	25		12			20	JP		TIM
Turf Paradise	TUP	20.75	21.75		25.8	25.8	21.75	25.8	25.8		25.8			25.75	JP		TUP
Turfway Park*	TP	17.5	22		22	22	22	22	14		15			15	JP		TP
UK (Place/Show 20%)	UKO	19.25	25	30	25			25	25								UKO
UK World Pool (HKJC)	AOD	17.5	25		25			30	30					30			AOD
Will Rogers Downs	WRD	18	21		24	24	21	25	25		21						WRD
Woodbine	WO	15.95	20.5		25	26.3	15	26.3	25		25			15	JP		WO
Zia Park	ZIA	19	21		25	25	21	25	25		25						ZIA

* All Kentucky Tracks have penny breakage

DOWN THE STRETCH PODCAST

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December 10, Episode 203:

Starting with the La Prevoyante and Steady Growth Stakes from Woodbine, this episode has an interview with leading jockey **Kazushi Kimura** who talks about his compatriot **Shohei Ohtani** and why he's looking forward to driving all the way to L.A. Friday was a big day at the track for newly arrived jockey **Fraser Aebly**. Writer **Dave Briggs** expands on his Harness Racing Update story called *Only a dope would think harness racing doesn't need serious change*. Driver **Louis-Philippe Roy** erupted for 5 wins last Friday at Mohawk and we have a tasty call from **Robert Geller** that includes steak, cheese and soup.

December 17, Episode 204:

With the Thoroughbred racing season concluded, we officially identify the champion jockey, trainer and owner, which means references to **Kazushi Kimura**, **Mark Casse** and **Bruno Schickedanz**. Trainer **Marty Drexler** cracked the 100-win mark this year and he tells us how he became a major force at Woodbine. **Doug McNair** put on a show Saturday night at Mohawk. He had 4 winners, not that anyone got rich betting him. Jockey **Isabelle Wenc** rode professionally for the last time and reveals just how mentally and physically the sport wore her down. And – **Moops** is not only a winning pacer in Australia, but a hilarious episode of Seinfeld, which we sampled.

December 24, Episode 205:

In this episode we review the most outrageous, unpredictable and certifiably insane moments in horse racing. Included in this delicious buffet are:

- + 5 straight races in which the #1 was the winner
- + A night of harness racing where it seemed only the Millers could win
- + A horse that paid \$1,000 to show
- + The night **Ken Middleton** teased Maple Leafs fans only to have it turn badly on him
- + The easiest horse racing question ever on Jeopardy that all the contestants got wrong
- + **Pete Aiello's** self-deprecating race call at Gulfstream
- + A dead heat between brothers
- + A race in which **Somebody** was coming late in the lane
- + The 4th place horse that was placed 1st
- + **Katie Davis** winning a race with her brother 2nd, her husband 3rd and her sister 4th
- + Driver **Doug McNair** carving out the sign of the devil one night at Mohawk
- + The track scraper who had one job....and did it during a race
- + **Frank Mirahmadi's** entertaining impressions
- + How we worked in the **Beatles** and **Chuck Berry** into a story about a mare with a 17-race win streak

December 31, Episode 206:

Can you jam every memorable moment from horse racing into 30 minutes? No, you can't, but this episode takes us on a journey through the most amazing results, the most intriguing stories and the most talented horses and people who made the headlines in 2023. Host **Peter Gross** points out that both the Canadian and U.S. Triple Crowns produced 3 winners. He also tells us that invaders took most of the cash from the big money races at Woodbine. Harness racing had all kinds of great stories – TCI winning the William Wellwood, then surging back in the Mohawk Million after breaking stride; **Scott Zeron** winning the NA Cup, the Hambletonian, the Little Brown Jug, the Jugette and the Kentucky Futurity. **Ken Middleton** was badly hurt and his absence allowed an army of race callers necessary to replace him. And our Story of the Year is both inspiring and heartbreaking – the tale of **Cody Dorman** and the great horse named after him.

January 7, Episode 207:

In episode 207 – and the first for 2024 - props to **Woodbine Entertainment**, whose broadcast team won an Eclipse Award for their Secretariat – The Last Race. Honours to trainer Harold Ladouceur, inducted into the North American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame. **James MacDonald** hit the 400-win mark at Mohawk; he was good to the very last drop. Jockey **Fraser Aebly** was golfing with his dad, Derek when we found him to talk about his good start at Woodbine. A win at Santa Anita for Ajax Downs regular, **Ismael Mosqueira**, and for this first podcast of the year, we have **Psychic Nikki** with her horse racing predictions.

January 14, Episode 208:

Standardbred racing takes the stage this week – Woodbine's **Bill McLinchey** tells us about 3 significant changes to the Mohawk Million and a few more bucks added to the Metro Pace. **Phil Hudon** was just as amazed as we were when he won 4 in one night recently, and he breaks down his most excellent night. **Lindsay Rainey** of the Canadian Horse Racing JHall of Fame explains how you can bid for a service from among the most impressive thoroughbred and standardbred stallions. Talking about stallions – not only does **Garnet Barnsdale** provide us endless material for this podcast, he is also the sire of **Nicholas Barnsdale** who is a finalist at the O'Brien Awards in the Media Excellence Writing category. And if you thought after last Thursday that **Belichick** would never win again, you were wrong.

January 21, Episode 209: Woodbine introduced a tempting promotion on the Mohawk Pick 5 and Garnet Barnsdale explains why this is a good thing. When **Sylvia Hanover's** groom, **Natasha Steacy** rises at the O'Briens to accept the trophy for Outstanding 3-Year-Old Pacing Filly, she will do so in her custom-made Sylvia Hanover sneakers...Horseowner **Chris Nolan** is from the U.S. but he tells us why he really likes Woodbine, Sam-Son Farm and his trainer, **Steven Chircop**. We were on the phone to **Milena Kwiecien** just after she learned her speedball, **Snow Moose** had been named Canadian Quarter Horse of the Year. And welcome back to the booth **Ken Middleton**, who tells us what it was like calling the races again more than 6 months after a dreadful training spill.

January 28, Episode 210:

We're everywhere this week – from the Pegasus World Cup at Gulfstream and the Eclipse Awards in which we feature Cody's Wish, Kylie and Kelly Dorman and Sofia Vives. Then to Steven Chircop and Bruno Schickedanz winning races at Penn National, **Marty Drexler** and **Raroma Stable** scoring at Gulfstream. We've got **Kazushi Kimura** and **Luis Contreras** winning at Santa Anita. There was over \$790,000 bet in the mandatory Jackpot Hi-5 Saturday at Mohawk and when **Natasha Day** won at over 50-1, the payoff was life-changing. **Janaya Gallant** is a 20-year-old trainer and her first winner paid over \$100. We talk with **Rachel Slevinsky**, who was chosen by an international company to promote their racing products. And when a sulky disintegrated in mid-stretch in an Aussie harness race, **Ben Wallace** was reminded when it happened to him.

February 4, Episode 211:

This podcast has the highlights from the 35th O'Brien Awards in Charlottetown. It was a very good night for **James MacDonald**, **Dr. Ian Moore** and the filly, **Sylvia Hanover**. We have **Steven Chircop** winning at Penn and **Kazushi Kimura** taking a Stakes race at Santa Anita. The Kingmaker is a new book about **Northern Dancer** written by **Avalyn Hunter** and Hunter reveals some amazing figures about the Dancer's progeny. Woodbine trainer, **Ted Holder** talks with us about what it would mean to him to win the Sandy Lane Gold Cup in Barbados and the two horses he plans to send to next month's big race. **Garnet Barnsdale** helps us explain 'takeout' and tells us which tracks treat you well and which tracks chisel your bet down. And if you hit the 11th race Saturday night at Mohawk., you could care less about takeout as a 40-1 shot won with a 105-1 shot second - what did that pay?

ON AIR

DOWN THE STRETCH



A Podcast with Peter Gross