

PONIES 24-7

VOLUME 10/ISSUE 2/2024
\$2.95 CDN

Michael Copeland

Chatting With The
New Woodbine CEO

Rachel Ryan

Meet The Meadowlands
Director Of Marketing And
Events Operations

Ellen Downey

Tuff Therapeutic Riding
Sharing A Special Bond
With Horses

The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer-
'A Lesson In Patience'



PONIES 24-7

HORSE RACING LIFESTYLE EXPERIENCE



2024 LIVE HARNESS RACING

Opening Day MAY 4 POST TIME 5:00PM

TIOGA DOWNS 2024 LIVE RACING CALENDAR LIVE DATES 59

1:00PM

5:00PM

6:15PM

PENDING REGULATORY APPROVAL

MAY 12							JUNE 14							JULY 12						
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- JUNE 2: 3 Year Old Filly Pace
- JUNE 7: 3 Year Old Filly Trot
- JULY 14: 2 Year Old Filly Trot
- JULY 21: 2 Year Old Filly Pace
- AUGUST 4: 2 Year Old Colt Trot
- AUGUST 11: 3 Year Old Colt Trot
- AUGUST 18: 3 Year Old Colt Pace
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AT THE POST



WELCOME BACK!

Welcome back to PONIES 24-7 and another great issue for the 2024 racing season.

It has been said that as you get older, time passes by more quickly and this statement has never been truer nowadays, especially and to put it more eloquently in horse racing terms, we are now firmly entrenched in the back half of the 2024 racing season. But what a season it has been so far! It only seems like it was yesterday, that we were in the midst of following the stakes action leading up to the Kentucky Derby and then watching the Derby itself. Canadian racing fans were waiting patiently for their tracks to open up one by one and eventually they too had the opportunity to witness some great performances, including that by a horse by the name of Nijinsky winning the \$1 Million North America Cup at Woodbine Mohawk Park. Just recently at Woodbine, the Plate Trial and Woodbine Oaks, won by My Boy Prince and Kin's Concerto respectively, helped to validate the fact that the so called final half of the horse racing season looks very bright and promises not to disappoint. How could it, with races like the King's Plate and Mohawk Million still 'on tap' and to be raced on Canadian soil and of course the two days of Breeders Cup action in early November in the U.S?

Speaking of Woodbine, well newly named CEO Michael Copeland is the subject of our Cover Story interview in this issue, as he talks about some of the major initiatives happening at Woodbine and Woodbine Mohawk Park throughout the 2024 season. Naturally, Michael will also speak about the upcoming King's Plate and touches on the topic of Sports Betting and the process in blending it together with horse racing.

In addition, this issue of PONIES 24-7, also features an interview with the Meadowlands' Rachel Ryan, who holds the title of Director of

Marketing and Events Operations at the East Rutherford, New Jersey Standardbred track. On Saturday, August 3rd, the Meadowlands will once again play host to the famed Hambletonian Stakes, a classic trotting event that is celebrating its 99th Anniversary of the race this year.

Also, in this edition, you will meet Ellen Downey, the Chief Executive Officer, Director, and the creator of Tuff Therapeutic Riding. Tuff provides therapeutic riding opportunities for at-risk-youth In Ontario, empowers them to address their mental health and with the guidance and support of the volunteer team and horses, change their lives. Certainly a great read, that you are bound to embrace.

Enjoy this issue of PONIES 24-7 and if you want more 'PONIES', then once again, 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 1059therregion.com. Now in its fifth season, the show continues to offer 60 minutes of action-packed interviews, handicapping selections and informative content for racing fans everywhere and it all starts at 8:00 am ET. You will be glad you did!

Until next time,

Larry Simpson
theponies247experience@gmail.com



ABOUT THE COVER

Woodbine CEO Michael Copeland, framed by the track's Starting Gate. Photo by Michael Burns.

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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AUGUST 2024

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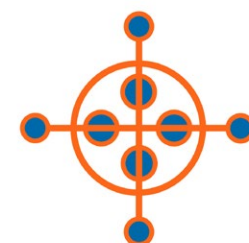


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PLAY IT AGAIN...

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MICHAEL COPELAND

CEO of Woodbine Entertainment Group

Photos by Michael Burns

Note: 'Ponies 24-7', THE RADIO MAGAZINE, currently is the only terrestrial radio show about horse racing in Canada and one of only a handful of shows in the U.S. It airs Saturday mornings for one full hour at 8:00 a.m. Eastern on 105.9 FM, The Region, and live streamed at 1059theregion.com.

Missed a show, past shows are available as a podcast on 1059theregion.com. As a regular magazine feature, we are now offering transcripts of pertinent guest interviews, previously heard on 'Ponies 24-7', THE RADIO MAGAZINE.

PONIES 24-7: We are thrilled to have with us today, Woodbine CEO Michael Copeland, who is here to talk about business and pleasure, when it comes to horse racing, hello Michael and welcome back to the show. The 2024 Woodbine Thoroughbred meeting is in full gear now, how would you describe the season so far?

MICHAEL COPELAND: It's been terrific and great to be back on the radio show again. The opening days of the racing season are an exciting time



and always special when the horses come back and you see all of the activity on the grounds and in the backstretch. There's been some great crowds and lots of excitement and everybody is looking forward to this 2024 race meet. There certainly is a lot of energy and excitement with everything that is happening at Woodbine and still to come.

PONIES 24-7: And you also recently had the opening of the Woodbine Gardens, correct?

MICHAEL COPELAND: We did, prior to Opening Day, we announced the re-opening of the Woodbine Community Garden which was something that was a big part of the Woodbine community prior to COVID and then because of COVID, like a lot of things, we had to close the garden down. We saw that there was so much interest from our staff to bring it back and it's such an amazing initiative, as it not only brings our people together, but also the community volunteers and it has produced over 10,000 pounds of fresh food for the local community. There is a real tangible output and it's nice to bring the garden back. We had Premier Ford and Toronto Mayor Chow both on site to help relaunch it and are

really looking forward to bringing back the initiatives that we had in the past, which were so successful and also important, as well as launching some new ones.

PONIES 24-7: Well, let's talk about some of the initiatives that Woodbine is currently working on to improve what is called the 'Racing Experience'.

MICHAEL COPELAND: Our racing as you know is 'best in class' at both Woodbine and Woodbine Mohawk Park and it is always about not resting on our laurels by taking the things we are doing well and enhancing and fine tuning them and finding ways to build around them. At Woodbine this year, we are creating a new 'Experience' down on the Apron and are trying to create some spaces where people can take in the races with comfortable seating and the best views in sports. There's nothing like trackside views, where you see the horses coming down the stretch, so we are building out the Apron space which will be ready for King's Plate in August. We have also created a new space called 'The Turf Lounge' and it's an exciting and more modern room to host parties and groups. We actually opened the

area in time to host a great and successful party for the Kentucky Derby this year and *'The Turf Lounge'* has become a great place to watch the racing in a fun way. We have also made improvements to our Woodbine Club, which is our more traditional dining experience, by making some fresh touches to the existing room and are also working on some other ideas on how to utilize this space more. And of course we are really looking forward to more success with the Stella Artois Terrace this racing season, as it continues to be the best place to be in the Summer with the food, the atmosphere and the view of the racetrack. At Woodbine, we are really trying to create new and exciting spaces to take in the races while at the same time, continuing to cater to our core fans and making sure that they have an area that fits everything that they are looking for. Of course we are also attempting to reach out to a new fan base, as we always have to be conscience of bringing in new fans to the sport.

PONIES 24-7: Well speaking about new fan bases, last year Woodbine, you could say, partnered with bet365 for Sports Betting, where people can now go on to the bet365 Sports App and bet Woodbine racing and several other racetracks. How has this relationship worked out so far and are you seeing that young generation, possibly migrating over to horse racing now?

MICHAEL COPELAND: It has been a great relationship so far for us and it's really been terrific in building out racing onto the bet365 platform. I would say that the build-out has been gradual, as one of the challenges we have had is really trying to integrate racing alongside all of the other sports. There's still some regulatory issues that we are trying to overcome, to allow us to market and promote horse racing side by side with other sports that you would see in many of the mainstream ads. These ads are showing hockey, baseball, basketball, or football and they are not showing a horse race alongside those other sports. Yes, there are some regulatory issues that are preventing them from doing that, but we think that we need to get past this, as it makes sense for customers in Ontario who want access to all sports. Currently, they can bet on horse racing, but we really want to make sure that they know that racing does exist and can be a choice like other sports. I think once we are able to achieve this, it is really going to gain exposure for racing, within the sports ecosystem. Not having this exposure has held back the level of growth, but we are still optimistic and confident that Sports Betting is going to play a large part in our future. It is just taking a bit more time until it gets to those levels that we had hoped to be at by now.



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PONIES 24-7: When do you think we will see the other Sports Betting companies getting on board Michael?

MICHAEL COPELAND: We are hopeful by the end of this calendar year that we will see other Sports Betting providers offering horse racing and I might add that there is a lot of interest. We are currently having great conversations presently with several potential partners, but the issue remains that it is actually more challenging from the technology perspective than what you think. Certainly, what I would say and I'm not a deep technology expert, is that there is a lot of work that goes into integrating the systems that we have in place and we are working through these challenges. Once we are able to do this, then I believe that it will take off, as the initial start up phase with anything is about trying to find relationships that work and we have a really good one in place with bet365 and are well down the road in having the solutions that are going to make sense for the rest of the industry. We believe that by the end of this year, we should have a couple of other partners on board and interest will continue to build from there. We are in this Larry for the long game and this is going to be the future of how the younger demographic engages with horse racing. The important thing for Woodbine though is to maximize the opportunity and that we make the initiative sustainable and strong. Woodbine will be patient and do it the right way and are hopeful that we will see real growth towards the end of this year and into 2025.

PONIES 24-7: And Michael, just getting the word out about how incredible horse racing really is and what a sport it is, brings me to the King's Plate, which is the cornerstone of the Woodbine race meet this year, what are the plans and how are they looking for the King's Plate?

MICHAEL COPELAND: Well, the King's Plate as always is the 'gold star' on the Woodbine calendar for sure, along with the Pepsi North America Cup and the Mohawk Million at Woodbine Mohawk Park. The King's Plate though is very special to Woodbine and we think that the race should be a signature event on the Toronto Sports Calendar. The Plate already means a lot to many people and we believe that we could expand on this. Our plan is to build it up in terms of the number of people that are on site for King's Plate and bring in several thousand more people than what we have seen in years past. We are going to work on new experiences for the fans, new spaces in the Grandstand and on the Apron and also on the exterior as we have the ability to take advantage of spaces that have been chipped out of the casino and the hotel adjacent to the track. We have a lot more to work with and I think that it is just having the ambition to really realize how large of a stature this event can be. Woodbine has an amazing team in place, that has plenty of energy, ambition and belief and together we are going to make Woodbine the greatest place to be this Summer. More to come as we build-out those plans, but it will be pretty impressive when it all comes together!

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PONIES 24-7: Let's talk a little about Woodbine Mohawk Park now and I am going to assume that it will be the same, promoting the Guest and horse racing experience, but just a different breed of horse, correct?

MICHAEL COPELAND: Yes, exactly, but it is a different experience. Woodbine Mohawk Park is such an amazing place to be, as it has a real connection to the community, which you feel when you are watching the races there. I think it is all about just doubling down on that, as we have great events and great harness racing, plus a state of the art lighting system that we have installed there. The racing itself, when you think about a nice Summer evening at the track in Ontario, Woodbine Mohawk Park is one of the first places that comes to mind. It's already a hidden gem and I believe that it is all about taking the good things that our team does there and continuing to respect what the Track stands for and what it means to the community and in its purest form what it represents to the horse racing industry in Ontario. All of the farms and the people who are employed in the horse racing industry, you kind of feel their presence at Woodbine Mohawk Park, so you continue to build on the experience by offering great food and combine that with great harness racing and just continue to keep up the good work that is being done there.

PONIES 24-7: Michael Copeland, you are Woodbine Entertainment's new CEO, how do you like your job so far?

MICHAEL COPELAND: I love my job and I am incredibly lucky as I'm able to work with a great team. We have some really good, smart hardworking

people, who really believe in our purpose to continue to support and improve the Ontario horse racing industry. The fact that we are all together working on some amazing initiatives is a tremendous environment to be part of. Just look at the opportunity that we have here, as Woodbine means so much and has a long storied history and continues to remain very important to the City of Toronto and the surrounding area. It is essential that we continue to respect this and grow the amazing initiatives that we have, to greater heights. There is a tremendous opportunity for Woodbine with the build-out, where we can build tens of thousands of houses and making a major contribution to the City and then partnering with the Casino and what they are bringing in terms of a whole new entertainment experience, is also very exciting. As well, having mass transit eventually on the site, will give us another opportunity to unlock the property and attract thousands of more people. To be able to have the opportunity to work with a really ambitious team at Woodbine, that believes in who we are and where we can go, is special and I'm very grateful and will not let people down, who are counting on us to realize everything that we want to realize!

PONIES 24-7: Well Michael, you have sold us and we are all on board and thanks for doing this and here's to a continued successful racing season at both Woodbine and Woodbine Mohawk Park going forward.

MICHAEL COPELAND: Thanks for having me and we will talk again soon.



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RACHEL RYAN

The Meadowlands Director of Marketing and Events Operations Has A Lifelong Passion For Horses That Runs Deep

| By Larry Simpson

You could say that Rachel Ryan, Director of Marketing and Events Operations, Meadowlands Racing and Entertainment, has been consumed by horses pretty much her entire life. What began with her mother who started Rachel in horseback riding when she was all of two-years-old, fast forward to now, which sees Rachel and her staff help mould the Meadowlands, into one of the top North American Harness tracks and home to the famed Hambletonian and the Meadowlands Pace, for three-year-old trotters and pacers respectively.

Recently, PONIES 24-7 had the opportunity to speak with Rachel about her life around horses and her role at the New Jersey Standardbred Racetrack.

PONIES 24-7: Rachel, thanks for doing this and I want to talk first about this early passion that you apparently had for horses.

RACHEL RYAN: Well, when I was

two-years-old my mother enrolled me in horseback riding lessons and I continued to ride horses all through high school and did quite a bit of show jumping. When I was growing up, my family would go to both the Meadowlands and Monmouth Park, typically for Thoroughbred racing, but occasionally we would visit the Meadowlands for their Winter Harness meet as well. I always loved horses and when I went to school at Seton Hall, I was majoring in Sports Management and I actually wrote my final marketing paper on 'Marketing Horse Racing'. In my Senior year I had a part-time job working for the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority in the Marketing and Media Department for the racetrack and I have been at the Meadowlands ever since, actually for twenty years now.

PONIES 24-7: I guess it is safe to say Rachel, that in those twenty years you have seen a lot of changes in the horse racing

business, what were some of the biggest ones do you think?

RACHEL RYAN: Probably on the attendance side, as when I first started here and we were conducting Handicapping Contests, we would sometimes see two to three hundred people signing up for them, in fact I actually remember one time we had over 400 people sign up for one contest. That number is not as large today and people in our Player's Club and VIP Club, well that number has certainly diminished as well. Actually, just seeing the number of people that come out on a weekend basis, I believe is one of the major changes at the Meadowlands now and probably horse racing in general. Also, it's very different today how the horse racing industry disseminates media information, as back then, we did have a website that I believe could be considered 'cutting edge' for the time, as it provided a lot of detailed information, but I remember that



we were still faxing and sending videos out by courier to media outlets to try to drum up more publicity for races. I think that you can say Larry that the way we promote horse racing today has changed very dramatically!

PONIES 24-7: Rachel, do you think that one of the reasons why the audience for horse racing has dwindled is because there is too much competition for the entertainment dollar, perhaps Sports Betting, or is it a combination of things?

RACHEL RYAN: I believe it's a combination of everything you just mentioned and perhaps more. People that were attending regularly back then, well their lifestyle has changed, they have families now and can't attend the races as often as they did back then. For us at the Meadowlands, we are so close to New York City and actually not even that far from Philadelphia, so there is much more competition for the entertainment dollar. Certainly too, Sports Betting is more accessible now, as New York has Online Sports Wagering and nobody needs to come across the bridge anymore. So really, we have made it where there is no need for people to come out to the track now, as you can watch all the races from home, whether its on your phone, your mobile device or your laptop-it's so easy you watch and bet from home now.

PONIES 24-7: And I guess part of the problem is that people have got older and some that were regulars have probably passed away, so the demographic you could say has changed as well, correct?

RACHEL RYAN: Certainly, our normal demographic, I would say is 55 plus now, but if we host an event day, we certainly 'skew' younger and become more family oriented because of the activities that we are providing. I believe what people say is correct, that it is easier to keep a current client than to bring in a new one! It's more cost effective and easier, but when our patrons pass away or reach the point where they can no longer gamble, it's almost impossible to replace them.

PONIES 24-7: I was actually doing some thinking the other day about this and I will 'bounce' it off of you. When I was growing up, my family and I would go to a place like Pompano Park for Winter vacation and you had to be at that time,



I believe 18 to get into the track. A couple of times I snuck in when I was probably 16 or 17, LOL and it was the same at pretty much all of the racetracks in the US. Could this be considered one of the issues now, where young people back then may have got turned off of horse racing because they couldn't get in until they were 18, which I might add, was very different up here in Canada, where you could attend the races provided you were accompanied by an adult?

RACHEL RYAN: That could have been part of the issue, when I was younger, we would go to the racetrack and people would either look the other way or not say anything if they saw you at the betting windows. You were with your parents, but actually were placing the wager, but I agree with you Larry, if you don't come to the track when you are younger, then it becomes very hard to get into the sport later in life. You may go to the racetrack once or twice, but you don't really develop a love or an interest for the sport unless someone takes you consistently when you were younger.



to take someone to a baseball game or a hockey game, so it's only natural that kids are going to be interested in something that they were exposed to at an early age and not horse racing where they couldn't get in. Maybe, the model was broken back then and nobody did anything to fix it, agree?

RACHEL RYAN: Well I also think that when there is an impression that things are going well, certainly here in the '70's and '80's, nothing can *'derail the train'*, which is certainly not the case. You need to be 'ahead of the curve' and if you are not, well that's what happened to our sport where we just thought things would continue as they were and nothing was done when the numbers and the attendance started to decline. And now, we are almost in a panic mode and what can we do to save it?

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk about the Meadowlands now and you are well into your meet, how's business?

RACHEL RYAN: It's going well, we kind of make the \$3 million betting handle our goal each night and we have hit the number on a majority of nights, which is great. Our Racing Secretary Scott Warren has done a great job, putting regular 14 race cards together with as many full fields as possible, which is the key to providing a great product night after night. People want to bet on large fields and the best drivers and Scott has done a great job in trying to maintain that level here.

PONIES 24-7: How about earlier in the year did you lose any race nights because of weather?

RACHEL RYAN: Off the top of my head, I'm going to say maybe one, so we were very lucky. What kind of hurts though is because our bettors are betting tracks all across the country, when other tracks lose days or maybe not provide full fields on some nights, it effects us as well.

PONIES 24-7: Rachel is there still some competition for entries with other Harness tracks racing?

RACHEL RYAN: Yes of course, once Pennsylvania opened and the New York tracks and their stakes action and Oakgrove in Kentucky, we were all competing for the same horses, the same drivers and it's difficult when



PONIES 24-7: As I mentioned earlier, back then you had to sneak in and I was with my parents and could probably read a Racing Program better than many of the other people at the track LOL, but I always wondered that because there wasn't that early involvement in horse racing until they were maybe 18 or 19, that perhaps a few generations of potential customers were lost, especially at the US tracks and maybe the industry is paying for it now?

RACHEL RYAN: True, but I also think that we get a lot of questions from either our social media or email where people ask whether they can bring their kids to the Meadowlands. I think that they are under the impression that at the Casino they have to be 21 plus and maybe it's the same in the racetrack portion, which is not the case as they are welcome and hopefully it's on an event day when kids are not sitting here bored. But I agree, if you don't know that you can go, or bring kids when you are younger, then I believe that it is hard to develop a love or an interest in racing.

PONIES 24-7: Agreed, it's a sport and there is no age limit

AUGUST 30

HARNESS RETURNS

POST TIME 6:20 PM



August

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MEADOWLANDS
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10/25
10/26
Breeders Crown

11/9
Kindergarten
Finals

11/30
Fall Final Four and
FanDuel Championships



you have all of these other competing tracks racing at the same time.

PONIES 24-7: And you are pretty much racing all year now, except for taking part of the month of August off, is that true?

RACHEL RYAN: Pretty much, we take three weeks off in August and then another break in October for five or six weeks for the 'boutique' Monmouth Park at Meadowlands Thoroughbred meet. But outside of those 8 or 9 weeks, we are racing pretty much year round.

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk about one of your signature events at the Meadowlands this Summer, the Hambletonian, what do you have planned?

RACHEL RYAN: Hambletonian Day which is on August 3rd this year, is an event that we actually plan with the Hambletonian Society all year round and we have a special celebrity guest that will be here that day, Carson Kressley. There will be carnival and pony rides and games, a baseball hat giveaway and it's a day that is jam packed with stakes events, a bettor's delight you could say. The race will be broadcast on FOX Sports and hopefully Big FOX and Network FOX and will be another great afternoon of harness racing. Hambletonian Day is pretty much an all day event now, as our doors open at 10 am and the first race is basically noon, so people are pretty much here at the track for 6 or 7 hours.

PONIES 24-7: How many years is this for the Hambletonian?

RACHEL RYAN: Well, this year will be the 99th edition, so next year will be number 100 and there is actually

going to be a large 100th Anniversary Celebration planned for 2025. We have been lucky enough to host the Hambletonian since 1982.

PONIES 24-7: You mentioned earlier that when you were growing up you were quite involved with horses, how much did you know about Harness Racing and was there perhaps a Standardbred or Harness Driver that you followed back then?

RACHEL RYAN: To be honest, I was more into the Thoroughbreds back then. I knew about Standardbreds and Harness Racing, but my family basically went to Thoroughbred tracks like Saratoga or Monmouth and I loved the grey horses (*laughs*). I was a big fan of Holy Bull, don't ask me why, but I heard the name, watched a couple of his races and saw some pictures, so he was probably the horse that I loved growing up.

PONIES 24-7: Did your family encourage you Rachel to remain in the horse business?

RACHEL RYAN: They knew that I wanted to be involved in sports in some way, especially as that is what I went to school for. My parents knew that I always loved horses growing up, I collected Breyer horses and I tried to ride whenever I could. I think that my parents were just happy that I was able to get a job that involved both horses and Sports.

PONIES 24-7: And how many years have you been at the Meadowlands?

RACHEL RYAN: Twenty, I started out part-time in the Media, Publicity, Marketing Department and basically went from part-time Publicity to full time Marketing Manager and now Director of Offsite Events and Entertainment.

Rocket Ship

RACING

PONIES 24-7: Rachel, if you had the power to make changes, what would you like to change about Harness Racing?

RACHEL RYAN: There's so many things I don't know if I could just pick just one but I really think that we need to work collectively as an industry to get more people involved with the sport on the ownership side. I know that there have been some smaller fractional ownership groups which have helped, but I think that people need to take larger stakes in racing. On the wagering side, we need to concentrate on establishing full fields and a larger horse population that will help to sustain racing. We also need to look at wagering takeouts, which are a huge issue at most tracks and I think we need to look at lowering takeouts and make betting horses more appealing to more people. Also, I believe that we work at giving people who are coming to the racetrack with a set bankroll, a reason to want to wager and make them feel that they do have a good chance of winning that larger jackpot.

PONIES 24-7: Rachel, you mentioned getting more people involved in racing, especially on the betting side, do you think that horse racing in general (both Thoroughbred and Standardbred), have made horse racing too confusing for people which deters them from getting involved more?

RACHEL RYAN: I certainly feel that with the way the younger person's brain works now, I don't believe that they are interested in putting in the time to learn how to read the program and decipher all of the Past Performance data. Instead, they want a quick and easy way to be able to read the program and select a horse and if someone knew a way to do that, well I know a ton of people that have tried, but I really don't know if it is possible. I do think though that how racing is being presented now in most cases, we do try to make it easier, with visual cues, self-serve terminals, just focusing on key points in the racing program, etc. But there are people that still want the full information in the program, so we try to provide everything for everybody and at times, it certainly can be a difficult task. But I do agree that for the younger generation there's just too much information and they aren't going to 'dive down' as it is just too challenging. They want an easier way to look at a program, select a horse and actually know what's going on. I know when we have festivals here at the track I talk to people and they say 'What should I bet on?' and they are only looking at Win, Place and Show and when you are explaining a Pick 4 or a Trifecta, it does sound good to them in their heads because that's how they can win more money, but to look at all that data in possibly four races is



just too much to comprehend. It's not like if you are betting a football parlay where you may have to pick the winner in eight games, but all you have to do is concentrate on who is going to win the game. Horse race betting just has so many factors which you have to take into consideration if you want to be successful and it's very challenging.

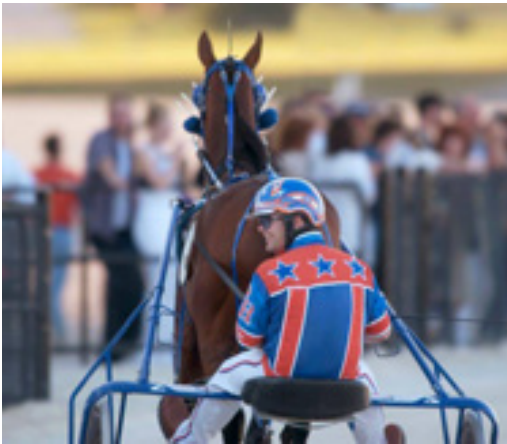
PONIES 24-7: Are you seeing more horse race bettors migrating to Sports Betting and if so what can you do to try and change this?

RACHEL RYAN: We are and that's another 'deep dive' question. It's an entirely different world, the 'hold' of the Sportbook world is entirely different than that of a racetrack. We rely more on takeout, where the Sportsbook can give more back to their players and do more offers for their customers. Again it comes down to the fact that you see sports on television every day, so now they are betting on Cornhole and Tennis which is one of the top five sports being bet. There's a lot of action coming at the player all of the time, which certainly appeals to many people. At the Meadowlands, we have 20 to 30 minutes between races and people's attention spans are much shorter now, so I really don't know. We have tried giving out betting vouchers to people coming out of the Sportsbook and different crossover promotions and even had prop bets related to the Hambletonian. It remains a work in progress and we are still trying to get people to come over to the racing side and we will keep at it going forward.



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HORSE RACING GIVING BACK

TUFF THERAPEUTIC RIDING

“Horses understand what kids need”

| By Chris Lomon

Ellen Downey is always grateful, yet never surprised when she sees the profound difference a horse can make in someone’s life.

For nearly 25 years, Downey, the chief executive officer, director, and creator of Tuff Therapeutic Riding, has witnessed, first-hand, the lasting impact horses have on those who utilize the program’s complement of services.

Tuff provides therapeutic riding for at-risk youth in Ontario, empowers them to address their mental health, and with the guidance and support of the volunteer team and horses, change their lives.

“I love to see the transformation from the exterior to the interior,” said Downey. “What I mean by that is that these kids have a lot of things that protect them. When we get to see the vulnerability and genuineness of the kid connecting with that horse, it is magic. It makes me happy every time.”

Tuff Therapeutic Riding Foundation serves youth who are involved with Child Welfare Services, youth struggling with addictions, and 2SLGBTQI+ youth.

Those who come to the non-profit charity’s farm, the aptly named Jewel View, are afforded the chance to learn basic horsemanship and riding skills.

There are 12 dedicated program horses, including five Royal Canadian Mounted Police geldings, who call Jewel View home.

Located just outside of Alliston, about one hour north of Toronto, Jewel View, situated on 100 acres of rolling hills, is a modern equestrian facility showcasing multiple turnout options, and large box stalls.

The farm, which also has an indoor and outdoor riding area, affords the youth who come to Jewel View an unconventional environment and approach to addressing their mental health needs.

“I have been a social worker for at-risk youth for 30-plus years and I knew that teenagers don’t like conventional forms of therapy,” said Downey. “One thing I have never taken for granted is how magical the horses are in giving the kids what they need and understanding what they need. It’s a powerful thing.

“The kids feel the connection and the bond immediately – it never seems to take long. Horses are very unconditional animals and very emotional. Our teenagers who come here are very emotional too. The more emotional a teenager becomes, the more they will feel that dysfunction in their lives and react to it. Horses understand what kids need.”

Downey herself would know.

Her association with horses traces back to her early school days, a bond that would ultimately lead to the creation of Tuff.



“I’m a lifelong rider. I have been riding since I was five. I started all of this because my experience with horses was very special, and I wanted to share that.”

Initially started in 2001, Tuff was run in partnership with Youthdale Treatment Centres. In 2020, Tuff Therapeutic Riding Foundation was established as a registered charity using the same program model, but under a new name.

The program was designed using a 10-week model specifically designed for youth at risk. Tuff assists youth who are struggling with mental health issues, and addictions, as well as the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and victims of sex trafficking.

Youth are referred from Child Welfare, and mental health organizations within Southern Ontario and the Toronto area, including Pine River Institute & Covenant House, and Dufferin Child and Family Services.

“I have a structured curriculum that builds on basic horsemanship – they learn to ride and to take care of the horse,” noted Downey. “At the same time, it builds on addressing their mental health.”

Each week is crafted to provide new optimism for everyone enrolled in the program.

“What ends up happening is that the kids end up regulating themselves because they are on top of a powerful horse. They have to have some impulse control because they are taking care of this beautiful horse.





“They have to solve a lot of problems when they are on a horse and they have to do it in a very structured, calm, relaxed way – that is something most teenagers struggle with.”

Downey recalled a recent conversation with a youth during a session she created named ‘Make a Plan.’

“One kid turned to me and said, ‘I can’t make a plan to save my life. How am I going to make a plan for this horse?’ I told him he just had to do it. He realized if he could make a plan for the horse that he could make one for himself. That is a result of the concreteness and emotional empathy that a horse conveys.”

As noted on the Tuff website, the program’s goal “is to create an experience where each participant feels successful, empowered, and connected to their horse.”

The youth that Downey watches complete the program are not the same ones she met at the start.

“One thing I hear is that they say they feel much calmer. For many of these kids, their anxiety is buzzing all the time, and they can’t find that space to feel calm. The reduction of anxiety and change of headspace is almost immediate.

“A lot of times we hear that the horse gave them a voice. They felt as though they didn’t have a voice before, so that is very significant. That typically happens after a few weeks.”

At the end of each week, Downey will engage the group in discussion.



“I do a check-in and ask them for a word that describes how they feel when they come in. We do a debrief at the end of each group where we talk about what was good or bad about the day. It’s a common way to process emotions and feelings in therapy. We talk about their horses and them.

“During those moments, I reflect and ask them what their word was then and what it is now. They have the chance to speak and identify that change.”

Some of the most gratifying moments for Downey come when the youth get their first leg-up on a program horse.

They are scenes she never tires of.

“Another thing the kids all talk about is how the whole world disappears. Everything that you think about and are worrying about is gone for the time you are on that horse. That is powerful for them, to have that break and feel that connection with the horse.”

Downey remembered such a moment, one that nearly brought her to tears.

She has never forgotten the touching interaction.

“The saddest thing I have ever had said to me was from a kid who had no family. He said, ‘I now know what happy feels like.’ I almost cried.”

On another occasion, Downey stood back and listened to a conversation, a one-sided chat that set the foundation for a young participant to open up about their struggles.

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“The summer program we do that Woodbine Cares has funded is specifically for the 2SLGBTQI+ group,” said Downey. “During the year, these people have a clinical support group, but in the summer they don’t, so we pick up that when they come here.”

“One kid needed to talk, and it was as if the horse needed to hear it. The kid started talking about video games – how to play them, how they were involved and all the levels they reached – and after a few weeks, this kid started talking to the horse about how he felt. It was amazing to watch that shift.” Downey will undoubtedly see many more of those shifts through the programs offered during the summer and throughout the year.

Downey’s hope, as always, is for those who participate in the Tuff Program to depart Jewel View in a better place.

Her goal is that they do.

“When they leave and have big smiles on their faces – they don’t have that look when they first come in – I just love it. That means more than I could ever say.”

One of the Tuff programs is funded by Woodbine Cares.

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POST TIMES 12:15PM 4PM 5:05PM 6:05PM

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NYSS 3-Year-Old Colt Pace
JUNE 21: NYSS 3-Year-Old Filly Pace
JULY 4: \$600,000 Zweig Memorial 3-Year-Old Trot
NYSS 2-Year-Old Colt Trot
JULY 26: NYSS 2-Year-Old Filly Trot
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The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer

By Larry Simpson

A LESSON IN PATIENCE

A Realistic Approach to Investing
For Profit at the Racetrack

(Note: This article originally was published in a North American horse racing publication in the early 2000's, but the content continues to withstand the test of time, the article has been updated in certain areas to reflect current horse racing handicapping conditions.)



Much has been written over the years by famous and not so famous horseplayers who make a serious living playing the horses, about the importance of money management. I like to refer to it as patient handicapping—simply put looking for that near perfect situation whereby you handicap a race better than others. However, sometimes the almost perfect situation does take some waiting, hence the reference to a lesson in patience.

One of the most difficult things for the recreational horseplayer to do though, is to pass a race, after all, it is participating as a bettor, that gives us that ultimate high, especially if a trip to the track is perhaps only a once or twice a week affair. Passing a race does take some strength, however, the realization that you are exchanging a one or two-minute high for a healthier bank account is well worth it. Patience is a virtue and he who practices a patient approach to playing the horses, shall reap the rewards at the end of the racing

season, which I might add is the bottom line for any horseplayer of any level.

HOW DO WE FIND THAT PERFECT BETTING RACE?

Actually, with the introduction of simulcast wagering and combination cards now with Thoroughbreds from one track and Standardbreds from another, the importance of practicing patient handicapping has reached epic proportions. Nobody in their right mind can successfully handicap a plethora of racing cards, they can try, but chances are that by the end of the day, they will be so fatigued that the last race will become nothing more than a handicapping blur, or a last chance effort at getting even for the day. But the sharp investor (notice I said *investor*) should always approach their handicapping decisions as if it were a

business, meaning to pass on certain races and search for that almost perfect betting situation, and trust me, with the large menu of races being offered nowadays, there will always be plenty to choose from.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PASSED RACE

To each his own, as it always comes down to an exercise in what class of horse you have previously handicapped successfully. However, to me, the key ingredient here is doing your homework the night before. You wouldn't buy a new car before test driving it, so why would you try to handicap races without some prior studying of the Racing Form? I like to buy the Form two nights prior), (note-back then this was possible) which gives me almost two whole days of handicapping. From there, I go through the exercise of attempting to find that ideal betting situation by following these simple steps.

1 - RECENT FORM

By quickly scanning the past performances in the Daily Racing Form I can eliminate any horse who has not raced or shown a serious workout for the past 21 days. By serious workout I mean one of three furlongs or

more, with a comment of *'handily'* or better. Although it may be argued that a horse has not raced for over three weeks because there wasn't a race 'written' to meet his or her conditions, a short breezing workout, in my opinion, does not necessarily constitute a totally fit horse.

2 - JOCKEY AND TRAINER PATTERNS

Like any athletes, jockeys can be subject to *'slumps'*. Again, by quickly scanning the Past Performances in the Racing Form, I will eliminate any horse that is not being handled by a jockey that has won with at least 10 percent of his or her rides at the current meet. Sure, once in a while, jockeys with a smaller win percentage do win an occasional race, however, by eliminating them in the initial handicapping steps, you are putting the odds in your favor. Remember, we are passing races for good reasons.

As for trainer patterns, again I look at the trainer summary line provided in the Racing Form. Like their jockey counterparts, trainers too have good and bad streaks, however, good, successful trainers perennially usually average around 15 per cent



winners. These people are serious about their work and they are the ones that I want to put my money on. I should point out too, that while I am scanning the trainer's summaries, I make careful notations of horses that have been claimed in their most recent start. At every racetrack, there are trainers who, while continuing to win at a regular 15% basis, are doing so while making a living claiming horses, stepping them up a class and winning first start back. Make some mental notes of who these trainers are at the racetrack that you are playing as you will be glad you did!

3 - CLASS

It is necessary to 'hone in' on horses which have shown that they are competitive racing at today's class level, at today's distance and carrying today's weight. This competitive race may have been the horse's last, or perhaps its second last start, but the key here is that he or she has shown the ability to compete successfully at today's standards. By compete, we mean any horse that has either won or finished within three lengths racing at today's classification. Don't be afraid to go three races back in order to find a key race, especially if the horse in question was a victim of poor racing luck in either or both of their last two races, or possibly raced on a bad track surface or had a poor post position. Providing that the horse has raced, or had a quality workout in the past 21 days, he or she just might become that betting opportunity that we are searching for today.

As this ends our primary handicapping where we have separated contenders from pretenders, the balance of our homework will take place trackside or at the betting parlor the day of the race.

SUMMARY

A famous North American handicapper and racing personality and also an advocate of 'patient handicapping', once said to me that he would never wager on a horse unless he felt comfortable betting at least \$50 on it. Any smaller wager to him was a sign that his confidence did not match the ability of the horse in question. Although you do not need to have the same \$50 minimum as our famous North American friend, it is still a good practice to determine a comfortable minimum wager that will enable you to take a major stand when the time comes. In other words, if the bet isn't worth risking \$20 or whatever you arbitrarily decide, then obviously your confidence is not at the level it should be when it comes to having an opinion on a particular race.

The other rule of thumb that should help you separate pretenders from solid plays, is the 3-1 theory. In my own case, I was a protégé of one of the best handicappers in North America, who was able to carve out a full time living from not only his wagering, but also as a trailblazer for running handicapping seminars, providing regular newsletters, etc. I was privileged for several years, to travel the seminar circuit with him and during this time, many good 'nuggets' of betting advice continued to resonate with my own betting convictions, and I might add, still do today. He also was the one that actually introduced me to the 3-1 theory of betting to win and it is one good betting edict that I still practice religiously today. In other words, as it was constantly drilled in to me, if you are looking for a win bet and your horse's odds are not 3 to1 or better, then you don't have a solid, value bet, as part of the key to becoming a good handicapper is unlocking good solid value. Yes, some handicappers do feel that getting 2 to 1 on a horse is good value and yes compared to say a 3 to 5 shot it may be, but at 3 to 1 or better, your horse just may be considered an overlay, especially if they meet all of our handicapping criteria, that we have outlined in this article. Something to add to your wagering arsenal and at the end of the day, abiding by the 3-1 rule may act as the last criteria your selection has to meet before you make your wager.

The old adage 'good things come to those who wait', has never been so true when it comes to wagering on horses. You will probably find that by eliminating horses because they do not meet the above elimination criteria points will help to make you a better handicapper and in better control of your betting bankroll. Betting horses, it has been noted in the past, can be compared to a game of golf or bowling, whereby you are constantly competing against another person, or several, similar to horse racing where you are actually competing against the other horse bettors. With this in mind, it is imperative that you continue to develop an edge or a competitive advantage over your fellow bettors and what better way than by developing that often-forgotten virtue of patience!



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By July 2020, Larry's condition had not improved. Finally, his wife, who has a 25-year background in healthcare, insisted he visit a medical clinic for further investigation into his symptoms. The doctor examined him and found a lump in Larry's groin area which needed immediate follow-up. The doctor referred Larry to a hematologist/oncologist and after several diagnostic tests, it was discovered that the root cause of Larry's symptoms was low-grade B-cell lymphoma.

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