

DOWN THE STRETCH

CANADA'S MOST INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING HORSE RACING NEWSPAPER

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Racing's abrupt stop at Woodbine

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WOODBINE STAKES

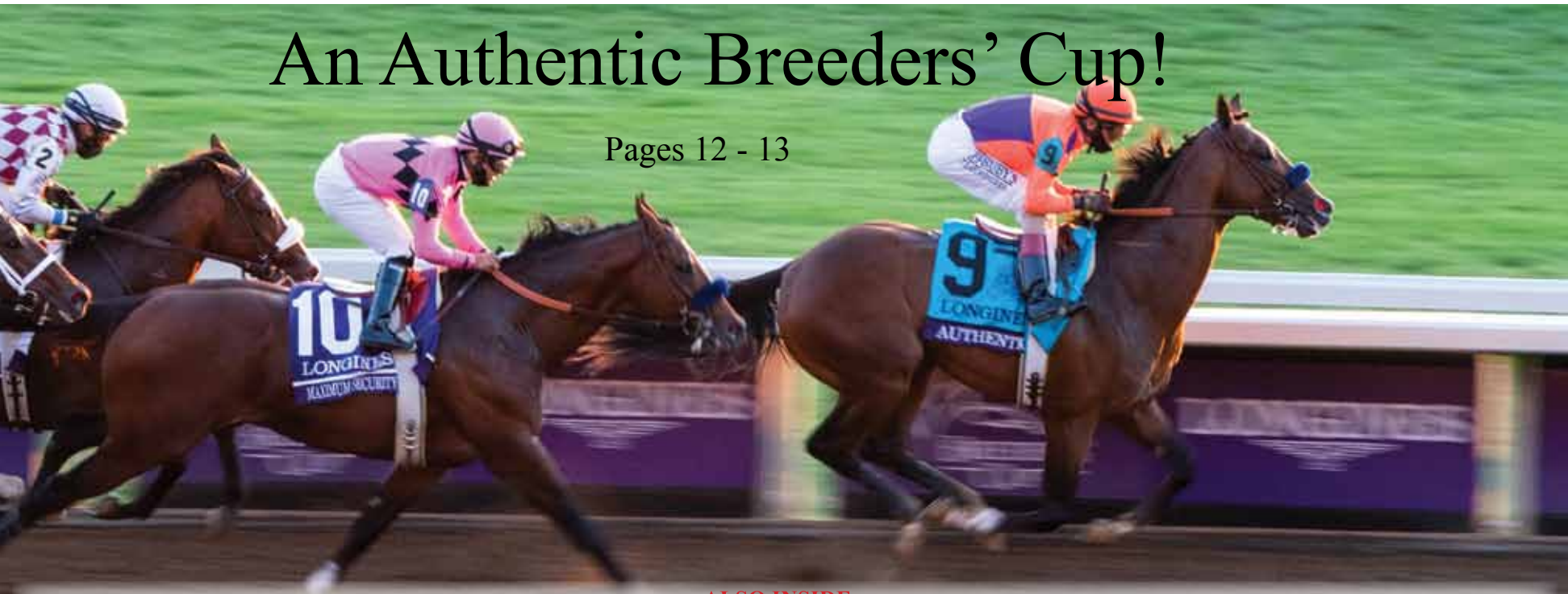
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Canadians prospered in the Breeders Crown

Hoosier Park in Anderson, Indiana hosted two nights of Breeders Crown races; twelve big money finals on the one mile track. The first four Stakes races went on Friday, October 30 and the Canadian content rested on the shoulders of driver Bob McClure. He was behind On A Streak in the \$600,000 final for two year-old trotting colts and geldings. After the field hit the three quarters in 1:24.1, On A Streak was pinned on the inside. Down the long Hoosier Park stretch, McClure was able to find a seam along the rail, and On A Streak shot through to win in 1:52.4, which was a lifetime best and a Stakes record.

"I wanted to leave and follow either Ake or Andy, or even both," said McClure after his first Breeders Crown win. "When I saw Ake look over and try to take off on Andy, I said 'this is looking really good'. Andy's horse still seemed like he was coming, so I just had to get into the passing lane and get him re-motivated. It's not easy for two year-old trotters to dive into the passing lane and try to advance; it's not really taught to them. But he's such a



Bob McClure liked his first Crown trophy

professional. As soon as he saw open air, he just took off."

On A Streak won the William Wellwood Final at odds of 60-1. In the Breeders Crown, he paid \$20.80. He is owned by the powerful Determination Stable of Montreal.



Scott Zeron engineered the most outrageous result in Breeders Crown history

Lady Chaos (David Miller) took down the \$600,000 two year-old fillies trot in 1:54.4, paying \$4.

Fire Start Hanover carried Dexter Dunn to victory in the \$600,000 two year-old fillies pace in the good time of 1:50.4. That created an \$8.20 payoff.

And in the two year-old colts and geldings pace, it was the 1-2 favourite Perfect Sting (David Miller) dead-heating for first with 22-1 shot, Summa Cum Laude (Brian Sears). This was the first dead-heat in Breeders Crown history, resulting in payoffs of \$2.20 and \$11.20 respectively.

Halloween at Hoosier Park saw eight champions knocking on the door for enormous treats.

And the greatest trick of all occurred in the \$500,000 three year-old colts and geldings pace. The wonderful Tall Dark Stranger was hammered down to 1-2 and he ran an amazing race. He made it to the top at the half, but did so in a gasping :52.3. After a third quarter in :27, Tall Dark Stranger was swarmed on all sides. He had every right to be exhausted, but he refused to concede as rivals seemed to be charging from everywhere. Scott Zeron on bomber, Sandbetweenmytoes, erupted from ninth at the head of the stretch and, in the final stride, hit the wire first, less than a neck better than a resolute Tall Dark Stranger. And this set a Breeders Crown record. At 203-1, Sandbetweenmytoes was the longest shot in the race and produced the biggest win payoff in Breeders Crown history - \$409.80.

The five year-old mare, Manchego, driven by Dexter Dunn, was a convincing 3/4 length winner of the \$300,000 Open Trot in 1:52. That one paid \$3.80 for trainer Nancy Takter.

Tim Tetrick steered Next Level Stuff to a quarter length win in the \$500,000 three year-old filly trot, winning in 1:49. Next Level Stuff is trained by James Campbell and she paid \$18.00.

Peaky Sneaky gave trainer Takter another Crown in the three year-old fillies pace, winning at 7-1 in 1:40 for Yannick Gingras. The win ticket was \$16.20.

Amigo Volo (Dexter Dunn) held on by a nose over Play Trix On Me (Joe Bongiorno) in 1:43 to win the three year-old colts and geldings trot. Chestnut Hill, partly owned by Canadian Melvin Hartman, was third. Amigo Volo paid \$3.

Kissin In The Sand, like Sandbetweenmytoes, an offspring of Somebeachsomewhere, repelled all rivals for victory in the \$300,000 Open Mares Pace. Time for the mile was 1:48.4. Toronto's Marvin Katz owns a share of the winner, who is trained by Nancy Takter and this was another win for Dexter Dunn. The bettors got just \$2.80 to win.

The \$500,000 Open Trot went to the even-money favourite, Gimpanzee, who won for the 25th time in 34 starts. He was driven by Brian Sears for trainer Mark Melander. Brad Grant's great trotting mare, Atlanta, chose to race against the boys and she came third.

And Canadian harness racing was celebrated from several angles when Century Farroh (David Miller) shot up the inside late for a quarter length win in the \$500,000 Open Pace in 1:49. Century Farroh, trained by Dr. Ian Moore, is owned by the Ratchford Stable of North Sydney, Nova Scotia. The second place horse was Bettor's Wish, and the third place went to Backstreet Shadow, which means the triactor of 7-9-6 (\$72.75) was comprised of three horses, all of which were OSS Series graduates. All of those horses come from Ontario Stallions. Century Farroh paid \$17.40 to win.

Tall Dark Stranger tops the charts



Tall Dark Stranger and Yannick Gingras made a good pair

Jason Lisa/Lisa Photo

He's now retired, but the three year-old colt, Tall Dark Stranger, finished his wonderful career as the #1 ranked horse in the final Hambletonian Society/Breeders Crown poll. Tall Dark Stranger was awarded 25 of 35 first-place votes. In 2020, he won 11 of 13 races, including the Meadowlands Pace (1:47.2), the Cane Pace (1:47.1), and the \$1 million North America Cup at Mohawk (1:48.2). Although he was beaten by a head by 200-1 shot Sandbetweenmytoes in the Breeders Crown final, his remarkable stamina in the stretch after cutting out vicious fractions only enhanced his résumé. That race was Tall Dark Stranger's last and he was retired to a new job as a stallion. Tall Dark Stranger was the only standardbred in North America to earn over \$1 million. The total for his career was \$2,365,549.

The top ten did not register any movement in the final

week of voting. Party Girl Hill, Gimpanzee, Kissin In The Sand, and Perfect Sting completed the top five. Party Girl Hill received eight first-place votes while Gimpanzee and Perfect Sting split the remaining two.

After that it was Bettors Wish, Amigo Volo, Manchego, Atlanta, and Ramona Hill.

Gimpanzee led the rankings for the first six weeks before giving up #1 to Party Girl Hill, who spent the next six

weeks at the top of the poll.

The Hambletonian Society/Breeders Crown poll does not determine Horse of the Year. The members of the U.S. Harness Writers Association vote on all Dan Patch Award division winners plus Trotter of the Year, Pacer of the Year, and Horse of the Year.

Rankings based on the votes of harness racing media representatives on a 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis.

Rank	Name (First Votes)	A/G/S	Record	Earnings	Points	Pvs
1	Tall Dark Stranger (25)	3pc	13-11-1-	\$1,428,681	334	1
2	Party Girl Hill (8)	3pf	16-15-0-0	\$932,545	301	2
3	Gimpanzee (1)	4th	11-8-1-1	\$997,092	245	3
4	Kissin In The Sand	5pm	12-8-1-0	\$523,059	221	4
5	Perfect Sting (1)	2pc	10-10-0-0	\$534,300	214	5
6	Bettors Wish	4ph	13-6-3-2	\$685,432	142	6
7	Amigo Volo	3tg	15-9-1-2	\$939,498	123	7
8	Manchego	5tm	13-6-2-2	\$606,171	119	8
9	Atlanta	5tm	12-5-4-1	\$816,742	82	9
10	Ramona Hill	3tf	10-6-1-1	\$968,282	79	10

ALSO: Anoka Hanover, 19; Shartin N, 18; Test Of Faith, 13; Action Uncle, Caviart Ally, Leonidas A, Sorella, Venerate, 2; Charlie May, Major Custard, Peaky Sneaky, Plunge Blue Chip, Yall Beneath Me, 1.

A VOTE THAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED!



Stretch has Wilson's phone number on auto-dial and here's our latest conversation:

Down The Stretch: What is it that you're involved in these days, now that you're not riding horses?

Wilson: I've got a few things on the go, but for the most part, just taking advantage of the extra time with the family.

Down The Stretch: How did you feel about the way the season came to such an abrupt end?

Wilson: I was really disappointed. The Woodbine community came together in such a strong way to do what was needed for us to compete and for us to earn a living and put on a show for the fans, albeit virtually, and to be shut down with a month left of racing to go, it was disappointing. I think everyone was as shocked about it as I was. I remember on that Sunday, talking to my agent Mike Luider, and expecting to go to work. I just felt odd, like we should be getting ready to go in tomorrow. I went in a couple mornings after, just to touch base with some people, and to see the mass exodus with the horse fans and people loading up their horses with such sad looks on their faces. It was tough.

Down The Stretch: So, are you of the opinion that the government made a bad decision?



Wilson: It's a tough thing to say. There are small businesses in Ontario that are taking as much of a hit as every horse trainer. I don't think it was an easy decision to make. But the argument that the racing community was trying to make was that the people that were looking after the animals, day in and day out, are the same people that put on the show of horse racing. Our record spoke for itself in terms of how effective we were at keeping COVID out of our community. I wish they had taken that into consideration. Perhaps the Ontario government doesn't understand horse racing. I wish they would.

Down The Stretch: So, let's assess your year. Was that a good year for you?

Wilson: Yeah, Peter. I'm really happy with my year. The last two years for me were crippled by injury. I had a broken arm and then a broken clavicle. So, it was abbreviated by injury. But this year, I still had a very successful year. I'm very, very happy with winning multiple Grade Ones, which is something I'm pretty proud of, and climbing my way back up in the standings and hoping to build off that success in 2020. I'm sure I'm not the only one looking forward to 2021.

Down The Stretch: How old are your little girls, Grace and Avery, now?

Wilson: They will be four in February. They're three and a half and just amazing little people.

Down The Stretch: In the blink of an eye, they're going to be young adults getting married, having children....

Wilson: Whoa! Settle down!

Down The Stretch: Do you see yourself still riding as a grandmother?

Wilson: Oh, my goodness! Rewind! Yes. I always said that I plan on competing as long as I'm happy, healthy, and in demand. I have never really sat down to contemplate when I'm going to stop. Athletic careers take their course and I plan on keeping mine at the top of my game, year in and year out, and worrying about being a grandmother is not something that's in the near future.

Down The Stretch: You're aware that, over the years, I've complained about the lack of votes you get for the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award. And this is the year, because of the COVID, in which other Canadian women athletes have really not done much on the international stage. I'm very disappointed that you get very few, if any, votes at all for the Canadian Female Athlete of year. Where do you stand on that?

Wilson: I appreciate your, um, enthusiasm for this. It's very much appreciated. The way I look at it, I'm just looking to be successful. Maybe it speaks to the lack of understanding of our game and what it is that I do. It's generally seen that, in horse racing, the horses are the athletes, so perhaps there's a level of misunderstanding as to how the rider plays a role in the game itself. So maybe we, as an industry, need to do a better job to educate people.

Down The Stretch: One of the main arguments I make is that when they vote for Bianca Andreescu or when they vote for Brooke Henderson, they're voting for women who only play against half of the population. You're the only professional athlete who beats both genders, and I think that should be a powerful tool for determining who someone votes for.

Wilson: I appreciate the statement, Peter, and I agree. But I'm just going to focus on what it is I do, and I'll let you be the advocate for that.

Down The Stretch: Well, I'm trying to get a charter to be the President of the Emma-Jane Wilson Fan Club.

Wilson: I think you already are.

The argument for Emma-Jayne

Every year, the Canadian press runs a poll to choose the Female Athlete of the Year in Canada. It's the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award. Last year tennis player Bianca Andreescu won it and that was justified - she won the US Open. Before that, golfer Brooke Henderson won it two years straight. Swimmer Penny Olesiak, who won four medals in the Summer Games was Female Athlete of the Year in 2016. Eugenie Bouchard has won it twice.

And what do all those great athletes have in common? They competed only against other women.

Which brings us to Emma-Jayne Wilson. She had another terrific year riding horses at Woodbine - 79 wins from 601 rides, a win percentage of 13%. She was fourth in the jockey standings and her horses earned over \$3,500,000, so you can calculate Wilson herself made about \$350,000. Brooke Henderson so far this year has earned over \$500,000, which would make Wilson the second highest earning professional lady athlete in Canada.

Here's what should upset horse racing fans. Emma-Jayne Wilson rarely gets any votes for Female Athlete of the Year. She's in a sport that requires ultimate fitness, super courage, strength, timing, intelligence, and more importantly, in every one of her 79 wins this year, she beat men.

In a year in which there were no Olympics, and no stunning major wins by Canadian women around the world, what Emma-Jayne Wilson did for six months at Woodbine should be recognized. In 17 years as a jockey, she has won 1,622 races and her horses have cleared \$77 million. She is the only woman to ride a Queen's Plate winner (Mike Fox, 2007), but that does not seem to resonate with the Canadian Press voters. **Down The**

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Woodbine Stakes

October 31

On October 31, a couple of fine horses dressed up as Stakes winners. The \$100,000 Overskate Stakes had a field of ten going 7½ furlongs on the inner turf. Rafael Hernandez gunned Not So Quiet to the lead from post 7, but down the backstretch, both Eskiminzin (David Moran) and Red Cab-



Not So Quiet was not so slow

Michael Burns photo

ernet (Steven Bahen) loomed up and actually went ahead briefly on the outside. When that threesome turned into the stretch, it was obvious that Not So Quiet was the stronger, and the five year-old Ontario-bred got to the wire three quarters of a length the best in 1:31.03.

"I tried to make sure I stayed there and kept my position with the other two horses," said Hernandez. "Turning for home, he just did as he does, he just kept rolling. He's got a lot of heart. This horse, I've been running a long time before. I broke his maiden, I believe, and he's always a good horse."

Not So Quiet added the Overskate to his résumé 27 days after winning the Vice Regent Stakes and improved to 6 for 12 in his career. Trained by Mark Casse for Heste Sport, Not So Quiet paid \$8.40.

The feature on Halloween was the \$250,000 Princess Elizabeth Stakes for Canadian-foaled two year-old fillies at a mile and a sixteenth on the Tapeta.



Dreaming of Drew is a good looking filly

Michael Burns photo

Patrick Husbands believed his filly, Dreaming Of Drew, was the best and he rode her with confidence. The pair went straight to the front and dared seven opponents to go with her. Those who tried to get close were not successful and Dreaming of Drew was alone by almost 4 lengths at the end in the good time of 1:44.03.

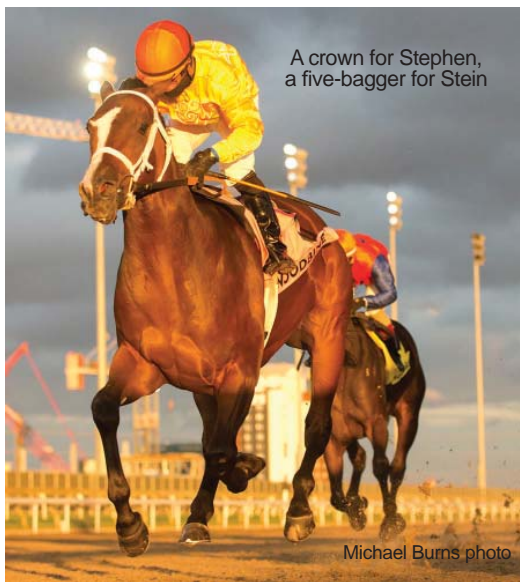
"She's a dream," said the winning trainer Barb Minshall, who took down her first Stakes of the year. "She's been a great filly for us and I'm really looking forward to the future with her. Hopefully, she'll be an Oaks contender next year."

Owned by Hoolie Racing Stable, Dreaming of Drew finished her rookie year with 2 wins and 2 seconds in 5 starts and paid \$3.90 to win.

Stein and Stephen strike in the Coronation Futurity

The two year-old colt, Stephen, benefitting from a smartly timed ride from a very focused Justin Stein, rallied from eighth down the backstretch to overhaul Tio Magico (Luis Contreras) to win the 117th edition of the \$250,000 Coronation Futurity on November 1.

Stein, who won 5 races on the card to open up a huge lead on Rafael Hernandez for the riding title, was patient



A crown for Stephen, a five-bagger for Stein

Michael Burns photo

with Stephen who was ahead of just one rival down the backstretch of the 1 1/16th mile race on the Tapeta. It was Tio Magico who cut out all the early work, leading the field through fractions of :24.87, :49.20 and 1:13.15, with the favoured Cup and Saucer Stakes winner, Master Spy (Patrick Husbands) pressing the pace.

Stein worked Stephen into fifth along the inside as the field turned for home and, by sliding off the inside, Stephen saw Tio Magico, and easily galloped past for the victory by 1¼ lengths in 1:52.46.

"He broke a little bit funny," said Stein. "But we recovered quick and I was happy with the trip we were getting and he just ran a good race. He put his mind to the task when he got some daylight and took aim at the horse in front of him. He ran by him professionally."

Traditionally, the winner of the Coronation Futurity ends up as the Queen's Plate Winter Book favourite, this despite the fact that not since Norcliffe in 1976 has a Coronation winner doubled up in the Plate. When presented with that information, Stephen's trainer, Kevin Attard just laughed, "Streaks are made to be broken," he smiled.

Stephen returned \$6.30 to win, breaking his maiden in a major Stakes race in just his third start.

He is owned by Bill and Al Ulwelling.

Casse and Hernandez had a good Saturday

Mark Casse, once again the leading trainer at Woodbine, Casse & Hernandez won with Heavenly Curlin



Michael Burns photo

was at Keeneland on November 7, but he might have had a better time at Woodbine. Casse sent out eight runners over two days of Breeder's Cup races and not one of them hit the board. But at Woodbine, Casse's horses swept two Stakes races.

The three year-old Heavenly Curlin made her Stakes debut, winning the Grade III co-featured \$125,000 Maple Leaf Stakes at a mile and a quarter. With Rafael Hernandez aboard, Heavenly Curlin rallied from eighth after 6 fur-

longs, circled four-wide on the turn, and powered brilliantly through the stretch for victory by 5¾ lengths in 2:03.24.

"There was too much speed in the race, so the main thing was getting her relaxed," said Hernandez of the winning trip. "We just sat behind the 10 [Art of Almost] and when we turned for home, I just put her in the clear. She was doing her thing and just rolling down the lane."

This was just the fifth race for Heavenly Curlin and she has won three of them. She is owned by Gary Barber and John Oxley and she paid \$7.60 to win.

The combination of Casse and Hernandez struck again in the Grade II \$175,000 Autumn Stakes which required a small field of five to go a mile and a sixteenth on the Tapeta.



Casse and Hernandez won with Skywire

Michael Burns photo

Hernandez was aboard the four year-old gelding, Skywire, and much like the Maple Leaf, Hernandez orchestrated a patient trip. Skywire was last at the half, but was moving the best as the field came into the stretch. In the final 100 yards, Skywire gained the lead and pulled away to win by 1¾ lengths in 1:42.70.

Hernandez said he learned from a previous ride on Skywire.

"Last time, we were stuck inside, and by the time he was clear and started running, it was too late, but today I made sure he had a clear path the whole way and you see the results," said Hernandez. "Every time he switches leads, he gives you another gear."

Skywire was bred in Ontario by the late Bill Graham and recorded his fifth win from 14 starts. Gary Barber, part owner of Heavenly Curlin, shares Skywire with Lou Tucci. The win bettors got \$6.70.

November 14

A field of nine fillies went postward in the \$100,000 South Ocean Stakes, 6½ furlongs on the Tapeta.

The 8-5 betting choice was Sunsprite, but she fought jockey Justin Stein right out of the gate, started in eighth, and was never a factor. Silent Guroo (Luis Contreras), at 38-1, was the longest shot in the field and she went right to the front in :22.54 for the first quarter and :45.59 for the half, but that was it for her. As she plummeted backwards, Jillie Marie was giving Stephen Bahen a perfect trip. Third most of the way, Jillie Marie had lots of energy at the head of the stretch. Bahen was able to find a very narrow seam between rivals and he scooted the filly through. In the final 200 yards, Jillie Marie was much the best, winning by 1½ lengths over Dejas Too (Patrick Husbands) in 1:16.57. This was Jillie Marie's second career race – she won her first impressively as well.

"We wanted to keep her close to the pace which was holding up pretty good today," said Bahen about his third Stakes win of the season. "So, she broke and she had me there, and whenever I called on her, she came running. It's always nice to ride a good one."

That was the 1,526th win for Bahen, whose riding career goes back to the mid 1980s.

For trainer Katerina Vassilieva, this was her first Stakes win since taking down the 2012 Lady Angela with Blues Dancing.

“Training up to her first race, I knew I had a pretty nice horse,” said Vassilieva. “The way she was working, she was very professional in the mornings.”

Vassilieva pointed out that owner Kevin Drew may have struck gold in his first equine investment.

“I am so happy for the owner,” she said “This is his first thoroughbred and now he’s won a Stakes.”

Jilli Marie paid \$12.40 to win.

November 20



Michael Burns photo

Red River Rebel was hot in the Frost King

The \$100,000 Frost King Stakes at 6½ furlongs was for two year-olds who had been sired by an Ontario stallion. Nine went postward and the lukewarm 5-2 favourite was Dragon’s Brew (Diasuke Fukumoto), but that one never got involved. Red River Rebel, ridden by Steven Bahen, was fourth at the half as Forest Survivor (Sahin Civaci) led the group there in :45.30. Red River Rebel started to advance three-wide on the far turn, then in the stretch, he darted to the rail where he found his best stride, opening up in the final sixteenth to win by 2½ lengths in 1:16.05. This was just the second start for Red River Rebel, a son of Spani Lou. He was third at the same distance 4 weeks earlier.

“He ran real good his first start, but he did get a little tired,” said Bahen. “He came back and he trained real good. I’ve been galloping him and he’s been training really well so I knew he was good today. “

Red River Rebel is owned and bred by Denny Andrews and Northern Dawn Stables. His trainer is Rachel Hal-den and his win price was \$14.90.

November 21

Pink Lloyd gets Upset



Michael Burns photo

Ride a Comet defeated Pink Lloyd

Four Stakes races hi-lighted the Saturday card on November 21.

The wonderful Pink Lloyd was bet down to even money in the \$175,000 Kennedy Road Stakes, which he had won two times previously. Despite his unbeaten record in 2020 and a ten race winning streak, this heat attracted a strong field, including two sharp Mark Casse trained horses, Ride a Comet (Patrick Husbands) and Souper Stonehenge (Emma-

Jayne Wilson).

It was, however, another speedball who set the early pace. Silent Poet (Justin Stein) went past the half in :44.79, which proved to be too fast. Ride a Comet surged from fifth into the lead at the head of the stretch and then had to repel his stablemate, Souper Stonehenge, to win by ¼ lengths. Pink Lloyd was fourth after a half, but always on the outside. He ran evenly through the stretch to be third and props to the winner. The time of 1:08.25 for 6 furlongs was just a fifth of a second off the record held by Pink Lloyd.

“He’s my favourite horse of all time,” said Husbands. “Pink Lloyd, you have to respect him. He’s a legend at Woodbine, and it’s a great honour to run against him and try to beat him. When you beat him, you’ve got to be really happy, but you have to respect him.”

Owned by breeder My Meadowview Farm and John Oxley, Ride a Comet was worth \$6.90 on the win ticket. The \$1 all-Casse exactor paid \$25.15.

Artie’s Princess in the Bessarabian



Michael Burns photo

Two Stakes wins for Kimura

Artie’s Princess won her second straight Stakes at Woodbine, and her first graded event, with a hard fought victory in the \$197,750 Grade II Bessarabian at 7 furlongs on the Tapeta.

It was Jakarta (Daisuke Fukumoto) who led early, going to the half in :44.41 as Artie’s Princess and Kazushi Kimura stalked patiently from second. In upper stretch, Artie’s Princess took her cue from Kazushi and opened up 2 lengths. Boardroom (Luis Contreras) rallied from seventh and just failed with a brave stretch run as Artie’s Princess held on by a head in 1:20.90, less than second off the course record (1:20.07).

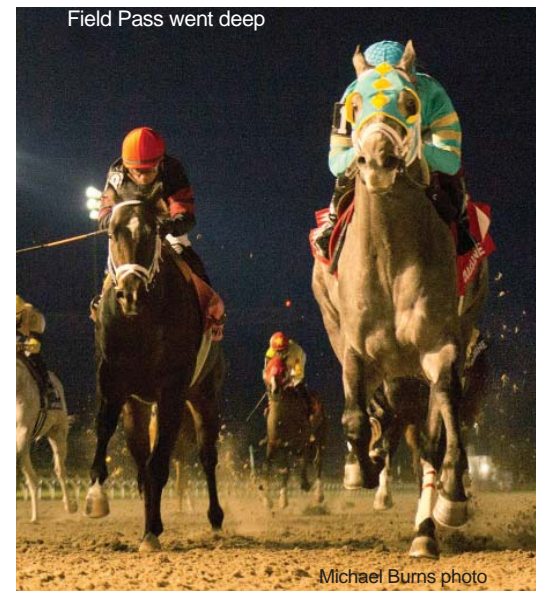
“I knew that the two horses wanted to go to the front, and it looked a little bit fast; that’s why I was just patient, watched from behind,” said Kimura. “She was just so comfortable today.”

Artie’s Princess is owned and bred by Ken and Sarah Ramsey. She’s won three of four this year and she paid \$7 to win.

A touchdown for Field Pass in the Ontario Derby

In the Ontario Derby, Kazushi Kimura rode Field Pass to a well-timed win in the \$150,000 Grade III Ontario Derby for three year-olds which went a mile and an eighth on the main track.

Field Pass was fourth coming into the stretch, about a length and a half behind the early leader, Malibu Mambo (Justin Stein). A sharp burst of speed in the final eighth secured the win for Field Pass, who found the wire a length ahead of Breeders’ Stakes winner, Belichick. Time for the distance was 1:48.35. Queen’s Plate and Prince of Wales Stakes winner Mighty Heart weakened in the stretch to



Michael Burns photo

Field Pass went deep

finish fourth.

“My planning was that I didn’t want to get too forward, but I didn’t want to send him to the front,” said Kimura. “That was the perfect position, just waiting for room.”

Field Pass improved to six for fifteen in his career and each of his wins has come at different tracks. He has also scored at Saratoga, Gulfstream, Turfway, Churchill Downs, and Keeneland. He is owned by Three Diamonds Farm and trained by Michael Maker. The win ticket was \$7.70.

“Such a classy horse,” praised Kimura. “I’ve watched him many times, winning replays. He’s nice, a nice horse.”

She looked Marvelous

The three year-old filly, Merveilleux, tossed her name into consideration as the top of her class when she romped



Michael Burns photo

Merveilleux runs herself into the voting

by almost 4 lengths in the \$150,000 Ontario Damsel Stakes at a mile and a sixteenth.

Under Rafael Hernandez, Merveilleux watched a two-horse battle in front of her, went three-wide into the passing lane around the far turn, and opened up with every stride for the emphatic win in 1:44.37. Trained by Kevin Attard, the filly added this race to her win in the Wonder Where Stakes a month earlier and improved to three for six on the season.

“I didn’t want to get the lead too early and then flatten out in the lane, but everything worked good in the whole race,” said Hernandez. “We sat behind the speed horse, relaxed good, and everything worked perfect today.”

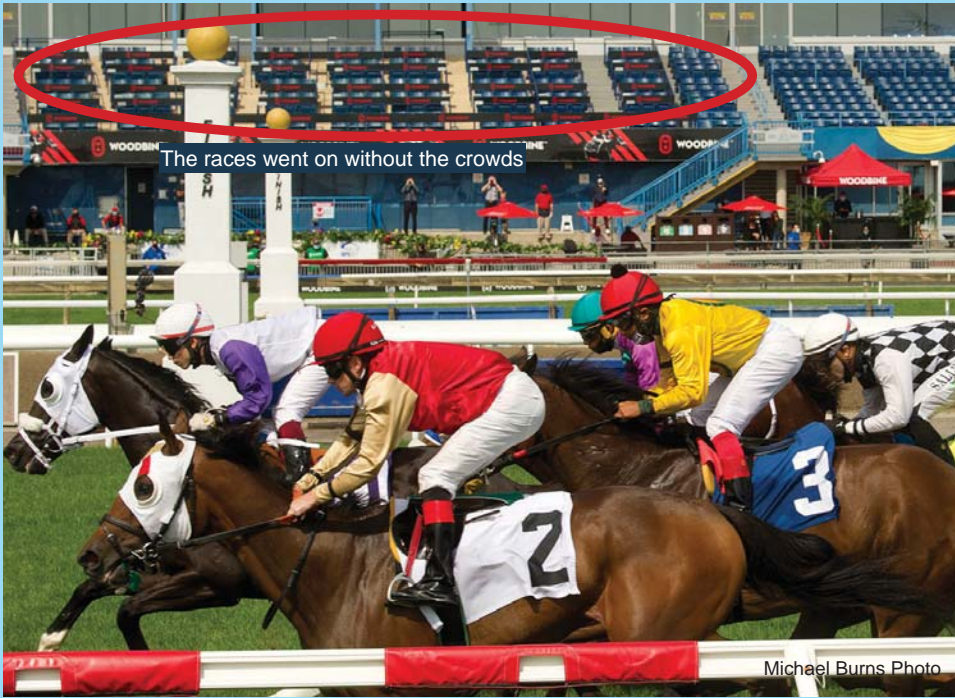
Merveilleux is owned by Al and Bill Ulwelling and has hit the board in eight of her eleven races lifetime.

“She’s really put it together lately and I’m just happy to see it for the owners,” said Attard, whose comments came on a telephone held in the winners circle by Hernandez because he was watching the race from home.

An obvious candidate for a Sovereign Award as Outstanding Three Year-Old Filly, Merveilleux paid \$6.10 to win.

Good news from the bad news for thoroughbred racing

by Brittney Mayotte



On December 4, Woodbine Entertainment announced that the shortened 2020 thoroughbred meet produced an all-sources handle of \$462,041,545.76, down more than \$50 million compared to 2019 (\$516,189,419.44). That represents a diminished handle of about 11% , which is not a depressing figure, considering that Woodbine conducted 37 fewer race days, with 305 potential races scrubbed because of COVID protocol. The racing season at Woodbine was shortened by about 28%.

The 2020 thoroughbred meet at Woodbine Racetrack included 96 race days as a result of starting late and finishing early. The COVID-19 pandemic postponed the start of the season from April 18 until June 6 and forced it to finish prematurely on November 22, instead of December 13 as scheduled.

“Like many businesses, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted our business and the entire horse racing industry in Ontario,” said Jim Lawson, CEO, Woodbine Entertainment. “However, I am very proud of how we responded and look forward to working with all of our stakeholders as we continue to manage the ongoing impacts caused by the pandemic.”

Not only did Woodbine lose several weeks of live racing, the closure of Woodbine Racetrack and Woodbine Mohawk Park to the public, and the closure of Woodbine Entertainment’s Champions’ Teletheatre Network, were also significant contributors to the decrease in handle.

“The fact that we were able to limit the

decrease in handle to 10.5%, despite losing nearly a third of our scheduled race dates, speaks to the strength of our thoroughbred racing product and our extensive efforts and focus on our wagering business in response to the pandemic,” said Lawson.

In Woodbine Entertainment’s Home Market Area, wagering on Woodbine thoroughbred racing was \$54,810,867.06, down 41% compared to last year. In 2019, Woodbine Racetrack contributed \$28 million to the all-sources handle

on thoroughbred racing. This year, Woodbine Racetrack only contributed \$124,000 to the overall handle due to being closed to the public for most of the year.

However, wagering on Woodbine thoroughbred racing continued to be strong in foreign markets, generating \$391,395,974.30 in all-sources handle, which is down less than 3%, despite running 27 per cent fewer race cards.

Handle per race was also strong at \$509,417.36, up 19.6% year over year.

Field size per race was 8.9, up from 8.2 the year prior. The 8.5% growth in field size was believed to be a result of the postponed start.

“With the start of the season being postponed more than a month, this allowed more horses to be ready for the start of the season which resulted in increased field sizes,” said Lawson. “While any growth in field size is always encouraging, it continues to be a focus for us as it is impacting our ability to maximize our wagering handle and support the purse payments.”

Although The 161st Queen’s Plate was not able to welcome spectators this year, it generated the third highest handle in its history. The 13-race card generated a total of \$14,532,678, including \$3,494,496 the Plate that saw one-eyed Mighty Heart live up to his name, defeating his 13 rivals after going off at 13-1.

“Overall, we will reflect back on this season as a year of overcoming many challenges that will only strengthen and benefit our industry moving forward,” said Lawson.



We'll take thoroughbred racing for \$2,000



When Alex Trebek died of pancreas cancer on November 8, there was a great outpouring of sympathy for the famous Canadian game show host. Trebek, of course, was best known for the 37 years he anchored the popular Jeopardy answer and question show.

But for nine years, Trebek owned and raced thoroughbred horses. His interest in thoroughbreds was sparked after he purchased a property in Raso Robles, which is about 250 kilometres northwest of Los Angeles.

"I fell in love with the property," Trebek told the *Los*

Angeles Times in 2003. "I didn't have any interest in horses or racing. At the beginning we had 700 acres and not one horse."

In the 90s, Trebek's land was called Creston Farms and he had developed an interest in breeding. At one point, Creston Farms was home to as many as 300 horses, 40 of which belonged to Trebek. His trainer was Dan Hendricks, who sent out Brother Derek to win the 2006 Santa Anita Derby.

"He's approaching the business the right way," Hendricks said of Trebek. "He's not running out and buying a bunch of yearlings or 10 two year-olds in training, or 20 broodmares. He's breeding the right way."

In the spring of 1999, Trebek paid \$130,000 for a two year-old colt by Slew O' Gold which he named Reba's Gold. That one turned into Trebek's best racehorse. He ran 37 times, with 8 wins, 7 seconds, and 7 thirds, earning \$717,422.

In the fall of 2002, after coming third in the Grade II Del Mar Breeders' Cup Handicap, Reba's Gold was the 9-5 favourite in the \$100,000 Ralph M. Hinds Pomona Invitational Handicap at Fairplex Park. With David Flores aboard, Reba's Gold ran in the middle of the pack for three quarters of a mile, then accelerated past rivals to win by almost 4 lengths at the end of the mile and an eighth.

Six weeks after that victory, Reba's Gold won the \$72,850 Steinlen Handicap at Hollywood Park, again as the betting choice and again with Flores up. He covered a mile and a sixteenth on a muddy track in 1:44.77 and got

up by a head.

"He always does well, no matter what the company is," Trebek said after that win. "If he can do the same thing for us in Japan, I'll be very happy."

The Japan Cup took place 13 days later and Trebek was in Nakayama to see his horse run in a huge race. As you might suspect, Reba's Gold was up against much better than he'd ever faced previously. Flores had the five year-old close to the pace until the final turn, but Reba's Gold tired badly and finished ninth.

"That was disappointing," Trebek told reporters. "David said the horse was never handling the track. It was too deep."

Apparently, the horse didn't sulk from that bad experience. He was given the winter off and, as a six year-old in 2003, was never in jeopardy in the Grade III \$100,000 Seabiscuit Handicap at Bay Meadows, pulling away by 8 lengths and stopping the clock in the very good time of 1:41.63 for the mile and a sixteenth.

That was the last time that Reba's Gold posed in the winner's circle. He did race seven more times, with a couple thirds and a second place finish, after which he was retired to stud at Trebek's farm.

"The horses are such beautiful animals," Trebek once told the *Los Angeles Times*. "It's relaxing. It's like getting back to nature. Everything just slows down and is much calmer."

In 2004, Trebek sold Creston Farm for a reported \$10 million.

\$9.5 million for Monomoy Girl

The day after she won the Breeders' Cup Distaff for the second time, the sensational five year-old mare, Monomoy Girl, was sold, but only when the bidding at the Fasi-Tipton November Sale reached \$9.5 million. It was Spendthrift Farm, represented by B. Wayne Hughes who emphasized *spend* more than *thrif*t to buy the great race horse. The good news for racing fans is that Spendthrift intends to race Monomoy Girl in 2021, while retaining Brad Cox as her trainer.

Monomoy Girl had a perfect four for four in 2020 after missing the entire previous year because of colic and a pulled gluteal muscle. Incredibly, after an eighteen month layoff, she knocked off an allowance race, then followed that up with a smart looking win in the Grade II Ruffian Stakes at a mile at Belmont. Stepping up into her

comfort zone on September 4, she romped home by 1¾ lengths in the Grade I La Troienne Stakes at Churchill Downs. She ran the mile and a sixteenth in 1:42.14, just over a second off the track record for the distance. Her last race of 2020 was the Breeders' Cup Distaff and it was her most impressive. Under regular rider Florent Geroux, Monomoy Girl left from post 10, never got to the rail, but with an emphatic four-wide move into the stretch, she took command and won by almost 2 lengths in 1:47.84, an eyeblink off the record (1:47.75) for a mile and an eighth.

For the part of her career when she was owned by Michael Dubb, Monomoy Stables, The Elkstone Group, and Bethlehem Stables, Monomoy Girl won 13 of 15 races and earned \$4,426,818.

The most ever paid for a thoroughbred horse at an auction is \$16 million, piled up in 2006 for The Green Monkey, a descendant of both Northern Dancer and Secretariat. That price tag may be historic; the Green Monkey was not. He raced just three times, managed a single third, and earned just \$17,513. The Green Monkey's career as a stallion was, to be generous, unremarkable and he was euthanized at the age of 14 due to laminitis.

Spendthrift Farm is likely to prosper much better with its expensive mare. They also own the colt Authentic, the 2020 Kentucky Derby winner who also captured the Breeders' Cup Classic. It would certainly be tempting to breed their champion colt to their champion mare at the point when she tells them her racing career is over.



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RACETRACK HUMOUR

Perry & Mooch



The 12 days of Pissedness

On the 12th day of Christmas, the Tories gave to us:

- 12 cancelled race dates
- 11 Punters pissed off
- 10 jockeys weeping
- 9 lost exactors
- 8 maidens canceled
- 7 Steins a swearing
- 6 grooms not grooming
- 5 empty sheds
- 4 calls not answered
- 3 silent tracks
- 2000 back stretch people
- And a month off for Robert Geller...



Last Stakes races at Mohawk By Mark McKelvie

Karma Seelster and LMC Bumble Bee captured SBOA (Standardbred Breeders and Owner Association) Stakes glory to wrap up the 2020 Stakes season on November 14 at Woodbine Mohawk Park.

With the temperature sitting at the freezing mark, the SBOA finals saw full fields of ten Ontario-sired fillies clash in the \$138,518 pacing final and \$141,518 trotting final.

Karma Seelster finally got her big win, shooting up the rail after a two-hole trip to win in 1:53 for driver Doug McNair and trainer Gregg McNair. The daughter



of Sportswriter entered the evening with over \$200,000 earned this season, despite having just found the winner's circle twice in 14 starts.

"She finishes second, third quite a bit, and I mean going for money like that, it adds up," said Doug McNair of Karma Seelster. "It's a little frustrating sometimes as a driver when you get a trip like that and sometimes she'll shoot through and just kind of hang around and finish second and third, but she really put out tonight and raced great."

Karma Seelster blasted to the front, posting a :27.2 opening quarter. Rose Run Victory also flashed early speed and made the front early in the second-quarter after being parked around the first turn.

The middle-half saw little action, as Rose Run Victory got there in a comfortable :56.3 and three-quarters in 1:26. Lauras Love angled out from third to sit first-up on the far

turn, while Rose Run Vantage followed that cover.

In the stretch, Karma Seelster found daylight up the pylons and shot through to the lead, holding off Rose Run Vantage in the centre by a head in 1:53. Lauras Love finished third, while Rose Run Victory was fourth.

"I figured the way Hensley's filly (Rose Run Victory) raced last week she was probably the one to follow. As soon as I made the front, she was on the move right away," said Doug McNair. "In the last turn I just thought we were racing for second or third off those fractions, but things opened up and she raced great."

Karma Seelster's win is a family affair, as she is owned by Hall of Famer Keith Waples, his wife Eileen Waples, and their daughter Karen Hauver. The pacing filly now has three wins and \$277,570 earned this season to bring her career totals to seven wins and \$539,775.

A \$2 win ticket on Karma Seelster returned \$5.70.

The SBOA Filly Trot final delivered a thrilling finish,



with LMC Bumble Bee capitalizing off some nifty stickhandling from driver James MacDonald to win at odds of 9-1.

"I was in an awful spot with nowhere to go," said MacDonald about his position at three quarters.

LMC Bumble Bee was seventh at the head of the stretch with a wall of opposition blocking her way.

"They kind of hooked wheels for a second in front of me and I got a seam to get out and, at the top of the stretch,

I was just dying for some daylight because I had all kinds of trot."

LMC Bumble Bee hustled off the wings of the gate to lead into the first turn just before Shape Shifter cleared to command at a :27.1 opening quarter. Princesspartyants, who was parked around the first turn, got a rough ride in the second quarter on her way to the top, finally clearing at a huge :55.2 half.

Race favourite P L Notsonice was out and moving going to the half, taking over the top spot racing to three quarters in 1:25.1. Second-choice Susies Lady was left uncovered first-up, while LMC Bumble Bee was pinned at the rail and shuffled back to seventh turning for home.

The stretch drive saw P L Notsonice and Susies Lady square off for a good chunk, but neither filly had enough in the tank to hold off the back field.

Jula Shes Magic and Yen were marching strongly in the centre, but the strongest of all was LMC Bumble Bee. The Nick Gallucci trainee and MacDonald were flying up behind rivals before diving down to the rail and maintaining momentum to pull off the thrilling victory by three quarters of a length over Jula Shes Magic. Yen grabbed third, while Susies Lady and P L Notsonice settled for fourth and fifth, respectively.

A daughter of Muscle Mass, LMC Bumble Bee has found her best stride late in the season after some setbacks.

"When we trained her down, we thought she was the best trotting filly we had ever owned," said owner Frank Cirillo, who shares ownership with his daughter Loredana. "She got two surgeries last year, she had two surgeries this year after the first Gold, and we never thought she'd make it back, but (Nick) Gallucci did just an amazing job bringing her back, so it's just unbelievable to be standing here right now."

The Gallucci-trained LMC Bumble Bee is now four for nine with \$121,975 earned on the season. Her clocking of 1:55 on Saturday established a career best.

LMC Bumble Bee will be racing in the upcoming Harvest Series, as she had little money on her card prior to October and met the eligibility. She paid \$20.00 to win.

Oh Henry! Trevor scores # 7,000 by Mark McKelvie

A last-to-first rally with pacing mare Gias Surreal gave driver Trevor Henry career driving win 7,000 on November 6 at Woodbine Mohawk Park.



The Arthur, Ontario resident entered Friday's card three wins shy of the 7,000 mark and completed his Hat-Trick victory in Race 11 in upset fashion, scoring at odds of 12-1.

Gias Surreal will go down as winner 7,000 for Henry and it came in style. The four year-old mare, who is trained by Don Lindsey, was seventh and last turning for home and unleashed a furious stretch rally to sweep by her rivals late and take this week's top class for pacing mares.

Henry's other two victories on the card came with the five year-old trotting mare Shes Got Pizazz, and the five year-old pacing mare Furiosa.

A leading driver across Ontario for many years, Henry has been a top driver at Woodbine over the last several seasons and, with his landmark win, was fifth among drivers with 149 victories at Mohawk Park in 2020. His career best season for wins was 533 in 2012, while his highest



earning season was \$5.9 million in 2017.

Now a member of the 7,000 win club, Henry has driven the winners of \$65 million over the course of his more than three-decade career.

Hernandez, Casse, tops in class

By Brittney Mayotte

The jockeys' race for the 2020 meet title at Woodbine Racetrack went right down to the wire and the wire came sooner than expected. When the thoroughbred season ended abruptly on November 22, it was Rafael Hernandez edging out Justin Stein in what had been a heated battle for top honours all

Etoile, and teamed up with Canadian star Pink Lloyd, who won four Stakes for trainer Robert Tiller and Entourage Stable.

Stein's highlights included winning the Grade I Ricoh Woodbine Mile with the Kevin Attard-trained Starship Jubilee, and partnering with multiple graded

Saturday and wrapped up the meet by winning three of the final six races on Sunday, finished third in the jockey standings with 83 wins, ahead of Emma-Jayne Wilson (79), and Luis Contreras (76).

Casse topped the trainer leaderboard with 93 wins during the 2020 season and more than \$7.13 million in purse earnings. Norm McKnight, who led all trainers for wins over the past three years, picked up a victory on closing day to own the second spot in the standings with 44 wins, while Tiller finished third with 43. Kevin Attard, whose stable amassed \$3.51 million in purse earnings, edged out Martin Drexler in fourth with 37 wins. Josie Carroll, who trained winners of 29 races, finished third in the money category with \$3.49 million in earnings, thanks in part to OLG Canadian Triple Crown stars Mighty Heart and Belichick.

Casse's Saturday score with Grade II Kennedy Road champion Ride a Comet, ridden by Patrick Husbands, marked his seventeenth Stakes triumph of the Woodbine season. Another local highlight for the 59 year-old horseman included winning the Grade I Summer Stakes with Gretzky the Great, ridden by Kimura, for owners Gary Barber and Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners.

Barber was the leading money-winning owner of the meet with more than \$1.56 million in purses, followed by Stronach Stables (\$1.24 million) and Live Oak Plantation (\$1.14 million). Meanwhile, Bruno Schickedanz topped the win column with 35 successful starters, followed by Barber's 17 victories.



Michael Burns Photo

season long.

With more than double the wins of his closest competition, trainer Mark Casse ran away with his twelfth Woodbine training title.

The abbreviated 2020 Woodbine meet, which was scheduled to run through December 13, concluded after the Government of Ontario issued a minimum 28-day lockdown order for the region of Toronto due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The season began on June 6 after its April 18 start date was delayed, due to the initial spring COVID-19 lockdowns. The shortened season included 96 race days.

Hernandez and Casse were the hottest combination of the season and teamed up for one final victory before the meet concluded prematurely, as the two year-old filly Road to Romance broke her maiden in the third race. Hernandez and Casse combined to win a total of 37 races, including six Stakes from 117 starts.

Hernandez earned his first Woodbine jockey title with a total of 129 wins at the meet, besting Stein for the honours by just three wins, while his mounts earned in excess of \$7.18 million. The 36 year-old jockey, who moved to Woodbine fulltime during the summer of the 2016 season, finished top three with 154 wins in 2017 and second in the standings behind the now-retired Eurico Rosa Da Silva over the next two years. He accumulated 168 wins at Woodbine in 2018 behind da Silva's record-breaking 237 victories, and followed up with a 164-win campaign in 2019.

Among his meet-leading 17 Stakes wins this year, Hernandez earned his first Grade I victory in the E. P. Taylor Stakes with the Chad Brown-trained filly

Stakes winner Silent Poet, conditioned by Nicholas Gonzalez. His mounts earned more than \$7.19 million. Kazushi Kimura, who won a pair of graded Stakes on



Michael Burns Photo

Breeders' Cup 2020 Keeneland

Day One of the Breeders' Cup at Keeneland was all for the two year-olds – five races for the rookies and not much happening for Canadian connections.

The first Cup race was the \$1,000,000 Juvenile Turf Sprint at 5½ furlongs. Golden Pal with Irad Ortiz was hammered down to 4-5 and the son of Uncle Mo led pretty well all the way, winning by three quarters of a length in 1:02.82 and paying \$3.60. Golden Pal is trained by Wesley Ward for Ranlo Investments.



The Breeders' Cup is notorious for its massive upsets and, in the next race, the \$1,000,000 Juvenile Turf, 30-1 shot Fire At Will (Ricardo Santana) surprised, coasting home by 3 lengths in 1:35.81 for the mile on the grass. The Canadian interest in the race was Gretzky The Great, who had won the Summer Stakes at Woodbine. Gretzky The Great was second early, but gradually dropped back, and finished sixth. Fire At Will is trained by Michael Maker and owned by Three Diamonds Farms. A \$2 win ticket was worth \$62.40 for a horse that has now won 3 of 4 starts.



The Juvenile Fillies had seven two year-old fillies running a mile and a sixteenth for \$1,000,000 and it was Vequist (Joel Rosario) who ran the fastest, winning by 2 lengths in 1:42.30. The winning trainer is Robert Reid for the owners, Gary Barber, Wachtel Stable, and Swilcan Stable. The win ticket was worth \$15.20.

Aunt Pearl and Florent Geroux galloped to victory in the \$1,000,000 Juvenile Fillies Turf, covering the mile in 1:35.71. She is owned by Michael Dubb, Madaket



Stables, Peter Deutschm, Michael Kisber, The Elkstone Group, and Bethlehem Stables. The trainer is Brad Cox, who would have a brilliant two days at Keeneland.

The \$2,000,000 Juvenile at a mile and a sixteenth had a field of fourteen and it was the unbeaten Jackie's Warrior (Joel Rosario) who took a lot of money, going off at 4-5. But Jackie's Warrior gave it up in the stretch, fading to fourth, about 3½ lengths behind the winner, Essential Quality (Luis Saez), who was 7-2. The second place horse, Hot Rod Charlie (Tyler Gaffalione), was 94-1 and that created a \$600 exactor. Essential Quality gave Brad



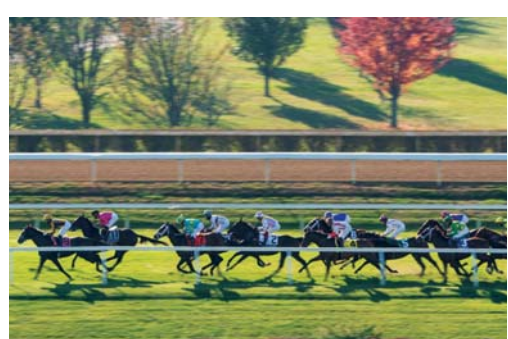
Cox his second training win in this year's Breeders' Cup. The owner is Godolphin and the win ticket was \$9.40.

On Saturday, November 7, the bettors got nine Breeders' Cup races. The main interest for Canadians came in the \$2,000,000 Filly and Mare Turf, which included the great mare Starship Jubilee, running for the 39th and final time in her career. Claimed for \$16,000 by Tino Attard in 2017, Starship Jubilee would be trained by Kevin Attard and she went on to win 13 Stakes races, including the Woodbine Mile earlier in the fall.



racing career with a win. As soon as the gates opened, she stumbled badly, and ejected jockey Florent Geroux. Neither horse nor rider was injured, but Kevin Attard, who was at Keeneland, could barely believe what he was witnessing.

"When I saw the rider come off, I was stunned," he said. "It was almost like, 'this is not really happening.' I could not believe it. Of all the ways to lose a race, that is not what I anticipated would happen. Luckily she came out of the race unscratched."

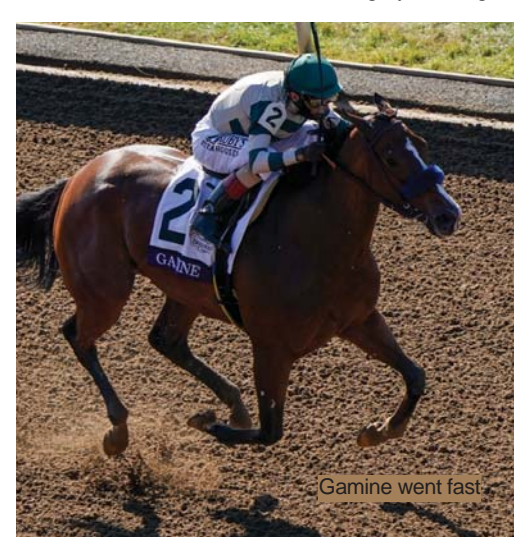


As the outriders were corralling Starship Jubilee, up ahead where jockeys and horses were still united, the French filly, Audarya, came flying late to win by a neck



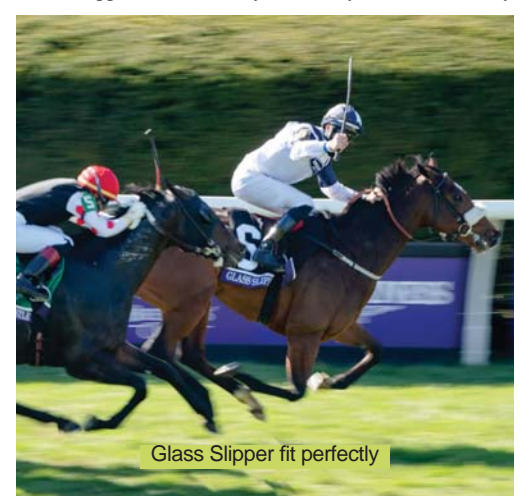
in 1:52.72. Ridden by Pierre-Charles Boudot, Audarya was almost 18-1. She is trained by J Fanshaw for AM Swinburn and she paid \$37.60.

The \$1,000,000 Filly and Mare Sprint was contested at 7 furlongs and the even-money favourite, Gamine, showed how fast the track was, winning by 6¼ lengths



in 1:20.20, a record for 7 furlongs. Gamine was ridden by John Velazquez for trainer Bob Baffert and owner Michael Lund Peterson. The win bettors got just \$4.20.

Next up was the \$1,000,000 Turf Sprint and a four year-old filly surprised. Glass Slippers and rider Tom Eaves rallied from tenth to win by half a length in 1:01:53. Glass Slippers is trained by Kevin Ryan and owned by



Bearstone Stud. The win price was \$22.40.

The New York Knicks basketball team may be dreadful, but the horse named after them is great. Knicks Go, ridden by Joel Rosario, sizzled ahead of eleven overmatched



rivals to win the \$1,000,000 Dirt Mile by 3½ lengths. Knicks Go led at the half in a bruising :44.40 and was clocked in 1:08.25 for the 6 furlongs. Even so, he had plenty left to be timed in 1:33.85, a Keeneland record for the mile. Knicks Go is owned by the Korea Racing Authority and was Brad Cox' third win of the weekend. As the favourite, Knicks Go paid \$5.60.

The Breeders Cup Sprint was a \$2,000,000 race and Irad Ortiz gave Whitmore a brilliant ride. Whitmore



was ninth after a half, but Ortiz steered the seven year-old in and out of traffic, got clear in the final eighth, and pulled away by ¾ lengths to win in 1:08.61, less than a second off the course record. Whitmore is trained by Ron Moquett, who owns along with Robert La Penta and Head of Plains Racing. The win ticket was a generous \$38.80 – generous for a horse that had won 14 times previously, had earned more than \$3.2 million, and had the western world's best jockey aboard.

The biggest payoff of this year's Breeders' Cup came in the Turf Mile. The very lukewarm favourite in the field of fourteen was Lameko (Oisin Murphy) at over 5-1, but

that one was not a factor, finishing seventh. In the stretch, the field's longest shot, Order of Australia (Pierre-Charles Boudot), battled with Circus Maximus (Ryan Moore) and, at the wire, it was Order of Australia by a neck in 1:33.73.



Three fascinating story lines here – Order of Australia was 73-1. Boudot got the ride because the intended jockey, Christophe Soumillon, had tested positive for COVID-19 two days earlier; and the winning trainer, Aiden O'Brien,



also trains the second place horse, Circus Maximus, and the third place finisher, Lope Y Fernandez. If O'Brien hit the tri, he cashed \$17,572 for a \$2 bet. Order of Australia blew up the tote board with a \$148.40 win price. He is owned by Derrick Smith, Mrs. John Magnier, Michael B Tabor, and Anne Marie O'Brien.

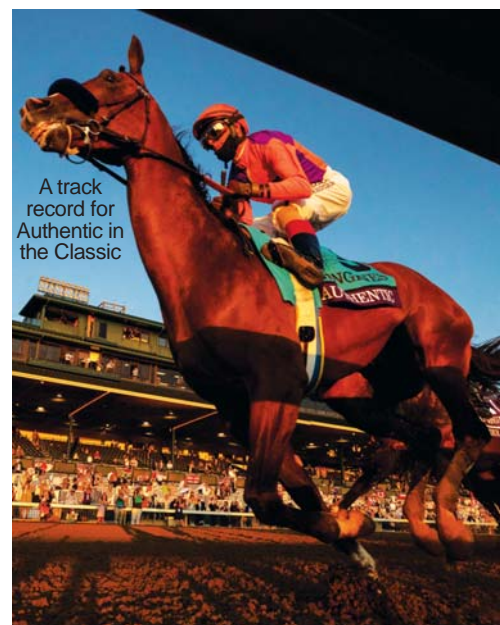
The bettors' confused state returned to normalcy in the \$2,000,000 Distaff at a mile and an eighth on the dirt. The even-money choice, Monomoy Girl, was simply much too good, racing on the outside for Florent Geroux, but still the most powerful in the stretch, prevailing by 1¼ lengths in 1:47.84, less than a tenth of a second off the track record. It was Monomoy Girl's eleventh straight win for trainer Brad Cox and the owners, Michael Dubb, Monomoy Stables, The Elkstone Group, and Bethlehem Stables. Monomoy Girl



gave Cox his fourth win of the weekend and she paid \$4 to win.

The Breeders' Cup Turf had a \$4,000,000 purse and it was a very lucky set of circumstances for jockey Colin Keane, who replaced the ailing Christophe Soumillon. Keane rode Tarnawa to victory by a length in 2:28.02 for the mile and a half. Trained by Dermot Weld for HH Aga Khan, Tarnawa paid \$11.40. Keane's 10% share of the winnings comes to \$208,000. Perhaps he sent a fruit basket to Soumillon.

The final race of Breeders' Cup 2020 was the \$6,000,000 Classic at a mile and a quarter and Kentucky Derby champion, Authentic, was magnificent. Sent right to the



front by John Velazquez, Authentic led every step and repelled Improbable (Irada Ortiz) by 2¼ lengths in 1:59.19, the fastest mile and a quarter ever run at Keeneland. Authentic improved to 6 for 8 in his career. He gave trainer Bob Baffert his seventeenth Breeders' Cup victory and his fourth Classic win (Arrogate, American Pharoah, Bayern). Owned by Spendthrift Farm, MyRaceHorse Stable, Madaket Stables, and Starlight Racing, Authentic gave his backers a \$10.40 win ticket.

Overall wagering on the two days of Breeders' Cup racing was in excess of \$160,000,000.

The 12 days of...nothing

Despite the best efforts of Jim Lawson, Sue Leslie, passionate fans, and newspaper writers, the 2020 thoroughbred season could not be salvaged. Late Thursday afternoon, November 26, Woodbine and the



Jim Lawson

HBPA, within minutes of each other, announced that the final twelve scheduled dates of racing were officially cancelled.

Woodbine had been advised on Friday, November 20, that in accordance with the Grey Lockdown Phase, racing would not continue past November 22. That inspired a veritable tsunami of response. Lawson, CEO of Woodbine, and Leslie, President of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association of Ontario (HBPA), contacted various individuals in the Doug Ford administration.

"The unfortunate part is we kept people in limbo because we didn't get an official answer from the government" said Lawson. "I spoke with senior levels of government on Tuesday. I did impress upon them that there was some urgency to this. First of all, horses were leaving our grounds."

As the government dragged its heels with regards to a response, potential race days started falling off the calendar. The Thursday, November 26 card was lost, as were the Friday races. As the sun started to settle on Thursday, races for Saturday were wiped out.

"The way it stood was, if we were to lose Sunday, and then we had three days off the next week, we just couldn't leave people in limbo any longer," said Lawson. "So, we said we will decide by Thursday night at six o'clock whether we're running Sunday. We did not hear anything all day Wednesday. Late Thursday afternoon, I had a call from the premier's office which was qualified as a 'heads up' that there's not going to be a change in their guidance as it relates to horse racing. And I said, 'We're now going to go ahead and cancel the season.'"

By the end of the last full week of November, Sue Leslie could be heard muttering the same mantra over and



Sue Leslie

over.

"There is no logic for us not to be able to race," she says, the pain and weariness evident in her voice. "And that's what puts the knife in the heart. Because there is no logic. It's really just evidence how little they understand our industry. Despite a concerted effort to explain that those training horses and racing horses are in fact, the same people. The people who train are the people that are racing."

Leslie does understand the enormous scope of the pandemic and that the Provincial Tories are most certainly swamped with issues and unhappy business people.

"I think that there's so many areas of concern and so much pressure," said Leslie. "We've got a big, big province here, and there's a lot of businesses that are closed down right now. And they're all crying. They're all upset. Small business owners are getting wiped out. So, it's just a combination of things. It just didn't come together the way we hoped it would."

Pounded emotionally as she was by the stonewalling from Doug Ford's office, Leslie had to move on to another important subject. Had the final twelve days of racing occurred, about \$5.2 million in purses would have been available.

"My priority right now is the purse money that had been set aside and allocated for the twelve days," she said. "That needs to be distributed to horsemen and we've already had discussions with Ontario Racing with regard to that purse money. And that'll be my number one priority. I will be fighting hard to get that money distributed to horse people that were at the track readying their horses for those twelve days."

On Tuesday, November 23, Steve Buffery, who covers horse racing for the Toronto Sun, published a column whose headline announced:

Woodbine has kept Covid-19 at bay and is being punished for it.

And in his opening sentences, Buffery leaves no doubt which side of the argument he favours.

Woodbine Racetrack workers are being thrown to the wolves by the Ontario government and, rightfully, they're howling mad.

What is happening at the Rexdale track is an absolute travesty. And it's not just the workers being thrown under the bus. There is a serious animal welfare issue that could become very ugly.

"Well. I was pretty angry," said Buffery about his



Steve Buffery

critical essay. "I thought it was ridiculous that Woodbine got caught up in this lockdown without any consideration and I think they deserved it. I was not happy with it. That's why my story was not just sort of a straight board news story. I put in a little editorial feeling."

Buffery identified a huge opportunity lost for horse racing. On Friday, November 20, the handle at Woodbine was over \$5 million, an extraordinary figure. The next day, with four attractive Stakes races, Woodbine took in more than \$8 million. With no major league action filling television time slots, sports fans were gravitating to horse racing to fill the void.

"All that betting money is going to go somewhere else because people are still going to bet," said Buffery. "Horse racing has been the only game in town for a while. For example, the Sun has been writing more about the horses this year. With the Leafs, the Raptors, the Blue Jays, and the Argos not playing right now, that could have been three more weeks of sports fans looking at the races, maybe even betting some. Then next year, when things are back to normal, maybe there's a few more horse racing fans out there."

That same day that Buffery's story came out, the Canadian Thoroughbred, in its on-line site, had a column from Jennifer Morrison. The headline for that story emphasized the foot dragging of the government:

Ontario Government, Health Minister Remain Silent to Racing's Pleas

Morrison, a fierce defender of horse racing, was also very un-neutral on the issue of the races being stopped:



Jennifer Morrison

Horse racing appeared on the lockdown list on the website of the Ontario government, allowing for "training only", which is nonsensical since the same people who are training the horses take them to the track to race. There have been no fans and very limited owners allowed this year on-site.

As a member of the press, Morrison was one of the very few who actually attended races. She was at Ajax Downs for every race card as well as some of the thoroughbred Stakes races. According to Morrison, Woodbine should be considered the gold standard of how to conduct business during this pandemic.

"It was Fort Knox," said Morrison. "At the backstretch, they were very strict. Only essential workers. The front side of the track, you had to do all the protocols with the temperature taking and filling out of forms. No one was allowed in the racetrack other than the essential people to run the races and take care of the horses. They were the leaders in safety and protocols with this COVID."

Further to that, from the time racing resumed in June until Sunday, November 22, Woodbine did not have a single positive test on its grounds. Jockey Sunny Singh did register a positive for COVID in mid-November, but it was clear he had contracted it outside the track and, subsequently, he was not allowed on the property.

There's no need to feel sorry for jockey Justin Stein. He had a remarkable season, but after the final day of racing, he found himself three wins behind Rafael Hernandez for the jockeys' title at Woodbine. From day one in June, it had been a pitched battle, with changes in the lead, as Stein and Hernandez pulled away from the rest of the field. To Stein, it must have felt like an NBA game, stopped with 5 minutes to play, one team ahead by a basket.



JustinStein

"A little bit, definitely," said Stein. "There were twelve days left in the season and I was counting on them. It was getting hot and heavy the last few weeks. It was more of a win by default."

Rafael Hernandez has nothing to feel guilty about. He ended up with 129 wins to Stein's 126. Their performances were remarkably similar. Hernandez' horses won at a 20% clip, Stein's at 19%. Stein's mounts earned slightly more - \$5,414,154 to \$5,403,294. Horses ridden by Hernandez hit the board 48% of the time, Stein brought them in at 46%. Despite the fact that he wasn't given the chance to overhaul his rival, Stein has no hostility towards Hernandez.

"We get along really well. We have a lot of respect for each other as riders. He's a very good rider," said Stein. "During that last day of racing, we spoke, and I told him we had a lot of fun and I had enjoyed riding with him."

As for the abrupt end to the season being decided by men in expensive suits...

"It's extremely unfair. And the government of Ontario definitely lacks an understanding towards our industry," said Stein. "You get politicians that don't know anything about it making decisions on the livelihoods of not only thousands of people but the horses' future, horses that can't be kept because they're no longer affordable. So, yeah, it pisses me off for sure. We just had the carpet yanked out from underneath us."

On social media discussion boards, racing fans expressed their opinions. One of the first was Tia Menard, who identifies herself as a horse player. She sent a letter to Doug Ford:

Hello Premier Ford and Ontario Government. I am an avid horse player and frequently wager on HPIbet.com with Woodbine. I love supporting the Ontario economy through choosing to wager at Woodbine. The horse people at Woodbine who race are the same people who train and their economic livelihood is really threatened by Toronto's lockdown. I understand the HBPA, the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association, has written you and I echo their plea: Please make an exception to woodbine and allow their final few days of the season to continue. Thank you.

Menard did not get a response, but definitely has an opinion on how her betting action is part of the whole horse racing economy.

"If I can't wager, there is no money going in and



Tia Menard

there is no purse money," she says. "The people that depend on that money – the owners, the trainers, the backstretch workers. This is all coming at a time right before Christmas in a pandemic. I think the government had a chance to get this right and support the economy, support the horse people, and support Woodbine which has been the model of keeping their workers safe while providing entertainment of thoroughbred racing, which I love."

Justin Stein's Facebook page

Within hours of the final thoroughbred race of the season at Woodbine, jockey Justin Stein inaugurated his own Facebook page – **All About The Longshots**.

"It was suggested by a local trainer, who has more experience than me with social media. I just went with it," he says.

When it comes to administering a social media site, Stein admits he's much more comfortable in the saddle than at a computer.

"I felt I had to make an effort, so I gave it a try. You have to keep on going," he says.

That the page is called **All About The Longshots** could be autobiographical, considering the 40 year-old athlete brought winners in at over 19% this year. That's all the more remarkable considering that he left the sport in 2016 and returned after the season began in 2019. That kind of comeback is a longshot in itself.

"I've won a lot of races on horses that were completely overlooked," says Stein. "I never really look at the tote board and the horses don't understand what the numbers mean. If they decide to run a winning race, it doesn't matter."

Despite the fact that he fell three wins short to Rafael Hernandez in the jockeys' competition at Woodbine this year, Stein delivered more high-priced horses than anyone else. A remarkable percentage of his 126 winners paid over \$10.

"Yeah, they run for me," he says. "I can put them in a good position. I can save a lot of horse. Maybe I have some kind of gift. And I've been lucky."

All About The Longshots invites lovers of horse racing to submit their comments, images, and opinions. In the first few days alone, it brought in over 350 new members.



Crossing the aisle



Dave Landry Photo

Consider this an historic column for **Down The Stretch**. Some years ago, Ben Wallace was the Standardbred Owner of the Month. Here, Wallace Standardbreds are the Thoroughbred Owners of the Month.

It's the first time someone has been featured in both Owner of the Month columns. It's a crossover that will make sense as you read on. And 'crossover' is the key word here. Back on November 13, as part of Woodbine's Crossover Pick 5, Agnelli, a three year-old gelding, won the eighth race at Woodbine at odds of nearly 25-1. The jockey was Ismael Mosqueira and the trainer was Renee Kierans. Kierans is the partner of Ben Wallace and that's how Wallace Standardbreds owns a winning thoroughbred.

Wallace has spent much of the past five decades as a spectacularly successful owner and trainer of standardbreds – his Trackit statistics show nearly 2,000 wins and over \$38,000,000 in earnings. But he admits, he always had an interest in the thoroughbred side and that grew exponentially when he met Kierans about 10 years ago. At the time, she was a television interviewer.

"She used to do the interviews after Stakes races, when she was involved with The Score Television and Woodbine," says Wallace. "I just met her through my association with racing horses. I actually brought up the idea to her. She had all the background that you needed to train thoroughbreds and whatever, and collectively, we put our minds together, and it was a natural progression."

The first thoroughbred purchased by Wallace Standardbreds was called Gator Spy.

"He's got about \$85,000 made," says Wallace. "We bought him in Florida and had a little fun with him. He was our first winner."

Gator Spy was acquired in 2014 and started his career brilliantly, breaking his maiden in October 2016 at first asking. Jeffrey Alderson was aboard as Gator Spy rallied from the back of the field to win at 6 furlongs by a length. That produced a \$46 payoff for a \$2 win ticket. Now about to turn 7, Gator Spy is still in the Wallace Standardbreds stable.

We asked Wallace to talk about the most successful thoroughbred he's had.

"He's called Time Skip," he says. "I buy a yearling every year and we bought him for 20 grand. He's already made over \$360,000."

A son of Court Vision, Time Skip has won 4 of 32

starts and hits the board with remarkable consistency – 7 seconds and 11 thirds on his résumé.

"He's been an ATM," cracks Wallace. "He's paid for all the mistakes for us. Every year, he sort of grinded out good money. He's been a real useful horse."

Time Skip may just be peaking, now that he's a five year-old. On October 11, he was a good third to Salute With Honor in the \$125,000 Durham Cup Stakes. Jockey Leo Salles had Time Skip running strongly at the end of the mile and a sixteenth. That third-place finish was worth \$16,500. Less than 4 weeks later, Time Skip again finished third, this time in the \$210,000 Autumn Stakes under Justin Stein. That put another \$23,100 into the Wallace Standardbreds' account.

So, let's talk about Agnelli, who paid \$51.10 to win, a very nice payoff to have on Friday, the 13th.

"That horse is also one that won his very first start for us," says Wallace. "He was by the first crop of Frac Daddy. I spotted him at the Canadian Thoroughbred Horse Sale and I think we paid 9 or 10,000 for him. That's a big thrill when a two year-old wins right off the bat."

It was Maiden Claiming race at 5 furlongs on October 14, 2019. Agnelli went off at 10-1 with Omar Moreno aboard and roared from mid-pack to win by a head in :58.72.

When Agnelli struggled to produce good results in his next 10 starts, Wallace Standardbreds dropped him to a rock bottom \$5,000 claim race. That worked out well – Agnelli came flying down the middle of the track from out of the clouds and punched out the others with a win by over 3 lengths.

Sometimes it can be difficult for two people in a romantic relationship to get along in a business agreement. Kierans, happily tells us, that's not the case with her and Wallace.

"It's very easy," she says. "With his knowledge of horses, I'd be a fool if I didn't pick his brain every now and then. But, for the most part, he lets me do what I need to do with the thoroughbreds. I like the way we buy yearlings. He knows what he likes visually from a horse,

and generally we like the same thing. I'll do a lot of the pedigree research and we'll go and look at certain horses. And as far as the visual aspect of the horse, generally he has the final say, which is cool with me. And then if we want to bid on something, we'll go ahead and do it. But it's a pretty good partnership, especially when we're buying yearlings."

Kierans is an experienced trainer of thoroughbreds and, to some extent, she has also 'trained' Wallace.

"With the standardbreds, he takes them so many miles a day," she says. "It was tough for Ben to understand that a thoroughbred might for a mile and a half, sometimes two miles. A thoroughbred and standardbred might look the same from the outside, but they're not the same inside. If you try to train a thoroughbred as you train a standardbred, you'd have nothing left of your thoroughbred. He's always telling me, 'Get the miles into him, get the miles into him,' but with thoroughbreds, you got to have them right on the edge. So, it's a different beast and he gets it now."

"We talk everyday about our horses," says Wallace. "I might offer some ideas when we're purchasing. But as far as the training, it's all up to her."

Tough question for Wallace, whose standardbred career has him in the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame. What does he prefer? Harness horses or thoroughbreds. Note the diplomatic response.

"Well, the standardbreds got me in the Hall of Fame," he says. "So, I can't really knock that, can I? But, I would have loved to have had 40 or 50 years training thoroughbreds, too. I think it's a great game. It brings a lot of, uh, different angles to the sport. At my age, it's nice to have something refreshing. It's fun."

It's particularly uplifting to talk about great outcomes with Wallace. We are approaching five years since the worst day of his life, when the tragic fire at Classy Lane Stables killed 43 racehorses, including every one in Wallace's stable.

"That was a horrific, horrific night," he says quietly. "It was a Monday morning, 12 o'clock in the morning when I got the call. We lost everything. So, we regrouped and moved forward. The whole industry came together and patched things up, as best as it could for the people who lost everything. And most of us are still going."

Classy Lane Stables moved quickly and rebuilt the lost buildings. Recently the original owner, Jamie Millier, sold the property.

"It's very vibrant and I know the new people are really aggressive," says Wallace. "They put a brand new barn on top of exactly the same spot where I lost everything. And it's now Barn 6 instead of barn 1. It's a great spot."

It's almost a cliché, the saying that the worst things sometimes bring out the best in people, but it sure applies to Classy Lane.

"There's that joint effort to help people who have had problems totally out of their control," he says. "The industry has come together. I still get people, even now, from all across Canada that will mention, 'You were involved with the fire.' There's still feedback from that."

Wallace Standardbreds. They own thoroughbreds. Getting the best from both worlds.



Marvin Katz (right) with partner Al Libfeld

The interview with Marvin Katz begins with an apology. For 13 years, **Down The Stretch** has profiled Standardbred Owners of the Month, but we somehow never got around to writing about Katz. Considering what a big player he is in the sport, that was quite the oversight. Katz graciously forgives us as we ask him to recall how his interest in harness racing began.

“My dad, David, would take me to the races at old Greenwood,” he says. “We’d go together and bet on daily doubles and watch the Grand Circuit races. It became a passion and a joy that I have maintained throughout my adult life.”

Katz remembers clearly his initial involvement in harness racing.

“J M Lassie was the first horse that I purchased,” he says. “We kind of broke even. She made a few dollars and was claimed from me. We had some fun with her and didn’t lose any money. So that seemed okay.”

A little later, there was a pair of competitors that gave him thrills and made money.

“One was Buster Hanover and the second one was Ladino Hanover. Both were bought for me by Doug Arthur. And they both became Stakes-type horses, and both were sold for what was a considerable amount of money at that time.”

According to Trackit, Standardbred Canada’s informational resource, Buster Hanover raced 291 times with 42 wins and 146 finishes in the money with earnings of \$176,133. Ladino Hanover earned over \$70,000.

There was a specific race that Katz identifies as the moment he really believed he was a major participant in this sport.

“It would have to be Dream Away,” he says, “winning the Meadowlands Pace in 1997. We had gone for many years without enjoying a lot of success. We really hadn’t won a big race. When he won the Meadowlands Pace, that was a breakthrough.”

Ron Pierce drove Dream Away that night. The odds were 7-2 and Dream Away carried a 3 length lead into the stretch, hanging on to win by a head in 1:50.2. Dream Away finished his career with 15 wins from 48 starts and \$1,342,071 in earnings.

There was another triumph many years ago on an extraordinary day in Canadian sporting history.

“Expensive Scooter. It was October 23, 1993,” Katz says, setting up the plot. “We were at Freehold Raceway for Breeders Crown in the afternoon. Expensive Scooter won the \$300,000 Two Year-Old Pace. We got back on the plane, flew to Toronto, and we were on the third base side, about 25

rows up when Joe Carter hit that home run to win the World Series. And I turned to Sam Goldband, who was with me at the ball park, and I said, “Does it get better than this?””

Since then, the Blue Jays have failed to win many important games, but taking down the big races has happened with regularity for Katz and his various partners.

Katz bred the trotter, Ariana G. It was a well thought out project that turned spectacular.

“I bought the mother, Cantab It All during her three year old season,” he says. “I looked at the pedigree, and it was a pedigree I loved. I bought half of her halfway through her three year old career with the idea that I would buy out the other half at the end of her career. I bought her with the hopes of breeding her. The third time we bred her to Muscle Hill and that was a filly named Ariana G.”

When Ariana G finished her racing career, she had won 26 of 40 starts, making \$2,600,995. She won the Peaceful Way Stakes at Mohawk in 2016 and the Breeders Crown as a two year-old that same year. The next year, she won the \$500,000 Hambletonian Oaks with Yannick Gingras a happy passenger, then the Simcoe and Elegant Image Stakes at Mohawk. Then, as a four year-old, she took down the Graduate Series Final at the Meadowlands, as well as the Hambletonian Maturity three weeks later.

Katz was held to just one Breeders Crown win in 2020. His five year-old pacing mare, Kissin In The Sand, a daughter of Somebeachsomewhere, was driven by Dexter Dunn to victory in the Open Mares Pace. Kissin In The Sand swept to the front before the half, then threw a :26.3 final quarter to discourage her opponents, winning by a length in 1:48.4.

At 2-5, Kissin In The Sand was fully expected to win, but no one could have predicted the outcome of the Three Year-Old Pace. Katz owns a piece of the great Tall Dark Stranger, who was bet down to 1-2, and justifiably so – he had already won the Meadowlands Pace and the North America Cup. In this Breeders Crown final, Tall Dark Stranger raced first up for Gingras and hit the half in a sizzling :52.3. Behind him was an army of excellent pacers ready to pounce when Tall Dark Stranger began gasping. After hitting the three quarters in an eye-popping 1:20.3, Tall Dark Stranger had every excuse to fade. Horses stacked up 6, 7-wide, coming at him from everywhere. One by one, he repelled them and looked to be the winner. But in the final strides, way on the outside, came Scott Zeron with Sandbetweenmytoes, at one point 16 lengths behind, but finding the wire a neck the best in 1:48.3. How weird was that? Sandbetweenmytoes was 203-1, creating the greatest win price (\$409.80) in Breeders Crown history. Katz

actually considers Tall Dark Stranger’s defeat as possibly more impressive than his many wins.

“That may be the greatest race of his life,” he states. “Any other horse in the world would have been seventh and not gotten a check. He was surrounded on all sides after getting to the half in :52 and change. And he’s doing all the work. He’s on top, turning for home. They’re coming at him - five or six other horses. I thought he wasn’t going to get a check. At the sixteenth pole, he’s actually pulling away from the competition. I don’t think he saw the horse that was on the far outside. I just don’t think he saw him.”

It’s almost impossible to overhype what a wonderful horse Tall Dark Stranger is.

“He’s really deserving of all of the accolades,” says Katz. “Just the will to win beyond anything I’ve seen. Going back to Cam Fella – he is just relentless in his pursuit and his desire to win.”

If anything, that incredible race, albeit a losing one, will probably just add to the lustre of Tall Dark Stranger. It says here he will be an overwhelming selection as Horse of the year in Canada and the U.S.

And talk about an embarrassment of riches. When Tall Dark Stranger becomes a stallion, he’ll be entertaining some amazing female race horses.

“We’re going to bring Kissin In The Sand to Tall Dark Stranger,” says Katz. “We’re going to breed Tall Drink Hanover, who has nearly \$1 million earned and a :48 record, and Idyllic Beach who made over a million dollars, to Tall Dark Stranger as well.”

Thinking that I have covered all of Marvin Katz’ great harness horses, I am reminded of at least one more.

“I’m very fortunate that I own Captain Treacherous as well,” he says casually. “It’s been a remarkable ride.”

From 2012 through 2014, Captain Treacherous won 23 of 33 races, including the Meadowlands Pace, the Cane Pace, and the Breeders Crown. He put over \$3 million in the bank.

Katz takes great pleasure in forming partnerships with close friends. His longest relationship is with Al Libfeld.

“Al and I have been partners for almost 40 years now,” he says. “We’re friends. We’re family and friends for decades. Our families travel together. It’s a very close relationship. I’ve owned horses with Sam Goldband, George Siegal, and Brittney Farms, and I own pieces of almost 20 fillies now. I like George Siegal a great deal and consider him an excellent partner and a friend as well. Then there’s Bud Hatfield who owns a piece of Kissing In The Sand. I own several horses with him as well.”

So, much later than we should have, this is our Owner of the Month piece on Marvin Katz. No need to feel sorry that we’ve neglected him for so many years. This guy’s spending a lot of time getting thrills in harness racing.

“When you win the Super Bowl. It’s amazing,” he says, explaining how much he loves this sport. “You win the Stanley Cup. It’s unbelievable to be an owner or participant. It’s the same thing with racing. When you’re able to win some of these major events, the thrill you feel as you climb to the top of the mountain. And the only thought in your mind is *I just want to do this again*. To experience that competition is certainly part of the challenge. The people, the lifetime friends in the business. Now, of course, it’s a much richer experience because of the breeding. Seeing the foals grow up and have success in that regard and the stallion that I’ve been part of. Clearly I have a great passion for it.”

Northern Dancer and Me

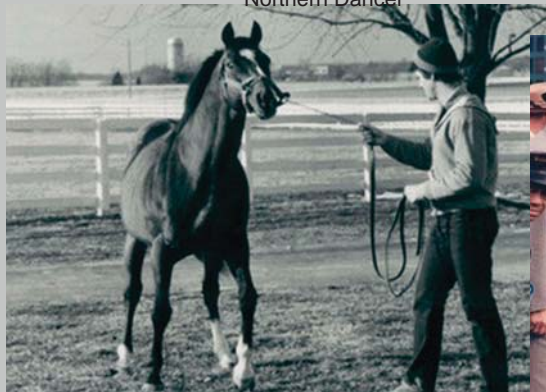
By Perry Lefko



Northern Dancer



Perry Lefko



When I heard in mid-November that it was the 30th anniversary of the passing of Northern Dancer, it brought back the memory of visiting the great Canadian horse a year before he died when he was stationed in Maryland, long since retired from his brilliant breeding career.

It was just me and the tiny Dancer, a memory that I consider one of the most amazing of my journalism career.

The Dancer was bred in 1961 by E. P. Taylor's Windfields Farm. Mr. Taylor was the visionary behind the building of Woodbine Racetrack on undeveloped land in Rexdale in the west end of Toronto. He saw this property as a future thoroughbred racing palace with a one-mile dirt track and a separate turf course. It proved to be a brilliant move. The outside grass course, once called the Marshall Turf Course, was rebuilt and renamed the E. P. Taylor Turf Course. It is arguably the best in North America.

E. P. Taylor was also a commercial breeder. He had a reserve of \$25,000 on a yearling colt by Nearctic out of the Native Dancer mare Natalma. Because the colt was on the small side, he failed to meet the reserve, so Taylor kept him, named him Northern Dancer, and raced him in his turquoise and gold silks.

Trained by Argentinian Horatio Luro, a future inductee into the National Museum of Racing Hall of Fame, the Dancer debuted as a two-year-old at Fort Erie Racetrack and won his maiden race. He recorded seven victories in nine starts and was voted the champion two year-old colt in Canada.

He started his three year-old campaign in Florida and placed third at Hialeah Park at 7-5 odds. He rebounded with four consecutive wins leading up to the Kentucky Derby. Bill Shoemaker, who rode the colt twice, had already committed to Hill Rise, so Bill Hartack, who rode the Dancer to victory in his last race before the Derby, maintained the mount.

The Dancer won the Derby by a neck over Hill Rise in a time of two minutes flat, a record at the time and now third

fastest of all time. The victory was the first by a Canadian-bred and Canadian-owned horse, which apparently didn't sit well with the Kentucky hard boots because Kentucky was – and still is – the primary breeding ground of champions.

Two weeks later, the Dancer won the Preakness Stakes by 2¼ lengths. He came into the Belmont Stakes on the edge of making history by sweeping the U.S. Triple Crown, but came up short, finishing third by 6 lengths.

Only two weeks later, the Dancer came home to Canada for the Queen's Plate and won by 7½ lengths. Sadly, he never raced again after developing a leg injury and was retired to stud duty.

The Dancer outproduced his racing talent as a stallion, siring progeny that became champions throughout the racing world. At the height of his stallion glory, it cost \$1 million non-guaranteed to breed to the Dancer.

It was said that the Dancer had a window in his stall from which he could see the mares being brought in for mating and became quite excited. The legend goes that he would become agitated if mares were mated with stallions other than him.

Because he was so small, an elevated ramp was built to help him reach the taller mares. The ramp became known as The Pitcher's Mound.

Because of the horse's age, Taylor's son, Charles, who became president of Windfields, did not want to bring the Dancer back to his birthplace in Oshawa after he was retired from the breeding shed. The risk was simply too great. So, in 1989, with the Dancer still residing at the farm in Maryland that had long since stopped being used for breeding purposes, I pitched the idea to my sports editor at the Toronto Sun, Wayne Parrish, about writing a story about the legendary horse. I could do it while in Maryland for the Preakness Stakes.

I asked Charles Taylor for permission, and he agreed... upon one condition – that I not take any photos because the Dancer was 26 years old, and had a swayed back and

grey hair.

I agreed. For all I had read about the legend of the Dancer – I was all of four years of age when he was making horse racing history – I now had a chance to see him and gain a perspective of what made him so great, even if he was long since pensioned. He had someone looking after him on a daily basis and was basically confined to his stall.

I walked into the stallion barn where he was stationed and there were about eight stalls there and only two were occupied. One of them had a horse of no distinction. I seem to recall the horse may have been there to keep the Dancer company.

I walked towards the Dancer and he was wet, having just had a bath, but standing in front of his stall I saw the horse that had been great on the track and even better in the breeding shed. He looked just as Charles described him – the back was noticeably swayed, almost concave – and he had grey whiskers. But beyond the frailties of age, all I could see was greatness. It was like standing in front of Muhammad Ali, or Hank Aaron, or Wayne Gretzky, except in this case the athlete did not speak.

Despite the unspoken word, I got the feeling the Dancer was saying, "Oh, so you're another person who wants to look at me. Go ahead, but make it quick."

And I couldn't blame him if that was indeed the case. Who wants to be gawked at when they are old and grey and a shade of what they looked like 25 years ago?

Iconic Toronto Sun columnist Jim Hunt, who once wrote a magazine story about an apparent conversation he had with a thoroughbred racehorse, often said he wanted to be reincarnated as a champion stallion because they would bring all the mares to him and he wouldn't have to do any courting. That was Jim – or Shaky as he was called – and I loved his zest for life and buoyant disposition.

After staring at the Dancer for a few minutes – and all I can say is I was mesmerised – I went into the breeding room and saw the The Pitcher's Mound. Aside from it, the room was barren. I could only imagine what it would have been like when the Dancer was in his prime, mating several times a day. I thought about the care his handlers must have had leading him up to the ramp when he was wild and full of himself and gently escorting him off of it after he had done his duty.

Every year during the broadcast of the Queen's Plate, one of the announcers would refer to a horse being a grandson or great grandson of the great Northern Dancer. In my head I was saying, "They are ALL grandsons of Northern Dancer."

The Dancer died in 1990 and it was huge news across the racing industry and beyond. He was so much more than a racehorse. He was a Canadian superstar at a time when horse racing mattered. It was like the passing of Gordie Howe, or Maurice (The Rocket) Richard.

I felt so privileged to have seen him. In a way, I kind of understood what made him so special, even if I never saw him race or breed in person. All I knew of him was what I read or saw in replays of his races, but that memory of seeing him in person gave me some kind of idea of his special talent.

On the 30th anniversary of Northern Dancer's death, the memory of seeing him 31 years ago stands out so vividly. It feels like yesterday since I saw him. Some things you just don't forget. That will always be one of them.

When racetracks die



Welcome to Scarborough Downs Harness Race Track, Maine's best bet for live harness racing action since 1950! 2020 marks our 70th year operating as a small, family business in beautiful Scarborough, Maine, offering exciting racing from April 4 - December 6, 2020, with simulcasting of thoroughbred and harness tracks from around North America, 7 days a week, 363 days a year.

The above is what used to greet you when you went to the Scarborough Downs website, but not any more. On Saturday, November 28, the last card of racing was conducted at this track. It actually opened as a thoroughbred racetrack some 70 years ago, subsequently switching to trotters and pacers. In recent years, the premises suffered from disrepair and, combined with poor attendance and unremarkable handle,

its days were numbered. The track is now in the hands of Crossroads Holding Inc., which is going ahead with a mixed-use development and town centre at the site.

A modest crowd attended the last day of live competition; a ten-race card of minimally talented harness horses. The purses were between \$3,500 and \$4,800. The feature race was the seventh, an \$8,000 claimer with a purse of \$4,800 and it was won by JJs Delivery, driven by Kevin Switzer Jr. At odds of 1-2, JJs Delivery won by 5 lengths in 1:57 on the one mile track.

"It's been a difficult go in the harness racing industry for a number of years now," said Mike Sweeney, track announcer, handicapper, and publicity director since 1981.

According to Sweeney, since the Oxford Casino

went online, interest in the harness racing took a hit. Scarborough Downs lost 30% of its revenue that year.

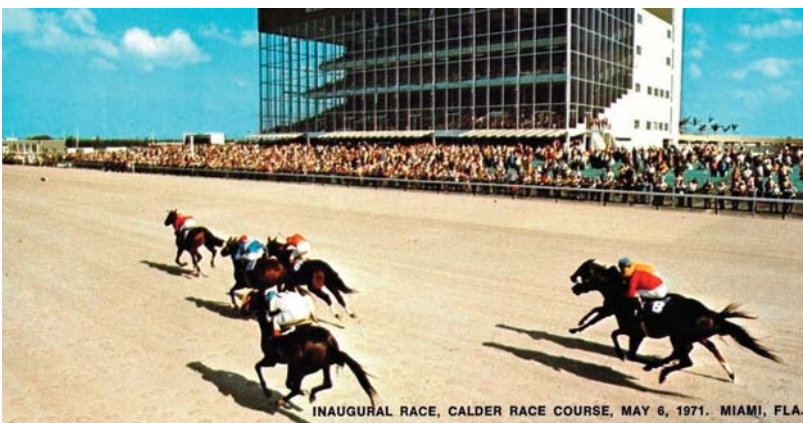
A licenced harness driver himself, Sweeney once bolted from the announcer's booth to take part in a race, while another driver called the mile.

"It's the best time for us to just step aside and allow the industry to move forward in some other manner," Sweeney said.

In the tenth race, the last ever to be conducted at Scarborough Downs, Wayne Watson steered Goin Manstyle to the win in 2:02.1 for the lion's share of the \$3,600 purse. Goin Manstyle paid \$10.20 to win. The total handle for the afternoon card was \$99,121.

As the crowd started to disperse, the song "Auld Lang Syne" played over the speaker system.

The same day that Scarborough Downs closed, so did Gulfstream Park West, which was the re-branded Calder Racetrack, a fixture in South Florida since 1971.



Churchill Downs can absorb the blame for the failure here. The company has leased the track to the Stronach Group since 2014, when the name was changed from Calder to Gulfstream Park West. The agreement between Churchill and Stronach drops off at the end of 2020, and the 2021 racing schedule for Florida does not include Gulfstream Park West.

Racing used to be quite popular at Calder, which began May 6, 1971 with 16,263 fans in attendance and the handle was \$712,931. Apparently, the desire to attend the races that day was so intense, the gates had to be closed and potential bettors were turned away.

In the early years, the Florida racing action bounced from Hialeah to Gulfstream to Calder. In 2000, Calder inaugurated the "Summit of Speed" program, which featured several major Stakes races, all of them sprints.

"Calder was a workingman's racetrack and a lot of fine horses came from there that competed on all levels, whether it was Spend a Buck to a horse I had, Three Ring, who went on to win all sorts of graded Stakes races," said veteran trainer Eddie Plesa Jr. "My father was the second one through the backstretch gates when it first opened. Calder was a great place for me and my family. It gave us a lot of stability and it gave me time to be with my family. I am going to sorely miss it."

In 1999, Churchill Downs bought Calder for \$87 million. With seriously declining interest in racing, Churchill was trying to morph into the much less expensive and much more profitable business of slots. In fact, in 2015, Churchill tore down the grandstand.

Because a casino had been created on the property in 2010, Florida law compelled Churchill to conduct live racing for at least 40 days a year to maintain its licence. However, a loophole discovered in the contract allowed Churchill to open a jai alai fronton and, apparently, they successfully argued that any kind of pari-mutuel wagering satisfied their obligation. Jai alai is much less expensive to run than horse racing. Subsequently a Florida Court confirmed this was sufficient to maintain the licence and horse racing was no longer needed.

"I feel that Churchill Downs didn't do its best for horse racing," trainer David Fawkes said. "They've done the same thing in Chicago with Arlington and to Hollywood Park. It's sad because we all got on board to help them get their casino, and once they got what they wanted, they were done with us."

The Stronach Group does not want to pursue any more legal battles to keep racing at Gulfstream Park West.

"It's the end of an era," said Bill Badgett, the executive director of Florida Racing Operations for The Stronach Group. Gulfstream Park in Hallandale actually benefitted from the racing at Calder. Gulfstream runs a lot of grass races and that takes it toll if the meet runs for the entire year. The two-month respite when the horses went to Calder allowed maintenance to prepare the grass course for the Gulfstream Championship Meet which runs from December into March.

Some thought has been paid to the problem of what to do with all the horses. There is an agreement that 450 horses can remain in the stables at Calder until April 1, after which the animals and the workers who care for them can move into an expansion project at Palm Meadows.

The last winner at the track originally called Calder was a three year-old gelding named Diligent, ridden to victory by Victor Lebron in a 7½ furlong grass race for \$16,000 claimers. Diligent won by 1½ lengths and paid \$17.40.

Total handle for the final day of racing was over \$8 million.

How Adriano saved...



Among many things, Adriano Sorella is a horse buyer, a horse trader, and a horse breeder. Considering the number of animals he's seen come and go, it was almost inevitable, the call he got on November 17, 2020.

"Somebody reached out to me from the Standardbred Retirement Foundation," says Sorella. "They said that there was a horse that they tracked back. I was one of the previous owners on him, and they can't find any information on anybody else. The horse ended up in a kill pen in Pennsylvania."

The horse's name is Rollaroundtheworld, bought six years ago by Sorella.

"I bought him at the Lexington Select sale," continues Sorella. "I remember bidding on him and going past 100 for him. And I remember Casie Coleman saying, 'You're crazy,' and I ended up buying him."

The price tag was \$115,000 – first time Sorella had gone that high for a horse and, he admits, it wasn't his best purchase.

"His head wasn't in it and he didn't amount to much," he says. "He had speed and I knew he had a lot of potential. He just didn't want to do it. He had less than 20 races."

Sixteen starts, actually, for Rollaroundtheworld; 3 wins, 5 seconds, 2 thirds, and about \$44,500 earned. A loss on the ledger for Sorella, but he was still attracted to the pacer's breeding.

"I was at the sale and I was bidding on a horse and so was Ron Burke," says Sorella. "So, I messaged Mark Weaver and said, 'Hey, I'm bidding against Ronnie. If you guys cut me in on this horse, I'll stop bidding.' And they did, and I ended up buying into that horse, and it was Rollaroundtheworld's brother and his name is World On Edge. I ended up buying the mare, Inanotherworld, at the Meadowlands sale and she was bred to American Ideal. I kept the baby which is turning two in January. He's named SixinSix because of the Toronto Raptors winning the championship in six. I also have a new foal from the mare; she's a Bettors Delight filly. So now I have four out of this family. When they contacted me, it kind of shocked

me that this horse in this family, that he would end up in a kill pen."

If nothing else, Sorella is a man of action, more impetuous than cautious. He did what he needed to do to save Rollaroundtheworld.

"I got him out right away. I pulled out my credit card and paid \$1,300."

Thanks to Sorella, the Standardbred Retirement Foundation in New Jersey was able to find the horse and get him out of that dire situation. It was all part of a very strange and coincidental day for Sorella. Hours before he found out about Rollaroundtheworld, he'd received a phone call from Moira Fanning, the CEO of the Hambletonian Society. At the heart of her call was the issue of the Standardbred Transition Alliance which tries to grab retired horses before they end up with the kill buyers. She was wondering about Hoofbid, Sorella's on-line auction site for standardbreds.

"She was saying how she really would like to reach out to all the on-line auction sites and see if there's a way to implement a fee to help the STA," says Sorella. "To transition some of these horses before they end up in kill."

We should all get to walk around in Adriano Sorella's brain. Some of the things he has done to promote harness racing have been brilliant, entertaining, and productive. On-line draws, scratch and win contests, the Jimmy Freight Stakes, a \$100,000 partnership with Woodbine to hold a race in which only horses sired by his stallion Jimmy Freight get to compete. Suddenly Sorella is thinking, *How can we raise money to prevent more horses from going to slaughter?*

"I've already spoken to some publications about putting a couple ads in," he says. "I think I'm going to do some form of contest or promotion, give up a breeding to Jimmy Freight in lieu of some donations. And we'll have a draw to raise some money for retirement foundations."

It's like dominoes with Sorella. One idea cascades into a second which bumps into a third.

"I'm all for a percentage of the purse," he offers. "Or

maybe even an entry fee, every single condition, overnight races or whatever, say there's \$5 added to it or just \$2. Can you imagine how much money could be raised even at \$2? Every horseman's got an account at WEG, maybe charge \$2 for every entry. Even at the sales, if you tacked on \$100 bucks for every horse that goes through a sale in Lexington and Harrisburg and Ontario, or \$50 or \$25. I don't care. As long as it goes to a foundation so they can help a lot more horses out. Maybe they can't save them all, but they can help save a lot more horses, that's for sure."

There's some twisted politics involved in being a kill buyer. They bid low on animals that aren't wanted anymore and, at the end of the line, the price can be as little as 25 cents a pound; a 1,200 pound horse would go for \$300. But the kill buyers take special interest in former race horses. They know the emotional back story and, if anything, they probably encourage visitors to check for racing tattoos. There's much more cash selling the horses back to the previous owners.

"These kill buyers know that they're going to touch on the heartstrings," says Sorella. "That's why there's a lot of these guys buying these horses because they know that some of these are going to end up in SRF, and they're going to pay a lot more than what these guys will get, selling for meat."

Sorella is the best example of a guy whose heart is easily played. This is a man who loves the horses and he was appalled that one he once owned came so close to a terrible fate.

"I'll be honest. It messed up my whole day," he says. "My ex-girlfriend's daughter; this was her first horse that she was ever close to. And every horse we bought after that was a sibling to the family, she would call it *Rolly Junior*. So, it really bothered me when I saw that horse in a kill pen. I went back on my phone to look at pictures back in 2015 that I had when the horse was over at Casie's barn in Florida as a baby. And I was just looking at the pictures of him and looking at the pictures of him in the pen. I couldn't believe it. I had no idea that this had happened."

Rollaroundtheworld is now in a much safer place, thanks to the Standardbred Retirement Foundation in the States. But Sorella points out a very fine program offered up here that assures horses don't get lost in the system.

"It's called Full Circle with Standardbred Canada," he says. "I'm going to put all my horses in the Full Circle program. I don't want that to happen and I urge people to donate. There's got to be a better way."

Full Circle is a free program offered by Standardbred Canada to connect horses in need to a new home after their racing or breeding careers are over. The idea is to connect horses with their breeder, former owners, trainers, drivers, caretakers, or another interested person who might be willing to provide a home for the horse.

Take it from a guy like Sorella, who knows just how wonderful every race horse is.

"Once a horse competes in a race and does so for our entertainment, we have the obligation to ensure that horse lives out a long, safe, and dignified life."

and how Adriano lost



Forty eight year-old Adriano Sorella is a masterful promoter. During the last few years harness racing in Ontario has been the beneficiary of his aggressively successful ideas. But sometime last spring, the charismatic owner of Jimmy Frieght realized he was much too heavy.

"I was pretty sure I was very close to 350 pounds

and I'll tell you why I knew that," says Sorella. "My scale only goes to 340 and it was pinned right at the end. When you're travelling all the time and out for dinner, you're not exactly shedding weight."

When the pandemic brought everything to a halt... Sorella had a frightening thought.

"Holy shit. I'm already a big guy and now I'm not

even active at all."

Sorella had an app on his phone that counted the number of steps he walked each day.

"I started walking twice a day and I was averaging 7,000 steps a day," he says. "I started noticing a little bit of weight coming off and I thought, 'Oh that's crazy.' I won't forget the day I started. It was May 5. I was going every single day about 7,000 steps a day and I kept losing weight. In the month of June, I decided to go on my route three times a day instead of just once or twice. So, I started doing it three times, averaging 14,000 steps a day and the weight continued to fall off."

Adriano Sorella went from a casual walker to an obsessive walker to an addictive walker.

"I said, 'I have to push myself.' For the months of July and August, I was averaging 18,000 steps a month. In September and October, I pushed myself to 25,000 steps a day. I was hitting 750,000 steps a month. Then in November, I got carried away, doing 27,000, 28,000 steps a day. I broke through 800,000 for the month."

A little math here. According to Sorella's app, 800,000 steps is close to 500 miles. So, since May, the guy has essentially walked from Toronto to L.A. and back. From May into December, like a snowman melting in April, Sorella went from over 350 to under 220.

He has always been a high octane promoter, but if anything, a slimmer, more mobile Sorella found it easier to dive into the projects that make harness racing look exciting to the masses.

"We've given away tens of thousands of dollars of gift cards to people, absolutely free," he says, the voice rising with his passion. "The scratch n win game runs through the Facebook platform, so as soon as somebody plays it, you have to log into Facebook to play the game, and the scratch n win automatically knows who you are. So, we have that information, and we can e-mail you promotions until you opt out."

A tremendously successful idea that jumped from Sorella's brain was the work with COSA (Central Ontario Standardbred Association) to wrap the trailers of trainers with huge dynamic images of drivers and horses. This has created dozens of eye-catching billboards constantly criss-crossing the highways of Ontario.

"Here in Ontario, we have these trailers on the road," he says. "Carmen Auciello goes and races at Georgian Downs, Flamboro, Grand River; Richard Moreau, Teesha Symes all these guys – McIntosh race all over the place. So we're using COSA money to that for Ontario racing to promote Ontario Racing."

When asked how he managed to walk so much and lose so much, Sorella's explanation is easy.

"It's like that scene in Back to the Future, when Marty McFly says, 'If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.'"

STRENGTHENING OUR FOUNDATION TO PREPARE FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

Organization Releases Annual Corporate Responsibility Report

On November 3, Woodbine Entertainment released its 2019/20 Corporate Responsibility Report that summarizes the company's recent achievements during the April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 fiscal year. While the report focuses on this period, it also includes information on how Woodbine's operations were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Titled *Breaking New Ground*, the 2019/20 Woodbine Corporate Responsibility Report focuses on the company's commitment to the communities in which it operates, philanthropy, industry leadership, property development, and sustaining the horse racing industry.

"While this year has been extremely difficult for so many, including those in horse racing, we have been highly focused on strengthening our foundation to prepare us for a future of prosperity across the industry," said Jim Lawson, CEO, Woodbine Entertainment. "Through this preparation, and despite the ongoing uncertainty caused by the global pandemic, we are optimistic about our future based on the quality of our racing, strength of our brand and efficient management of our operation."

The report highlights contributions to three broad areas that encapsulates Woodbine's charitable initiatives including *Supporting Community Health*, *For the Love of Horses*, and *Our Footprint*. Additionally, the report provides an update on the status of key endeavours such as industry leadership, optimal land development, world-class racing, people and culture, and more.

COVID-19 Response Highlights:

- Backstretch remained open as an essential service to provide stabling and care for upwards of 1,700 horses.
- Frequent communications with Standardbred and Thoroughbred stakeholders via new weekly updates.
- Developed "Woodbine's Guide to Working and Racing Safely" that documents policies and procedures created to operate and race in the safest way possible.

- Responsive and comprehensive planning contributed to being the first professional sport in Canada allowed to return to competition since pandemic closures.
- Rigorous health and safety protocols saw screening of 500-1,000 essential workers per day on site.
- Pivoted to safely hosting spectator-free premier races, including The Queen's Plate, Pepsi North America Cup, Ricoh Woodbine Mile, and Mohawk Million.

Charitable highlights within the 2019/20 Corporate Responsibility Report include:

- Supported more than 100 community-based organizations and charitable causes.
- Created the Breeders' Crown Charity Challenge which had a record one-time donation of \$282,996.00 to five local charities including \$109,484.00 won by the Ontario Standardbred Adoption Society.
- Hosted six 50/50 draws at Woodbine Racetrack and Woodbine Mohawk Park, raising more than \$27,500 for five different charities.
- Received the Osler Award for Philanthropic Leadership for being a long-term supporter of the Etobicoke General Hospital.
- Hosted (2019) for the third time, the Road Hockey to Conquer Cancer event that saw more than 1,900 participants raise a record-breaking \$3.1 million for the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation.
- Addressed food insecurity through the production and distribution of hundreds of pounds of food from the Woodbine Cares Community Garden to local community organizations.
- Honoured to receive naming rights of the emergency waiting rooms at Etobicoke General Hospital and Milton District Hospital as acknowledgement

of Woodbine's long-term and sustained financial support of both medical centres.

Business highlights within the 2019/20 Corporate Responsibility Report include:

- Hosted three industry summits called "Stronger Together" to increase communication to industry stakeholders in order to educate them on the workings of the industry, our operations and policies, and generally introduce a new level of transparency.
- Invested in our industry through opening a new seven-furlong Kentucky Bluegrass inner turf course and new Standardbred paddock.
- Commenced the first phase of land development at Woodbine Racetrack including a planned Metrolinx train station and municipal infrastructure necessary for the development of a world-class casino resort.

The economic impact of horse racing continues to be significant with the industry contributing more than \$2.3 billion annually to Ontario's gross domestic product. Additionally, the horse racing industry employees more than 60,000 people or 45,433 full-time equivalent jobs.

"Every year, we work to build relationships," said Zenia Wadhvani, Woodbine's Director, Community Relations and Corporate Affairs. "To be a good neighbour and give with the intent of making an impact in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. To bring our employees together and foster the value of caring for each other and those around us. To make decisions that will be good for the environment and to be a better corporate citizen. Each year, we aim to improve upon what we have accomplished the previous year. This report is a glimpse into how we do that."

As a responsible corporate citizen, Woodbine Entertainment has produced a Corporate Responsibility Report every year since 2006. The 2019/20 report is publicly accessible and is available for download or online viewing at WoodbineCares.ca.

The view from Down Under

By Ric Chapman

We, as the collective lovers of the thoroughbred horse racing game, have come upon a piece of good fortune. Woodbine Entertainment in particular.

And, don't we need it at this time when the COVID-19 bug still runs rampant?

But, the thing we have in front of us once the clouds of COVID eventually pass, is this -an opportunity to see something truly remarkable. To create something unprecedented, something that would be truly inspiring, equally life-changing, and a tipping point for the sport.

As you read this, the female rider, globally, much like the female racehorse, has become the better player in the sport.

I shall elaborate..

On 20 December in England this year, champion female hoop Hollie Doyle will go head-to-head for votes with Formula 1 megastar Lewis Hamilton, English cricket royalty in Stuart Broad, heavyweight champion boxer Tyson Fury, and Liverpool Football Club's captain Jordan Henderson, for the coveted title of BBC Sports Personality of The Year. It is the Academy Award of Europe for sporting excellence.

Hollie is an outsider to win, even though she smashed her own record for the most winners in a calendar year by a female jockey last month, on top of enjoying a Champion Day double at Ascot – including her first victory at Group One level on Glen Shiel in the British Champions Sprint.

Earlier this year, the 24 year-old claimed her first Royal Ascot win aboard Scarlet Dragon, while more recently she has traveled to ride at the Breeders' Cup in America, also the Bahrain International Trophy, and the prestigious Hong Kong Invitational Jockey Challenge where she rode a winner!

She is a superstar, hailed by many as the best female rider on the planet and, irrespective of gender, one of the best jockeys.

If she doesn't win the BBC gong, her presence there alone will let millions know how hard it is to be a jockey and how gifted they all are. And more so, her presence there will inspire little girls all over the world to pursue careers in racing.

That's important. That's the tipping point, and that's where Woodbine can make its mark on the international stage.

Earlier this year Hollie won the Sunday Times Female Athlete of The Year and, if you get a chance to see her ride, she is like Gretzky on ice. Horses run for her and they improve lengths under her. It's a magic that rare sports people have.

Here's how Woodbine can capitalize:

Imagine if the marketing department of Woodbine actually saw its own potential for global recognition and, in that epiphany, got to do two wondrous things – firstly, showcase Canadian racing, and secondly, be ahead of the curve in promoting female riders.

For years Emma-Jayne Wilson has toiled as a superstar in her own right at Woodbine. Unlike the way

Doyle rides with balance and tenacity and unrelenting vigour, EJW relies on strength. Her strength is her strength along with knowledge of the track and her sublime balance. She is, in her own way, in her own sport, a superstar more than likely the equal of Doyle, but outside of Woodbine, and a few racing fans living in tiny racing outposts like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Alberta, no-one knows about her.

Which is an absolute travesty. She is a Sovereign and Eclipse Award winner. Someone with her accolades who lived in Australia, Ireland, Hong Kong, or England, would be a household name and lauded the country over.

The reason she isn't in Canada is largely a result of the woeful press coverage racing gets here and the direction it takes when it does get an opportunity. That's a story for another day.

So, let's change that by bringing all the best females to Canada for a race day. Just the girls. Just the superstars from their own territories. Bring them to Woodbine to compete in a 10-race card – and why Woodbine? Well, because Woodbine is perfectly placed on many levels, especially geographically and time-zone, to hold a race programme that would generate interest the world over.

And it can serve as the Champion Woman Rider of the World meeting as well, ending the debate about just who is the best.

Here's how it would work.

Woodbine invites EJW (obviously) and flies in Hollie Doyle (obviously) and also the female stars racing from Australia: Rachel King, a Gr 1 winner and who, in December, rode four winners on a Saturday in Sydney – a feat very rarely achieved by any rider; Gr 1 winning rider Kathy O'Hara; Gr 1 Melbourne Cup winning rider Michelle Payne; and this year's Gr 1 Melbourne Cup placegetter Jamie Kah, who also has bagged four winners on a major carnival day.

Then invite Japan's freakish talent and record-breaker Nanako Fujita to join the party as well. She can feel at home regaling and comparing successes with 2020 Queens Plate champion, Daisuke Fukumoto.

Add New Zealand's star Alysha Collett who, after winning everything there is, now plying her trade with success in Australia, to the squad along with her star country-woman, Lisa Allpress who recently created history, becoming the first female to ride a race winner in Saudi Arabia.

Allpress was competing in the inaugural international jockeys' challenge in Saudi Arabia on Saturday NZT, and won one of the four races in the series, aboard Matmon.

Naturally, England's legendary star Hayley Turner deserves an invite as she is a role model for all of them, having been successful at Royal Ascot. England's Josephine Gordon, the former champion apprentice and one of only three ever females to win the title, (Turner and Doyle the others) is a prolific race winner. So she has to come.

It would be wrong not to throw Canada's emerging young star Isabelle Wenc into the mix also.

She must be given an opportunity as well, so make sure she is there. Young Australian-born, US-based Crystal Conning is knocking up winning races in Kentucky and is the Champion Apprentice at Belterra Park in Cincinnati this year.

Italy's champion mum, Jessica Marcialis, who is the first ever women to ride a Gr 1 winner in France, doing so this year, must be included as well.

Let's start with this collection. That's 14 females. Put their names in a hat, and draw out which horse they will ride in each race. Scores allocated to them depending on finishing order in each race. Highest point-scorer at the end of this all-female race card is crowned Champion Woman Rider of the World. Provide a big trophy, a cash incentive to the top three finishes and wham...Woodbine sits atop the world with something no other racing jurisdiction on the planet has ever done.

I guarantee a day like that would give EJW the due accolades she deserves. But, what it would also do is bring into focus one vitally important ingredient missing in most race days.

Joy.

It is neither sexist or inaccurate to say that female riders en masse tend to love the sport more than their male counterparts. And, in an era where a growing number of people want to ban horse racing, showcasing what true love is towards the sport, is paramount.

Maybe we should keep that in our minds. Horse racing, like all other sports, is still a passion for some participants, whether or not you're making money—and no matter how much. If you're not having fun, you miss the point of everything and it will hurt you, too, because eventually your performance will decline.

Emma-Jayne Wilson's passion for riding and her love of the animal is as grand today as it was when she was a starry-eyed teenager. It's there in equal portion with Hollie Doyle and Australia's superstars Rachel King and Michelle Payne. They even made a Hollywood movie about Michelle Payne, after she rode the Melbourne Cup winner in 2015. It's called Ride Like A Girl and was directed by Hollywood star Rachel Griffiths and starred superstar Sam Neill (of Jurassic Park fame).

So, the opportunity exists to the first racetrack, or country for that matter, to acknowledge the rising tide of the female jockey.

Hollie Doyle is being hailed as the best in the world. A speculative title without competition to justify it. We all hope she wins the BBC Sports Personality of The Year award, but is she actually the best female rider?

In Ontario we have one in EJW who could lay claims to that, as could Rachel King and Jamie Kah in Australia. They just need to be brought together.

Make it happen, Woodbine.

ODDITIES & ENTITIES

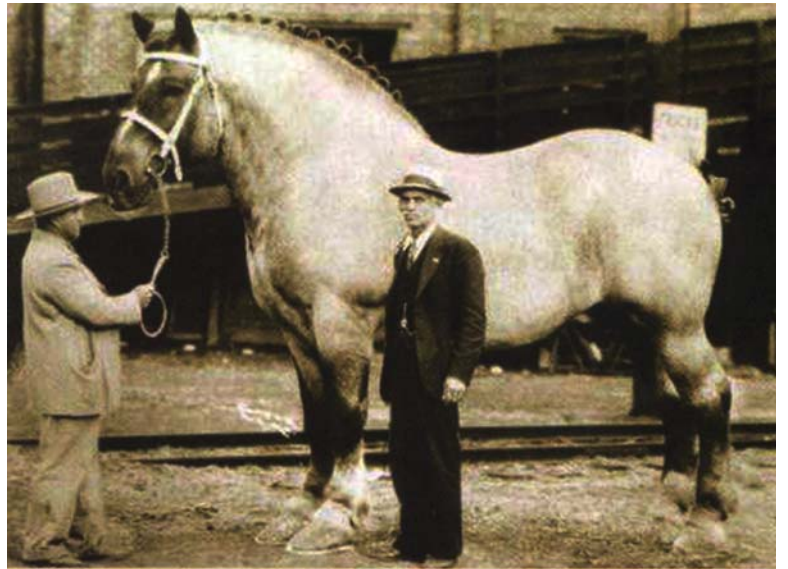


This photo of a ferocious feline was posted by Dermot Carty on Justin Stein's new Facebook page, All About The Longshots. Sample captions:



- 1) No one's breaking into this house!
- 2) Doug Ford - you're doing what?
- 3) Why couldn't I bet the Pick 5 at The Fairgrounds?

Belgian Draft named Brooklyn Supreme, who weighed 3,200 lb (1,500 kg) and stood at 19.2 hands (1.98 m). At one time, he was one of the world's largest horses. He was not a thoroughbred, which is just as well, as he would not have fit into the starting gate.



Come seventh – get paid

The last race at Fontwell, England on November 15 had its maximum quotient of confusion. The first six horses to the wire were all disqualified for failing to jump the third last hurdle. Dharma Rain, the only one to take the hurdle and the only horse to officially finish the race, was declared the winner.

The confusion surrounded a fallen horse. As the rest of the field approached the jump in question, members of the grounds crew appeared to be putting down markers making most of the riders believe they were being told to avoid the hurdle. In actuality, the markers were somewhat beyond the fence, but to the oncoming riders, that was not visually evident. So, seven horses were led around the barrier, while jockey Jack Tudor had to make a quick decision.

"It was made very unclear, it wasn't done brilliantly at all," said Tudor. "It looked as if the markers were in the correct position. It was a 50-50 call, but I went with my gut instinct."

"The horse broke down at the hurdle. I was further back in the field and, from where I was, the markers looked like they were in the hurdle," said rider Page Fuller, aboard Queen Among Kings. "Until you got around the hurdle, you couldn't see they (markers) were behind."

Dharma Rain was officially the winner and the only horse credited with finishing the race, but the stewards determined that no jockeys would be punished, conceding that "the poor visibility, and the illusion that the chevrons had been placed in the hurdle – which was caused by the chevrons being carried across the course behind the hurdle, which gave riders cause for concern for the safety of all involved".

Twas the night before Christmas, and at the North Pole,
Santa Claus was so sad, he could not be consoled.
Said the big man when asked just what was the matter,
"Think of all of those roofs that won't hear reindeer clatter."
Could it be that the greatest tradition each year
Could be cancelled (as Santa Clause stifled a tear)?
"Yes, it's true," said St Nick. "I could not predict
So many bad things that could happen so quick.
All my elves, wearing masks, say the shop is too small,
So, they walked out en masse, to go work in the mall.
And the reindeer, Dancer and Prancer, and Comet and Vixen
Say they're smelling a fraud; yes they claim that the fix is in.
And Dasher and Cupid and even young Donner
Got gigs in Dakota, some park that's named Fonner.
Look at all of these gifts, piled high to my roof,
With no way to deliver...I'll look like a goof."
And even as Santa was so sadly engrossed,
He heard the familiar call to the post.
And when he thought he'd lost all his four footed friends,
Came the thunder of hooves churning out of the bend.
And he recognized all of them, from Racing Night Live,
Pink Lloyd, Mighty Heart, Belichick, Shirl's Speight.
Said, "We've got the month off, with no purses to chase
So, we're willing and speedy for a round the world chase."
And Santa perked up, and said, "Thank you that's great,
But to pull the huge sled...you're just 4 - I need eight."
And those words had barely slipped out of his mouth,
When the sound of excitement rose out of the south.
There was Atlanta, Manchego, and Ramona Hill,
Tall Dark Stranger, just pacing a thrill.
"But wait," wondered Santa, "Runners and sulkies
All teamed up together - isn't that politically bulky?"
"Not at all," chimed the octet, as they all harnessed in,
"This time for the kids we race bipartisan.
The Christmas tradition will surely survive,
The visitors said, "Cause we're all here to drive."
And the field of eight lined up with the sled,
And flew off into space every place Santa said.
Every child everywhere, every smile every laugh,
By the morn they were done by six and a half.
All the children got gifts, Santa felt he was blessed.
And that's how Christmas was saved by horse racing's best.



Toys for Tots at the Raceway at Western Fair



Greg Gangle, General Manager of the Raceway at Western Fair in London, has put together an admirable afternoon of charity at his track. Eight drivers on December 20 will be donating all their purse winnings towards Toys for Tots, which is collecting gifts for kids who might otherwise get very little on Christmas. One of the drivers from Woodbine will be veteran Trevor Henry, and his wife

Shannon is also doing her best for the project.

“Greg Gangle asked me if I could help promote it,” says Shannon. “It’s just gotten so big. We had 65 gifts before Standardbred Canada posted it on our website, and it jumped to over 200 just since they’ve done that. People are being so generous.”

If you watch the race at Western Fair on December 20, you’ll see some of the best competing for free.

“There’s eight drivers,” she says. “There’s four from Western Fair – Scott Ray, Tyler Borth, Colin Kelly, and Mark St. Louis; on the Mohawk side is Trevor Henry, Bob McClure, Doug McNair, and Louis-Philippe Roy.”

On her side, Shannon Henry has been pulling in significant donations.

“People donating through Mohawk have been great,” she says. “And they get to go into a draw for \$100 gift card. I’ve had two \$500 cash donations and one for \$300. People just keep sending it in.”

It’s been an unusual year and there’s a lot of families going through something they’ve never experienced.

“People that are utilizing it this year have never had to before, due to the pandemic,” says Shannon. “These people won’t be back once they get back on their feet. So, if there’s a way we can help them get through this, that’s our goal – just to help so people don’t have to cancel Christmas.”

Shannon says that this year being grateful is a driving force.

“We are still working. Our owners have been fantastic. They pay their bills and Trevor has been driving four nights a week. Everybody has said the same thing, that they’re more than happy to do it because their own kids aren’t going to suffer. We all appreciate that we’re working. It’s a great bunch of guys. They always step up when they’re asked. There are trainers as well that have also offered up their winnings for the night. Horsemen are just a great bunch of people.”

Toys for Tots. Some great harness racing at the Raceway at Western Fair on December 20. If you’d like to contribute, contact Shannon Henry at shannonhenry22@yahoo.com.



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