

PONIES²⁴⁻⁷

VOLUME 10/ISSUE 1/2024
\$2.95 CDN

Mike Romeo

Combining Two Family Businesses
For Over Three Decades

Monte McNaughton

Woodbine's Newest
Executive Team Member

RCMP Sergeant Scott Williamson

Riding Master Of The Musical Ride



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						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	SA	S	M	T	W	TH	F	SA	S	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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AUGUST 13							SEPTEMBER 8													
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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
- AUGUST 25: 2 Year Old Colt Pace



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AT THE POST



WELCOME BACK!

Welcome back to PONIES 24-7 and our first issue of 2024. It's hard to believe that we are only a few weeks away from the opening of the Thoroughbred racing season at Woodbine and to celebrate, this magazine includes a somewhat 'Woodbine theme' you could say, with two features to enjoy. First, we introduce you to Mike Romeo, who is the third generation of a family that has continued to combine horses and horsepower with their Terra Farms and Pine View Hyundai, respectively. Terra is coming off a stellar year at Woodbine and their two Hyundai dealerships, one in Vaughan and one in Brampton are a provider of the official vehicle of the NHL. You will meet Mike and the Romeo family in this issue of PONIES 24-7, as they look forward to another successful Thoroughbred season at Woodbine.

Speaking of Woodbine, we'll meet Monte McNaughton, Woodbine's newest Executive Team member, who last fall was named to the post of Executive Vice President, Industry Relations and People Experience. Born in horse country, Monte was first introduced to horse racing via the Standardbred side and lands at Woodbine with a resume that includes serving in public office for more than 15 years and experience that will contribute plenty as Woodbine continues to focus on growth initiatives, sustaining and growing horse racing in Ontario and

creating more jobs in the province

In addition, this edition of PONIES 24-7, also features an interview with RCMP Musical Ride Riding Master Sergeant Major Scott Williamson, who is in charge of a 'troop' that has been a regular performer at Woodbine Mohawk Park, over the past several years. Among the topics Scott discusses is the recent Divestment Program that the RCMP put into place that would allow the general public the opportunity to adopt a retired Musical Ride horse.

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 Photographer Michael Burns catches Terra Farms' Fashionably Fab in full flight during a stakes event at Woodbine last year.

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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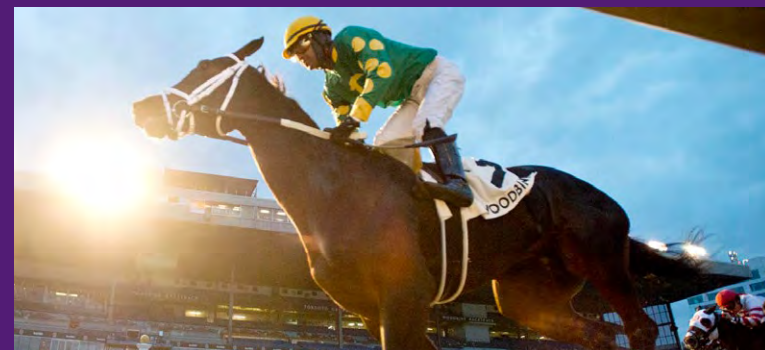
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MIKE ROMEO

A passion that drives two family businesses and has 'combined horses and horsepower' for over three decades.

| By Larry Simpson



Mike and namesake Big Red Mike

It could be said that the family that works together, plays together and in most cases, this special bonding goes a long way in forming a strong family foundation. In the case of the Romeo family, they have successfully 'combined horses and horsepower' for over three decades and checked off all of the boxes necessary to make their two Ontario-based businesses Terra Farms and Pine View Auto Group very fulfilling. What began with Dom Romeo in the early '80's and then his sons Frank and Mark, now see's the torch slowly being passed to the third generation, that being Frank's son Mike. Their Terra Farms are coming off a very successful year on the racetrack, which saw their filly Fashionably Fab record four stakes victories last season and to be considered for a Sovereign Award this April. Meanwhile, Pine View Auto Group has grown to three Ontario dealerships, located in Vaughan and Brampton and two are a provider of the official vehicle of the NHL.

Recently, we had the opportunity to sit down with Mike Romeo and talk about Terra and Pine View and also more about the family behind the businesses.

PONIES 24-7: Mike thanks for doing this, let's talk first about the long history behind the two Romeo family businesses, where did it all begin?

MIKE ROMEO: With my Grandfather, Dom, who worked originally as a Mechanic for a car dealership and eventually he moved into the sales side of the business and enjoyed a pretty successful career. He worked his way up the ladder and then bought his own dealership and as time went on, my Father, Frank and Uncle Mark, started to take over the 'reins' so to speak and then I guess it was only natural that I became involved. My two kids are still pretty young and they really don't get too involved with the car dealerships, but they like coming to the races with me, so maybe they will be the fourth generation someday. *(Laughs)*

PONIES 24-7: And for Terra Farms, again the same story, your Grandfather?

MIKE ROMEO: Correct, he liked the 'ponies' and started buying and claiming some horses in the early 1980's. Back then his trainer was Bill Marko and with many of the horses, my Grandfather's close friend Rocco Marcello was a partner. Together, the two had some early success and won some stakes races, Rising Young Star was one of their better horses that they owned together and of course when you have early success, as they say 'the bug bites hard' and you 'jump in with both feet', which they did.

PONIES 24-7: I actually met your Grandfather 'back in the day' as he was at the time very involved in the Thoroughbred industry in general, was he not on the Board of the Canadian Thoroughbred Horse Society?

MIKE ROMEO: He was active on various industry boards back in the 1990's as well. He was always a member of The Jockey Club and actually only gave up that membership maybe 10 years ago.

PONIES 24-7: Mike, was there ever any doubt that you wouldn't follow your Grandfather and Father into the family horse business?

MIKE ROMEO: There might have been in the early days because honestly Larry, I wasn't a fan of horse racing when I was younger. I didn't like going to the races much, more so because when you did go you always wanted to get your picture taken in the Winner's Circle and I didn't seem to have a lot of luck with that. I would go and our horse wouldn't win! *(Laughs)* Things changed though when I was around 12 or 13-years-old, as we had a horse that won a couple of races early in the year and I happened to be at the track

both times and that changed everything and from that point onward I was 'hooked' you could say. Over the years I began reading the Daily Racing Form more and learned how to read a Condition Book and eventually started studying pedigrees and breeding and I just fell in love with everything about horse racing after that.

PONIES 24-7: And of course one of the best horses that Terra raced was Big Red Mike who won the 2010 Queen's Plate at Woodbine, I have to ask, was he named after you?

MIKE ROMEO: He was, *(Laughs)* and that was my Grandfather's idea, as he named the horses after his Grandkids. He actually has 15 Grandchildren and every one of his horses, probably since 1995, were named after one of us. It became a fun, little thing with all the Grandkids having Winner's Circle photos hanging up in their rooms and was actually 'pretty cool' when your horse won and you could tell all the other kids in the schoolyard about it. We have continued the tradition on naming horses after Grandkids, Spouses and Great Grandchildren and my immediate family has been quite lucky as I had *Big Red Mike* and *Fashionably Fab* is named after my wife Fabiana.

PONIES 24-7: I guess the natural progression of decision making for Terra Farms slowly relegated over to your Father, correct?

MIKE ROMEO: Yes you could say slowly. My Grandfather is 94 years-old now but he is still pretty active and comes into the office here three or four times a week. He still golfs and is of sound mind and doesn't want to give anything up, which is a good thing. He was probably the one 'calling all the shots' until around 2010. It was then that the decision making process started to filter down to my Father, at least the bigger decisions and maybe when it came to things like speaking with the Trainer on a daily basis. That has slowly changed though, where it's the both of us now and my Uncle Mark. Together, we usually talk about the horses and the car business, but it is certainly more fun to discuss horse racing, as that remains our hobby and passion.

PONIES 24-7: Last May, Terra Farms was honored as the initial winner of the Owner's Spotlight Award at Woodbine, how did you feel after you found out about the honor?

MIKE ROMEO: That award certainly made us feel special. We were never expecting to win it, as we are not one of the bigger stables at Woodbine, at least as far as number of horses is concerned. However, we have



Frank and Mark with My Katherine

been at it for a long time and fortunately our legacy has carried on, but sadly that doesn't hold true for others who have left the business for various reasons. Being the first winner of the Owner's Spotlight Award made it extra special too, as it allowed us to reflect back on the past and realize just how much we have been able to accomplish within the horse racing industry.

PONIES 24-7: Well, having the season that you had in 2023 was certainly a way of keeping you in the 'game', talk about that.

MIKE ROMEO: Definitely, it was a phenomenal year and we are fortunate to have good people behind us. Kevin Attard and his team do a fantastic job of getting our horses ready so that they perform well on the track. We had high expectations for Fashionably Fab and although the first couple of races didn't work out that well for various reasons, she turned the corner and her last five starts were really strong. Winning four stakes races in a row with her was quite an accomplishment, but overall though, even the non-stakes horses were competitive and we are very proud of what our horses were able to achieve in 2023.

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk about the 2024 racing season now which begins in late April, how many horses do you think you will have bedded down at Woodbine?

MIKE ROMEO: We have five horses that we intend to bring back from last season. They include Souper Flashy, who's an Ontario-sired stakes placed mare and we hope that she will continue to race well for us as a five-year-old this year. We also have two four-year olds coming back, including Fashionably Fab, who of course we are very high on again, especially after last season, but of course she will be in 'deeper waters' you could say this year. Fingers crossed though that she takes another step forward and is competitive in some of the open stakes races this season. Silent Sky,

is another Ontario-sired runner that had a pretty good year last year and although she only won one race, she was in the money six times in eight starts. We are also 'high' on a couple of exciting three-year-olds this season, as you always dream that these horses might be your next Oak's or Plate winner and one of them happens to be a half-sister to Fashionably Fab called Flashinthesky, who ran twice last year in Maiden Special Weights and she finished second both times. We have our fingers crossed for her too, that she is going to come back this year as a top three-year-old. Finally, we have an unraced colt that just turned three called Quiet Knight and we are looking forward to seeing him race in 2024 and then there are five two-year-olds, including one that we bought with Canuck Racing.

PONIES 24-7: So, you could say that you do have 'lots of bullets' this year? LOL

MIKE ROMEO: We hope so! Surprisingly, last year we had four horses claimed from us though and I think we maybe only lost one via claim in the prior five years. That was certainly a big 'hit' to our overall number of horses last season, but fortunately the five horses we were left with were all Allowance and Stake level competitors.

PONIES 24-7: Why do you think your horses were so popular in the claiming box last year?

MIKE ROMEO: I think part of it was that there was a shortage of horses all around, but actually about five years ago my Father and my Uncle and I became more conscience about where we run our horses. Obviously as a Breeder, you always think the most of your horses, so you have an unraced horse and automatically you start them in a Maiden Special Weight and see if they fit or not. But at the end of the day, you have to run them where they belong, for as you know Larry, it's an expensive game and running fourth, fifth and sixth, just doesn't pay the bills. Between Kevin (Attard), my Father, my Uncle and myself, we have become more diligent at racing our horses where we believe they belong, but of course that tactic comes with a big risk, where you can lose the horse via a claim. It's just part of the game, but I believe that when you have had some success over the past few years, you also have a target on your back and horses get claimed off you.

PONIES 24-7: And of course, you have Kevin training for you which pretty much puts a bull's eye on your back, correct?

MIKE ROMEO: Of course, you are absolutely correct.



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(Laughs) Actually Kevin made a comment to us last year that if horses are getting claimed from you, then that means that you are running them at the proper level.

PONIES 24-7: Well, let's switch gears, pardon the pun and talk about another form of horsepower, that being your two Pine View Hyundai dealerships, where did it all begin for the Romeo family playing a major role in the automobile business?

MIKE ROMEO: As I mentioned earlier, it all started with my Grandfather and when he was young and becoming part of the 'work force', he actually worked as a Mechanic at West York, on St. Clair Avenue in downtown Toronto. He worked his way up from being a Mechanic, to selling cars and actually for many years he was the number one General Motors Sales person in the Toronto area. Eventually, that success would allow him to venture out on his own and open up a General Motors' franchise here in Woodbridge and we operated as Pine View Pontiac Buick for forty years, up until 2010. We then transitioned over to a Hyundai dealer in November of that year and we have grown to two Hyundai locations, one in Vaughan and the other in Brampton and a Nissan store, which is also in Brampton.

PONIES 24-7: Why the transition over to Hyundai?

MIKE ROMEO: In 2009, General Motors was going bankrupt and they received a bail out from the government where part of the deal was to restructure the company, which included eliminating the Pontiac brand and with that they also got rid of their Pontiac dealers. Unfortunately for us, we were a Pontiac dealer and we were informed that we were no longer going to continue with our franchise, which was a really big blow when you are running a profitable business and have developed a good name in the community. My Grandfather had been involved with General Motors for 60 years at the time and really 'felt the sting' of GM's decision.

PONIES 24-7: Is it safe to say that the Romeo family still harbors some resentment towards General Motors, or have you let it go?

MIKE ROMEO: At this point we have let it go but when the news came back in 2009, it was devastating. My Grandfather and Father spent their entire working careers with General Motors and in a moment it was all over. The ironic part is we picked up Hyundai a few months after we lost General Motors and the growth Hyundai has achieved in the past 10 years is unmatched in the automotive industry. Looking at it today, I believe we're in a better place with two Hyundai dealerships and one Nissan dealership.

PONIES 24-7: The fact that you and your family have been able to move forward and continue to operate three dealerships is a testament to the strong family values that you continue to hold for each other, would you agree?

MIKE ROMEO: Well, I can honestly say that working with family is not for everyone, but from my own standpoint, I am close to both my Dad and Grandfather and of course they are not always easy to work for, but now that I'm older I can see things more clearly and why at times they were a little hard on me. They always held me to a high standard and now that I am operating one of the dealerships, I think that they both have made me a much better leader for the staff here. But definitely, working with family at times can be difficult, however the horse racing business is a nice break away from it. The auto side though is what 'puts food on the table' and has allowed us to have the horses as a hobby and I should add too, with us, when it comes to family time, we make sure that there's as little business talk as possible.

PONIES 24-7: You have two kids Mike, Matteo and Dominic, down the road do you see them following you into the businesses, or is it still too early to tell?

MIKE ROMEO: Actually right now it's hard to tell, they both have their own little personalities but they seem to enjoy the same things that their Dad, Grandfather and Great Grandfather enjoy. We will see how it all comes along, but if they do follow in the footsteps, I think it would be a really cool thing to have a fourth generation involved, but there's no pressure to move in any direction. They love coming to the track and they have their binoculars and know the names of all the horses, but they especially love going more now because when we win they can go into the Winner's Lounge that Woodbine opened last year and have a free bottle of water and a bag of chips. So there's even



The Romeo Family, winners of the initial Owner's Spotlight Award at Woodbine last year. Photo by Michael Burns



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more incentive now for them to enjoy the races!

PONIES 24-7: Wrapping up Mike, can you see yourself getting more involved in the two family businesses over the next few years? Like how many hours a week do you work now and what do you do in your free time or do you even have any?

MIKE ROMEO: *(Laughs)*, Well honestly there's not too much free time right now between work, the horses and the kids who are into skating, hockey and soccer. Actually, we seem to have something on every night, but that's life and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I do like to keep busy though and I'm not the type of person who sits at home and watches TV or scrolls on social media. I actually need to keep active and again that's the fun part of horse racing where you can study bloodlines and breeding and there are just so many facets of the business that you can involve yourself in. Luckily our stable is a manageable one, we only have three broodmares, so we are not spending hours trying to decide who we should be breeding to. Definitely, in my quiet time I'm a big sports fan, hockey, football and



obviously horse racing and that will occupy my free time when I have some. I still play recreational hockey once a week, which for me becomes an outlet away from everything else and it is my hour to not think about anything that is going on in my life. I will say though that horse racing has definitely brought our family closer together as my wife, kids and myself usually attend the races as a family, which I think is a great thing.

PONIES 24-7: I said that was my last question, but I want to ask you one more, you have mentioned quite a few times today that you are a big fan of horse racing now, with this in mind I would like to get your thoughts on the King's Plate last August at Woodbine, which was the first one in many years.

MIKE ROMEO: You know what, I thought it was great and Woodbine did a fantastic job putting it on which they always do. Obviously, there was some construction going on at the track itself which made it difficult to have the different food vendors and displays that they usually have out front, but the actual race day and the program they put on was second to none.

PONIES 24-7: And now it's gone back to a Saturday this year.

MIKE ROMEO: Yes and I think that's a great move as you will get more people coming out and better still, they don't have to get up the next morning to go to work, so they can enjoy the day even more. My first Queen's Plate was 2002 and I don't think I have missed one since and it has been a great evolution over the years. Woodbine does a really great job of making it a top shelf social event every year and that is what horse racing in general needs more of!



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MONTE MCNAUGHTON

WOODBINE'S NEWEST EXECUTIVE TEAM MEMBER

By Larry Simpson | Photos by Michael Burns unless otherwise indicated



This past October, former Ontario politician Monte McNaughton, was named Executive Vice President, Industry Relations and People Experience, for Woodbine Entertainment, a role that came after serving in public office for more than 15 years. It's no secret that Woodbine's mandate is to continue to focus on growth initiatives with the directive of sustaining and growing horse racing in Ontario and create more jobs within the province, areas that fit Monte's resume to a 'T'.

Recently, *PONIES 24-7* had the opportunity to sit down with Monte and discuss his thoughts about expanding the Ontario horse racing industry, his interest in the sport and of course, the new position with Woodbine Entertainment.

PONIES 24-7: Monte thanks for doing this, talk first about your new role with Woodbine and what it actually entails?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Well first off, I love the job and working at Woodbine as I have always been a big fan of horse racing. My role is part of the Woodbine Executive Leadership team leading our nearly 1,700 people that work for Woodbine Entertainment. On the Industry Relations side, the job entails relationship building with the horse racing industry, our vendors, our casino partners, and our local community. The role also includes working on new opportunities that expand the horse racing industry and strengthens the product in Ontario for the future, as our mission is to ensure that everything we do goes back into horse racing.

PONIES 24-7: So, what attracted you to this new position?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: I loved the time that I spent in government with 12 years as an elected MPP and five years as a Minister. The one place I wanted to work after politics was Woodbine. I was eight years old when family friends took me to my first horse race, a Standardbred race. By chance their horse won that night, and they took me into the Winner's Circle for a picture. I was hooked and that night really ignited a passion for the sport in me! I spent a good amount of time going to racetracks across the province when I was in government, and I was always an advocate for the men and women in horse racing. I love that the industry employs 25,000 people in all communities, including the 1,700 people that work at Woodbine Racetrack and Woodbine Mohawk Park. One of the initiatives that I launched in the early days was a Horse Racing Tour across the province, which included visits to places like First Line Training Centre, Winbak Farms, and a few racetracks, where I met many incredible men and women that the industry employs. I am proud of the work that they all do and ultimately, we at Woodbine want to continue to grow horse racing and create more opportunities for people to establish a good career in the industry.

PONIES 24-7: And it is always said that the people in the horse racing industry are the 'salt of the earth', would you agree?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: I have actually said that many times myself Larry, as it really reminds me what I did while working in government. I spent almost five years building up the men and women that work in the Skilled Trades, as they are the people that continue to build our province and Canada as a whole. I see the

folks that work in the horse racing industry in the very same light, they work hard in meaningful jobs, where you can build and raise a family. Part of the reason I wanted to get out and meet people was because I wanted to learn more about their industry to be able to 'talk up' the great work they do. When I went to First Line Training Centre, I literally met hundreds of people from Blacksmiths, to Hot Walkers, to Trainers and many others that are employed in the horse racing industry. It's an incredible business and one that should be respected more.

PONIES 24-7: Monte, how would you describe a person employed in the horse racing industry and what would their greatest quality be?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Wow, that's a tough question as I just see so many heroes out there in the horse racing community. These are people that get up early, work hard and are building a business that they're passionate about. I find it all very inspiring and I just want to ensure that there is more respect given from government to the horse racing industry and also from the broader public, because it is an exciting sport and I believe that we are on the cusp of really growing the business and it is all because of the hard work of the men and women in racing.

PONIES 24-7: You touched upon something there Monte that the government needs to start giving the horse racing industry more respect, what will it take for them to start respecting the racing business more?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: I think it's important for us as an industry to continue reiterating the fact that we are employing a large number of people, 25,000, and we are an important part of the province's economy, not just in small towns but in cities as well. Woodbine Entertainment, for example, currently employs 1,700 people and you could eventually see 20,000 people working on site in the next decade and a half because of the planned development of the property and expansion of the business. The horse racing industry is hugely important to the provincial economy as a whole and as we continue to grow, I do expect that we will receive more respect from all levels of governments.

PONIES 24-7: Getting back to your role at Woodbine, prior to that, you were Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, how did this position prepare you for your new job at Woodbine and in particular the company's future?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Well, the first thing it taught me was to 'get out on the ground' and talk to people

within the industry. I grew up in a family business, a Home Hardware Store, and my father always taught me that you can't just sit in an office! Instead, you have to get out and meet the customers and listen to their concerns and discuss business opportunities. You can only do this by talking to the men and women of the related industry. I did the same thing in the Skilled Trade's sector and I believe that's why we had a record number of people signing up for Apprenticeships and Skilled Trades in Ontario. We got out and talked to employers, we talked to unions and to the people in the Trades. I am taking that same approach working at Woodbine, where I am getting out and talking to people in the horse racing industry and discussing how we can make the industry better and grow the sport, so that people can make a better living.

PONIES 24-7: When you were a member of provincial parliament, you forged many alliances with labour groups, obviously your experience with them will bode well with what Woodbine has planned for their on going 'build-out', correct?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Absolutely, you need to have everyone at the same table, as that's how we are going to grow the sport, raise its profile, and expand



the Woodbine property. It's all about forging ahead together and I believe that this is one of the greatest opportunities that we have at Woodbine and as an industry as a whole. We really need to come together and work at growing the industry for the betterment of everyone who is part of it.

PONIES 24-7: Monte, when we interviewed you on our Ponies 24-7 Radio Show late last year it was mentioned that upon your hiring, Woodbine's new CEO Michael Copeland was quoted as saying that 'Woodbine has an opportunity to expand their business in a way that benefits Ontario horse racing and the families depending on it and that your expertise and leadership is going to help guide in realizing these ambitious goals'. What excites you about the ambitious goals that Michael has referred to?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Well certainly Woodbine is an entertainment giant and we have big plans for the future. One thing that is fascinating and really motivating about working here is the fact that everything goes back to horse racing. It's all about supporting and growing the industry and the people who are part of it. We have a 400-acre "City within a City" property development plan that began last year with the new casino, hotel, and music venue. Our goal is to also include transit,



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housing, and retail space as part of that project. We have taken on this endeavor because it will support the horse racing industry.

PONIES 24-7: Do you have some major goals going forward at Woodbine?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Absolutely, strengthening the horse racing industry and bringing it all together to help it grow, but also ensuring from a Woodbine perspective, that we are building on those 400-acres, increasing wagering handles, and finding new opportunities to grow the business.

PONIES 24-7: Monte, it was recently announced that the King's Plate will be run on a Saturday this year, would you agree that this day of racing is a great way of building the Woodbine brand and adding to the growth of the core business?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Absolutely, you are going to see King's Plate Day elevated to a different level this year. We have some big plans and our team is working hard and when it comes to The King's Plate this year, I think it is going to be the biggest and best ever! I'm not going to spill all the beans on what's planned, but I think it will be the most exciting Plate in a very long time.

PONIES 24-7: One challenge that horse racing is facing here in Ontario is a labour shortage of backstretch help, talk about this issue and some of the behind the scenes work that Woodbine is undertaking.

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: You are right Larry, it's no secret that every horse owner or trainer that you talk to is having trouble finding the help needed to care for the horses. Woodbine has taken a leadership role here and we have gone to Ottawa to ask for changes in the Immigration system in order to attract some new workers to fill these roles in the horse racing industry.

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk a little about yourself now Monte, when you are not working, what are some of your other interests?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: For me it's all about spending time with family, my wife Kate and our ten-year-old daughter Annie. Something that I found Larry, to be a real blessing and which I'm very proud of is that Annie wants to go to the racetrack. I get home from work at night and my daughter is waiting at the door, wanting to go to the races that night, whether it be Woodbine or Woodbine Mohawk Park and many times I have got back in the car with her and we have ended up at the track. My wife, daughter and I pretty much spend every weekend watching horse racing

Rocket Ship

RACING

now and it has become a shared interest for the three of us. We also like sports in general and thanks to Taylor Swift (*Laughs*), my daughter and I have become huge football fans, but Woodbine and the horse racing industry have become our hobby and interest.

PONIES 24-7: So Monte, is it safe to say that you don't have a problem finding balance between work and family?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Not at all, I'm home pretty much every night, so I spend more time with the family now and it's been a real blessing from a work/life perspective and also very different from working in the government sector. There's a lot less travel now, which is nice!

PONIES 24-7: And I guess it also helped that you grew up in 'horse country' and really weren't a stranger to the equine industry, agree?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Sure, as I mentioned earlier growing up we had a Home Hardware Store and an Auto and Farm Supply store all under one roof and many of our customers were farmers in the horse industry. I grew up with the men and women in the equine industry and you could say that my job now has brought me back to my roots. I'm very excited about working for Woodbine and contributing to its future and at the same time, raising the profile of horse racing along through the opportunities that exist.

PONIES 24-7: Can you share with our readers some of these opportunities Monte?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Well one opportunity that I do see is in fractional ownership, where I believe there is a ton of upside by bringing more horse owners into the province at a minimal cost. Obviously, there still is some regulatory issues to be addressed to make it happen, but I believe it's a very exciting way to attract a new demographic and generation of potential horse racing owners. Fractional ownership is one tangible product that I believe in and something that I would really like to see the province support.

PONIES 24-7: How do we get fractional ownership approved in Ontario, any ideas?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: Well fractional ownership is an Ontario securities question from an approval process, but again by working and meeting with the industry, there are a lot of exciting opportunities in horse racing including fractional ownership, so stay tuned.



PONIES 24-7: I want to go back to the Woodbine 'build out' for a minute, where would you say the project stands now and what would be the next steps?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: We are continuing to promote our plans with the city of Toronto and the provincial government. With 400-acres, the plan is to build up to 29,000 housing units and it also is a huge employment opportunity with literally tens of thousands of workers that will be needed to develop this property at Woodbine. We just have to continue to advocate elected politicians at the different levels of government regarding this project and I'm confident that it is moving along.

PONIES 24-7: Last question for you Monte, during your government days and remotely working with the horse industry, was there a person that maybe helped to persuade you to become part of Woodbine Entertainment?

MONTE MCNAUGHTON: I guess I would go back to our family friends that really took me under their wing when I was young. They are still Standardbred today. They inspired me back then and still do now. I remember the night before I made it public that I was going to work at Woodbine, I actually called them to give them the heads up and they were both so proud that I was going to work there. So, I would have to say that it is the men and women that are part of the horse racing industry that really motivates me, because what we are trying to accomplish is all about them in the long run!



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PLAY IT AGAIN...

Originally Heard On 'Ponies 24-7', THE RADIO MAGAZINE

In Conversation with Larry Simpson & Ann Rohmer

RCMP SERGEANT MAJOR SCOTT WILLIAMSON

Riding Master Of The RCMP Musical Ride

Photos courtesy of RCMP

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 new magazine feature, we are offering transcripts of pertinent guest interviews, previously heard on 'Ponies 24-7', THE RADIO MAGAZINE.

• • • •

PONIES 24-7: Well we are pleased to be joined today by the RCMP's Sergeant Major Scott Williamson, who is the Riding Master for the RCMP's Musical Ride and just this past December the RCMP opened a Divestment Program, which would allow the general public, to have the opportunity to adopt one of their retired horses, Sergeant Major Williamson, welcome to the show.

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Thank you so much for having me on the show today, it is certainly a pleasure to be here.

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk first about the Divestment Program, because from what we heard, it actually only lasted one day, is that true?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Yes it really took us off guard. We know that our horses are special and we feel it every time that we tour across Canada as the outpouring of support that we continue to receive, shows that people hold our horses in high regard. However, even we didn't expect the amount of attention and desire to have one of our horses, so to be quite frank, we actually weren't prepared for it and we had to hit the pause button temporarily. There were so many applicants and we wanted to make sure that we got the process right.

PONIES 24-7: And Scott, why do you think that so many people were very interested in adopting and seeing this as an opportunity of a lifetime?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: When Canadians look at the Musical Ride, I believe that they feel a sense of ownership in it as well. Certainly, we are the ones that get to put on the fancy uniforms and represent the RCMP every day, but at the end of the day, the Musical Ride is Canada! It actually represents every single Canadian, so whether we are leading the Queen's Funeral, or doing the show in the middle of the Prairies, we are representing what Canada is. I would like to think that is part of it, that when people see an opportunity to own one of our horses, they already feel that sense of ownership and who and what the Musical Ride is. Of course, we breed amazing horses as well and I believe that all that came together when we offered the opportunity to divest the horses.

PONIES 24-7: Scott, if someone went to the program and actually adopted one of the horses, what was the criteria they had to meet?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: The big part is you had to be Canadian and have experience with horses and an understanding of them. You also need to have the resources in place, to make sure that the horses will be going to good homes and we actually do an extensive check when the horse departs from us to make sure that they will be going to a proper home.

PONIES 24-7: Let's talk numbers now, how many horses were actually up for adoption, or have been adopted and what stage are you at in vetting the 'adopters'?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Well that's a great question, when the program opened we had one horse for sure that we knew was ready to be divested, but as you people know, horses and the state of horses 'ebbs and flows' all the time. We are already two months out when this program went live and we are meeting

shortly to re-evaluate the horses, like what is available to divest. It is something that we look at every day. As it stands right now though, we are still at one horse, but I believe that shortly we should potentially have a few more.

PONIES 24-7: How do you decide when it’s time to retire these horses?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Good question, I think it is important to talk first about the life cycle of a Musical Ride horse. Of course we breed all of our own horses and once they are bred and trained and they meet the strict requirements to be on the Musical Ride, they will then move over and become part of the Musical Ride tour. This will all depend on the horse, because like people, they all mature at different stages physically. They may breakdown or maybe not, but once we retire them from the Musical Ride, they are sent to what we call the Equitation Training Section and they are used to train the new riders that are trying out for the Musical Ride. The horses go through seven months of training and we draw on the horses to be used for the Equitation Training. Once we realize that the horse is no longer able to perform or function on a day to day basis, then this is when it is time to divest them. They may not be serviceable to what we require, but they have a lot of good to still give to the public!

PONIES 24-7: Scott, what happened to the horses before you started the Divestment Program and opened it up to the general public, like what would be the typical transfer from Musical Ride life, to Training life, to whatever life would be like before the program?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Typically, they ended up just living their life here and we would use them on a very sporadic basis, as we would have to diligently control how they would be ridden and what events they could still participate in. The unfortunate reality was that the government looked at horses like any other assets, in other words a horse would be no different than a chair or a table and that’s not reality, nor is it in the best interest of the horse. We needed to find a way where we could expedite the process to find the horses a good home, as opposed to just sitting here at our stable in Ottawa and not having a whole lot of purpose. That is typically what would have happened, where they would just stay here in Ottawa and live out the rest of their life.

PONIES 24-7: That is great what you are doing with them now, by opening up to the public and giving them a great next step in their lives.



SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: You have ‘hit the nail on the head’, when this conversation started to happen for us a few years ago, it was exactly under that premise. We looked at the process and said that there had to be a better way which had the best interest of the horse at heart and as we do everything here, it’s built around that exact question, what is in the best interest of the horse? Of course nothing is ever simple, when you are dealing with an asset and other government agencies, but we knew that this was an important piece that we needed to tackle, so we could find another opportunity for our horses and have them go on and live a better life. We did have in place as well, where we could donate horses to registered charities and that was allowable under the government’s rules and it was something we had been doing for quite a few years. Even that process though wasn’t as simple as what the divestment process should be now moving forward.

PONIES 24-7: So Scott, is there a particular breed of horse that you use and also does the RCMP have their own breeding program in place?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: We have had our own breeding program in place since 1938 and the history behind that is that in 1937 our Assistant Commissioner attended the Coronation of King George and the RCMP of course was becoming more and more mechanized and they were using horses strictly for ceremonial purposes. When the Assistant Commissioner attended the Coronation he saw this little Cavalry with their red tunics on black horses and in 1938 he became our Commissioner and the very first thing he did from

BIGGEST FIELDS

BIGGEST POOLS

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MAY 3

Championship meet returns!
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JULY 13

T-shirt giveaway,
mechanical shark, live DJ,
food trucks and more.
POST TIME 6:20 PM

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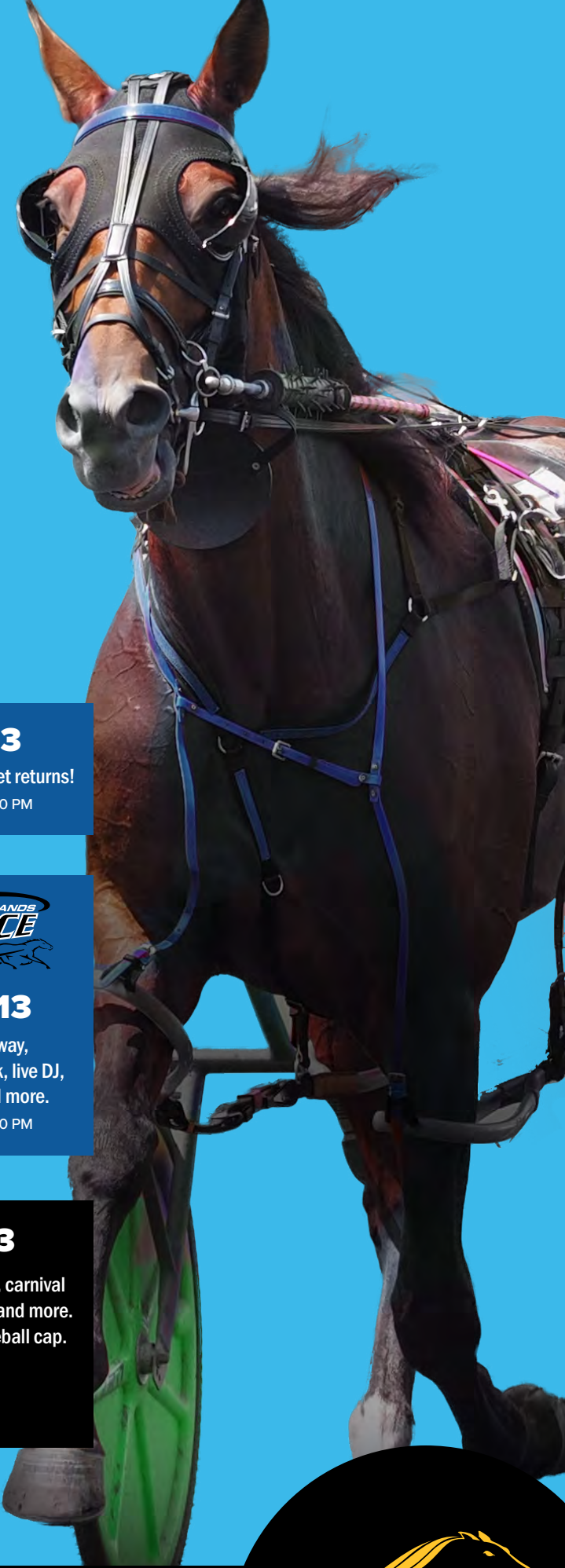
■ First Post 6:20 p.m.
■ First Post 12 Noon



AUGUST 3

\$1,000 Hambo hat contest, carnival
rides and games, live music and more.
\$5 admission includes baseball cap.

DOORS OPEN 10 AM
POST TIME 12 NOON





that day onward was insist that all the horses be black in colour. At that time, the RCMP recognized that in order to get black horses with the same size and temperament, we were going to have to set up our own breeding program, so we have actually been breeding our own horses since 1938. We have fluctuated between breeds, but currently today we are breeding Registered Hanoverians. They are horses that certainly meet all the requirements that we are looking for.

PONIES 24-7: And where does the breeding take place?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: We have a breeding farm just outside of Ottawa, just 45 minutes west in Pakenham. There's about 600 acres and we have approximately 15 broodmares, three stallions and horses everywhere from newborns all the way to three-year-old.

PONIES 24-7: Obviously the RCMP's Musical Ride has a special connection with horse racing, as the last couple of years you have been a major feature at Woodbine Mohawk Park, correct?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Yes, we have and it's a fabulous facility for us to do the show at.

PONIES 24-7: We would like to know more about what it takes to become a member of the RCMP Musical Ride and we are going to talk to you about that shortly, but first, what do you look for in a horse to become part of the show?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: That's another excellent question, the first and obvious piece is the colour, as they have to be black or what we call 'workable' black. Many of our horses are in fact, Dark or Dark Bays, but they look very black. All the horses need to be between 16 and 17.2 hands high and they have to have very good temperaments. That's the main criteria that we are looking for when we are breeding a horse. The horses once they are bred live their lives at the farm until the age of three and then they will come to Ottawa to undergo their training process and as you can imagine like anything in the RCMP it's very structured and organized, so we have a very well organized training phase that the horses will be introduced to. For the first seven months the training is mostly introductory where we may be introducing equipment, or to new areas in the barn and new riders and then slowly, depending on the horse of course, they get used to weight on their back. At the end of that seven months, we send them back to the breeding farm for five months, to just decompress and to be a horse once again. After that we bring them back to Ottawa and that's when they will undergo the final two years of their training and this is when we concentrate on the preparation and getting them to the Musical Ride. Typically, other than colour of course, they are usually vetted out according to temperament, so imagine 95% of our riders have never touched a horse before, so they are certainly not world class equestrians by the time that we are finished training them. Although the horses are still quite young, they are at the age of six when they get introduced to the Musical Ride and we essentially want them to have the temperament of a school master's horse and that's why the temperament is a very important part of the process.

PONIES 24-7: Scott, there's obviously a human element involved, what is the training process for the riders?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: Every member on the Musical Ride are all RCMP Officers, so they need to have a minimum of two years active duty service posted somewhere in Canada. After that, they would apply to be part of the Musical Ride and if they get their release, they will come here on a five week trial course and if their successful and typically only 40 to 50% of the applicants are successful after the five weeks, they will come back for seven months more advanced

Equitation training . If they are successful after the seven months of more advanced training, then they go for another four months of Musical Ride specific training. You are looking at about a year of investment of time and energy into each and every rider, before they will even 'don the red surge' on horseback.

PONIES 24-7: Two quick questions for you Scott, do you love your job, that's question one.

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: I absolutely love this job. I left the farm in Saskatchewan in 2000 to join the RCMP and I didn't expect to join the RCMP Musical Ride, but obviously I love horses and grew up around them. I joined to be a Mountie and a Police Officer, but the opportunity came up and I know you guys probably understand, horses are just in our blood. I have been here a total of 14 out of my 25 years of service and I love every second of this job. The opportunities that it has given this small town farm boy from Saskatchewan, I never would have believed it.

PONIES 24-7: Quick second question, how can people find out more the RCMP Divestment Program?

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: They can go to the RCMP Website, [<https://www.rcmp.gc.ca/corporate-organisation/musical-ride-carrousel/divestment-horses-program-programme-dessaisissement-chevaux-eng.htm>] and in there they will find a link and just keep checking if there is a horse available.

PONIES 24-7: Scott thanks for doing this and we will have to have you back on the show again soon.

SGT. MAJOR WILLIAMSON: It was a pleasure and I would always be happy to come on again and all the best to you folks.



The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer

By Larry Simpson | Photos By Michael Burns

Handicapping Through Body Language, Is Your Horse Talking To You?



So you have finished all of your pre-race handicapping, completed all of your pace and speed ratings and then, made a note of race trends and track biases. So what's next?

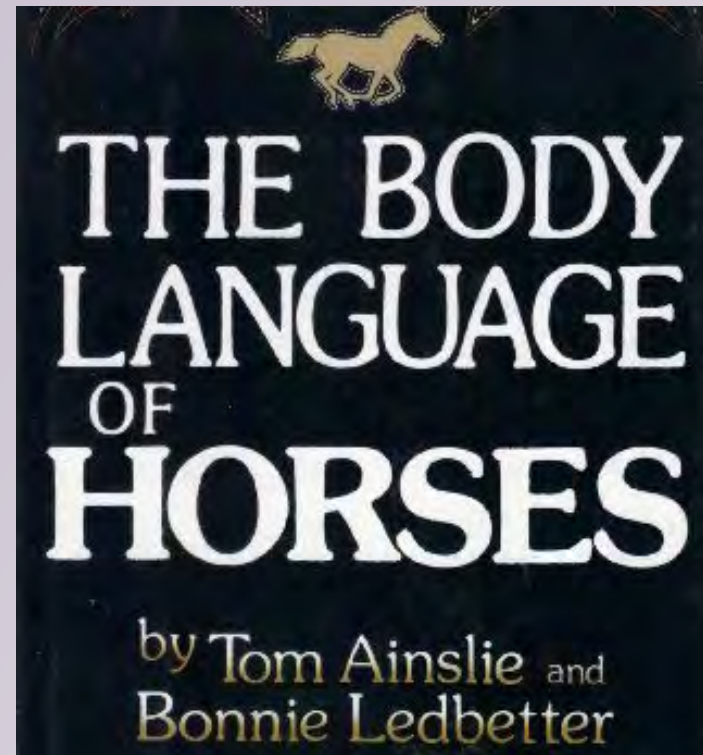
Well, welcome to the art of Body Language Handicapping.

There was always a common misconception around the racetrack, that horses were a type of machine but there really is nothing further than the truth. Horses are not to be confused with a fine-tuned automobile, in fact your selection in the upcoming race, on paper can have all of the numbers he or she needs to be a contender, however, something minor like a 'tummy ache', could be all it would take to effect today's performance.

Some years back, a friend of mine gave me a copy of what has to be a classic as far as horse racing publications go, the Tom Ainslie and Bonnie Ledbetter collaboration, 'THE BODY LANGUAGE OF HORSES'. Considered a 'book for the ages' when originally published in 1980, I still every once in awhile pick up

the book and refer back to certain sections, as although it's over 40 years old, the contents have stood the test of time. If you are lucky enough to find a copy for sale, I would recommend that you do so as you won't be sorry. But back to this installment of The Racer's Edge, where we talk more about how the body language of a horse can possibly help assist you with your handicapping.

How many times have you been watching a Post Parade either on-track, or at a simulcast location and someone blurts out 'Boy, the five horse really looks sharp!' Probably quite a few times when you actually think about it, so with that being said what exactly do we mean when we say a 'sharp looking' horse? Well generally speaking, when a horse is referred to as looking sharp, in most cases you are referring to his or her energy level- a high energy that when the horse is on the track, looks to be literally prancing with their ears up and the eyes taking in everything from the people in the grandstand to the other horses around. On some occasions, which I might add is a very good sign that your selection will run its best today, is when



the prancing is accompanied with a neck arch, almost tucked down to the chest and the tail pointed out and away from the body. Other good signs of a 'sharp horse' can include a shiny coat and if you are close enough, perhaps in the paddock or trackside, you may notice that the horse is actually making a grinding of the teeth sound.

It is also a good idea to keep an eye on pre-race warmups, as a 'sharp horse' that is eager to run, may sometime try to nip at the accompanying lead pony and when the lead pony breaks into a canter, watch how the horse beside him reacts. The 'sharp horse' will almost immediately break into a canter and then a gallop almost instantaneously. One important point to take into consideration when making your handicapping decision too, is when did the horse last race, simply put, if a horse is racing today after a lengthy layoff, despite looking very 'sharp' on the track, they may be expending too much energy before today's race. Ainslie and Ledbetter mentioned this in the book that sometimes the 'sharp horse' is just too sharp, where they may have looked the part, but were just too eager to perform well enough to win. Keep some notes on this, as a horse that may be 'too sharp' today, could be a better play at the windows next time. Also a 'sharp horse' should not be confused with what is sometimes referred to as a 'ready horse' and unfortunately at times it becomes hard to distinguish one from the other. So then what is the definition of a 'ready horse'? Well, here we are talking about a horse that looks a little more relaxed in the post parade and warm-up, then its 'sharper' contemporary. A 'ready horse' has a nice coat, looks

'muscle up' and appears alert to the surroundings. Although the 'ready horse' looks as healthy and ready to win as the 'sharp' one, he or she, by appearing a little more relaxed, will probably not expend as much energy and perform better when it counts in the race itself. According to Ainslie and Ledbetter again, on the track the 'ready horse' will walk or jog alongside the companion pony during post parade, then trot for a few strides before finally breaking into a warm-up.

Now then, we have discussed some positive points of a 'sharp' and 'ready' horse, what are some of the signs of a horse that may not be ready to perform well today? Again, watch the post parades and warm-ups as unlike the 'sharp' and 'ready' horse that will almost instantaneously break into a gallop or canter, the 'dull horse' will resist galloping and cantering, instead trotting along for many strides. Also stay away from horses that look scared or nervous-the scared horse has the appearance of actually trembling and their eyes move quickly and roll with their nostrils flaring. A nervous runner will 'sweat out', to the point that the sweat turns into a white, foamy substance, a process that is referred to as 'washing out.' Front bandages on a horse are also usually a cause for concern, especially on a young horse for the first time. Older horses though may wear what are called 'run-downs' on a regular basis and many can perform well, but on a young horse, well that's another story. Mind you, if this is the second time that the young horse has worn the 'run-downs' and performed well last time, then perhaps it may not be as serious of an issue today. The Daily Racing Form will usually indicate in the charted lines, whether the horse was equipped with front bandages last time out with the abbreviation.

So just to summarize, keep in mind that at the end of the day, it is still a horse race and at certain times, horses that appear 'washy' or appear to be listless on the track, will win occasionally. Smart handicappers though will do their 'numbers' and then do a visual inspection of the horse in both the post parade and on the track before the race. A horse that appears nervous or 'washed out' and is short odds on the board, to most bettors is not good value. On the other hand, the horse that looks 'sharp' or 'ready' might be worth a bet if they are good value on the board. And don't forget to make some notes for next time, on the horse that was actually just 'too ready' when racing off a layoff today!



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21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

MAY						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

JUNE						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23/30	24	25	26	27	28	29

JULY						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

AUGUST						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

SEPTEMBER						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

OCTOBER						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

NOVEMBER						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

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

*PENDING REGULATORY APPROVAL.

STAKES HIGHLIGHTS

MAY 27: NYSS 3-Year-Old Colt and Filly Trot
JUNE 14: \$500,000 Empire Breeders Classic Finals
3-Year-Old Colt and Filly Trot
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
AUGUST 17: NYSS 2-Year-Old Colt Pace
AUGUST 23: NYSS 2-Year-Old Filly Pace
SEPTEMBER 13: NYSS Excelsior Series Final



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