

DOWN THE STRETCH

CANADA'S MOST INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING HORSE RACING NEWSPAPER

The Saratoga Adventure

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A 3rd Hambo for Zeron

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Husbands and Casse win the King's Plate

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King's Plate Eye Candy



THE EDITOR STANDS TALL AT SARATOGA



You would think that almost 60 years of betting on horses would provide some intelligent guidance. You could easily conclude from the last 15 years that Mark Casse is a superior trainer of horses and his capacity to have a four-footed athlete ready for a Stakes race is unrivalled. None of that explains why I didn't cash a penny when Casse's Paramount Prince won the Plate Trial at 11-1, or when Casse's Elysian Field captured the Woodbine Oaks at almost 6-1. Of course, years of experience should inform us that the Plate Trial winner and the Oaks Champion are always dangerous in the Plate, be it the Queen's or King's. And any horse ridden by Patrick Husbands in an important Stakes race is a player.

So, please tell me – how did I not cash at all on the Oaks or the Trial? How did I end up with a fist full of worthless tickets when Casse's two entries ran 1-2 in a 17-horse field in the King's Plate?

Those who hit the exactor of Paramount Prince and Elysian Field will get more pleasure than I did from our King's Plate spread on pages 4-5.

I'm making no apology for the 3,000-word, 4-page (10-13) spread on my recent trip to Saratoga. There is probably not a single word in this long indulgent saga that could benefit humankind in any way. But it was the first time in 4 years that Jim McKenny and I were able to go to the Spa, and for a weekend, we were joined by equally fanatical horseplayers Garnet Barnsdale and Gary "Suitcase" Smith. We like to boast that this publication is "Canada's most informative and entertaining horse racing newspaper." The Saratoga story has virtually no valid information, but perhaps you will find our disastrous wagering efforts amusing. At one point, I had cashed just one of my first 43 bets. A hungry chicken let loose on an open Racing Form would peck at more winners than I did.

Anyway, as a means of justification, I have learned from previous years of reporting on the Saratoga trek that I get more feedback from this scripture than any other story in the paper.

It was just 4 days before the first King's Plate in 72 years, when Woodbine CEO Jim Lawson revealed that – after which felt like an eternity – horse racing would be included



in the buffet of wagering offered by Bet365, the largest on-line betting company in the world. Our story on that can be found on page 8.

Lots of other great stuff is in this issue. Canadian Scott Zeron pulled off a remarkable win in the Hambletonian at the Meadowlands. He was driving Tactical Approach and his tactical approach to remain inside the entire trip resulted in a stunning upset (page 17).

Many racing fans were saddened to learn of the passing of photographer John Watkins, a familiar figure at Woodbine, Mohawk, and Ajax Downs. Our eulogy to him comes in the form of our Standardbred Owner of the Month feature (page 19.) Since this is the issue in which we report on the King's Plate, it seemed appropriate to get Mark Romeo of the Terra Racing Stable to reflect on the 2010 Queen's Plate in which Big Red Mike (named after Mark's nephew) won the race with the Queen in attendance. That's our Thoroughbred Owner of the Month (page 18). And our Quarter Horse Owners are Richard and Linda Wincikaby, who are having a wonderful time raising cattle and breeding quarter horses (page 20).

Just once, I had a date with a jockey. Her name was Diane Zippi and in the mid-80's she was riding at

Woodbine for Frank Merrill. At the time, a lady rider was a relatively rare thing at a major racetrack. I took her to a Blue Jays baseball game at the old Exhibition Stadium. It was on the same Saturday as the Preakness, and as the game dragged on, she began getting nervous.

"I have to see the Preakness," she said, insisting that she had to go before the game ended. I am sure that in my life, I have on several occasions, abandoned a date to get to the track. This was the only time a woman had dumped me for a horse race.

Segueing neatly from that, we have a story about Katie Davis, whom I consider to be a remarkable athlete. She was riding at Saratoga this summer and pulled off something that will probably never be duplicated. She won 3 times in 3 days, and in the process set up one exactor with her sister Jackie 2nd and another with her husband Trevor McCarthy 2nd. All this occurred while her brother Dylan was putting up 5 winners during the same weekend. Oh, did I mention that Katie is riding just 21 months after giving birth to a girl named Riley? Read about this on page 15.

Families combining for wins seems to happen a lot in this sport. On page 16 we have father Ramiro Castillo and his son Alexis Sanchez combining for 5 wins on an afternoon at Ajax Downs.

Aside from the many Stakes that accompanied the King's Plate on August 20, we document several weeks of Stakes results at Woodbine. Read about winning jockeys Rafael Hernandez, Eswan Flores, Adam Beschizza, Patrick Husbands, Sahin Civaci, Daisuke Fukumoto, Omar Moreno, and Kazushi Kimura on pages 6-7.

And our most loyal readers will find our regular pages – we reference the King and the King's Plate on page 9 and check out the amazing picture by photographer Jessica Hallett that we have "sampled" for page 2.

I may be among the world's worst horseplayers, but I do believe that every issue of *Down The Stretch* gallops bravely through the stretch, sticks its neck out winningly at the wire and provides great reward for the minimal risk taken by all of you who enjoy reading about a wonderful sport.

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KING'S PLATE

Paramount Prince in the King's Plate



It was 4 weeks ago that Paramount Prince won the Plate Trial at odds of 11-1 on the same afternoon that Elysian Field captured the Woodbine Oaks and paid \$13.60. Both horses were trained by Mark Casse who, for more than the last decade, has dominated Stakes races at Woodbine. We wondered how the bettors (ourselves included) could let his horses go off at such high odds. Of course, we never learn.

On Sunday, August 20, the first running of the King's Plate since 1951, Patrick Husbands gave Paramount Prince a magnificent ride to win the \$1,000,000 convincingly and it was the brave filly, Elysian Field, under Sahin Civaci who challenged late but had to settle for 2nd. Yup, Mark Casse sent out 2 horses in the 17-horse field and they ran 1-2. Paramount Prince paid \$18. Elysian Field was 9-2.

Husbands orchestrated a confident race, revving Paramount Prince to the lead from post 13 and coaxing perfect fractions from the gelded son of Society's Chairman. They covered the first quarter in :47.41, 5 furlongs in 1:11.81 and the mile in 1:36.47. They were fast enough to discourage those behind, but not so fast that Paramount Prince would wilt when his stablemate came calling. Credit to the filly – she came inside as the field turned for home and looked for a moment as if she might skip to the lead. But Paramount Prince was able to run his final quarter in :25.46 and that was sufficient to secure victory by 1 ½ lengths. The final time of 2:01.93

is excellent, just $\frac{45}{100}$ ths of a second off the record for the distance set last year by Moira. Javier Castellano brought in Stanley House for 3rd.

This was Husbands' 3rd victory in the King/Queen's Plate. Previously, he won with Lexie Lou in 2014 and Wando in 2003. Casse tripled up as well, adding this one to the Plates he won with Wonder Gadot in 2018 and Lexie Lou.

Husbands did not share the lack of enthusiasm that the bettors had for his horse.

"At the end of the day, you've got to let the horses talk and don't get too cocky," offered Husbands. "I had a clean break, I let him do what he likes to do best, and he just enjoyed the running. I asked him to get over on his right lead and he was just gone."

"There's a lot of speed, as I've talked about," said Casse. "He's so quick from the gate and that's where he won it. He outbroke them and I knew when he went by us the first time he was travelling well. I was with Gary Barber, and we saw the half in :47 and I said, 'That's not too bad.' And that Elysian Fields, she's tough. She came up. But it was a dream come true."

There was some grumbling over the bizarre incident with El Cohete, who was originally in the field. It turns out that Enjoythesilent's purse earnings were adjusted to include an Ontario Sired bonus of \$714, and that allowed Enjoythesilent to leapfrog from the also eligible list

ahead of El Cohete, who did not get into the race. Some handicappers felt that El Cohete's early speed might have changed the outcome by forcing Paramount Prince to go too fast.

Paramount Prince is owned by Michael Langlois and Gary Barber. He has now raced just 6 times, with 3 wins, 2 seconds, and a third.

Bred in Ontario by Ericka Rusnak, Paramount Prince was the first horse bought at auction by Langlois and his wife Charmaine, who made the purchase through then-trainer Jamie Attard. Barber, one of the sport's most prominent owners, eventually came on board as a co-owner.

As he was being interviewed just past the finish line, Husbands got a little emotional, thinking about his friend and fellow countryman Ricky Griffith, who passed away recently.

"Unbelievable," said Husbands. "It's a great feeling. I give this race to Ricky and all the other riders and grooms here from the Caribbean. This race is for Ricky. It's not for me."

The exactor of Paramount Prince with Elysian Field returned \$92.60, and it would be the second time that Sunday that an all-Casse exactor paid off at over 45-1.

And to punctuate a brilliant day of racing at Woodbine, it was announced that the betting handle for the day was \$18,127,726, by far the most ever in Plate history.



\$125,000 Catch A Glimpse Stakes:

Nine 2-year-old fillies went 6 ½ furlongs on the grass, and it was Airosa benefitting from a patient ride from Rafael Hernandez to score at odds of 5-2. Airosa had a wall of opponents ahead of her as the field turned for home. Hernandez considered going inside, then outside, then back inside when space opened up and at that point, Airosa was live, shooting to the front and winning by over length to the late running 3-2 favourite, Ready to Jam (Sahin Civaci). Airosa is trained by Kevin Attard and owned by X-Men racing Stable, Star Lady Racing and Madaket Stables. The win ticket was \$7.80.

\$150,000 Bold Venture Stakes:



Patches O'Houlihan

Trainer Bob Tiller made a bold venture by entering the 3-year-old Patches O'Houlihan against 8 older horses in this 6 ½ furlong dash. The gamble paid off brilliantly as Daisuke Fukumoto gunned Patches right to the front, at one point, leading by 4 lengths. At the top of the stretch, it appeared that several rivals would go by, but Patches O'Houlihan had more in the tank and found the wire 1 ½ lengths ahead of 46-1 bomber, Last American Exit (Jose Campos). Patches O'Houlihan was 6th in his first career race but has won all 5 since. He is owned by his breeder, Frank Di Giulio Jr., and he paid \$6.30.

\$125,000 Soaring Free Stakes:



It's always surprising when a Mark Casse horse pays in double digits after winning a Woodbine Stakes.

Casse sent out 2 fillies, Golden Canary and Dancing Duchess against the boys and the Casse horses ran 1-2.

Jockey Sahin Civaci notched his 3rd win of the day by putting Golden Canary right on top and daring the rest of the field to catch up. At the wire, Golden Canary won by a head over her stable mate. The win price was \$17.10, and the all-Casse exactor paid \$91.40 for a \$2 bet.

\$200,000 Dance Smartly Stakes:

Seven fillies and mares went 1 ¼th on the grass and Miss Dracarys went the best. Under Javier Castellano, the 5-year-



Miss Dracarys

old mare had the lead shortly after the break and never gave it up. Moira, the even-money choice and last year's Oaks and Plate champion came late, drifted a bit in the stretch, as Miss Dracarys found the wire safe by almost 2 lengths. The winning trainer is Neil Drysdale for Al Shira'aa Farms. Miss Dracarys paid \$10.70.

Woodbine Stakes

July 8, \$100,000 Lake Huron Stakes:

Only four 3-year-old boys lined up for this one at 5 furlongs on the inner turf. Silent Reserve under Rafael



Hernandez got the first call and led into the stretch, but it was Patches O'Houlihan and Daisuke Fukumoto who powered through the lane to win by an expanding 1 ¼ lengths in :56.49. The 3-year-old gelding is owned by his breeder, Frank Digiulio and is trained by Robert Tiller. As the 3rd choice in a 4-horse heat, Patches O'Houlihan paid \$6.00 to win.

July 8, \$101,500 Georgian Bay Stakes:

Souper Sunday



There were eleven 3-year-old fillies in this one, also at 5 furlongs on the grass. Souper Sunday got a super steer on a Saturday from Eswan Flores. The filly ran behind the leader, Cara Cara (Justin Stein) for the early running, grabbed the lead turning for home and found the wire a comfortable 2 ¼ lengths the best in :57.24. Souper Sunday is trained by Steve Owens who also bred her. Owens shares the filly with Empress Stable, and Souper Sunday paid \$11.70.

July 22, \$150,500 Ontario Colleen Stakes:

Nine 3-year-old fillies went a mile on the grass, and it was Mohawk Trail under Adam Beschizza who went the best. Beschizza had his filly 7th down the backstretch, then had to manoeuvre 4-wide at the top of the stretch to skate around rivals in front. Once clear, Mohawk Trail was much the best, spurting away to win by 1 ½ lengths



in 1:34.68. The winning trainer is Kelsey Danner for NBS Stables. Even though Mohawk Trail had previously won the Alywov Stakes and improved to 4 for 9 in her career, she paid a generous \$25.60.

July 22, \$180,000 Hendrie Stakes:



This was for fillies and mares 3 years old and up at 6 ½ furlongs. Loyalty proved to be faithful to rider Kazushi Kimura. The 4-year-old filly watched the pace from 4th early, came along the inside as the field turned for home, and galloped home fiercely to win by 2 ½ lengths in 1:15.61. Josie Carroll trains for Gainesway Stable and LNJ Foxwoods. Loyalty won for the 6th time in 8 races which explains the \$4.30 win ticket.

Nice of Mark Casse to Drop In!

Though he was firmly entrenched at barn 29 at the head of the Saratoga stretch, Mark Casse flew into Toronto – for him, a rare appearance in Canada – but it was certainly worth his time. Casse sent out Paramount Prince in the \$152,000 Plate Trial, which was run at a mile and an 8th. The jockey was Patrick Husbands and, historically, when Husbands and Casse team up in a Woodbine Stakes race, it's "bettor beware" – their numbers are staggering. Despite that, Paramount Prince was let go at more than 11-1. Maybe it was because his only win in 4 previous races, was in maiden company, and maybe the gamblers saw the colt had never raced beyond 7 furlongs. Conversely, Paramount Prince had finished a solid 2nd in each of his last 2 races, including the Queenston Stakes. In the Trial, Husbands went right to the lead and got Paramount Prince to relax through beneficial fractions of :48.58, 1:12.93

Paramont Prince



and 1:37.40 for the mile. In the stretch, Paramount Prince was a happy camper, scampering away to win by 5 lengths in 1:49.99. He paid \$25.50 to win. The owners are Gary Barber and Michael Langlois. That win alone was sufficient justification for Casse's journey from Saratoga, but there would be much more. Casse sent out 3 fillies in the \$503,000 Woodbine Oaks, also at a mile and an 8th. Casse's best shot was with Ticker Tape Home (Husbands) who was coming in off an impressive win in the 7-furlong Fury Stakes. Ticker Tape Home went off as the 2-1 choice, Me and My Shadow (Emma-Jayne Wilson) was 10-1, and Casse's 3rd entry, Elysian Field under Sahin Civaci was almost 6-1. Ticker Tape Home faltered and could do no better than 5th. Me and My Shadow came from 8th to finish 4th, but it was Elysian Field who shone this day. The white-hot Civaci rallied his filly from 7th down the backstretch, went 6-wide into the lane and was

Elysian Field



dominant to the wire, winning by 2 ¼ lengths in 1:49.63, a little faster than the boys went in the Trial. Casse trains this one for Gary Barber and Team Valour International. Elysian Field notched her 2nd win in 6 races and paid \$13.60. This was Civaci's first Oaks ride, but one of 4 wins he had on the day. That would be the 2nd time in 8 days that Civaci had taken down 4 races on a single card.

"I owe so much to Woodbine," said Casse after the race. "It has been near and dear to me for a long time. It has helped me get into two Hall of Fames. I'm a lucky guy."

When asked if Elysian Field was a King's Plate candidate, Casse didn't need to think very long.

"I would think so, he," replied. "She ran a 5th of a second better than the colts. In recent years, we had to run back after 3 weeks after the Oaks. Now we get a month. We know the fillies can win. We have won twice with fillies. We won with Wonder Gadot, and we won with Lexie Lou."

July 30, \$100,000 Lake Superior Stakes:



Michael Burns Photo

Just five 3-year-old boys raced in this 6-furlong dash (on the Tapeta after being taken off the grass) and the 2-5 favourite, Patches O'Houlihan under Daisuke Fukumoto, clearly understood he was the heavy favourite. Fukumoto took him right to the lead and carved out fractions of 22.64 and 45.16. Into the stretch, Patches O'Houlihan was several lengths in front and with a final 8th of 12.50, he was an easy winner, relaxed at the wire, 8 ½ lengths ahead of One Bay Hemingway (Luis Contreras) in the good time of 1:09.86. Patches O'Houlihan, a bay gelding, is trained by Robert Tiller and owned by Frank Di Giulio. With his 5th win in 6 races, he returned just \$2.90.

July 30, \$100,000 Thunder Bay Stakes:



Michael Burns Photo

The 3-year-old fillies also had to race on the synthetic instead of the turf. Five of the six in this race went off at 4-1 or less, and it was Foolish Games and Omar Moreno who established a clear lead at the top of the stretch. The filly was tired at the end but persevered to win by a length. The time for this race was 1:11.06, which would have been about 5 lengths slower than the boys. The owners are Mentec Mississauga Industrial Equipment, Big Willow Stable and Michelle Love, the filly's trainer. In her 13th year of training, Love, a former quarter horse jockey, recorded her first Stakes win. Foolish Games won for the 2nd time in 3 races and paid \$9.00.

August 5, \$150,000 Vice Regent Stakes:



Outlaw Kid

Michael Burns Photo

The field of eight 3-year-olds and up went 5 furlongs on the turf and the 4-5 favourite, Outlaw Kid with Kazushi Kimura needed every yard of the stretch to get up very late to win by a neck over a brave Silent Reserve (Eswan Flores). The race was timed in :56.20, about 4/5^{ths} of a second off the course record of :55.40 set by Silent Flash in 2022. Outlaw Kid is trained by George Weaver and owned by R.A. Hill Stable and SGV Thoroughbreds. The

4-year-old gelding won for the 4th time in 10 outings and paid \$3.80.

August 6, \$100,000 Hamilton Stakes:



These Woodbine Stakes summaries have a lot of Mark Casse in them, and the Hamilton Stakes simply reinforced his dominance at Woodbine. Casse's main guy, Patrick Husbands pressed the "go" button on Conman coming into the stretch of this 7 ½ furlong inner grass race. Conman did the rest, floating effortlessly to the lead and winning by over 3 lengths in 1:28.65, half a second off the course record of 1:28.11. The 2nd place horse was Lifetime of Chance, ridden by Sahin Civaci. Both of the first 2 horses are trained by Casse and owned by D. J. Stable, and Eyes On the King (Rafael Hernandez) is also a Casse horse, owned by M Racing Group. Conman won for the 3rd time in 10 races and paid \$5.00. The all-Casse exactor returned \$8.60 for a \$1 investment and the Case-Casse-Casse tri was worth \$9.64 for a 20 cent bet.



THE HORSEMEN'S BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TAKE NOTICE that an Annual General Meeting of the Horsemen's Benevolent Protective Association of Ontario (hereinafter referred to as the "Association") will be held virtually via Zoom on Saturday, September 23th, 2023 at 11:00 a.m. for the following purpose:

1. To approve the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held September 24th, 2022;
2. To receive the report of the auditors for year ended March 31, 2023; and the pension plan for year ended December 31, 2022
3. To appoint the auditors for the Corporation;
4. To report on the activities of the Association;

DATED at the City of Toronto, in the Province of Ontario.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lesley Barker, Executive Assistant

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Woodbine and Bet365 Strike a Deal:



“There’s a buzz out there for the industry,” states Jim Lawson, Woodbine CEO, in an interview three days before the King’s Plate. “The momentum is unique. It’s great for the industry.”

Lawson’s enthusiasm at the time was two-folded. The King’s Plate was already a sell-out, and he had the pleasure of proclaiming that, finally, horse racing will be part of the wagering buffet with a major betting enterprise.

“We have been working for more than a year and a half since the announcement of sports betting legislation,” says Lawson. “We had realized that we had to be part of

this fast-growing sector, which is expected to be from \$4 billion to \$10 billion in Ontario alone. After some very hard work with various levels of government and with Bet365, we have announced an agreement with Bet365 where we will put our horse racing content and wagering onto their platform.”

This matters for the sport, because if horse racing were left out of the equation, the outlook would be grim.

“There is no question that companies like Bet365 attract all the new sports wagering customers in this province, and that had the potential to cannibalize horse racing. This industry was going to be in dire straits. The new customers are teenagers and people in their 20s and 30s and they are going to be betting on sports. Now when they go on the sports betting apps and they will see, say, on a Monday afternoon or Thursday afternoon where there is no other content, they will see that they can wager on horse racing. We have always been concerned about the aging demographic that we have in horse racing. This goes a long way to addressing that.”

Sports bettors have enjoyed the flexibility of the on-line betting sites. The props are very popular – to parlay Bo Bichette at 1 ½ hits with Kevin Gausman over 7 ½ strikeouts. Lawson says it’s going to be a while before we can bet Kazushi Kimura over 1 ½ wins with Mark

Casse at 2 ½.

“Until the Criminal Code changes, Bet365 and other sports betting operators will not be able to offer that type of fixed odds wagering,” he says. “This is the first step, but the wheels turn slowly in this area. In coming years, I expect that you will see fixed odds wagering in Canada, and I expect there will also be the opportunity to have those type of wagers. This opens the door to that kind of wagering, but it’s some years off.”

We asked Lawson to put a dollar figure on how much more wagering on horse racing this will create.

“It’s really hard to project,” he says. “We’re projecting the Ontario sports betting market to grow to \$10 billion. We see horse racing being as high as 7% of that. So, you could see additional revenue of \$700 million from horse racing. It has that potential.”

And here’s some reassuring news for horse players tempted to wager with Bet365. Garnet Barnsdale, upon hearing about Woodbine’s arrangement, went immediately to the platform, made some bets and much to his satisfaction, discovered no additional takeout was involved.

“They pay track prices,” reported Barnsdale. “It’s very user friendly and easy to navigate.” Barnsdale subsequently submitted his losing bets for reimbursement under the category of “research costs.”



This beautiful picture was taken by Laura Trotter, wife of Emma-Jayne Wilson. Here’s the great jockey with their twin daughters, Grace and Avery



RACETRACK HUMOUR



Perry & Mooch

"I've got my exactors. I've got my win and show bets and a nice superfecta. Oh dear.... Camilla...have you seen my Swinger bets?"



"You've invited some guests to swing?
That sounds delightful!"

Peter and Jim's

SARATOGA Adventure

It had been 4 years since Jim McKenny and I last made the trek to Saratoga. He is my favourite person to play the races with. Many know him from his 7 years as a Toronto Maple Leaf defenseman. (He is still the 5th highest scoring rearguard in Maple Leafs history). He also made an impact during his 25 years as a sports anchor with Citytv.

But horse racing – specifically pounding the ponies – has always been a theme, even as an 18-year-old signing his first contract.

“I tried to sign with Punch, but he wouldn’t give me what I wanted,” recalls McKenny. “So, I ended up dealing with King Clancy. It was about noon and King says to me, ‘Just sign it! I don’t want to miss the double at Greenwood.’ I said, ‘I’ll sign it if you give me \$100 and take me with you.’ He said, ‘Done!’”

Opening Day at Saratoga was Thursday, July 13. Jim picks me up at 11 a.m. the day before. We drive to Turning Stone Casino, just off the I-90, about 3 hours from the track. Jim crashes in the room, while I play blackjack until 5:30. You will note here that I am not indicating whether I won or lost. What happens at Turning Stone....

Thursday, July 13:

Our party swells by two on Opening Day. Gary “Suitcase” Smith has flown in from San Diego to join us. Smith was a well-travelled goalie in the NHL in the same years that McKenny played. He earned the nickname Suitcase because:

“I played for Toronto, Oakland, Chicago, Vancouver, Minnesota, Washington, back to Minnesota, Winnipeg,” he says. “Also, in the minors, I played for Victoria, Tulsa, Hershey, the Fort Worth Texans and the Rochester Americans.”

Joined by 2 of the most notorious players in NHL history, we make it in time for the early double on day 1. The parking lots closest to the entrance ask for \$25 a day, but since the ‘90s we’ve been leaving the car less than a furlong from the main gates on a property run by a man named Andrew Shea, a public school teacher who augments his income during the Saratoga meet. I pull some bills out to pay for the parking and he shakes his head.

“You guys have been coming for so long and it’s nice to see you after 4 years,” says Shea. “There’s no charge this year.”

A few weeks earlier, I had purchased reserved seats. Many years ago, we learned that the Saratoga experience is somewhat compromised if you don’t have a decent place to sit. It used to cost \$6 a seat. This year, it’s \$25. Keep reading – the seat story changes dramatically for the better. We also rented a house from Racing City Realty. It doesn’t come cheap – \$4,000 for our 10-night stay. It’s promoted on the



The house known as ‘7 Furlongs’

Racing City Realty site with the catchy name, “7 furlongs”, as it is supposedly $\frac{7}{8}$ of a mile from the top of the stretch.

(Actually, we measured, and it’s a little further, but “Mile and a 16th” doesn’t quite roll off the tongue.

Before the first race, Smith and McKenny visit the jockeys’ room. “Suitcase” is friends with the jocks’ custodian. He chaperones the guys into the inner sanctum, where they meet briefly with some of the riding stars. A picture is taken with Smith and McKenny and champion jockey John Velazquez.

What happens in the first race is not necessarily predictive of what the whole Saratoga visit will be like, gambling wise,



but you always want to cash the first double on Opening Day. We don’t.

The first race is an optional claim at a mile and an 8th. The claim price is \$50,000. The purse is \$149,500. José Ortiz, aboard Bustin Bay, tracks the early leader for the first mile, comes outside in the stretch and wins by 1 ½ lengths. Bustin Bay, a 5-year-old mare, pays \$5.40.

There were few pari-mutuel thrills for us that day. In the 3rd race, veteran jockey, Javier Castellano delivers the 4-year-old filly, Diva Ready in a 5 ½ furlong dash. I celebrate loudly, declaring I have hit the exactor, which pays \$61. When I put my player’s card in the machine, it advises me that I neglected



to take the 2nd place horse. I cash nothing else for the rest of the day.

McKenny’s wagering also gallops at the rear of the field. I ask him how he made out.

“I really don’t want to talk about it,” he growls.

It was notable that My Sea Cottage, ridden by Irad Ortiz, prevailed as the 9-5 choice in the 8th race, a starter’s allowance at a mile. The 5-year-old gelding is trained by Mark Casse, the perennial leader at Woodbine and a friend of *Down The Stretch*. My plan is to find him for a brief interview.

I told you that our party expanded to 4. Around 7:30, Garnet Barnsdale, skilled racing journalist and handicapper, pulls into our driveway in his 10-year-old Volkswagen Passat.

Barnsdale made his plans to join us many months ago, around the same time I announced our schedule.

“It’s been a while since I was in heaven,” he states succinctly.



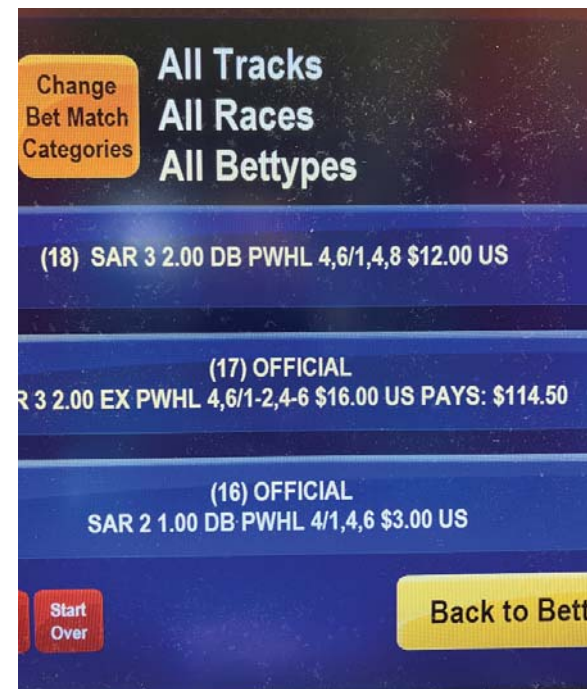
Gary and Garnet

7 Furlongs turns out to be a lovely house, with 3 bedrooms and a giant tv screen in the living room. It was mandatory that the home came with the Racing Channel. Even though McKenny split the cost with me, he brought along a nifty pup tent and invited Smith and Barnsdale to use the bedrooms. McKenny camped out in the back yard.

Friday, July 15:

McKenny and Smith are missing when we wake up on day two.

I text Mark Casse, asking if I can hook up with him. He texts back in 3 minutes.



“Yes, Barn 29,” is his response. I strap on the rollerblades and wheel myself to the back stretch. It is here that Barnsdale’s assessment of “heaven” rings true. The atmosphere on a cloudy humid morning is serene. Grooms, trainers, and riders go about their business. Magnificent thoroughbreds enjoy cool water sprayed over their backs. It’s a timeless scenario. If it wasn’t for the ubiquitous cell phones, it could be 1923.

Casse greets me warmly.

“If winning any race at Saratoga is on a trainer’s bucket list, then winning at Saratoga on Opening Day must be on your executive bucket list,” I say to him.

“Oh yeah,” Casse answers. “It takes a lot of heat off. I

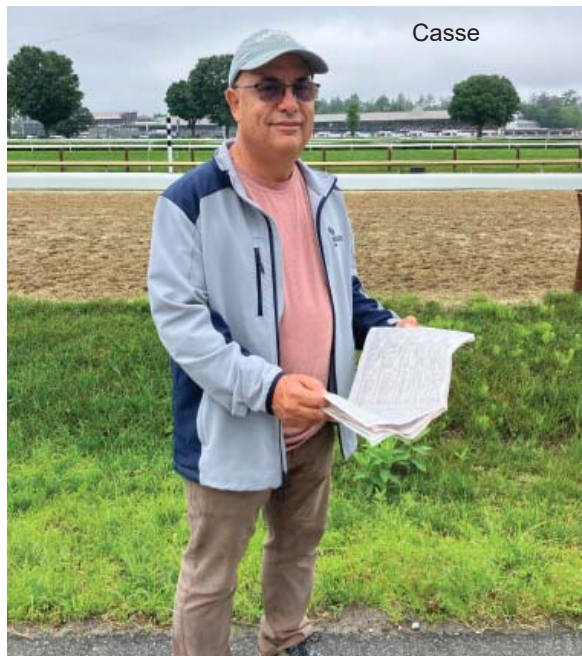
have been here 30-40 meets, and I have gone 30 days without winning a race. You start getting concerned about the 3rd day.”

I diplomatically suggest that Casse’s Saratoga numbers are not as substantial as his Woodbine figs.

“No, but you have to remember something at Saratoga for us,” he says. “We bring mostly our good horses, so we’re competing at the top. When you do that, even with 2^{nds} and 3^{ths}, those are wins. Over the years, we are usually in the top 5 or 8 in earnings. I remember in first grade, the teacher told me, ‘Zero times a million is zero.’”

For Casse, preparing horses at Saratoga stimulates profound emotions.

“It’s probably a little more special for me,” he says. “I grew



Casse

up here. My father, who I lost about 5 years ago – for a couple of years, we lived in the parking lot next to Fasig-Tipton. We would walk everywhere together. Everyone would gather downtown around 9 at night and wait for the next day’s racing form to come in. There’s a lot of memories here.”

I screwed up this interview with Casse. He told me he was coming up to Woodbine for the Plate Trial and the Woodbine Oaks. Would it have killed me to ask him which of his horses he liked?

Casse walks to the rail at the head of the Saratoga track and lets me take his picture. As I rollerblade away from his barn, I am accosted by a couple of security guards.

“You can’t do that here,” I’m told. “You could spook a horse.”

“I won’t do it again,” I answer sheepishly.



Horses yes. Rollerblades no!



There’s a \$109,000 carry over in the Pick-6 and since heavy showers have created multiple scratches and eliminated all turf races, Garnet and I consider that the Pick-6 is “gettable.” We put our genius level heads together and sculpt out a \$256 ticket, confident we have covered all possible reasonable outcomes.

McKenny and Smith return with very good news. They had driven up to Glens Falls to visit another former hockey star Kevin Dineen (upon reading a draft of this, McKenny objected to being categorized as a “star”). I’m not sure of all the details, but Dineen was in possession of reserved finish line seats belonging to former head coach Joel Quenneville. Apparently in return for a collection of expensive cigars, Dineen hands over the tickets to Jim and suddenly, we have prime accommodation for the rest of our stay.

We tell McKenny and Smith that we have already handicapped the Pick-6 and their share is \$64 each. With excessive trust, they immediately cough up their share.

It turns out that was not their best move.

I think Jim hit a pick-3 on day two. He didn’t take the beating that his 3 companions took. In the first leg of the Pick-6, the winner is Empire Sky for Kendrick Carmouche.



The 4-year-old gelding is the 2-1 favourite, but we don’t have him on the ticket. One race into the pick-6 and our \$256 investment is worthless.

I can attest that I didn’t cash a single ticket that day. But it wasn’t a complete loss. Way back in March, knowing he would be our “guest” for 4 days, Barnsdale made reservations at Morton’s, an upscale steak house located in the hotel-harness track facility a couple kilometers from the thoroughbred track.

“Order anything you like,” he instructs. I don’t need to be told twice.

I get the lobster bisque, which was great. I also order a New York strip and ask if I can have a lobster tail with it.

“Do you want the 4-ounce or 8-ounce tail?” asks our server, Denise.

Barnsdale was paying. “What do you think?” I said.

Saturday, July 15:

There were a few interesting things that happened that day, not that your author benefited. The biggest takeaway is that any horse, no matter how brilliant its form, no matter how low its odds, no matter how skilled his trainer and jockey can lose.

The 4th race is the \$500,000 Diana Stakes for older fillies and mares. It’s a mile and an 8th on the turf and there are only 5 in the field. The 5-year-old mare, In Italian comes in having never missed the board, with 7 wins in 11 races, Irad Ortiz aboard and Beyer numbers of 100 or better in each of her last 5 races. Her trainer is Eclipse Award winner Chad Brown. She

is obviously unbeatable. She will go off at 2-5. Garnet has concerns. It had rained earlier, and he worries that In Italian might not be at her best if the grass has some give. He bets \$30 to win on Whitebeam, also trained by Brown.

It’s a great race. Ortiz guns In Italian right to the top and



seems to be cutting out benign fractions – :48, 1:11.86 and 1:35.55 for the mile. Flavian Prat had Whitebeam within 2 lengths down the backstretch, started to move closer on the turn and was right beside In Italian with a furlong to go. The crowd was roaring as both horses refused to concede. It was agonizingly close at the wire, but the photo went to Whitebeam by a nose. Garnet cashes \$264. I’m happy for him...sort of. I had a \$10 exactor with In Italian on top of Whitebeam.

I’m including the 6th race here simply to reinforce my pari-mutuel incompetence. I didn’t cash a ticket on either Thursday or Friday. I lost the first 5 on Saturday. But when Joel Rosario delivered Silver Skillet at the end of this one-mile inner turf race, I hit the exactor. Silver Skillet paid \$7.60. The 2nd place horse, Waterville (Flavien Prat) was 11-1. By cashing, I ended a 15-race losing streak. That’s the good news. The bad? I had only \$1 on the exactor and was paid \$26.

The 10th race Saturday was the Grade 3 Sanford, a \$175,000 Stakes at 6 furlongs for 2-year-olds. For most bettors, it was impossible not to see Gold Sweep in the winner’s circle. Trained by Steve Asmussen and ridden by José Ortiz, the rookie colt won his last race at Belmont by 9 lengths and earned a 91 Beyer. No other horse in the race had a number in





the 70s. Gold Sweep is a cinch. Except:

When the gates open, track announcer, Frank Mirahmadi declares stunningly,

“Gold Sweep has stumbled coming out of the starting gate!”

The heavy favourite lost at least 6 lengths with the inconvenient beginning. As Ortiz tries to get his horse back in the race, longshots battle for the lead. As the field turns for



home, Yo Yo Candy, under Angel Castillo, is barreling past rivals 4-wide in the stretch and opens up a clear lead coming down to the wire. Gold Sweep finds his best stride much too late and rallies to be second.

Castillo rides mainly at Parx, and though he is closing in on 1,000 career wins, this is his 1st at the Spa. Yo Yo Candy went off at 46-1, produced a \$94 win ticket, and was the penultimate result of a pick-6 that paid \$344,811.50. That is a very nice day at the track.

We didn't have it.

Sunday July 16:

We try again to take down the late Pick-5. Our ticket, the product of animated arguments from all 4 at 7 Furlongs comes to \$256 in 50-cent selections. We are much more confident this time.

After the 1st race, I almost had some cute product for the *Down The Stretch Podcast*. I started my day by taking #6 Giroovin in the first race, just in doubles and Pick-3s. This one is 6 furlongs for \$25,000 claimers. With Manny Franco riding, Giroovin stalked the early leaders, battled with Speakingofthediabol in the stretch and pulled away late to win at 9-2.

Barnsdale, a constant provider of great material for both this paper and the *Down The Stretch Podcast*, starts singing a hit song from the '60s.

“Groovin’ on a Sunday afternoon”

I know immediately that I can use a clip from that Young Rascals ear worm in the podcast, especially if I get the double. I have 3 live in the second race. My horses are 2, 5 and 7. They finish 2nd, 4th and 8th. José Ortiz wins with Jolly Miss Jill. It's the first of 2 winners on the day for Ortiz. His brother, Irad wins a pair as well, and finishes 2nd four times. Irad's 2nd win comes in

the Grade 3 \$175,000 Quick Call Stakes. He brings in the 6-5 choice, Uncashed. The 3-year-old gelding pays just \$4.40, but because none in our foursome had it, we were...uncashed.

But of course, you want to know how our Pick-5 ticket worked out.

Not so well. In the first leg, we had 3 of the 7 runners, but He's Got Swagger, ridden by Julien Leparoux thunders down the muddy Saratoga stretch, winning at 3-1, and for the 2nd time in 3 days, we're extinguished in the first leg.

There was some good fortune to report. The NYRA carries the Woodbine product and I amused myself by betting 20-cent pick 3s. The one that worked for me started in race 4 when the wonderful apprentice, Sofie Vives scored with One More Brew, paying \$9.20. The next leg, race 5, was a maiden optional claim at 5 ½ furlongs, and this one had an exhilarating finish, especially for the guy who had Emma-Jayne Wilson's Pontiac on the ticket. Wilson had the 2nd time starter pretty far back around the far turn, but late in the stretch all the leaders started to collapse, and Pontiac started motoring late, splitting horses, and getting his nose on the wire in the final stride. Because he



had been beaten by 19 lengths in his debut, Pontiac went off at 13-1. I whispered to myself, “You got it Pontiac!”

So now my interest in the 3rd leg of the Pick-3 is at maximum pulse. Sahin Civaci is crushing it this year at Woodbine, and in mid-stretch of this mile and an 8th optional claim with a purse of \$117,000, Civaci had grabbed the lead with the 5-year-old Palazzi. Despite a late thrust from Malibu Mambo (which I also had), Pallazi won by 2 lengths. This was another winner at Woodbine for trainer Mark Casse and owner Gary Barber and my 20-cent pick 3 was worth \$77. I also cashed the 7th race exactor which added another \$66.

That score comforted me on another frustrating day in which I failed to cash a single Saratoga ticket.

Jim and I are fond of saying that the only thing better than losing at Saratoga is winning at Saratoga.

Wednesday July 19:

In previous years, Saratoga did run racing on Mondays, but reverted to a 5-day week a few years ago – something about making life easier for the backstretch workers. Apparently, there was little consideration for the out-of-town committed gamblers. Jim and I take our clothes to a laundromat. On Tuesday, we waited out the rain to play 9 holes at the State golf course. Jim can still drill the ball high and long. I still hit it low and short.

Wednesday is one of those days at Saratoga that I would like to frame. It was glorious. My day began at 9 a.m. at the Roosevelt Spa. A few centuries ago, it was discovered that the hot mineral springs in Saratoga had beneficial health results for both people and horses. It's a tradition for me each year to take a hot mineral bath followed by a one-hour massage. After 20 minutes in a very deep tub, I am ready for Kayla to work her magic on me. She starts by making a critical point.

“We're not masseuses,” she says. “We're massage therapists.”

I booked a Swedish massage. Kayla is not Swedish but tells me,

“It's a technique for stress reduction and relaxation. The bath you took reduces inflammation, promotes relaxation,

and the minerals get absorbed through your skin.”

I ask the most critical question:

“After this massage will I be much better at picking exactors, doubles, and Pick-3s at Saratoga?”

Kayla pauses a moment to consider her answer.

“Absolutely not,” she states firmly.

That cause and non-effect determined, the massage is great. Kayla has great hands that work with authority and



after an hour, I feel relaxed, stress free and ready to tackle Saratoga's 10-race card.

But first:

The day before, Keith McCalmont, the Director of Communication, texted me to say I could meet with track announcer, Frank Mirahmadi. This is exciting because Mirahmadi is a special race caller. I was surprised to hear his voice on opening day. I was anticipating the professional voice of regular NYRA announcer John Imbriale. Apparently, Imbriale not only wished to pass on Saratoga, but he recommended Mirahmadi.

“It started with me taking the part-time Aqueduct job at the end of 2017,” says Mirahmadi. “I was working at Golden Gate Fields at the time. Coming to New York was something I absolutely had to do. John Imbriale set me up for success here. When he decided to give up Saratoga and Aqueduct, they called me and offered me the job, and I am very grateful.”

About 8 years ago, Mirahmadi was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer. It's been a long and painful journey, but he's a survivor.

“I feel good,” says Mirahmadi. “My oncologist fired me. He told me that the next issue is to deal with my weight. He said, ‘You need to, in horse racing terms, back off the feed tub.’ I had emergency surgery in 2016. It's called an impacted colon. It's not a pleasant thing. I've got half a colon left. I'm sure your readers are pleased to hear all these details. If you're over 40, you should get a colonoscopy. You would prefer that to the alternative. I am cancer free and feeling good.”

Mirahmadi's good health is a blessing to racing fans. His calls are accurate and animated. He makes every race sound important and at the finish line, he sounds as if he has the winning ticket.

Most interesting is that Mirahmadi started his career by mimicking famous race callers. He is a skilled voice



This was the best superfecta seen at Saratoga

impressionist. Way back in 2009, he made YouTube history with his amazing call of the long-distance Hasta La Vista Stakes at Turf Paradise. Mirahmadi used 23 different voices of famous race callers, as well as Jack Buck, Hank Stram, Rodney Dangerfield, and Andy Rooney. This is awesome.

When I tell Mirahmadi that I have cashed just one time from the first 41 races at Saratoga, he responds in his best De Niro, "What's the matter with you. Can't pick a winner? Pick a race. Pay attention. Watch replays. Open your eyes!"

Not sure if that gangster advice worked, but I then proceeded to have my first successful wagering day at the Spa.

After losing the first two races (bringing my record to 1 for 43), I connect in the 3rd when Dylan Davis wins aboard Golden Dagger in a 5 1/2 furlong turf dash. His sister, Katie comes 3rd, but when Proud Foot (José Ortiz) roars up very late to be 2nd, I cash the exactor. The winner pays \$11.20, and even though it was just a 6-horse race, the exactor comes back at \$114.50. Now I'm 2 for 44.

Race 4 that Wednesday was at a mile for older horses, and the appropriately named Dontbelate arrives punctually at the wire, allowing me to cash a \$58 daily double. Javier Castellano wins the 5th aboard Rock The Weekend, trained by Jena Antonucci, who won the Belmont with Arcangelo. This gives me another exactor (\$34.80) and another double



(\$42.60).

I don't hit either race 6 or 7, but a typically thrilling Saratoga finish helps out in the 8th. At the head of the stretch, Mirahmadi tells me that my horse, Sixtythreecalibre "is losing ground." I'm resigned to defeat, but very late in the stretch, Sixtythreecalibre, under persistent work from Tyler Gaffalione, resurges amongst the horses, takes the lead with a 16th to go, and repels a game Nostalgic for the neck victory. I have the exactor for \$5 = \$68. I'm live in the double and the late Pick-3.

Anna Karenine and Irad Ortiz win by a head in the 8th. My double redeems me for \$23 and another exactor is worth \$28. And in the 10th race, Joel Rosario and Orange Freeze circle the field in a one-mile turf race. Orange Freeze is 4-1 and my double gets me back \$170. The Pick-3 pays \$76.

So, the stats after a wonderful day in Saratoga: I left the track with \$250 more than I took in. I was now 6 for 51.

Thursday, July 20:

This was definitely the least memorable day of the trip. For both McKenny and me, it was a case of betting longshots when the favourites came in, and betting favourites when the longshots prevailed. We console ourselves by buying a \$48 tomahawk steak at Price Chopper and Jim cooks it to perfection on the barbecue at our rental home.

Friday, July 21:

On this day, I turn 73. The present to myself, which was several months in the planning, was to be at Saratoga for my birthday. Mission accomplished. It would have been even better if I'd cashed a ticket. Actually, there were some gifts. Just inside the west entrance to the track, a guy named Scotty reaches out with a kiwi fruit.

"Have a kiwi sir?" he says. "We're with Zespri, a New Zealand kiwi brand and we have sun gold kiwis that we're giving out to create brand awareness. We're doing this every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday until August 20."

I tell Scott I'm a numbers guy and ask him how many kiwi fruits they will give out during the meet.

"Well, we have 150 boxes a day," he says. "And we have 50 per box, three days a week for 5 weeks."

My brain, capable not of picking winners, but of calculating daily double payoffs sees the figures in my head, so I say to Scott,

"That's over 100,000 kiwis."

"Wow," says Scott, obviously impressed.

I bite into the kiwi. It's cool and sweet, as was the free swag that day. Saratoga does a wonderful job of promoting and attracting fans to their giveaways. Since Jim and I had been given paid reserved seats, our tickets entitled each of us to the Saratoga red and white beverage cooler. The mentality of the gambler is such that he can drop \$200-\$300, but cling to his cooler like an Olympic Gold Medal.



Even though I go another 10 races without cashing, my day is still better than that of jockey José Ortiz. In the first race, he finishes 4th on the prophetically named Same Old Fears. There is always the "fear" a jockey can be thrown from his horse, and just past the finish line, Same Old Fears clips heels with a rival and falls suddenly to the dirt, tossing Ortiz. There is an audible groan from the large crowd, and for several minutes, Ortiz lays on the infield grass while medics hover over him. When he rises with some assistance, the sound of applause echoes through the stands. We will learn later that the damage was limited to bruised ribs. As if to pay tribute to his fallen brother, Irad Ortiz goes on a tear. He wins the 5th aboard Tiebreaker (\$6.10), the 6th with Costa Terra (\$12.20) and the 7th on Abadin (\$7.40). The all-Irad Pick-3 pays \$55.50. The 10th and last race was an \$88,000 Maiden Special Weight at a mile, and Irad scores with Bourbon Chase (\$3.60). We know that the Ortiz brothers rule the New York races. Despite that, neither Jim nor I make a single winning bet on Irad.

Saturday, July 22:

On another futile day at the races, there were a couple of thrills. Irad Ortiz sweeps the early daily double, winning the first with Noted (\$3.50), and the second with Paddington (\$4.70). It should be noted that Jim and I could bear-ly contain our frustration at not cashing.

But shortly after the second race, as I wandered under the grandstand, I ran into Tom Durkin. Durkin deserves to be called a "legend." For so many of our Saratoga treks, he was the narrator of our misfortunes. His race calls were brilliant, exciting, and creative. I confront him and remind him of a lovely interview a few weeks earlier for the *Down The Stretch Podcast*. I also tell him how angry I was that Fox TV screwed up the audio of his Belmont call. Apparently, I was much more upset than Durkin.

"It was just something technical," he shrugs.

"But Fox has decades of covering sports," I persist. "And job number one is to minimize the crowd noise so that the broadcaster can be heard."

"The check didn't bounce," he smiles.

Ortiz wins 2 more on the card. Over a span of just 15 races, he has won 8, and with that opens a huge lead in the Saratoga jockeys' race.

Sunday, July 23:

There is a remarkable time-space continuum matter than rules at Saratoga. When you are here, time moves faster than anywhere else in the world. For months, the clock ticked away at a snail's pace as I anticipated this venture. Then, in the blink of an eye, it's over. I can barely believe that 9 days earlier, I was interviewing Mark Casse outside barn 29. At the time, he told me he would be flying to Toronto for the Woodbine Oaks and King's Plate Trial. Some reporter I am. I neglected to ask what horses he was sending and what chances he thought he had. Mark Casse has won more Stakes at Woodbine than any other trainer over the last 20 years.

Jim and I tidy up the rental, pack our bags and leave the key.

We park the car oh so briefly, agreeing to meet back after the first race. We each advance-bet the entire card at Saratoga and Woodbine. Neither one of us hits the first, so we're back in the car as Mirahmadi is revealing official prices.

It's 585 kilometers from Saratoga to my townhouse in Mississauga. We amuse ourselves by watching and listening to race calls on our phones. The Plate Trial goes off about 50 miles east of Buffalo. Patrick Husbands wins with Paramount Prince at 11-1. The trainer is Mark Casse. Jim gets off the freeway to drive to Smokin' Joes where he claims the chewing tobacco is way cheaper than in Toronto. In the parking lot, we watch the Oaks. Sahin Civaci rides Elysian Field to a convincing win over 13 others. Elysian Field is trained by Mark Casse, and she pays \$13.60. It didn't strike either of us to bet Casse in the double which paid \$125.75 for a \$1 bet.

But it did complete the theme of this year's trip to the Spa.

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Katie Davis and Her Amazing Weekend at Saratoga



There is a long list of jockeys who have won races on 3 consecutive days. There is also a list, not as long, of riders with wins on three days in a row at Saratoga. That list would have historically notable names on it. But what Katie Davis did from Friday July 28 through Sunday July 30 at the Spa stands alone. Simply put, no one has ever accomplished what she pulled off.

On Friday, race 3 was a maiden claim race at a mile on the turf, and Davis gave the 3-year-old filly, River Tay an aggressive ride 3-wide around the far turn, and then, after losing her whip in mid-stretch, she urged River Tay to poke his head into first at the wire. River Tay is trained by Bruce Brown, and she paid \$21.60.

That was notable enough. It was Davis' first win at Saratoga with her 14th ride (13 this year and just one in 2022) but winning is better than losing. The next day, Davis had 4 mounts. She finished 2nd in the 2nd with High Oak, who at 19-1, was the longest shot in the race. She was out of the money in the 3rd and the 6th. Meanwhile, her brother Dylan was having a day – he won the first with Carson's Run (\$13), the 3rd with Volkart (\$53) and the 9th with Tough Street (\$12.20). We imagine Katie must have been thinking, "I can't let my brother hog all of the glory."

There were 11 races that day. The 11th was an allowance with a purse of \$95,000 for fillies and mares. Because of rain, this race, originally scheduled for 5 ½ on the grass was run at the same distance on the dirt. Davis had Queens Dancer, who went off at 13-1.

Unappreciated by the bettors, Davis launched Queens Dancer right to the lead, went the first quarter in :22.55, hit the half in a comfortable :46.25, and had sufficient energy to finish the job, winning by ½ length in 1:05.81. That was two wins in 2 days for Davis, but making this more special was that the 2nd place horse, Sandy's Garden, was ridden by Jacqueline Davis, Katie's sister. Go ahead, scroll through 161 years of racing at Saratoga. You will not find a 1-2 finish

involving sisters. Those who didn't cash the exactor (\$25 for a \$1 bet) can blame it on the rain.

"It rained that day and the main track, only horses got it," says Katie. "I picked up Jackie's other horse in that race, she ended up picking up her MTO."

After the race, were people commenting on the uniqueness of sisters running 1-2?

"Yes," replies Davis. "I had people come up to me and they said, 'You guys are making history. Keep



going!"

If you're keeping score, Katie Davis wins at Saratoga for the first time. The next day, her brother Dylan wins 3, then Katie wins again, with sister Jacqueline in 2nd. And you'd figure, well she can never top that.

And you'd figure wrong.

On the Sunday, Dylan Davis was still cooking. He took down the 2nd with Vintage (\$31.20) and the 3rd with Certified Loverboy (\$20.60). Sister Katie was underutilized that day – she had just one assignment and it came in race 8, a \$30,000 maiden claim event that attracted 9 winless horses for a mile on the dirt. Katie rated the 3-year-old gelding, Leftembehind perfectly, watching the leaders from 6th, about 4 lengths behind. As she brought Leftembehind 4 and 5-wide coming into the stretch, Katie had to deal with some solid bumping from a tiring Cattani, but had a brave horse under her as Leftembehind ripped away from all pursuers late in the stretch to win by 4. It was Mudville Nine, who took a brief lead at the head of the stretch, hanging on for 2nd. Mudville Nine was ridden by Trevor McCarthy, the husband of the winning jock.

A day before, Katie Davis had become the first woman in Saratoga history to win a race with her sister second. Then she won a race with her husband rounding out a \$29 exactor. Again – this had never before occurred at Saratoga. And the rare sequence of events sure had the jocks' room talking.

"Everybody was kidding around," laughs Davis. "They were saying, 'She's got one more to beat. Where is Dylan Davis? He's next.' It was great. We loved it.

Dylan was like, 'Don't you dare lose your crop when we are dueling in the stretch! I'll be upset if you beat me that way.' Everyone was laughing."

A few years ago, this wasn't so funny. There was an archaic rule on the books of the New York racing Association. It stipulated that if a husband and wife were riding in the same race, their horses had to be coupled as an entry. Did people believe that a married couple would conspire together to alter the outcome of a race?

This created a huge problem for Katie. Hubby McCarthy was much more of a go-to jockey and trainers did not like the idea of their horses being part of an entry, if simply for the fact that the odds would be less. The fallout from this is that Katie Davis would get passed over for another jockey.

It was probably the legendary Steven Crist, famed handicapper and publisher of the Daily Racing Form who got the rule changed. He wrote brilliantly about it, pointing out how stupid it was, and perhaps more importantly, how it was diminishing pools in many races. A year ago, the rule was thrown out.

"It was a silly rule," says Davis. "That's why we have stewards up in the room to discipline and keep it fair. If they thought anything was up, then they could pull us aside and correct us. The most important thing is that we're competitive. If Trevor is beside me in the stretch, there's nothing I want more than to beat him. And he feels the same about me."

We may have buried the lead here. For all the history that Katie Davis and her family made during the last week of July, there's something else that elevates this woman in professional sport – she's doing something that the Ortiz brothers, Sandy Hawley, Wayne Gretzky, and Michael Jordan could never do. She's riding at an elite level after giving birth. Daughter Riley is 21 months old. Davis reports that she encountered some grief when she determined to return to riding after becoming a mom.

"It's incredible," she says. "I've had women riders tell me it's hard to come back. And some of the discrimination I got – 'You're a mom now, you're supposed to stay home. You should be cleaning and cooking. That's disgraceful that you're going back to riding.' I will always put my child first. I was galloping a couple of months ago and I stepped down because my little girl is going to be two in December, and I want to be with her as much as possible."

At the time of this article, Katie has 3 lifetime wins at Saratoga. We could find just one for Jacqueline. Dylan is lighting it up this year at the Spa and had recorded 90 Saratoga wins, and Trevor had 8.

AJAX DOWNS RACETRACK



Special Events

WEDNESDAY RACE DATES 2023

Wednesday May 10, 17, 24, & 31
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday June 7, 14, & 28
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday July 5, 12, & 26
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday August 2, 9, 16, & 23
1:30pm First Race

Wednesday September 13, 20, 27
12:55pm First Race

Wednesday October 4, 18, 25
12:55pm First Race

SPECIAL RACE DATES 2023

Sunday June 18
Father's Day
12:55pm First Race

Sunday July 16
Craft Brewery Day
12:55pm First Race

Sunday August 27
Family Fun Day
12:55pm First Race

Sunday September 3
Fan Appreciation Day
12:55pm First Race

Monday October 9
United Way - Pumpkin Day
12:55pm First Race

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Father/Son Day at Ajax Downs

Alexis Sanchez won 3 at Ajax Downs on August 2, including the Ontario Bred Futurity with Snow Magically Sweet, (shown with trainer Jason Pascoe) in the Ontario Bred Futurity



New Image Media Photo

It was something you're not likely to see at any other racetrack. Ramiro Castillo and Alexis Sanchez combined to win 5 of the 7 races on Wednesday, August 2 at Ajax Downs. Castillo is the father of Sanchez.

The familial festivities got underway in the second race, which was at 350 yards for maidens. Alexis was aboard the 6-5 favourite, Dark N Stormy and the pair flew out of the gate right to the lead and prevailed by a head

after a furious battle with Dagney Taggart, who, of course, was ridden by Dad, Castillo. Dark N Stormy is a 3-year-old colt trained by Lauren Spada for her father, Craig. He needed 6 tries to break the maiden and he paid \$4.50.

The 3rd race was a speed index dash at 350 yards with a purse of \$15,500. Princess Leia made a smart middle move and found the wire a half-length the best in 18.061, good for an 88 index. Princess Leia was ridden by Castillo and is trained by Bob Broadstock for his wife, Marie. The win ticket was \$4.70.

The early tie for wins was broken in the 4th race, which required 6 allowance level horses to go 300 yards for a purse of \$17,500. Sanchez had Krash On Okey close out of the gate, go the lead well before the wire and survived by a neck in a photo that included 5 horses, all within a length. Krash On Okey is trained by Lauren Spada who doubled up for Dad, Craig. (This story has a lot of keep-it-in-the-family results!)

Dad Ramiro temporarily reached level ground with his son by winning the 6th race with Night Fishn, a 9-year-old mare who earned a 90 speed index by covering the 110 yards in just 7.022 seconds. The trainer is Dan Giles for owner Mary Schrama, and this was Night Fishn's 11th win in her 37th race. She has wins in 6 of the last racing seasons and she paid \$3.60.

The 7th and last race that Wednesday was the \$58,095 Ontario Bred Futurity for 2-year-olds and this one had a sensational finish as 5 of the 7 horses appeared to hit the wire together.

The judges determined from the photo that the winner, by a nose was Snow Magically Sweet, giving jockey Alexis Sanchez his first racing hattrick. Dad, Castillo aboard General Skywalker was 4th, probably no more than 5 feet from the winner. Snow Magically Sweet is owned by Milena Kwicien and trained by Jason Pascoe. By winning for the first time in just her 2nd race, Snow Magically Sweet paid \$16.50.



New Image Media Photo

Hambletonian # 98:

Scott Zeron's Amazing Day

It would have been ultra newsworthy alone that Canadian harness driver Scott Zeron won the \$1,000,000 Hambletonian for the 3rd time, but Zeron had a day at the Meadowlands that he and racing fans will never forget. We will address his extraordinary work in the 98th Classic for Trotters, but let's start earlier in the card.

In the 2nd of 15 races that afternoon, Bob McClure had the pleasure of steering the wonderful 3-year-old Sylvia Hanover in the \$100,000 Shady Daisy Stakes. After a long overland trip, Sylvia Hanover had to fight hard in the stretch to get past Beach Cowgirl to win by a head in 1:48.3. This was her 15th win in 16 races, and she paid the minimum \$2.10. Mark Steacy is the trainer for the owners, Hudson Standardbred of Quebec.

Then it was time for Zeron to add to the Canadian content. In the 5th, a \$35,000 trot, Zeron was teamed with Tactical Mounds, exiled in post 10. Tactical Mounds never had the benefit of the rail, as Zeron kept the 3-year-old filly on the outside picking up cover down the backstretch. Despite covering more ground than all the other horses. Tactical Mounds was powerful in the stretch, roaring past rivals and winning by a length in 1:52.1. Megan Scran trains for TheStable.ca and Tactical Mounds, a daughter of Tactical Landing rewarded those brave enough to back her with \$48.40 to win.



Race 7 was the \$171,000 Lady Liberty Stakes for pacing mares, and Zeron delivered Silver Label at 4-1. Silver Label followed cover after the half, moved to the center of the track as the field straightened for home and had a :27.3 kick to win by a length in 1:47.3, the fastest mile of her career. She improved to 19 for 34 for trainer Nick Gallucci and Millar Farms. Silver Label produced a \$10.60 win ticket.

But it was in the Hambletonian that Zeron produced a drive that may be argued for decades as the greatest – or perhaps luckiest – steer. Once again, with Tactical Approach, he was paired with an offspring of Tactical Landing and once again, he had to start from post 10. But Zeron's tactical approach this time was different from his strategy with Tactical Mounds. Off last into the first turn, Zeron played the patient game, moving inside



each time a rival moved to the right. Just before the half, Tactical Approach was 6th and as the trotters turned for home, he may have been 5th, but with a wall of rivals blocking his path. In the final 8th, Zeron knew he had a ton of horse. As the early leader, Celebrity Bambino began to tire and drift ever so slightly off the inside, Tactical Approach found inches to spare and squeezed forward, and in the final 8th found the lead, winning by over a length in 1:50.3. That was the fastest mile so far for Tactical Approach, who is trained by Nancy Takter and owned by Canadian John Fielding and Americans, Robert LeBlanc, Joe Sbrocco, and Jaf Racing. This was the colt's 6th win in 14 races and when you do that from post 10, you pay \$26.80. At 34, Scott Zeron has now won the Hambletonian 3 times. His previous wins came with Marion Marauder in 2016 and Atlanta in 2018.

Zeron Breaks it Down

When great athletes produce amazing performances, sportscasters often characterize the feat as “a clinic,” as in “Shohei Ohtani put on a clinic tonight for the LA Angels.” Well, what Scott Zeron did on Saturday, August 5 fits that category. He won 3 races on the biggest card of the year at the New Jersey track including the \$1,000,000 Hambletonian. What's amazing here is that Zeron employed different tactics for each win. *Down The Stretch* got him talking about his unforgettable afternoon.

Down The Stretch: Let's start with Tactical Mounds. It was just a \$35,000 purse, right?

Zeron: Yes, it was a soft purse, but it was a good field of horses and any race on that card is a significant race. My girlfriend, Megan Scran is the trainer, so it was a big deal.

Down The Stretch: So, post position 10 in a 12-horse field – you really had no choice but to drift back and then start working on the outside. What did you need to do right in that race to have such a shot in the stretch?

Zeron: It was really just a floating plan. You can't really go into it with a strategy because there's just too much action and variables. I just wanted to just get her in the flow, and it turned out to be extremely good flow with lots of leader changes. I was second over turning for home and before the race, if I thought I could have that trip, I would have said to you, I think she can win.

Down The Stretch: Then, the win with Silver Label in a \$171,000 Stakes race. She went first over, and she just demolished them.

Zeron: I did that a couple starts prior with her. She came first up and went another big mile against those same mares and won. So, it was an amazing performance from her. It was not the trip I was looking to get. I thought Brian Sears wasn't going clear to the front. And then when I moved up the backside, I thought I would just pick up the cover of Brian second over and go from there. But he cleared and



went an extremely fast third quarter, which made it tougher for me, but my horse excelled. It was just her day.

Down The Stretch: Let's talk about the Hambletonian. Would you agree it was a combination of great driving and great luck?

Zeron: It was definitely great luck. I always had a good horse, so that wasn't the problem. The problem was going to be, where am I sitting turning for home? Am I in a competitive spot where he's capable of winning, or he could race the mile of his life and finish 5th? So, yeah, I needed a lot of things to go right. I didn't have a plan. It wasn't that I wanted to stay to the inside the whole mile. It's a million dollar race with 10 competitive horses. So, everybody wants to give the horse a chance. No one wants to get locked in with nowhere to go. So, it's completely understandable when people pull to the outside. And incrementally throughout the race, it just became where each person in front of me started to pull and it just shows you that the stars have to align on that day to win that race.

Down The Stretch: Have people been pointing out the eerie similarity to the trip that Tactical Approach had in the Hambletonian to the trio Mine That Bird had in the 2009

Kentucky Derby?

Zeron: Yeah. Definitely different breeds, but the similarity of a long shot that had a ground saving trip that surprised everybody.

Down The Stretch: Have you ever been mistaken for Calvin Borel?

Zeron: Not yet. As long as we don't have any paddock fist fights, I don't think I will.

Down The Stretch: So, you're 34 and you've got three Hambletonian victories – Marion Marauder, Atlanta, and now Tactical Approach. Which one is the best?

Zeron: My favourite horse will always be Atlanta. She was such an amazing horse to drive. She was extremely competitive in every race. Marion Marauder had extremely high intellect because he knew where that finish line was, and he was never going to win by too much. He always got his nose forward. Then, Tactical Approach. If you told me two months ago, this horse is going to win the Hambo, I would have said, 'Yes, I believe you. He's sensational right now.' And then I became maybe too super confident in him, and I kept driving him like he was the best. I put him on front maybe one too many times and he just got tired late. Then when you get the 10 hole, it was a little discouraging. When I took him to the back, that was a surprise to the horse because I hadn't previously done that. And then when I gave him a ground saving trip, that was also a surprise to the horse. So, he later thanked me finishing as strong as he did.

Down The Stretch: Have you ever had a day at the Meadowlands where you won twice with trotters from the 10 post?

Zeron: Definitely not. By the way, I don't think you'll ever see both the Oaks and the Hambo have winners from the 10-hole again. Tetrick came from dead last with Heaven Hanover. That was just like winning a lottery ticket.



With the first King's Plate in 72 years in the books, we can only imagine how the Romeo family enjoys looking back on the last visit that Queen Elizabeth made to Woodbine. It was in 2010 and the winner that year was Big Red Mike, ridden by Eurico Rosa da Silva and owned by Terra Racing Stable, which is run by the Romeo Family, whose principals are father Dom, sons Frank and Mark, and grandson, Mike (aka Big Red Mike). When you win the Plate Trial, you know you belong in the Plate," says Mark. "Everybody wanted to come, so we had a large group. When he won, it was just a sheer jubilation and a little unreal, just unbelievable. You almost need to be pinched. It was really exciting."

Winning the Queen's Plate is a once in a lifetime moment, but what about meeting Queen Elizabeth?

"I personally have a lot of respect for the monarchy and tradition," says Mark. "They allow you to have 6 people in the paddock to meet her before the race. I was one of the lucky ones. Then after the race, obviously, my father was the one who had the most interaction with her."

It was a long journey for the Romeo family from the start of their horse racing investment to the very peak of the sport's glory.

"Back in the 60s, my dad, Dom worked at West York Motors down on St. Clair," says Mark. "And a man named Ed Seedhouse got him interested in horse racing. I recall his first horse, in 1980 was Two Times Henry."

That alone tells you how long the Romeo family has been in the sport. Two Times Henry, who won 10 times through 115 starts was bred by Conn Smythe.

"The first horse that was really good was Rising Young Star," Mark continues. "Bill Marko was the trainer for us back in those days, and Rising Young Star's claim to fame was that he ran second to Sunny's Halo in the Grey Stakes and the Coronation Futurity in 1982. Not too many people can say they ran second to a future Kentucky Derby winner. He ran in the Plate in '83 and finished 5th. We had another Plate runner in '85 by the name of Fighting Champ."

Before running 9th in the Plate, Fighting Champ won the Marine Stakes. It was the 4th and final victory of his 24-race career.

Mark Romeo recalls one terrific horse, shared in ownership by Rom Romeo.

"My dad had 25% of Bold Executive," he says. "That was a lot of fun."

Fun is a word associated with winning, and Bold



3 generations of the Romeo family – (L to R) Mike, Frank, Dom and Mark

Executive, who was ridden by Sandy Hawley, won 6 of 19 with 9 second place finishes. He took down the Coronation Futurity Stakes in 1986 and added the Shepperton Stakes to his resumé in 1987.

"It was around that time that my dad decided to get into the breeding business," says Mark. "He had a filly named Flashy Chestnut. She raced from 1985 to 1987 and then he bred her, and the first horse ended up being Bold n' Flashy."

Bold n' Flashy was something special. He raced 40 times with 10 wins and 23 in-the-money finishes. He won Stakes races at Woodbine, the Meadowlands, Arlington, and Pimlico and earned \$362,231.

"We even took him to Paris to run in the Prix de l'Abbaye de Longchamp where he finished a close 6th," says Mark. "What an experience to see racing at Longchamp."

Mark Romeo recalls that around 1992, Dom incorporated his company and created a racing stable. He came up with the name from the Latin word "Terra" which refers to the land, and the earth itself.

Now owned by Terra Racing Stable, Flashy Chestnut was bred to Smarten, a tryst that produced Flashy n Smart.

"She was a Grade 3 Stakes winner down in Florida and she also was Grade I placed in Saratoga," says Mark.

That Saratoga race was the 1992 ballerina, won by Pearl City.

But let's get to Big Red Mike, the 2010 Plate Champion.

As the Romeo family expanded, Dom started naming horses after his grandchildren. Mike, the son of Frank was 24 when a yearling was named after him.

Flashy Chestnut got together with Vice Regent and created Regent n'Flashy.

"Regent n'Flashy never made it to the races," says Mark. "She ended up being the dam of Classic Mike whom we ran in the 2002 Queen's Plate. She's also the dam of Big Red Mike."

Big Red Mike won just once after his Plate conquest. Under da Silva, he captured an \$89,400 allowance heat at Woodbine on August 21, 2011. And this is cool – that race was at a mile and a quarter and Big Red Mike was timed in 2:04.17, a little faster than the 2:04.88 he posted in the Plate.

Dom Romeo also has a granddaughter, Katherine (Frank's daughter), and the name Katherine abounds in the Terra Racing Stable.

"Include Katherine is the dam of Amalfi Coast," points out Mark.

The Romeos sold Amalfi Coast at the Keeneland November Breeding Stock sale and she is now retired after doing some wonderful things. She won 7 of 22, including the Carotene Stakes, the Grade 2 Bessarabian Stakes, the Sweet Briar Too Stakes, the Grade 2 Royal North Stakes, and the Grade 3 Ontario Fashion Stakes. Amalfi Coast was named Champion Female Sprinter at the 2021 Sovereign Awards.

So, the Romeo family have been sending out horses at Woodbine for over 50 years. There are more than enough memories to fill many lifetimes, but one really stands out to Mark Romeo. It was after Big Red Mike had crossed the finish line in the Queen's Plate and there was the winning rider, Eurico Rosa da Silva, who had rocketed from a poor, emotionally abused little boy in Brazil to the pinnacle of thoroughbred racing.

"I'll never forget when they interviewed da Silva. How they do that as he's bringing the horse back to the winner's circle," says Mark. "At the end of the interview he yelled out, 'I'm going to meet the Queen today!'"



The 2nd race on Tuesday, August 8 at Mohawk was, on paper at least, nothing special. It was a pace with a purse of \$17,000 for maiden 2-year-old fillies. Louis-Philippe Roy gunned pretty Missy May to the top from post 7, kept her close enough when others scrambled to the lead, then roared up the inside late in the stretch to win by a head.

“Up until a couple of years ago, John was a stranger,” says Ken Middleton. “He often chose horse racing as a subject for his photography, and I marveled at some of the work he did. So, I reached out to him, and I said, ‘You do a great job.’ He said it was a passion to him and that led us to have longer conversations. I learned he was a great guy, very unassuming and quiet, but very intelligent and charismatic. Because I had horses, I said to John, ‘I see you at the racetrack and I see you making friends with everybody. The only thing you don’t have is a horse. If you ever want to own part of one, even just 1% or 2%, you come out and see me. And that’s how it started. I had two homebred yearlings and John took small pieces of those two. They didn’t amount to much, but now there’s Pretty Missy May. I sold her as a yearling to partners and John bought a small percentage.”

The first two horses that Watkins invested in were Littleballofhate and Grammys Girl. Littleballofhate started just once in 2022 and finished a well-beaten 8th. Grammys Girl has started 20 times and Watkins was able to experience the pleasure of seeing his horse win – Grammys Gril took down an \$8,600 pace at Flamboro last March.

“He was ecstatic,” says his wife, Jane. “And I’m sure he was just as ecstatic when the horse won two days after he passed, too.”

Jane was witness to John’s new hobby when he started to delve into photography, specifically taking pictures of horses.

“His connection with horse racing started when he was a teenager,” she says. “He was down at Greenwood Racetrack when he was probably 17 or 18. About 10 years ago, he took a couple of photography classes, figuring he should know what he’s doing. He just loved the environment, the people, and the action. He loved the whole art of it.”

Award winning photographer and blogger Will Wong got to spend some quality moments with Watkins. The two would often see each other snapping shots at various racetracks.



John Watkins’ picture “The Pocket” was nominated in 2020 for the O’Brien Award for Outstanding Photography

“John was a quiet man, but he was very talented at what he did,” says Wong. “He was juggling a few things. He had a career. He worked many years. He helped build up a company, and then he wasn’t well for a bit. I know he retired only a couple of weeks before he passed. So, he was working up until the very end. He had an amazing eye for detail, and he supported racing. He would go to all the small little standardbred tracks around Southwestern Ontario. He’d drive hours, even on his days off. He loved horses so much. On some weekends, he would help out at farms with friends that he had made. Near the end of his life, he was really doing what he wanted to do, being around horses and being involved in every way.”

With his success in business, Watkins was not into horse racing photography for the money, though his work was recognized by the industry.

“Some of his photos would get published, especially on the standardbred side,” says Wong. “Ontario Racing Management supported his work when he was more active a couple of years ago. Some of his pictures were on the covers of harness racing publications and he did get nominated for an O’Brien Award.”

John Watkins’ health was always an issue, unfortunately. In 2006, he was on dialysis treatment before receiving a kidney transplant with an organ donated by his sister, Nancy.

Covid knocked him down a few years ago and he never recovered from a bout of pneumonia that hit him hard earlier this year. At the end he was in ICU and back on dialysis and ultimately, he was taken off life support.

Wong’s most pleasant memory of John Watkins has a harness racing aspect to it.

“There was a retirement ceremony at Mohawk last year for Bulldog Hanover,” recalls Wong. “I’m so busy on the thoroughbred side, that I don’t get to see the standardbreds

all that much. I didn’t have a car and John was so nice because he lived east of me and came and picked me up and we went and saw Bulldog Hanover, got some pictures, had some dinner and it was just nice just getting to know him a little better. We were talking about some of his health struggles. After he got COVID, he had to be super careful because he was immune compromised. I’m glad I had that experience because that was something I always wanted to do. I was very lucky I got to hang out with him.”

A wonderful example of Watkins’ kindness and generosity was experienced by 22-year-old Nicholas “Ace” Barnsdale, who is scratching out his own career as a racing journalist and photographer. Apparently after running into Barnsdale a few times at racetracks, Watkins gave the young man a professional camera.

I had known him a little before, and I told him I was interested in getting into photography,” says Barnsdale. “He gave me an old camera of his for free and gave me advice on how to use it. It really kickstarted my passion for photography.”



John Watkins Photo

Despite Middleton’s own serious condition – he had a dreadful training accident that required some 44 staples to repair damage to his back and neck – he’s acutely aware of the unfairness of Watkins’ passing.

“He was only 59,” says Middleton. “He had a wife and kids and grandkids. He had horses and dogs. What he should have been doing is kicking back on his porch and enjoying life.”

Jane attests to just how pleasing this sport was to her husband.

“When he was at the track, he never had a sour look on his face,” she says. “He always had a smile on his face or a look of curiosity. He was truly in his element.”



AJAX DOWNS

The 4th race at Ajax Downs on August 16 was *different*. Jockey Ed Walton was aboard the 3-year-old Da Zoom, who was racing for just the 2nd time, and the first time in 14 months. It was a 300-yard race for maidens with a purse of \$15,500 and Da Zoom had a horrible start. He stumbled as soon as the gates opened, veered awkwardly to his right and was bumped badly by the horse next to him. Walton was jarred out of the saddle and for a precarious moment was dangling off the right side of his horse. Incredibly, not only did the rider get back squarely on his horse, but Da Zoom proved to be much the best in the field of 6, overcoming his compromised start and roaring down the Ajax Downs strip to win by half a length. Da Zoom paid \$2.80 to win. The trainer is Michelle Woodley, and the winning horse is owned by Linda and Richard Wincikaby who also bred him.

Richard Wincikaby is from Matachewan, Ontario. Wincikaby is a native word meaning "black birch." Linda is from Quebec where her family were farmers.

"We bought a little mare in the northern Quebec area," says Linda. "Her named was Miss Kentucky Miss and my daughter was riding her. I was looking at the bloodlines and I said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to find one of her sisters?' All of a sudden, we heard that a lady by the name of Belinda Taggart was selling the half sister. We bought Hillbilly Marshall from Belinda. So, Belinda is the one who introduced us to quarter horse racing and helped us find our first trainers."

Hillbilly Marshall was already pregnant when the Wincikabys bought her. The colt was named Breakaway Bashka.

"We decided we wanted to raise him," says Linda, "because all his siblings had already been on the track, including the mother and the daddy."

Breakaway Bashka, born in 2005, raced just 8 times, but he did break the maiden on the 2nd try, carrying Kim Ito to an authoritative 4 ½ length win in a 330-yard race on September 7, 2007. The Wincikabys travelled far to witness this and were glad they did.

"We came down the night before the race from Englehart, which is about 200 kilometres north of North Bay and 6 hours from Ajax Downs. We watched the horse race and when he won, it was such a feeling and we were on such a high, we don't even really remember the trip back home."

That's all it took for the Wincikabys to be fully hooked on quarter horse racing.

"Good Lord, we got multiple horses after that," laughs Linda. "We were with Barry Wood. Then we decided to go with Don Reid. And he asked us if we wanted to buy a horse from the Heritage Place, and the first horse we got from the Heritage Place was named Leanintoit."

Leanintoit did some wonderful things. As a 2-year-old, she won her first 5 races, all in the deep end of the pool. Under John McInerney, the 2-year-old filly won her first start in the \$13,000 Trial for the Maple Leaf Futurity on May 22, 2011. Three weeks later, she won the \$59,400 Maple Leaf Futurity, carrying McInerney to a ¾ length verdict. Then she was first in the Trial for the Princess Stakes, followed by a win in the Princess Stakes, and just 23 days after that Leanintoit won the Trial for the All-Canadian Futurity before a 3rd place finish in the final. Then she went out and took down an allowance race 3 weeks later, and she finished her rookie year with a resounding win at Fort Erie in the \$166,150 Jackpot Futurity. Kim Ito rode her that day and the 1 ½ length win earned Leanintoit a 90 speed index, while earning the bettors \$9.90. In her rookie season, Leanintoit won 7 of 8 races and earned over \$148,000.

When Don Reid stepped back for awhile from training, the Wincikabys turned to Michelle Woodley and her partner John McInerney to take care of their horses.

"This year, we had three on the track," says Linda. "We just sold Sour Candy and Firstprize Charlotte, so now Da Zoom is the one that is racing for us. Richard bought a stallion named Peight Your Fate, and next year we'll have babies out of our own stallion. Peight Your Fate was a horse owned by Reliance Racing in Oklahoma and he was a finalist in the All-American Derby."

When it's pointed out that Ed Walton, the rider on Da Zoom is 60 and almost 6 feet tall, Linda Wincikaby adds

to his resumé.

"He's also incredibly athletic," she says emphatically. "I have no idea how he managed to stay on the horse and get his balance back. I bet that he saw the ground very close. Ed was way on the side for awhile and somehow not only climbed back but won the race. He is an amazing man."

The Wincikabys also owned a horse named Twixt of Fate who was more than worthwhile for 3 seasons from 2020-2022. As a 3-year-old, the gelding won his first 2 races, taking down a Trial for the Ontario Bred Futurity before winning the final for rider Walton as the even-money choice. Twixt of Fate had an unusual stretch of races as a 4-year-old. Over a span of 2 months in 2021, he finished 2nd in 4 consecutive races that included the Trial and Final for the Ontario Bred Derby and the Trial and Final for the Alex Picov Derby. Linda has no issue with the string of runner-up finishes.

"It is always fun to win, but the most important thing is for our horses and the jockey to have a safe trip," she says. "So, when you get a very good second with a safe trip and the horse did what he had to do, it *is* satisfying."

Twixt of Fate was subsequently sold to Barry Wood.

Located as far as they are from Ajax Downs and occupied as they are in building up a farm and putting up fencing while raising Texas Longhorns, the Wincikabys often don't get down to Ajax Downs to see their horses race. They do watch the races religiously on TV, and though their investment is with the quarter horses, all the breeds interest them.

"We like all the types of racing," says Linda. "We'll sit sometimes and just watch some Standardbreds or what's going on at Woodbine. We keep telling each other it's almost like our life is one big race."

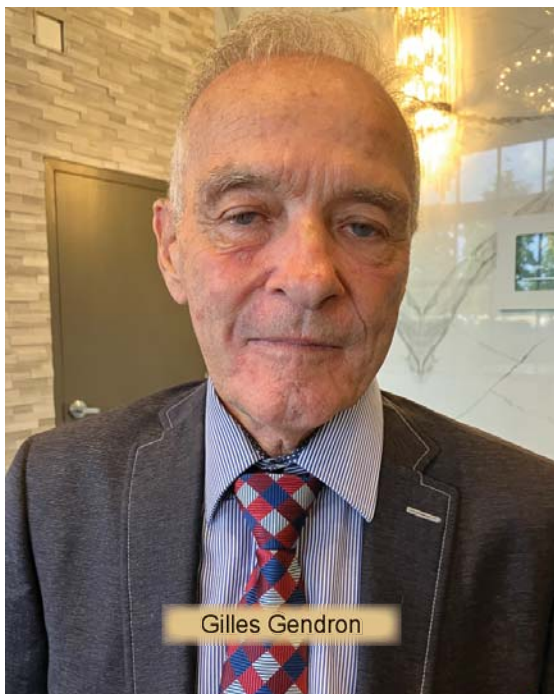
Hall of Fame Inductions:

On Wednesday, August 9 at the Mississauga Convention Centre, a full deck of worthy horses and people were officially inducted into the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame. The ceremonies covered honourees from both 2022 and 2023.

Class of 2022: Eurico Rosa Da Silva – Jockey, **Jack Darling** – Standardbred Trainer, **Charles E. Fipke** – Thoroughbred Builder, **Gilles Gendron** – Standardbred Veteran, **Frank Salive** – Standardbred Communicator, **Alydeed** – Thoroughbred Veteran, **Court Vision** – Thoroughbred Male Horse, **Shadow Play** – Standardbred Male Horse
Class of 2023: Chris Christoforou – Driver, **Irwin Driedger** – Jockey, **Dr. Lloyd S. McKibbin, DVM** – Standardbred Builder, **R. Glenn Sikura** – Thoroughbred Builder, **Bulldog Hanover** – Standardbred Male Horse, **Formal Gold** – Thoroughbred Veteran, **Pink Lloyd** – Thoroughbred Male Horse, **Pure Ivory** – Standardbred Female Horse.

There was an element of bittersweet concerning **Irwin Driedger**. He learned in April that he was going into the hall, but he passed away a few weeks later. Driedger's impact on Canadian racing was multi-faceted. As a jockey, Driedger won 1600 races and, in 1998, was a recipient of the Avelino Gomez Award. After retiring from riding, he became the manager of the Jockeys' Benefit Association of Canada. During that tenure, Driedger was instrumental in the installation of safety rails at Woodbine. His concern for the well-being of horses and riders led him to be named the Director of Track Surfaces at Woodbine, and he was an important player when Woodbine transformed first to Polytrack and then to Tapeta – racing surfaces that have been shown to dramatically reduce catastrophic injuries to horses.

Gilles Gendron, 78, was 22 when he began his driving



Gilles Gendron

career in Quebec. When it was over, Gendron had steered home 7,053 winners from over 37,000 races. Apparently, the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

"About 6 months ago, they called me from Ontario and asked me if I wanted to be a Hall of Famer," he jokes. "I said, 'Why not?'"

Gendron also drove in Australia and made multiple trips to Europe.

"It's a long way to come here," he said. "When you're driving horses everywhere in the world, you never think of getting into the Hall of Fame. When it happened, I was very happy."



Eurico Rosa da Silva

Putting Eurico Rosa da Silva into the Hall was a no-brainer. From 2004 through 2019, he put up elite numbers at Woodbine, finishing with 2,286 wins and over \$100 million in purse earnings. In addition, da Silva won 5 Woodbine riding titles and 6 Sovereign Awards as Canada's Outstanding Jockey.

"I am so grateful to be in the Hall of Fame," he said. "It's almost impossible to thank all the people who helped me. I was lucky to ride for the top trainers – Bob Tiller, Malcolm Pierce, Reade Baker, Kevin Attard, Roger Attfield, Norm McKnight, Norm De Souza, and Glen Magnussen. I will never forget them. The grooms and the exercise riders, the gate crew, the pony people – they were on my side, and I express my gratitude to them."

On induction night, da Silva was part of a special exactor – his favourite horse Pink Lloyd was also ushered in.

"That was like a dream," he says. "This is the best horse I ever rode. The most consistent horse. We have so many memories together and now we get into the Hall of Fame on the same night."

If that "exactor" was special, how about the "triator" of legendary pacer, Shadow Play, his amazing son, Bulldog Hanover, and Bulldog's owner/trainer Jack Darling all being honoured on the same night?

"I was always a big fan of Shadow Play and his trainer, Ian Moore," said Darling. "With Bulldog being in there, it's quite an experience."

Frank Salive is a very worthy new member of the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame. His velvety delivery has been heard at racetracks all over North America, but we do have reason to question his handicapping skills.



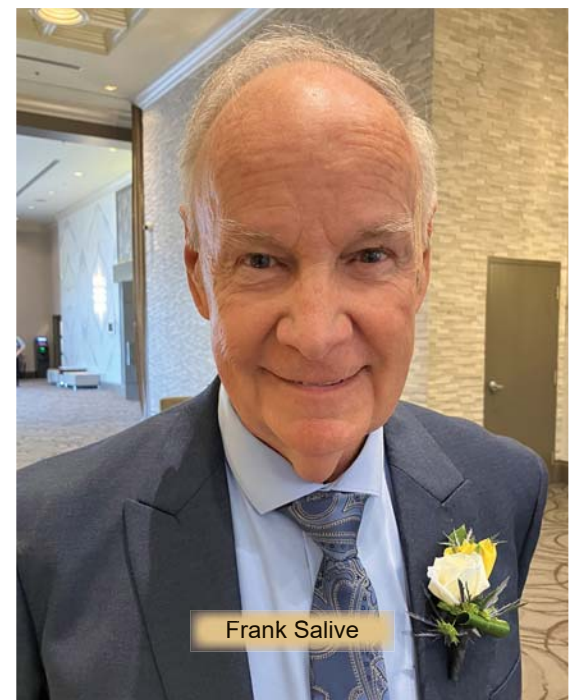
Jack Darling

"It came at me as a surprise," he said. "There were 3 of us in the category. One gentleman, I rated at even money, another at 2-1 and myself at 8-1. I considered myself a real longshot."

Salive estimates that he has called races at at least 75 tracks.

"Some of them are long gone," he points out. "I happened to be in the right place at the right time. When there was an explosion of off track betting in the 90s and when the internet came 23 years ago, it was suddenly a nightly live world-wide broadcast."

Although he officially "retired" a few years ago, Salive



Frank Salive

still dips his toes in the water. He called the thoroughbred races at Fort Erie in 2022 and, in a move he calls "Retro nights at the track", he returned to the booth for a couple of nights at Mohawk.

"There's some tough criteria when they need a pinch hitter," he says. "You need to be still alive and breathing to get the gig."

ODDITIES & ENTITIES

This is Photographer Jessica Hallett's awesome shot of the start of the 5th race at the Meadowlands on Hambo Day, August 5.



Her comments are *"I have never had the head poles of all 12 horses in a race before!"* #10, Tactical Mounds, driven by Scott Zeron would win.

Rare...and Obscure

You'd have to look far and wide to see if this ever happened before. It was at the Miami County Fair in Troy Ohio on August 15 – women drivers swept 3 consecutive races. Kacey Kelly brought in the winning 2-year-old in a OCRA Stakes race, then Devan Miller won the R.J. Brown memorial and right after that, Emma Wahlberg completed the all-ladies Pick-3 by taking the Ladies Driving Series. Legendary track announcer, Roger Houston gave them props by tweeting, "Congratulations Ladies!"

DOWN THE STRETCH PODCAST

On Apple, Google, Spotify, Stitcher, iHeartRADIO and wherever you get your podcasts

Episode 183, July 24:

Deviating dramatically from all previous episodes, this 30-minute epic concerns host **Peter Gross** and his buddy **Jim McKenny** and their return to Saratoga after a 4-year absence. Over 11 days, the pair were joined by **Gary 'Suitcase' Smith** and **Garnet Barnsdale**. The betting was uninhibited and, for the most part, unsuccessful. Listen in horror as Pick-5 bets die after just one race. **Mark Casse** had an opening day winner and tells us why that matters, while indicating he has good reason to go to Woodbine for the Oaks and Plate Trial. The host takes a bath, financially and literally as he enjoys the Roosevelt Spa and Massage. Then he interviews race caller **Frank Mirahmadi** and gets pep talks from **Rodney Dangerfield**, **Marv Albert**, **Robert De Niro** and **Andy Rooney**. The trip was not fruitless thanks to the free kiwis given out daily. On the final Saturday of the trip, Down The Stretch hooked up with trainer **Jeff Gillis** who had 2 strong entries in the \$250,000 Joe Gerrity Pace at the Saratoga harness track. And on the way home, Gross and McKenny place more losing bets on the Queen's Plate Trial and Woodbine Oaks, leaving them wonder how they could leave the Casse horses out.

Episode 184, August 1:

Woodbine CEO **Jim Lawson** sweats it out, telling us how extreme heat caused two cards of racing to be cancelled. We have 3 Stakes races from weather friendlier Woodbine on the weekend and the CanCon from an Hambletonian Elimination at the Meadowlands. **Russell Baze**, the all-time winningest jockey in North America was the latest winner of the Avelino Gomez Award, but our attempted interview didn't get out of the starting gate. We did better with **Flavien Prat**, who is winning races at both the Saratoga thoroughbred track and the Saratoga harness track. We run the entire card of quarter horse racing from Ajax Downs and challenge the listeners to figure out what all the winners had in common. Driver **James MacDonald** scored another grand slam at Mohawk, but this one had a fascinating twist to it and a bizarre race from Harrah's Philadelphia in which each of the first 3 finishers were DQ'd.

Episode 185, August 9:

Amazing and historic moments in horse racing – **Scotty Zeron** won his 3rd Hambletonian, but his drive with **Tactical Approach** may very well be the greatest harness drive of all time. **Louis-Philippe Roy** broke out with 5 wins at Mohawk Saturday night. Jockey **Katie Davis** made history twice at Saratoga, each time doing something that had never been done before. We have the Vice Regent and Hamilton Stakes from Woodbine and trainer **Michelle Love** tells us how she won a Stakes race for the first time in her 13-year career. And we have all of the quarter horse card from Ajax Downs on a day when **Ramiro Castillo** and his son **Alexis Sanchez** won 5 of the 7 races.

Episode 186, August 15

A week before the King's Plate, this podcast features the Bison City Stakes from Woodbine. **Scott Zeron** breaks down his amazing Hambletonian day at the Meadowlands. From the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame Inductions, we chat with **Gilles Gendron**, **Eurico Rosa da Silva**, **Jack Darling** and **Frank Salive**. A harness race from last Tuesday whose poignancy greatly exceeded its purse - **Ken Middleton** talks about his 2-year old winner, his sadness over the death of co-owner **John Watkins** and his ongoing recovery. Race caller **Vance Cameron** gives us two trials for next week's Gold Cup and Saucer from Charlottetown - it was trainer **Jeff Gillis**, owner **Mark Ford** and driver **Scott Young** winning both heats. At Ajax Downs, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, daughters and dads winning. And a shoutout to **Terra Racing Stable**, winners of Woodbine's first race on Saturday.

Episode 187, August 21:

The big story is, of course, the first King's Plate since 1951, only somewhat overshadowing a brilliant day for trainer **Mark Casse** and jockey **Patrick Husbands**. This podcast also has the Catch a Glimpse, the Bold Venture, the Soaring Free and the Dance Smartly, as well as a huge upset on Saturday in the Sweet Briar Too. **Mark Romeo** of Terra Racing Stable looks back on the last time Queen Elizabeth attended Woodbine and the thrill of their horse, **Big Red Mike** winning. Woodbine CEO **Jim Lawson** tells us just how hard it was to finally get horse racing on the **Bet365** platform.

A wild night of harness racing at Mohawk Park and we have the 3 eliminations for the William Wellwood Memorial Trot. **Vance Cameron** exhilarates us with his rendition of the the \$100,000 Cup and Saucer Stakes from Red Shores. Father and son are still winning at Ajax Downs, and **Melissa Keith** breaks down Sunday afternoon at Clinton when she called the whole card.

ON AIR

DOWN THE STRETCH



A Podcast with Peter Gross