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Meadowlands (FRI) [Analysis](#)

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Hawthorne (SAT) [Analysis](#)

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Woodbine (SAT) [Analysis](#)

Yonkers (SAT) [Analysis](#)

Top Links & What's Inside

Trace Tetrick wins Miami Valley Driver Challenge [READ MORE](#)

Giwner: Early returns strong for Yonkers 2018 handle, [Page 3](#)

Zoccali: Examining the new integrity rules, [Page 4](#)

Bergman: Attacking the \$28K Pick 5 carryover at Meadowlands, [Page 5](#)

Macedonio: Experimentation leads to creation, [Page 6](#)

On The Backstretch: Profile of driver Marcus Johansson, [Page 6](#)

Carryovers, industry news and more on the Racing Integrity rules, [Page 7](#)

Winter/Early Spring stakes schedule, [Page 8](#)

Obvious loophole in the Integrity initiative

Woodbine & Jeff Gural have adopted new rules to increase integrity at their tracks when it comes to illegal substances. Will it work?

PLUS: Clay Horner speaks out on potential rule changes, page 7



JAYWALKING

By Jay Bergman

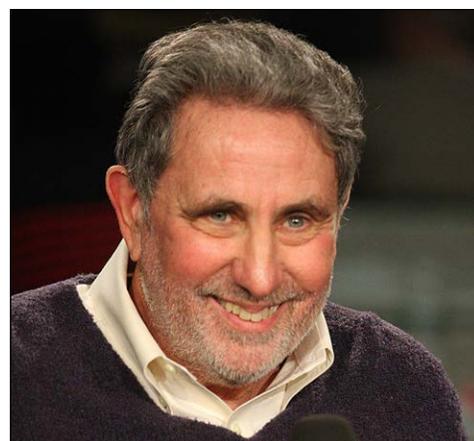
[@BergmanJay](#)

Meadowlands Chairman Jeff Gural promised after last year's Fall Final Four that matters relating to ownership and exchanging trainers to gain entry into major stakes would be different in 2018.

This past week Gural along with Woodbine Entertainment proudly revealed the Standardbred Racing Integrity and Accountability Initiative (SRIAI) in a joint announcement that seriously penalizes horses, trainers and owners of horses that test positive in 2018 for Class I, II, TCO2 or steroids during the calendar year that begins January 1, 2018.

The core of the penalty will prohibit said horse from racing in any stakes events at Woodbine, Mohawk, The Meadowlands, Vernon Downs or Tioga Downs while at the same time also prohibiting said horse's transfer.

The rule will not only ban horses that test positive, but it is specifically designed to shake up owners. The owners we're talking about are those who engage in partnerships. According to the rules, if an owner has a horse that tests positive for the substances mentioned, all other horses that he or she owns at least 25 percent of will also be prohibited from stakes



LISA PHOTO

Jeff Gural: "I think by the end of the year all the drug guys will be either out of business or not using drugs because I think our rule will scare owners into not using drug guys."

competition at these tracks.

The core belief from those who wrote these rules appears to point directly at owners and partnerships. The effort would appear to force partners to question which trainers are employed by each member and what added risk they have to their own horses.

That appears to be Jeff Gural's belief as he looks to force the equation that produced some

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

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rather embarrassing moments in 2017, with horses in the employ of suspect trainers simply moving their horses and entering prestigious races at The Meadowlands.

"I think by the end of the year all the drug guys will be either out of business or not using drugs because I think our rule will scare owners into not using drug guys," Gural said.

Gural's optimistic approach to this is not by accident. He has campaigned heavily over his time as Meadowlands owner to rid the sport of those who allegedly break the rules. He has a list of trainers that are banned from any of his tracks.

Yet let's look a little closer at his expectations and the actual rule that he believes will shake up owners in the industry.

Essentially the magic number here is 25. That's right, 25 percent is the threshold put for in the SRIAI regulation and it forces those who own that percentage or higher to put their partners at heightened risk.

We can allege all we want about who the next trainer will be on the list that will be caught with a positive test. As expected in the initial announcement, Mohawk president Jessica Buckley was quite careful not to condemn all those who participate in the sport. She suggested a "super low percentage of positives," in her remarks.

That said, SRIAI is designed to keep both WEG and the three Gural tracks from experiencing the same issues that felled them in 2017. The substitution of beard trainers used to circumvent the rules. With this action there is a hope that all owners and trainers are forewarned what will and won't stand this year.

That's where the 25 percent number becomes so incredibly interesting.

Perhaps bettors and those fans of the industry are unaware, but there are no regulations in place that force owners in partnership to actually declare the percentage of ownership on a given horse. The USTA does not define percentage in ownership it lists for horses, only the names of owners of record.

The only people with accurate knowledge of the way partnered horses are divided are the owners of record. The trainers and their bookkeepers are obviously aware of the breakdown of owners for each and every horse because they need to send bills and checks to those individuals.

So with that said, why would any trainer want to take any risk that an owner could sideline a top horse from a stakes race because the actions of another trainer impact him?

The short answer is that no trainer with "good intentions" would want to be taken down by this rule.

Therefore the best antidote for any trainer concerned with partnerships that include owners who employ multiple trainers is to make certain that none of these people have 25 percent ownership in any horses they train.

Although the "A" in the acronym stands for Accountability, it may actually turn out to mean Accounting as trainers will do the math and partnerships will change so that questionable owners can either move to 24 percent and no more, or perhaps add family members with none reaching the 25 percent threshold.

In reality I believe those who put SRIAI together wanted to go after owners but certainly didn't want to unnecessarily punish those with minor ownership share of horses. That's commendable considering the action was intended to benefit horse owners and encourage more of them to participate. It was also meant to some degree to offer greater integrity to those who wager on the sport, though I struggle to understand if this action will encourage more wagering.

Jeff Gural stated that stakes nominations or payments from horsemen on his banned list won't be accepted this year at his three tracks. That's actually the precursor for how last year's trouble started and why trainers had to be changed in the first place.

The actions taken by WEG and Gural are meaningful and will likely need to be tweaked in some manner going forward. Perhaps of more importance is whether the alleged "bad guys" will lose any of their current support. There are a large group of owners that want to race horses and make money. There's a list of trainers that have succeeded and have done so without achieving the positive tests that some expect to see. The obvious conclusion by those on the offensive is that they are using illegal substances that are unknown and not being tested for. Should that continue in 2018, what will the next step be?

Call it a comeback at Yonkers?



EDITOR'S EYE

By Derick Giwner [@harnessveguy](https://twitter.com/harnessveguy)

Let's give credit where credit is due. Whatever changes Cammie Haughton has put in place since becoming the Director of Racing seems to be working according to the numbers.

Granted the sample size is minuscule with only three racing dates contested, but year-over-year average handle per race is up an astronomical 73.6%.

Opening day, January 7, North American commingled wagering was \$1,398,314 for 12 races, seven of which were sent overseas for wagering via the French PMU. The same card from 2017 with 11 races and the exact number of French simulcast races produced just \$725,392 in wagering dollars.

On Monday, January 8 the track saw wagering hit \$664,744 for a 12-race card. That marked the first time they eclipsed the \$600K plateau on a Monday since May 8, 2017 (\$620,451) and demolished the \$344,417 total the track handled on the comparable Monday (Jan. 9, 11 races) in 2017. It is worth noting that Northfield Park cancelled on Monday, but that can do as much harm as good since people who normally bet Northfield and dabble in Yonkers might just take the night off from betting.

Finally, the Tuesday, January 9 handle had to top even the most enthusiastic expectations. The \$802,409 wagered on the 12-race card demolished the \$442,606 (11 races) from the same date last year. Even more impressive is that it was the first time the track topped the \$600,000 mark in handle on a Tuesday since August 16, 2016 and the total was the largest on a Tuesday in more than two years (former high was on March 1, 2016 at \$719,788).

To what can we attribute this initial spike in handle? Was it the removal of the passing lane? Was it the introduction of longer post parades? Was it the earlier 6:50 p.m. post time?

I'd say none of the above, though anyone watching the product without the passing lane over the first few cards had to come away more entertained than in previous years. There was definitely more aggression and movement. The showcase for what every track would hope to offer was race 11 on Monday night. There was a three-way battle for the lead heading to the quarter-pole and action throughout the contest. It was fun to watch and entertaining. Most of all, everyone who wagered had to come away feeling they got their money's worth.

But back to why I believe handle is up, and it isn't some hidden gem of an idea--scheduling of post times. There is indeed an art to when you allow each race to start. You want a 2-6 minute window between your races and whatever major tracks you are competing against. Yonkers used to do this all the time when Haughton was the presiding judge and regularly handled two to three times what they averaged in 2017. Northfield Park does it . . . so does Pompano . . . and many others.

Just like Hall of Fame MLB outfielder Willie Keeler said over 100 years ago about his success. You have to "Hit'em where they ain't." If you are the only track scheduled to go off for the next three to five minutes, logic states that there is a better chance that more people will be attracted to your product.

Imagine if we could get the industry to work together on this front? Take the top five or six handling tracks each night and have them race every three to four minutes, and to satisfy the masses who can't seem to embrace a post time drag, go off ON TIME.

The bottom line is for the first time in years on a domestic level, I've seen some signs of life from Yonkers Raceway, a track where I cut my teeth as a handicapper and spent countless nights in my late teens and 20s. My only immediate suggestion would be to add a Superfecta to races 6 and 9 as those races only have an exacta and trifecta right now.

I'm thrilled to see the efforts being taken by Haughton and I'm rooting for the track to soar to new heights.

Examining the new integrity rules

By Darin Zoccali

Less than a week ago the Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) announced a joint venture with Jeff Gural of The Meadowlands and American Racing & Entertainment regarding integrity in harness racing.

The venture comes in the form of the largest steps taken by racetracks in an attempt to, for lack of a better term, “clean up the sport of harness racing.”

That phrase alone spurs debate, as there are people in the industry who believe the integrity issues related to performance enhancing drugs are wildly exaggerated. Counter to that are many who believe the integrity issues are grossly understated; so it goes without saying that this initiative has sent shockwaves throughout the industry.

There are people in the industry who have thrown their support behind the concept, there are those who are skeptical of the implementation while praising the general premise and there are those who believe this initiative could literally cripple the industry.

In my opinion and from my experience, there is, without question, prevalent use of performance enhancing substances in the sport of harness racing. Accepting that to be factually correct is the first step in the process. Unfortunately grasping that concept is the simplest aspect of this subject.

As we have seen, the enforcement of “rules” and subsequent “punishments” over the past few years have been met with some praise, some hostility and even some lawsuits. The most common complaint has been a lack of consistency when it comes to transparency and integrity. Several times prominent horsemen have accused Jeff Gural of treating two horsemen differently who receive the exact same positive test or infraction. The claim has been that they admire his purpose, but they don’t care for how that purpose has been executed.

One thing is for certain, these new rules handed down by WEG and The Meadowlands are not inconsistent. They are written in black and white and treat everyone exactly the same, without exception. I think it is important to point out that this rule puts Jeff Gural at as much risk as Ron Burke, Brittany Farms, Al and Michelle Crawford, etc. Jeff has multiple partnerships in place and has horses with multiple trainers. He is just as exposed to these new rules as anyone else. Yet throughout social media, there have been scores of complaints. Some of the complaints are valid, while some are a bit over-the-top.

Included in these new conditions is the concept of owner accountability. No longer will an owner be permitted to change trainers for the purpose of racing at WEG or The Meadowlands when their trainer has a positive test. The rule effectively eliminates beards in stakes races. Granted, 99-percent of races are overnight, which is really where we need to see the removal of beards, but that’s a whole other debate. Beyond that, not only is the horse who received the positive test and its trainer barred from stakes events at both tracks, but the owner, and all of the horses he owns are as well.

To be clear, I have no problem with the concept of an owner being barred from a racetrack for violations that include performance-enhancing substances. I will say that this rule is quite extreme; it is strike one and you are out. Not only are you out, but so are all your horses. The problem with that is some of those horses could be trained by an individual who has done nothing wrong and is not the offending trainer. But, this puts the onus on the owners and perhaps an owner who is concerned that one of his trainers could pose a risk within these conditions may decide to make a change. Perhaps the “honest” trainer who has never had a major positive test can benefit from this rule. Whether or not this actually happens, I cannot say, but it is possible.

The other issue raised is how this impacts the “minority owner.” While the rule limits the penalties to owners of at least 25% of the horse, there is still the impact of a minority owner who is not making any decisions. Is it fair for him to be punished for being in a partnership with someone? This is very difficult to say. In business and in life, in most instances, who we associate ourselves and have partnerships with impacts us. Should harness racing be different? I don’t know and I agree that both this point and the previous one regarding the impact on innocent trainers are valid.

I wrote a column a few months ago about owner accountability that didn’t go to the lengths that this new rule does. It wasn’t strike one and you’re out, but rather a scale of disciplinary actions against owners for

infractions because I do believe they need to be held accountable. Not everyone agreed with that point when I raised it on Facebook.

In response to the question of whether or not owners should be responsible for what their trainers do to their horses, one owner, Gordon Banks, replied as follows on Facebook:

“To be clear, of course not, unless the owner is knowingly complicit in the illegal activity alleged, or in sourcing the drugs a trainer uses. In all other cases, owners are just innocent victims who lose money, reputation and purses because of inappropriate trainer actions.” He went on to say, “take away the licenses (of trainers) and the problem disappears.”

While taking away trainer licenses would be a great step, that would be the task of racing commissions. It also doesn’t eradicate the “beard” problem. A racetrack can do very little if anything regarding this course of action and I applaud racetracks for taking matters into their own hands when they deem that to be necessary.

But the fact that a person genuinely believes an owner’s responsibility ends with him writing checks to pay for his horses concerns me. That is a very slippery slope. How many positives does it take for one particular owner to change that thinking?

I do concede that this rule is incredibly tough and I can understand the viewpoint that it may be too tough. I believe that some adjustments to this rule would be optimal.

1) An initial Class 1 or Class 2 positive results in the exclusion of that trainer and the horse from stakes events, however the majority owner receives a suspension for a period of time; perhaps 30 days. Minority owners are not subject to any disciplinary action. The trainer can re-apply for admittance into stakes events the following season and it is up to an “integrity-panel” to determine if the trainer will be allowed to participate. The panel consists of both operational directors as well as other horsemen.

2) If an owner has a second offense, he is suspended for 60 days.

3) Upon a third offense, the owner is barred for the rest of the season and has to go through the same re-application process as listed above.

4) Lastly, after the first and second offense, an owner can transfer his horses to another trainer if and only if he transfers all his horses away from the trainer who received the positive test and the new trainer must be approved for participation by the integrity panel above.

I believe these types of adjustments ensure both owner and trainer accountability, severely minimize the risk of beards and avoids one singular person making decisions which could be viewed as “inconsistent” by some. More accountability, more transparency and more integrity.



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ROCK N ROLL HEAVEN

Breaking down the \$28,786 Pick 5 carryover at The Meadowlands

By Jay Bergman

After a week hiatus and time to reflect, the Meadowlands Pick 5 carryover is upon us on Friday night. The \$28,786.67 starter comes with a \$125,000 guarantee in races 3 through 7 on the card with a first post slated for 6:30 p.m.

The Pick 5 at 50 cents a ticket is an interesting wager made more alluring by the prospect of a huge payoff. On Friday Racing Secretary Peter Koch has done perhaps too good a job assembling fields, with three trotting races among the five and one of those for non-winners with many showing the potential to break stride.

As in all multiple race wagers, the expense can get overwhelming especially if you have to back up your selections with additional horses, as should be the case with anyone attempting to take down the pool and tiptoe through challenging trotting races.

That said, nothing ventured and nothing gained, and we've set out to make a \$96 play pared down from an original \$300-plus adventure. Regardless of the carryover there just isn't enough incentive to go deeper.

In race three, a non-winners affair for bottom level pacing mares, we're hoping that class will prevail. When you get to the basement at the Meadowlands you have to match what may be \$5,000 claimers with horses worth twice as much. This event is for optional \$10,000 claimers and that's where we'll start with (3) CASA MIASA. The Saratoga shipper caught a tough night for her Meadowlands debut in December and was a little flat. Prior to that she jogged in a 1:54 1/5 effort over the half-miler and now lands inside with Brett Miller. Joining her on our ticket is (6) MOJARRA HANOVER. Now 11, Mojarra Hanover is a veteran of the mile track and is generally quite reliable at a level of this magnitude.

Race 4 is the first of the three trotting events and the nature of this non-winners of 2 suggests the need for three horses in addition to the likely odds-on choice (6) RECEIVERSHIP. The now 4-year-old Receivership broke as a 1-2 favorite in his debut for trainer Jenn Bongiorno.

The altered son of Chapter Seven surprised many people when he qualified in 1:54 the week before. Nevertheless this gelding has only eight lifetime starts and sported some impressive closing efforts on the half-mile track before joining with Bongiorno. If Receivership minds his manners he'll be tough to beat. If he doesn't, we're going for coverage from (2) PRESIDENTE ZETTE, (7) BREAK FREE and (9) IM DONE. That threesome has shown enough to get in the picture should the favorite falter.

Race 5 is another we find challenging and in need of multiple options if the ticket is going to survive through leg five. There should be support for (4) CAULFIELD, a horse that has shown speed while dropping in class for the successful duo of driver Jimmy Marohn Jr. and trainer Patti Harmon. (6) TWO HIP DIP looked like a future FFA Trotter a few years back for Nick Salenetri. He was a solid horse in the winter of 2015 and perhaps his two qualifiers off the shelf give rise to a successful comeback. (8) NEW JERSEY VIKING and (10) LONG STORY SHORT can't be ruled out.

Fortunately we feel confident in just two selections for race 6. (10) FREE SHOW has enough back class to overcome the tough draw while (1) KEYSTONE WISH should welcome the move to the inside.

Race 7 is the final leg and the chalk players would appear to be correct in placing (5) P L ICABOD and (6) WATKINS on their tickets. Brett Miller made his choice between the two and chose P L ICABOD, perhaps off the improved draw, because the veteran has been notably camera shy. WATKINS may have more of a class edge against these. (4) ALEXANDER HANOVER could be a sleeper in this group with Anthony Napolitano driving for trainer Mike Watson. He had no chance in his Meadowlands debut but was competitive at Harrah's Philadelphia

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ASKED & ANSWERED

By Ryan Macedonio [@Trotcast](#)

Experimentation leads to creation

For the first time in a long time, the Meadowlands and Yonkers are working together and achieving great success! Ok, maybe Joey (Faraldo) and Jeffy (Gural) aren't singing Kumbaya around a campfire, but those two tracks are implementing a proven model for success . . . a culture of innovation.

I'm not going to sit here and nitpick about each idea and change that they've brought about, because I think it's important to look at the long-term, the bigger picture. When any business plan is set forward, you need a long-term vision and goal. It doesn't matter how nefarious or civic that long term goal may be, it just matters that you have one.

I have no idea what the long-term goals are for The Meadowlands or Yonkers, but I'm willing to support the process. The reason is because most of the time the process actually changes the long-term goal in the end. This is how science works, you try something, you make observations, take notes, do some research, brainstorm ideas, make an alteration, and repeat until you have a formidable product . . . or die.

Thomas Edison didn't fail at making a light bulb 1,000 times. The light bulb took 1,000 steps to create. Do we actually know if he was setting out to make a light bulb in its final product on the first attempt? My guess is absolutely not, but he kept making adjustments to the design and eventually created the final product that worked. Now imagine if another scholar was watching Edison after the first try and it failed, and the response was, "Give up Tommy, it didn't work." That's just bad science and harness racing is swirling in bad science.

Going back to Yonkers and The Meadowlands, they're doing some good science stuff! Make a change; get feedback; create discussions; filter the good ideas; make a change; try it again. Eventually some good science stuff will come out of this culture. They aren't afraid to change and that is the best part of this. When fear is eliminated, creativity can actually spawn! Ideas can be explored without the fear of rejection in step 1.

It's ok to criticize, because that's how everything adapts. Try to offer a compromise and a solution to improve whatever changes are being offered. Competition always increases the quality of a product, so let's hope that Yonkers and The Meadowlands keep pushing each other, because one day, they both may create a light bulb out of sand.

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Did you ever want to know more than just the statistics of your favorite trainers and drivers? Derick Givner took to the backstretch to ask them some more unorthodox questions.

DRIVER MARCUS JOHANSSON

What is your favorite track to race at? Meadowlands

What kind of car do you drive? Mercedes 300

Do you have children? How old? Yes-- 9 & 12

Pick one: Chicken, Beef or Pasta? Pasta

Pick one: Cake, Cookies or Candy? Cookies

When you leave the track, are the races still on your mind?

No.

Do you study the past performances before showing up at the track?

Yes, but I don't put too much thought into it.



DERICK GIVNER

Marcus Johansson warming up 2014 Horse of the Year JK She'salady.

What is the longest time you've sat in traffic trying to get to a track?

Seven hours.

How often do you check the entries after the draw to see if your horse got in or if you are listed to drive?

I don't need to check because my wife tells me.

Other than you, who is the best driver out there?

Brian Sears; bar none.

If you are going to grab a drink after the races, which horseperson would you want to hang out with?

Myself.

Who are you watching the Super Bowl with?

Myself and the dogs.

What is your favorite sport? Team?

Ice Hockey - Rangers.

What is one thing about you most fans/bettors don't know?

They know more about me than I know about myself.

What is one word that describes harness racing for you?

Thrill of a lifetime.

8-year-old champion Obrigado preparing for his 2018 debut

By Kim French

While his rivals continued their journey through 2017, there was a name that was conspicuously missing from the programs of the sport's marquee older trotting events as the march to divisional honors transpired. That horse, the 2016 Dan Patch Award winner, is none other than Obrigado and if all goes according to plan, the 8-year-old world champion will return to work next week to resume his quest for another title.

"After his last start (a ninth-place finish in the \$303,050 Cashman Memorial on Aug. 5) we just knew he was not himself," said co-owner and conditioner Paul Kelley. "That is why we started a little later with him last year because we knew something was bothering him; we just couldn't figure out what it was. Finally Dr. Stewart pinpointed that it was something in his right stifle, so we took him to Cornell where he had arthroscopic surgery in November. Dr. Nixon went in and just cleaned it up for him. Everything looks great and we hope to start jogging him the third week in January down here in Florida."

Also owned by SRF Stable, Linwood Higgins and Stable 45, Obrigado is also a two-time Maine champion and burst onto the national scene in 2014 after winning 21 consecutive contests in his home state. Kelley and his partners purchased him for \$53,000 at the 2013 Standardbred Mixed Sale and since then the gelding has collected more than \$1.5 million for his connections.

A model of consistency, Obrigado has earned \$405,535, \$873,300 and \$109,265 in his last three seasonal campaigns. Although he did bank more than \$100,000 last year, that obviously was unusual from one of the best older trotters on the planet. Even at less than his best he still managed to accrue that amount from a record of 6-0-2-2.

"We just could not find out what was wrong with him," Kelley said. "We took him all over to have him looked at. Even when he had a bone scan

nothing came up that was not normal. I'm just so grateful to Dr. Stewart and Dr. Nixon for finding the problem; they deserve all the credit."

Since his time on the surgical table, Obrigado has been engaged in light exercise in preparation for his return.

"He's just been doing some groundwork after he had some rest," Kelley said. "He looks great and his recovery seems to be coming along perfectly. Of course it always helps he is such a good patient. I would expect he is ready to begin doing just a little more though as he does really enjoy racing."

With the advances in veterinary medicine, removing bone chips, draining fluid or simply "cleaning up" a joint or two is now quite standard and the prognosis for a full recovery from most horses is excellent. Therefore, there is no reason to not expect Obrigado to return to his exceptional self this season.

"We will start jogging him in January but he will not race again until very late spring or early summer," Kelley said. "It is such a long season with so many good races late in the summer and fall that you really just want to have him ready for those. It's a lot of travel and with so much racing it can be hard on them. We just want to do what's best for the horse and he pretty much tells us what to do for him."

"Of course we were disappointed with what happened last year, but most of that came from him not being himself, so we knew our job was to find out what was bugging him. Hopefully we will pick up right where he left off and have another great season this year. In this business you never know anything and have to see what happens. We are, however, very excited to have repaired the issue and have him back."

"We are also really looking forward to this year with him. He really is such a great horse to simply be around and watching him race has brought us so much joy. We hope it is more of the same this year."

--Courtesy USTrotting.com

HARNES NEWS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

Opening weekend cancelled at Buffalo due to weather

The only winner this weekend at Buffalo Raceway will be Mother Nature as a forecast of heavy rain on Friday (Jan. 12) followed by a projection of a foot of snow on Saturday (Jan. 13) have forced officials at the Hamburg half-mile oval to cancel the opening weekend of live harness racing action.

There were nine races scheduled for Friday evening and 10 more for Saturday but those will be wiped out due to the impending weather and potential dangerous track conditions. The 2018 opener is now slated for Wednesday, January 17 at 5 p.m.

Pick 5 carryover and Mixed Sale at Meadowlands

The Meadowlands resumes live racing on Friday, January 12 with a Pick-5 Guaranteed Pool of \$125,000, the evening's headline.

Nobody picked five back on Saturday, December 30, the most recently raced card what with the cancellation of last weekend's races due to frigid weather. The resulting carryover of \$28,786 led to the hefty guarantee which is backed by The Meadowlands in concert with the United States Trotting Association Strategic Wagering. The wager begins in race 3, has a fifty cent minimum and a 15% retention rate.

Harness Eye past performances for the Pick 5 can be found [here](#).

There are more than a few horses on Friday's card that have been consigned to the Tattersalls January Mixed Sale that will be held on Monday, January 15 in The Meadowlands paddock. Information on the sale may be found [here](#).

\$15,113 Pick 5 carryover on tap at Yonkers Friday

Friday evening's (Jan. 12) Pick 5 wager starts with a double carryover of \$15,113.25 at Yonkers Raceway and the final pool will be guaranteed at \$40,000.

The Pick 5 is a 50-cent base wager comprising races 7 through 11 during every racing card. It has no consolation payoff, meaning if no one

selects all five winners (as was the case Monday and Tuesday nights), the entire pool (minus takeout) moves to the next racing program.

First post for all evening programs is now 6:50 PM.

Owner Martin Scharf tries the Thoroughbred game

Horse agent Anthony Altomonte confirmed on Wednesday that he closed a deal between Martin Scharf and Ivan Rodriguez on the purchase of a 50% interest in Sharp Azteca, a likely starter in the \$16,000,000 Pegasus World Cup at Gulfstream Park on January 27.

Sharp Azteca won the Cigar Mile and was the runner-up in the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile in 2017.

The purchase is Scharf's first investment in Thoroughbreds. He has been a major player in harness racing for years and owned 2000 Horse of the Year Gallo Blue Chip.

Irad Ortiz is expected to ride Sharp Azteca in the Pegasus.

Horner says changes coming to new Integrity rules

Clay Horner, Chairman of Woodbine Entertainment Group, said in an interview on Post Time with Mike and Mike on Thursday morning that changes to the Standardbred Racing Integrity and Accountability Initiative would be coming in the near future and well before the key February 15 deadline for stakes payments.

"I spoke with 10 owners and trainers yesterday and two more this morning. I am very happy to say, and very impressed that all 12 when they heard the proposed changes said, 'we're in,'" said Horner.

The basics for the changes would center around only the trainer, owner and horse that was involved in a Class I/II infraction would be punished and not other owners, trainers and horses who had no direct involvement in the incident.

Horner listed five core objectives for the new rules: 1) Improve the reputation of elite stakes races; 2) foster bettors' confidence; 3) Attract good and new owners, small and large; 4) Impact general trainer choices by owners; 5) Reward good decision making by owners.

Winter/Spring Stakes Schedule

WOODBINE (FRIDAY, FEB. 2)

\$30,000 BLIZZARD FINAL 3&4YO F&M PACE

\$30,000 SNOWSHOE FINAL 3&4YO H&G PACE

YONKERS (FRIDAY, MARCH 16)

\$40,000 BLUE CHIP MATCHMAKER F&M PACE (LEG 1)

YONKERS (SATURDAY, MARCH 17)

\$50,000 GEORGE MORTON LEVY OPEN PACE (LEG 1)

YONKERS (FRIDAY, MARCH 23)

\$40,000 BLUE CHIP MATCHMAKER F&M PACE (LEG 2)

YONKERS (SATURDAY, MARCH 24)

\$50,000 GEORGE MORTON LEVY OPEN PACE (LEG 2)

YONKERS (MONDAY, MARCH 26)

\$50,000 PETTICOAT FINAL 3&4YO F&M PACE

\$30,000 PETTICOAT CONSOLATION 3&\$YO F&M PACE

YONKERS (TUESDAY, MARCH 27)

\$50,000 SAGAMORE FINAL 3&4YO H&G PACE

\$30,000 SAGAMORE CONSOLATION 3&\$YO H&G PACE

YONKERS (FRIDAY, MARCH 30)

\$40,000 BLUE CHIP MATCHMAKER F&M PACE (LEG 3)

YONKERS (SATURDAY, MARCH 31)

\$50,000 GEORGE MORTON LEVY OPEN PACE (LEG 3)

YONKERS (FRIDAY, APRIL 6)

\$40,000 BLUE CHIP MATCHMAKER F&M PACE (LEG 4)

YONKERS (SATURDAY, APRIL 7)

\$50,000 GEORGE MORTON LEVY OPEN PACE (LEG 4)

YONKERS (FRIDAY, APRIL 13)

\$40,000 BLUE CHIP MATCHMAKER F&M PACE (LEG 5)

YONKERS (SATURDAY, APRIL 14)

\$50,000 GEORGE MORTON LEVY OPEN PACE (LEG 5)

MIAMI VALLEY (MONDAY, APRIL 16)

\$40,000 JAMES HACKETT FINAL 3YO FILLY TROT

MIAMI VALLEY (TUESDAY, APRIL 17)

\$40,000 JAMES HACKETT FINAL 3YO C&G TROT

MIAMI VALLEY (FRIDAY, APRIL 20)

\$40,000 JAMES HACKETT FINAL 3YO FILLY PACE

MIAMI VALLEY (SATURDAY, APRIL 21)

\$40,000 JAMES HACKETT FINAL 3YO C&G PACE

YONKERS (SATURDAY, APRIL 21)

\$200K (ADDED) LEVY FINAL OPEN PACE

\$125K (ADDED) MATCHMAKER FINAL F&M PACE

\$100,000 LEVY CONSOLATION OPEN PACE

\$75,000 MATCHMAKER CONSOLATION F&M PACE

YONKERS (TUESDAY, APRIL 24)

\$55,000 SOA BONUS TROT FINAL OPEN TROT

\$35,000 SOA BONUS TROT CONSO. OPEN TROT

MIAMI VALLEY (FRIDAY, APRIL 27)

\$50,000 SCARLET & GRAY INV. 3YO FILLY PACE

\$50,000 SCARLET & GRAY INV. 3YO FILLY TROT

FREEHOLD (SATURDAY, APRIL 28)

\$40,000 DEXTER CUP ELIMINATION 3YO OPEN TROT

MIAMI VALLEY (SATURDAY, APRIL 28)

\$50,000 SCARLET & GRAY INV. 3YO C&G PACE

\$50,000 SCARLET & GRAY INV. 3YO C&G TROT

(Information courtesy USTA - All stakes with purses of at least \$30,000 through April 30 are listed.)