

# PONIES 24-7

VOLUME 7 / ISSUE 4 / 2021  
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## Brook Smith

His Rocket Ship Racing  
Readies for Launch

## Mark Casse

Hall Of Fame Career  
For The 'Kid' From Indiana

## Michael Copeland

Highly Recognized Sports  
Executive Joins Team Woodbine

## The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer



# PONIES 24-7

HORSE RACING LIFESTYLE EXPERIENCE



# 2021 TIOGA DOWNS RACE SEASON

WHERE FANS & HORSEMEN FINISH 1st!



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# Do You Know What Lymphoma Is?

**Lymphoma Is A Group of Cancers Affecting the Lymphatic System. Thousands of Canadians Are Engaged In The Fight, Yet Many Of Us Are Unfamiliar With The Disease!**

We are familiar with many parts of our body and how they relate to our overall health, but when it comes to the lymphatic system and our lymph nodes, Canadians are not as informed. Many of us have heard of lymph nodes and know where they can be found in the body, but beyond that, details about the lymphatic system and lymphoma often remain a mystery.

Since the word "cancer" is not in the name, lymphoma is not commonly recognized as a type of cancer. Did you know that **lymphoma is the fifth most common cancer in Canada**, the third most common cancer in children aged 0-14, and the most common cancer diagnosis for adolescents and young adults from 15-39? There are over 80 different types of lymphoma and over 100,000 Canadians currently living with this illness.

**Lymphoma Canada** is the only national organization in Canada that is focused entirely on lymphoma. It is our mission to empower patients and the lymphoma community through education, support, advocacy, and research.

**Lymphoma Canada** provides information to patients and their caregivers through comprehensive resource manuals, educational forums, webinars, and national conferences. Lymphoma Canada advocates for equal access to lymphoma treatments and supports Canadian lymphoma researchers in Canada. With your help, we can continue to raise awareness, assist newly diagnosed patients, and seek equal access to treatments across Canada.

No one should have to face lymphoma alone. **Lymphoma Canada** provides resources and support to patients through the difficult journey of diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship.

Take the 'Know Your Nodes' quiz to see how you score at  
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For lymphoma resources or for further information, visit our website at [lymphoma.ca](http://lymphoma.ca)  
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# DON'T HORSE AROUND WITH LYMPHOMA

Thousands of Canadians are engaged in the fight against lymphoma, yet a large percent of the population are unfamiliar with this type of cancer. Lymphoma affects your lymphatic system, namely the lymphocytes that together with other cells of the immune system, work to fight infection and prevent disease.

Lymphoma is also the most common cancer diagnosis for adolescents and young adults in Canada. Though common early signs and symptoms can be minimal or mimic other conditions, it is possible that the lymphoma can remain undetected for many months or possibly years.

**Did you know that both humans and horses can contract lymphoma?**

With your support and through our  
**'Don't Horse Around with Lymphoma'**  
campaign, we can help create awareness, promote early detection, assist newly diagnosed patients and support lymphoma research that one day may lead to a cure.

**We are committed to hoofing out lymphoma!**



Visit [lymphoma.ca/ponies](http://lymphoma.ca/ponies) today, to learn more about lymphoma and to support the **'Don't Horse Around with Lymphoma'** campaign.

# AT THE POST



## A MESSAGE TO OUR VALUED PONIES READERS

Welcome back, it's hard to believe as I write this that we are sadly, halfway through Summer! On a positive note though and from a horse racing standpoint, the racing product has never been better this year and we still have several major 'big' days of horse racing ahead of us as we head into the Fall.

I hope you enjoy this issue of PONIES 24-7, as we should have actually called it our 'Mover's and Shaker's' edition. Our Cover Story introduces you to Rocket Ship Racing's Brook Smith, a Kentucky Entrepreneur, Philanthropist and Horse Racing enthusiast and one of Brook's philanthropic efforts is his 'Purses For A Purpose' program that benefits the Backside Learning Center at Churchill Downs. You will find out more about this cause and Rocket Ship Racing.

Also in this issue, you will meet Woodbine Entertainment's recent addition to their growth team, Michael Copeland who in May was named Chief Commercial Officer. Michael brought with him a well rounded background of sports and business that will certainly play a key role in

Woodbine's continual infrastructure growth.

And finally, what would a 'Mover's and Shaker's' edition of PONIES 24-7, be without a story about trainer Mark Casse? The winner of over 3,000 races in his career was finally inducted into the Hall of Fame in Saratoga this year, although he was actually part of the 2020 class which due to the pandemic, their induction was held over to early August of this year, with the 2021 inductees.

Enjoy this issue of PONIES 24-7 and if you want more 'PONIES', then don't forget to tune in Saturday mornings to 'Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE on the FM channel, 105.9 The Region and live streamed at 1059theregion.com. It's 30 minutes of action-packed interviews of the 'who's who' of horse racing, handicapping selections and informative content for racing fans everywhere, and it all starts at 8:30 am ET.

*Until next time*

Larry Simpson  
theponies247experience@gmail.com

## EDITOR Larry Simpson

Larry Simpson is an avid and passionate writer, horseplayer, handicapper, and marketer for both Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing. He has published and edited several horse racing journals, conducted handicapping seminars for both breeds and is a major proponent for the education of new racing fans through publications like PONIES 24-7, and initiatives that develop 'fresh' demographics for racing, produce cultured bettors and promote the value of the horse racing advertising space!



## LIVING THE HORSE RACING LIFESTYLE

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Rocket Ship Racing's Brook Smith is the subject of our Cover Story this month. Photo by Parker Staten-Silent Wolf Productions X Traffick Media



# BROOK SMITH

Kentucky Entrepreneur,  
Philanthropist and  
Founding Owner of  
Rocket Ship Racing

By Larry Simpson



Brook with Winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown, who he refers to as the 'rockstar' of Napa Valley.  
Photo by Suzanne Becker Bronk

As the Churchill Downs Spring meet was coming to a close, Rocket Ship Racing, the brainchild of Louisville, Kentucky's Brook Smith, made quite a splash, claiming three horses out of the same Maiden \$100,000 Claimer. An interesting piece of business, but even more notable was the fact that all three horses would be enrolled in Brook's *'Purses For A Purpose'* undertaking, where a percentage of money earned by these and other horses racing for Rocket Ship Racing would go to support the Backside Learning Center at Churchill Downs. Brook proposed the program to the BLC several years ago as an opportunity to further support the lives of the *'unsung heroes'*, namely the backside workers and their families.

Recently, we had an opportunity to meet Brook and talk more about *'Purses For A Purpose'* and several more of his philanthropic and entrepreneurial undertakings.

**PONIES 24-7:** Brook, as a person involved in many business opportunities, how would you best describe your business philosophy?

**BROOK SMITH:** Simply put, it comes down to focusing on the process versus the results. In the world we live in today, I believe people think more about results, and it is so easy to do that. In fact, we are all guilty of living and dying by metrics and math and how we stack up against the next guy or gal. It's all about surrounding yourself with the best possible



Photo By Stephanie Wolden



Pictured from left to right, Trainer Jeff Hiles, Racing Manager, Bill Denzik, and Brook Smith.

Photo by Parker Staten-Silent Wolf Productions X Traffick Media



people. Trust is everything, so make sure you are working with people you can trust. It's important not to 'sugar coat' things. In other words, if things aren't going right, then just *'take your lumps'* and move on. You must know your industry, surround yourself with the sharpest people available, and have complete transparency and communication. After that, it comes down to old fashioned hard work. Having some *'out of the box'* thinking doesn't hurt either.

**PONIES 24-7:** As an entrepreneur, you have involved yourself in many businesses outside of horse racing, including a major influence in the wine and spirits industries. Maybe for our readers, you can talk more about some of your other ventures.

**BROOK SMITH:** As you can imagine, wine and spirits are fun businesses to get involved in, especially if you focus on creating high quality products that people can enjoy. My partners and I created a wine called *'Post Parade'*, obviously a horse racing term, but the branding is very simple with minimal equine features. I was travelling across North America quite a bit, working with various industries in different cities in my Surety Bond business. While in Las Vegas on a development project, I would stay at the Venetian Hotel where I met a Master Sommelier who taught me about wine. He also introduced me to some lovely people in Napa, and on one of my visits there, a bit over served, (*Laughs*) I decided that I would really like to make a wine, something that is of high quality, while relying on the experts to produce it. I wanted it to be approachable, so that people could afford to enjoy it. Eventually, my partners and I created *Post*

*Parade*, which I'm proud to say has received some very high ratings (95 | 96 points). I don't own any vineyards or wineries myself, but I have friends that do, so we make *Post Parade* at their winery under the helm of winemaker Thomas Rivers Brown, who is like the rockstar of Napa Valley. I'm happy to report, we've grown *Post Parade* from a hobby, to a very successful business. As a Kentuckian, I was approached by some people who wanted to purchase the ruins of the Old Taylor Distillery, where Colonel E. H. Taylor got his start. They were going to rename and rebrand it, but most importantly, they were going to use the old infrastructure, which was an old castle built in the late 1800's. It's an absolutely gorgeous building, like the *'Willy Wonka'* of bourbons, which *Travel and Leisure Magazine* recently selected as the single best distillery destination in the United States. If your readers ever have a chance to visit Kentucky, it's well worth paying *Castle & Key Distillery* a visit. I'm also involved in another brand called *Barrell Bourbon*, which wins more than its share of awards. The owners don't actually distill, instead, they source older barrels filled with bourbon and rye and blend them together to create these incredible products. It's been a great venture, but again, like I said earlier about business, you *'hook your wagon'* to people with passion, artisans that you can trust and hopefully support, and not just with capital, but with strategy. I have numerous other investments in all shapes and sizes through RSLP Ventures. RSLP does private investing, providing pre-seed and seed capital to people looking for start-up funding. Our check size is usually \$50,000 to \$100,000 and we make 50 +/- investments a year. What we've discovered is that



this early investment is often the most important, and you hope they all succeed. We look for great people full of great ideas who are willing to listen.

**PONIES 24-7:** You are fortunate that you have a such a passion for horse racing and business. Do both of these passions breed off of each other?

**BROOK SMITH:** Yes, I say this a lot and I don't want to sound reckless, but we only have one rodeo! We are here for a period of time- we don't know how long that time is, and we certainly don't know what the future holds. People often say to live every day, and then they think about it for thirty minutes, and off they go on with their life. I'm also guilty of this, but I try to do something exciting or add value to someone else's life every day- I love to support new ideas. The Thoroughbred industry has been around forever and there is such a culture around it. I love the horses, the people, and the excitement that surrounds horse racing. I'm looking forward to creating something different in Rocket Ship Racing with the *'mankind component'*, so I couldn't be more excited about the *'Purses For A Purpose'* program. I just hope that people that read this article will say *'Yes, that makes sense'*. Horse racing is a sport of economics, and you can only hope that its participants share their good fortune through giving a portion back.

**PONIES 24-7:** Perfect segue way Brook, to talk about your Rocket Ship Racing and *'Purses For A Purpose'* program. What was it that attracted you to both?

**BROOK SMITH:** Well, it began with *Post Parade*. After we started having some success and were proving to be sustainable, it needed a *'giving back'* component like every venture I'm involved in. I initially met with the Executive Director of the Backside Learning Center, Sherry Stanley, and found out that the BLC was existing *'hand to mouth'*. I immediately thought that *Post Parade* could be an anchor contributor to them. As we started to talk, I found it shocking that the BLC didn't have more money coming in from the Thoroughbred industry. I know Churchill Downs provides some funding, but surely there had to be others? After a couple of meetings, we came up with the *'Purses For A Purpose'* program, where Thoroughbred owners could give a percentage of their horses' winnings to the BLC. Hopefully this article will entice more horse owners to become a part of the program. You know Larry, if only 1% of the owners that raced at Churchill Downs contributed 2% of their purses, well, that's some incredible economics to help support the people who are playing such a large role in the industry. So, I made a decision to move forward with the program and lend my stable to help work out the *'kinks'* in the program. As we start to take in partners, we hope that they will also see the value in a portion of their purses going to the BLC. Hopefully, the program will find its way to other tracks, which I believe is very doable.

**PONIES 24-7:** Brook, with such a great cause, would you agree that horse racing could do with a few more promotions like this?

**BROOK SMITH:** Definitely, every industry has its peaks and valleys, and right now you could argue that Thoroughbred racing is in a bit of a valley. There's a lot of controversy and no continuity in rules from state to state. The industry must create a uniform and level playing field, otherwise, people won't participate. It needs to show now, more than ever, that it's thoughtful. I liken it to a rollercoaster ride, and I actually believe that overall, all industries really need to be more reflective about the ride.

**PONIES 24-7:** Would you agree that the key to bringing new people into the horse racing industry is by educating them more about the sport?

**BROOK SMITH:** Yes, education is at the heart of everything. Educating and informing people about





what is really going on is essential. The industry is loaded with compassion, but it needs to engage new people and promote it. Unfortunately, I believe many who are reading the headlines have forgotten about this.

**PONIES 24-7:** Is promoting a compassionate industry something that you encourage when bringing partners in to Rocket Ship Racing?

**BROOK SMITH:** We definitely will be. We are here because of the history and tradition of the sport. Winning a race is the icing on the cake. Yes, we will inform them, and the first thing we will ask anyone who is wanting to partner up with us is- why? If the answer is *'I want to win'*, or *'I want to be in the Winner's Circle'*, well, that is one element, but it shouldn't be the sole focus. If you like going to the backside in the morning, or you like the cultural experience, then you are getting in with the right group of people. We'll find the best burger joint or dive bar near each racetrack, as it's all about the experience and a love for all that goes with it.

**PONIES 24-7:** Who selects your horses for you Brook?

**BROOK SMITH:** Since I don't have the depth of experience or the expertise, I rely on the trainers I've worked with for many years. As we continue to grow and add horses, we'll continue to have experienced horsemen in/around all decisions, though I'll be consulting with them on a regular basis.

**PONIES 24-7:** Could you see sometime down the road where you may look at Woodbine for some racing opportunities?

**BROOK SMITH:** I would love that, as I love Canada and I have many friends up North. In the past, I spent a lot of time in Toronto working with clients in the mining business and I've been to Woodbine once. I would certainly be open to racing there and to possibly adding some Canadian breds to our stable. I have a lot of respect for Woodbine and the job that they have done putting their racetrack on the map in North America and the world.

**PONIES 24-7:** Going forward with Rocket Ship Racing, what would you like to achieve?

**BROOK SMITH:** As we *'launch'* Rocket Ship Racing, like everything else I have ever done, I would hope those involved will say *'Wow, my life is better from being involved with Rocket Ship Racing!'* And not just because of the racing, but the overall experience. If we do everything the right way, work with the most talented people, and pick out the right horses, perhaps we can make Rocket Ship Racing the gold standard of partnerships... and trust me, we'll win plenty of races.

**PONIES 24-7:** Brook, what is your number one passion, business or horse racing?

**BROOK SMITH:** I would say life in general. My family is my passion, my friends are my passion, and I look at business, life, and horse racing as one continual mix of it all. I'm excited at the magic of just being alive. My passion meter for life is pretty high up there.

**PONIES 24-7:** Finally, where did this passion for horse racing come from?

**BROOK SMITH:** Obviously being from Kentucky checked the first box, but I think it was right after I graduated from Clemson Univeristy and a friend of mine's father was part of a racing syndicate and owned a piece of a horse called Laura's Pistolette who won the Distaff on Kentucky Derby Day. If I recall, she went off at around 20-1 odds and everyone was jumping around because of the excitement. I just stood back and said, *'I want more of this!'* (Laughs) That was the moment in time when I thought that if I had the means, I wanted to be a part of this industry and eventually be able to share it with as many around me as possible!



# Rocket Ship

RACING

# THE BUSINESS OF HORSE RACING

# MICHAEL COPELAND

Leading, Highly Recognized Sports Executive Is The Most Recent Addition To Woodbine Entertainment's Growth Team.

By Larry Simpson



Photo by Michael Burns



With Woodbine Entertainment's eye on substantial business growth in the not too distant future, the recent announcement of the hire of Michael Copeland as Chief Commercial Officer came as no surprise to anyone within the professional sports industry. Most recently, Michael had his own successful sports and entertainment consulting firm, focusing on growth and transformation for his clients and prior to that, he was President and CEO of the Toronto Argonauts Football Club from 2015 to 2018, a stint that included a Grey Cup victory, symbolic of league supremacy in 2017. This followed his 10 years with the league itself as President and Chief Operating Officer of the Canadian Football League. Already considered to be one of Canada's leading sports and entertainment organizations, Woodbine Entertainment's appointment of Michael and the experience that he brings to the table, can certainly be considered by many, the perfect marriage

as the company prepares for a future where sustained corporate growth is a top priority.

Recently, PONIES 24-7 had the opportunity to learn more about Michael Copeland, his business career and his new role with Woodbine Entertainment Group.

**PONIES 24-7:** Michael, you have a well-stocked background in sports and entertainment, but you also have a very close connection to horse racing?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Yes, I spent quite a bit of time at Woodbine, I actually grew up in the area, but it was after I met my wife Deanne that I really became introduced to horse racing. Deanne's father was Nick De Toro, an owner and trainer of Thoroughbreds for many years at Woodbine, (unfortunately he passed away a few years back) and with her growing up on a horse farm in King City, you could say that much



of our life together was actually spent around horses and of course, going to the racetrack. I was fortunate to be able to learn quite a bit about horse racing from both my wife and her father, which I believe will certainly be an incredible asset with my new position at Woodbine.

**PONIES 24-7:** Let's talk about your business experience, as it hasn't always been just about sports.

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** No, I actually started practicing law first and then shifted from law to the business side and did some consulting work in Australia for a while. I moved back to Toronto and concentrated on strategy consulting within several consumer sectors, but they were not sports related and I eventually transitioned from the consulting side to corporate, when I started working for Molson Coors, which was actually Molson at the time. I worked on the merger with Coors and this led to my first opportunity to work in the sports industry, with the Canadian Football League. You could

probably say that it was really the second half of my career where my focus became sports. Larry, between the CFL, the Argonauts, and Maple Leaf Sports Entertainment, but it was through the experiences outside the sports realm, that really allowed me to acquire a better perspective of many other industries and how people envisioned them.

**PONIES 24-7:** Recently, you were hired for the position of Woodbine Entertainment's Chief Commercial Officer, how would you describe your role?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** I'm focused on driving the business side of Woodbine Entertainment so that the

revenue generation and the brand will be increased to new heights. Woodbine is a very successful organization, but they are at a time and place now where there's some really unique opportunities out there, like single game sports betting and discovering new ways of engaging new horse racing fans and current core fans. There's also some exciting plans for the property at Woodbine, which will help to increase the 'experience' of being at the track and my role will include taking a look at where do we want Woodbine to go from here? There's always going to be more opportunities to grow and develop and reimagine and I'm going to help to lead these efforts, including branding, marketing, partnership and sponsor liaison and other new business, that will tend to emerge as the landscape of sports and media entertainment continues to evolve.

**PONIES 24-7:**

Michael, you touched upon sports betting as an opportunity and of course there are other projects in the works that are designed to derive fan interest and increase revenues for Woodbine Entertainment. Maybe you can talk about some of these projects?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Well, watching a horse race I think is an incredible and unique sports experience and there's very few events that match the feeling of being at the track and watching the horses thundering by. It's just very special and Woodbine wants to help make this experience even better for our guests and present it in new and different ways. At the same time, there is that great need to attract new customers and do something similar like other sports franchises, essentially, having places for fans to congregate and enjoy the experience in a group setting. There's also media distribution, where you can now connect with anything online, which presents Woodbine with new opportunities to engage with our fans. We will also be looking at new ways to use social media, to bring



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out the stories in Ontario and Canadian horse racing and then bring the races themselves to people in new and exciting ways. Finally, introducing new ways and products for our customers to wager on, will definitely continue to be a priority. Woodbine can be a real leader in the industry, not only in Canada, but also globally and showcase how fantastic horse racing is as a sport and as a form of entertainment. Introducing this ‘experience’ to people in new and exciting ways, be it at the racetrack or off track, would certainly be our broad focus.

**PONIES 24-7:** How important was the recent passing by the Senate of Bill C-218 bill for legalizing sports betting?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Well, its transformational for the Canadian sports landscape! For horse racing, there was a large amount of very forward thinking in the way that the legislation was crafted, by recognizing the importance of the racing industry and having Fixed Odds wagering on horse racing exempt from the legislation. This allows the current system in place, pari-mutuel wagering on horse racing, that has proven to be very strong in the past, to continue to allow Woodbine and other racetracks, the opportunity to keep an integral and critical part of the business model that supports so many jobs across the country. The hope is that the ‘Grey Market’ operators will ultimately decide to participate through this legal system and if this does happen, then Woodbine would work with them and introduce horse racing to even more people. For Woodbine, it’s also an opportunity to lead and collaborate in an industry that is going to grow exponentially and do so where our expertise will only help to make it a very successful business, while continuing to place horse racing at the forefront of Canadian sports. Legalized sports betting, will also promote customer engagement in horse racing by providing familiar betting platforms that people can recognize and offer a mainstream way of participating in sports, with horse racing being one of the core products. Sports betting will bring more people into our sport and in particular, to Woodbine and we are looking forward to leading this evolution as it takes place.

**PONIES 24-7:** You touched on the fact too that through Bill C-218, horse racing was protected, which was a key component to sports betting being allowed to move forward, correct?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Absolutely, that was critical for the Ontario and Canadian horse racing industries.

It’s important that Woodbine maintains their roles in wagering and within the industry of supporting racing and the horse people. Any profits made from sports betting will go right back into horse racing and I think what has been demonstrated in the past, for this to occur and in order to have a vibrant industry that supports around 45,000 jobs in the province, the profits need to stay in Ontario. If horse racing was not exempt as part of Bill C-218, then I believe you would have seen those profits going to other organizations and causing an erosion in the Ontario horse racing industry. So, Bill C-218, was not only critical for Woodbine, but also for horse racing in Ontario.

**PONIES 24-7:** And before sports betting becomes a reality, there is one final step before approval, any idea when this will take place?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Well the Royal Ascent has taken place, making it official, but the way that the legislation works is that this is an amendment to the Criminal Code which now allows the provinces to announce their own rules of governing sports betting. So, the actual next step is for the provinces themselves to establish what those rules will be for operators to be licensed to engage in single bet sports betting. I currently don’t have a timeline on this right now, but my guess is that the provinces are interested and will be moving thoughtfully but quickly!

**PONIES 24-7:** Michael, what kind of financial impact can sports betting have on horse racing here in Canada?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Well, horse racing does benefit from receiving tremendous support from the Ontario government and our hope is that sports betting will have a large enough financial impact to allow us to become self-sustaining and to not have to rely on government funding. Sports betting will be great for horse racing and it certainly will be a significant influx of profit if the market evolves as we expect it to. But the real benefit will be to Canadian taxpayers and specifically those in Ontario, as we should be able to generate revenues that will offset the funding that has been received in the past from the Ontario government. This has always been a goal of Woodbine’s, to be a self-sustaining organization.

**PONIES 24-7:** You are part of Woodbine’s team that is working on the sports betting portfolio, are there any other horse racing jurisdictions in the US where sports betting is now legal, that you may have your eye on, as a working model?



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**MICHAEL COPELAND:** We are doing a very comprehensive review of all of them globally, Larry, with a particular interest in the US states. Since it's regulated state by state, there are many different models and of course we will definitely look at those that have racetracks operating as well. I don't think there is one particular model that stands out though, instead we would probably take a piece from each and apply them to our emerging model here in Ontario, especially as we get a little more clarity of what the provinces regulatory environment will look like. One thing that we are very confident in, is that Woodbine is in a very strong position to lead and to be very successful and that we have great government partners that we continue to work with. I think Woodbine brings a lot to the table in terms of experience, credibility and our approach to this market. Woodbine has always been a real leader in introducing new initiatives around 'safe play', 'responsible gaming' and 'fraud protection' and combined with the technology that we have developed to support the wagering system, my expectation is that there will be many jurisdictions that will be looking at Woodbine as the 'gold standard' model.

**PONIES 24-7:** Can you see a time and place where sports betting will allow for some cross promotional opportunities between horse racing and other pro sports?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** Absolutely, I think that you will see this happening very soon after the roll out. I believe that the sports betting offering will see a few consumers including horse racing and other major sports, together in one product offering.

**PONIES 24-7:** Michael, besides sports betting, Woodbine has some other new products in the works to engage new customers and fans and support horse racing. Can you talk about some of these?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** We are always pushing for new opportunities to build our business and grow the revenues that we can support Ontario horse racing with. Obviously, the major project is the 'Vision' to redevelop the Woodbine property. This again will be another transformational piece that's going to create

a world class mix-use area in the city. We are talking about roughly 680 acres, which is about the size of the downtown core of Toronto and within this area, horse racing and the Woodbine grandstand will be recreated as a very special entertainment destination. The new casino is also being redeveloped and will be coming online in 2022-there's a hotel that's part of the casino too, so it's really a reimagination of the sites where horse racing will be front and center. The idea is to build an innovative, new vibrant community



which will place Woodbine in the middle of a very active area for generations to come. This will not only provide revenue opportunities for Woodbine, but it will also help us elevate horse racing and once again, get more people engaged with horse racing.

**PONIES 24-7:** With your experience with professional football, do you see any business similarities between pro football and horse racing?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** There's many! At its very core, it's all about creating an emotional connection with fans and providing entertainment and an experience that is meaningful for individuals, whether it's a football game or an attachment to a particular player or team. You can also say the same about horse racing and if it is the excitement of the race itself or a favorite horse or jockey. Football and horse racing, have the same vision for what the connection is and developing a way to bring it to the fans in the

best possible way. Both horse racing and football are facing very competitive markets, especially competing for the younger generation, a challenge that is actually facing all traditional sports, but I very much believe in Woodbine's ability to be extremely successful and to face this challenge. Horse racing is perfectly suited to the way that the young generation consumes entertainment today, as they have unlimited choices and the entertainment provided

can be consumed in smaller or shorter packages. Horse racing fits that bill perfectly, it's exciting, it's quick, and if you present it in the right way, it is easy to understand, so I believe that everything is lining up for us to create fantastic experiences on site at Woodbine and with all of our Ontario tracks and also online for the other mediums that we have available to us. Sure, there's many similarities, but I like Woodbine's position as we move forward.

**PONIES 24-7:** Last question Michael, obviously you had the influence of your wife and late father in law which helped attract you to horse racing, however was there a horse or even a race that solidified your passion for the horse industry?

**MICHAEL COPELAND:** I don't know if there was a particular horse or race, instead for me, I think it was because I had such a respect on how amazing the horses were! The first time that you are up close to them, whether it be at the barn or at the track, you really have a sense of appreciation for how big and strong they are. I think it's that physical experience and seeing how fast these horses were that certainly left an impression on me. There is such a purity and honesty to horses and people in the horse community which is great. Another really powerful and compelling aspect of horse racing is the thundering down the stretch which is right up there with the F18's that go roaring overhead during the national anthem at a big sporting event. There really is no other experience quite like those two sporting moments! I have a passion for all sports, but horse racing is truly a special one. Once you experience being trackside with the horses so near, well as they say, there's no going back and when you get to learn more about all of the

other parts of horse racing, including the people that are involved, the quality of the horses and the commitment of the owners, breeders and trainers, that is when the connection deepens. I am fortunate to have had this and I really want to bring it to more people!





# MARK CASSE

It's Been Quite A Ride For The 'Boy From Indiana' The Winner Of Over 3,000 Races Reflects On His Career. **By Larry Simpson**

Watching the great Secretariat's win in the 1973 Kentucky Derby, was all the inspiration a twelve-year-old boy from Indiana would need to decide, that training Thoroughbred horses would be his full time calling. And like the horse icon, 'Big Red', who was inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame in 1974, Mark Casse received the same recognition as part of the Class of 2020, although the pandemic delayed his induction to early August of this year and a ceremony that was shared with the 2021 class.

Training the winners of over 3,000 races, Mark is also part of the Canadian Racing Hall of Fame and the Indianapolis, Indiana native's training achievements to date have included, 13 Sovereign Awards for Outstanding Trainer in Canada, two US Triple Crown victories, two Queen's Plate wins, five Breeders' Cup winners and his starters have earned over \$186 million in purses. To say that Mark Casse has come a long way, since that van ride with his 'biggest fan', his father Norman, some 47 years ago, where together they watched the great Secretariat win the Kentucky Derby, might be an understatement, but witnessing an equine star for the ages, was all the impetus this



## HORSE RACING PERSONALITY

'kid from Indiana' needed and another future Hall of Famer's career was born.

Recently we had the opportunity to talk with Mark about life as a Hall of Fame trainer now and whether there is any chance that we will see him slowing down any time soon.

**PONIES 24-7:** Mark welcome to PONIES 24-7, you were born in Indiana not really considered a 'hot bed' of horse racing back then, correct?

**MARK CASSE:** There actually wasn't any horse racing at all in Indiana then. My father was trying to push for the state to allow for horse racing and when he saw that there really wasn't any chance of it happening in Indiana, that was one of the reasons why we moved to Florida when I was five. My father was very frustrated with Indiana and he didn't believe that they would have racing in the not to distant future and he was right. Horse racing was in the blood though as I was born in Greenwood, Indiana which is a suburb of Indianapolis, but it was only a couple of hours from Louisville, and my Dad first went to the races at Keeneland with my Grandfather when he was

around 16 or 17 and that's when he caught the bug!

**PONIES 24-7:** You decided to become a trainer like your father, where did you win your first race?

**MARK CASSE:** My first win was actually at a place called Marshall Fair. I was 17 and my father had done some research and the only place in North America that a person could get their trainers' license before the age of 18 was Massachusetts. They had a little Fair Circuit up there which my Dad would race on and that's where I actually got my first license to train at the age of 17. My first win at a major track though was at Keeneland when I was 18 and it was with a \$5,000 claimer called Joe's Coming.

**PONIES 24-7:** So, you remember your first win at a big track?

**MARK CASSE:** Oh, I remember it very well. (Laughs) Jim McKnight was the rider and what actually happened is that at Keeneland they had two Finish Line wires and for this race the finish was the second wire. The rider who was in front of us pulled up at the 16th pole and misjudged the finish. Luckily, Jim never stopped riding and caught the other horse right at the wire and we won by a nose.

**PONIES 24-7:** Jim McKnight eventually found his way to Woodbine and rode up here for quite a while, correct?

**MARK CASSE:** Yes he did, he rode for me. His parents actually lived in Canada and Jim and I were fortunate enough to win many races together when I was younger.

**PONIES 24-7:** Mark, In November of 2020 you won your 3,000th race, was it safe to say then that you finally made it to the top as a trainer?

**MARK CASSE:** It's been great, but honestly for part of the time, training wasn't really my main focus. For about eight to ten years, I was General Manager of Mockingbird Farm and we were the leading breeder for three or four years in a row in North America. I think this was in the '90's, but I'm starting to lose track of time now! LOL. We won our 3,000th which was a very big deal though, especially when some years I only started maybe 20 horses a year, as I was so involved with the farm.

**PONIES 24-7:** Over 3,000 winners is still very impressive though, are there any wins that still stand out to you?





**MARK CASSE:** When I was writing my speech for the Hall of Fame Induction this year, it actually gave me some time to reflect back and I think our greatest victory of all time would be The Queen Anne at Royal Ascot with Tepin in 2016. We have won Breeders' Cup races and some Classic Races, but The Queen Anne is probably one of the biggest victories for an American-based horse and that's very special to me. And meeting the Queen, was also a tremendous experience.

**PONIES 24-7:** Would you prepare a horse for The Queen Anne differently than you would a North American race?

**MARK CASSE:** Not really, personally I think a lot of that is overdone! It's more important to keep your horse happy and healthy, as with horses *'It is what it is'* and *'they are what they are'* and the only thing that you can do is place them in the right spot to race. I strategize and spend hours and hours going through condition books, so for me, it's all about knowing your horse, placing them properly and learning what they can take and not take. It does take a special horse to win at Royal Ascot though and with Tepin, you could send her anywhere. She was truly a great horse.

**PONIES 24-7:** Mark, 2020 was a milestone year for you as you were elected into Saratoga's National

Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame, but you actually had to wait for the official induction this year because of COVID. How important was it though for you to be bestowed with this honor?

**MARK CASSE:** It's the biggest achievement from a horse racing perspective and it's my greatest accomplishment ever. I consider it to be a *'body of work'*, where you were able to perform well over a long period of time and now you are being recognized for this achievement. I never realized, honestly, how difficult it is to get into the Hall of Fame. There doesn't have to be a trainer selected every year, but this year (2021) was different, as our 2020 group was inducted with one of the best trainers of all time, Todd Pletcher. With everything considered, for me it's an honor to be part of the Hall of Fame.

**PONIES 24-7:** And in 2016, you were elected to the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame, was this induction just as important as this year's?

**MARK CASSE:** It was and I am very proud of that award too. Like who really thought that the *'boy'* from Indiana, who started his racing career in Kentucky, would end up part of the Hall of Fame in Toronto, Canada! I owe so much to Toronto and Woodbine though, I really settled in there and I actually had been introduced to the city and the racetrack when I believe I was around 12-years-old. My father and I flew up to watch a race and I went up another time when I was around 18 or 19 and to me, Woodbine has always been first class. It's such a great place and I have been able to develop a lot of very good horses up there, so you could probably say that it's like a second home for me.

**PONIES 24-7:** You alluded to having an affinity for Woodbine, but is there one track out there that you would consider special and maybe your favorite one to race at?

**MARK CASSE:** Woodbine is definitely home and we race more horses there than we do at any other track and we have for the last 20 years. I have three others that I would consider favorite racetracks though,



Saratoga is one, as I love the tradition and I have been going there since I was a little boy. I have such great memories of Saratoga, many of them with my father and he passed away five years ago. Saratoga is where I learnt the *'game'* and how to appreciate it so much, which is very important to me. Churchill Downs would also be considered a favorite for me, as it would be extremely difficult to be part of this business and not love that racetrack! When you look up and see those Twin Spires, you get chills and of course it's the home of the Kentucky Derby and the one race that you really want to win and I hope I can before I retire. The Derby has continued to allude me so far and I want to win it so very badly! My third track would have to be Del Mar, as it's such a beautiful place. We sent some horses out there this year and I had the pleasure of spending a summer at Del Mar a few years back and I honestly think that it's the racetrack *'where trainers go to die and go to heaven'*. It's such a

pretty place and probably a little more laid back than Saratoga and of course it too has its own tradition- *'Where The Surf Meets The Turf!'*

**PONIES 24-7:** Speaking of Saratoga Mark, you must have been pretty proud when your son Norman, who has followed you into the trainer's ranks, won the Opening Day stakes race this year?

**MARK CASSE:** It actually brought tears to my eyes Larry, as again all I could think about was how proud my father would be. He just loved Saratoga and he would never miss a summer there and I still miss him. I felt that there couldn't be a better way of honoring my Dad, but by naming my first son after him and that's why I did it. For Norman to win the Opening Day stakes at Saratoga for Marylou Whitney, I don't think that you can write a better script.

**PONIES 24-7:** You mentioned

earlier about your love for Woodbine, how many horses do you have there currently and how difficult was it for you to have them ready for the delayed opening of the season because of the pandemic lockdown?

**MARK CASSE:** We have around 60 horses at Woodbine, as for the lockdown, I would have to say that it was costly! We have people that have worked for us for years and it would have been probably more economical to have left the horses in Florida, but we wanted to get everybody working up there. I never dreamed that it would take so long for the meet to begin, sure it was difficult for us, but nowhere near as difficult as it was for the other Canadian horse people. I really, really felt so bad for them! Obviously too, when you don't race, you don't make any money, it's been difficult, but Woodbine has done a great job since we opened, especially with all of the adversities that have been thrown at them. They continue to





produce a very good product on the racetrack and I have noticed a very different attitude towards Woodbine south of the border, it's so much more positive. When I travel around North America it's amazing how many people come up to me and want to shake my hand and how many of them follow Woodbine. This is a result of over the years, Woodbine supplying a very good racing product that the world is watching and Ontario and Woodbine should be very proud of that.

**PONIES 24-7:** And part of that is because of field size, correct?

**MARK CASSE:** Field size is everything! Woodbine struggled a few years back and if you ever thought that there would be a field size issue, it would be this year. A few big outfits were planning on shipping in to Woodbine to race and because of the lockdown, they didn't ship in. I was impressed

though on how the Race Office made some adjustments and since Woodbine opened, you are seeing large fields and we are running for some very good purse money.

**PONIES 24-7:** Mark, with so many horses racing across North America, how do you keep 'tabs' on all of them?

**MARK CASSE:** I have a system

that's been in place for several years now, it works well and technology has made it so much easier then say 20 years ago. We have a lot of people that have been with us for many, many years, so this allows us to work with a good communication model and I believe we have 10 teammates that have worked for me for 25 years or more. I probably watch 25 to 30 videos a day of horses working or that may have an issue. It's totally changed now Larry, as we buy horses online and through videos now, in fact we purchased some from Europe and all through watching videos. Also, I would say that almost 90% of our horses start at our training center in Ocala, Florida and I'm on-site more now than before watching them train. If we have an issue with a horse at the track, we can ship back to Ocala and work the problem out as our training center includes a wonderful rehab center where they can swim, or use the cold water spa. You could probably say that we have our own 'training camp'. It's my job then to decide where to race the horses and we try to make it convenient for our owners. If I have an owner in Kentucky and he wants to see his horse race, then we try to accommodate him and race nearby. Likewise, we race our Florida bred horses here in Florida and our Canadian bred horses will all usually



start in Canada, but over the years we have been fortunate to have quite a few that were able to perform well across North America.

**PONIES 24-7:** When you need a break from training, what do you do?

**MARK CASSE:** Well I like to fish and actually have two ponds in front of my house and when I get frustrated or tired and need a 15 minute break I walk outside and make a few casts! I also like to play chess online and I usually play about 30 games at a time. You have to make at least one move every five days or you will be disqualified, so I'm a strategizer and in most cases, I train horses in the same manner. I don't ever look at it as the next move, rather I'm trying to look four moves down the road and where is it going to lead me. I have always said that training race horses is like putting a puzzle together and that you have to keep trying the pieces and seeing where they fit. The introduction of the Tapeta surface has helped a lot too, as now we have three surfaces in horse racing-dirt, turf

and synthetic. In my opinion the minority of horses like the dirt and the majority can run somewhat over the turf and Tapeta. I do find though that on certain occasions they may not like the Tapeta surface but for the most part, they will give you a decent effort over it. However, it's not uncommon to run a horse over the dirt and it will get beat 30 lengths and you don't see that happen on the Tapeta or the turf.

**PONIES 24-7:** That's interesting that you say that Mark, as so many times you will see a horse race very well over the grass, and yet not race a 'lick' over the dirt. How much of that is breeding and how much is talent do you think?

**MARK CASSE:** It's a lot to do with the breeding. Horses were not bred to run on the dirt, they were bred to race on the grass. They eat it, they grew up on it and that's what they are supposed to race on! Dirt is a long ways away from grass, but Tapeta is somewhere in the middle and it's as close to grass as you can get and that's why a lot of horses will race well

over a synthetic surface.  
**PONIES 24-7:** Finally, you are in two Hall of Fames and won over 3,000 races are you pinching yourself now saying what am I going to do for an encore? *LOL* Is there anything you haven't achieved during your career?

**MARK CASSE:** I don't think so, I'm in a 'happy place' now and sure I would love to win the Kentucky Derby and when the dust settles and if I haven't won one, then I guess it just wasn't meant to be. But, I want to slow down some, as every day is just a constant battle and the more horses you have the more chances something can go wrong. I could see myself, maybe in the next five to ten years, at some point slowing down. I still love the 'game' though and it doesn't matter if I'm watching a \$5,000 claimer, or a Grade 1 Stakes, if we have a horse in there, I'm going to be 'hooting and hollering' for him to win!





# The Racer's Edge

## A Handicapping Primer

Improving The Search For That Elusive Winner For The Casual And Recreational Bettor!  
By Larry Simpson



### PART ONE

It's been said by many that handicapping horses is a science, or perhaps, even an art. However, if you ask countless handicappers, in their opinion, the skill of actually making positive race selections, is considered to be more of a *'trade'*. And when you think about it, perhaps these top *'punters'* are on to something, as growing up we all have had it reinforced into us that before you can master a trade, excessive time needs to be spent absorbing as much information as possible to acquire a broad knowledge of the business itself. Sure, when it comes to handicapping horses, reading and studying as much as possible at the beginning does help, but probably of more importance, is that there is a third part to understanding the handicapping process more, and that is *'practice'*, like a proficient tradesperson who diligently serves his or her apprenticeship first.

Or, comparing it to the racetrack environment, a top jockey whose successful career didn't just happen, instead a significant amount of time and effort was put in as an apprentice or *'bug'* rider and this certainly helped them ready for the job ahead. Personally, I was brought up in a family that liked horse racing and was probably more adapt at a young age at reading a Daily Racing Form than a Mathematic's text book, *LOL* but you could say that growing up I was mentored along the way by many race goers and well respected handicappers.

Recently, horse racing received some extra attention during the pandemic, as it was one of the first live professional sports to start up again and fortunately what this did was introduce new people to the sport. Fans were craving action and horse racing certainly fit the bill. Unlike most other trades though, betting horses has no apprenticeship program for people to apprentice under a master craftsman and to *'learn*

*the ropes'* under a so called wagering expert. With this being said though, *'a tip of the old chapeau'* should go out to the horse racing community, as many tracks have realized the need to mentor new fans on how to bet through Apps, pre-race analysts and websites. Horse race betting can be confusing and sometimes for new fans, it can be more of a *'deer in the headlights'* situation, where the new handicapper becomes subjected to a plethora of racing terms, angles and simply, too much information overload. With this issue of *PONIES 24-7*, we feature Part One of a two part series and provide a few tips that hopefully makes the trip to the races both enjoyable and maybe even profitable for the new handicapper.

First, it's very important to stress the importance of not being a day-dreamer and looking at handicapping horses as a way of making *'life altering'* money through a small wagering bankroll. Day-dreamers, can also be prone to making several wagering blunders along the way, more so by betting too many long priced horses, which in some cases, will lead to a lack of self-control. Instead, they should take heed of the following horse racing facts and angles that may help to stretch their bankroll further, when wagering on horses.

### Number 1- Never underestimate the value of trainer's statistics

These trainers all have their own specialties you could say when getting a horse ready to race and many of these are listed as part of the Daily Racing Form Past Performances. They could include winning with horses that are third start of the layoff, or perhaps it may be an equipment change of Blinkers On or Blinkers Off. Or maybe the Trainer excels with horses when they are changing distances, either Route to Sprint or vice versa. One should look at Trainer's Stats as a form of broadcasting the fact that they are doing their best to make sure that their horse should race well today. My last point on Trainers is that they all have their own way of training and in some cases, horses may not respond well to these methods. In some cases, a trainer change may be just *'what the doctor ordered'*, so keep an eye out when you see a horse in a new barn, either by private purchase or a claim.

### Number 2- The Condition of the Horse

It has been proven that a horse that is in *'sharp'* condition, is the biggest contributing factor to a

winning effort. A horse that won its last race is obviously in good condition, or at least he was that particular day and if they have shown some good workouts since that last race, this is a good indicator that the good form is still there. No workouts, perhaps a red flag?

### Number 3- Racing Statistics

Growing up, as I mentioned earlier, I had the luxury of working with some very good handicappers, both on the Thoroughbred and Standardbred side and all shared some interesting *'tidbits'* of information with me and especially some horse racing statistics. One in particular was that just North of 50% of the races run (at that time it was during the past 20 years, but I'm quite sure that stat still holds true today) were won by horses that finished either first, second or third in one of their last two starts. Horses that finished fourth, beaten no more than 1-1/2 lengths, also helped to increase this percentage. This is some important information and can certainly be of a big assist to the casual or recreational bettor.

### Number 4- Money Management

It has been said that *'there is no sure thing in horse racing'* and many people make the mistake of going overboard on one horse that they think can't lose. Beginners especially should establish a bankroll and bet the same amount for each selection-if you are a \$2 bettor, then be consistent and bet your \$2 and don't waiver. Too many times you will see people bet their \$2 on several races and then come to a race where they like a horse and will bet \$10 on it. You guessed it, the \$2 bets seem to win more frequently, while the \$10 one doesn't and of course, this will hurt your overall betting bankroll.

### Number 3- Combine Number's 1,2,3 and 4

Look at Trainer's Stats, search for sharp horses, check for horses that ran in the money or 4th beaten less than 1-1/2 lengths and manage your bankroll. Oh, and don't look at betting horses as a quick path to financial freedom. Unfortunately, as we indicated earlier, there is no apprenticeship program when it comes to learning how to bet horses, but hopefully this article will help and give race fans of all betting skills, a better horse racing *'experience'*.

*Stay tuned for Part Two next issue!*



# World's Greatest Harness Racing Returns Sept. 3

Oct 29: Breeders Crown 2YO Finals  
Oct 30: Breeders Crown 3YO & Open Finals  
Nov 13: Kindergarten Finals  
Nov 20: TVG Finals & Fall Final 4

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