

PONIES 24-7

VOLUME 9/ISSUE 3/2023
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Jim Lawson

Looking Back At His Career
As Woodbine CEO

Handicapping

For The Novice Bettor

Chad Beckon

Meet Woodbine's October
Horse Person Of The Month



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AT THE POST



WELCOME BACK!

Welcome back to *PONIES 24-7* as we are in the midst of the Fall racing schedule with all eyes on the Breeders' Cup the first weekend in November and shortly before that, the harness set will be front and centre at Hoosier Park, with the Breeders Crown Championship races.

Our feature story this issue is an interview with Woodbine CEO Jim Lawson, who has been featured on a regular basis in *PONIES 24-7*, since our inception and in most cases they were end of year recaps of Woodbine and Woodbine Mohawk Park. This issue is different, as recently the Woodbine CEO was on our '*Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE Show*', where he also has been a frequent guest and Jim reiterated that as of October 1st, he would be stepping down as CEO and turning the reins, pardon the pun, to Michael Copeland, who has been part of the company for the past two years. Jim, as he says, will not be '*stepping down*', rather '*stepping away*', as he will take over the position as Executive Chair for Woodbine Entertainment after his departure. We enjoyed the radio interview that we conducted with Jim, so much so that we have included it in its entirety in this issue and we hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we relished conducting it. Also, we are quite certain that although Jim is as he says not, '*stepping down*' but rather just '*stepping away*', the fact remains that like a 1 to 9 favorite in horse racing, it's pretty safe to say

that you will have further opportunities to read more interviews with Jim going forward in *PONIES 24-7*, as he adjusts to his new role.

In addition, this edition of *PONIES 24-7*, also features an interview with former Woodbine jockey Chad Beckon, who was named the recent Woodbine October Horse Person of the Month and also gives you an opportunity to '*sharpen*' your handicapping skills, as we introduce you to the popular '*bounce*' angle.

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 Show*' on the FM channel 105.9 The Region and live streamed at 1059theregion.com. Now in its fourth 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

This issue we feature Woodbine CEO Jim Lawson, who is pictured happily on his way to the Woodbine Winner's Circle after one of his horses was victorious late 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!



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PLAY IT AGAIN...

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

In Conversation with Larry Simpson & Ann Rohmer

JIM LAWSON

CEO of Woodbine Entertainment

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

• • • •

PONIES 24-7: Woodbine Entertainment's CEO Jim Lawson has been an integral part of our *PONIES 24-7 Radio Show* from the very beginning and has not only been a frequent guest, but also a huge supporter of *PONIES 24-7*. We are deeply grateful for all he has done for us, for Woodbine and the horse racing industry as a whole and on Sunday, October 1st, Jim officially retires as the CEO of Woodbine Entertainment and he joins us now, on *Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE*, Jim welcome back to the show.

JIM LAWSON: Thanks for having me on again, it's always great to be on the show with you guys. I'm sure we will talk again in the future but officially on October 1st, I move into the Executive Chair role and Michael Copeland who has been with us at Woodbine now for a couple of years, takes over the CEO role.

PONIES 24-7: Was it a difficult decision for you to make and step away as CEO?



Photo by Michael Burns

JIM LAWSON: It wasn't particularly a tough decision for me to make as this was something that was discussed in detail with the Board three years ago. I had already extended the role once and was Chair of the company before I took on this role in 2015 on a temporary basis and that temporary has extended to over eight years. (Laughs) I have had a long and busy career and for me this is just more of a 'stepping back' transition that is going on here at Woodbine and I have to be careful and hand the reins over to Michael, but no, it was not a difficult decision, rather it was something I wanted to do for the last couple of years.

PONIES 24-7: Let's rewind to your first foray with Woodbine, what was your knowledge of horse racing then?

JIM LAWSON: Thanks for asking this, my knowledge was quite high, which is something difficult to say about yourself (Laughs), but I had a father who is in the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame and was a real 'student of the game'. He ran a very modest Thoroughbred stable from 1966 until he passed away in 2011, but while I say that it was modest, he did win over 70 stakes races and had multiple Sovereign Award Champions. From the time I was very young, I was helping him go through 'The Blood Horse' and at the time, 'The Thoroughbred Record', tracking sales and breeding, so you could say that I was a very young 'student of the game' as well. I started coming to Woodbine when I was around eight years old and established a pretty good knowledge of the racing game and during Law School, I actually worked for a very well-respected Equine Veterinarian in Paris,

Kentucky, Dr. Robert Copelan. I never imagined that I would end up working in the horse racing industry, as I was actually a Lawyer for 17 years and in Private Equity for 10, but when I joined the Woodbine Board to assist with the Real Estate here, as much of my legal career was in Real Estate Development, I never thought that I would end up on the Operational Management side.

PONIES 24-7: Jim, horse ownership and the breeding business is something that you have become more involved in lately, is this something that you may expand into now?

JIM LAWSON: I don't know about expansion (Laughs), but I certainly will carry on with it. I don't make any 'bones' about it that this is a very tough business (the breeding and racing) and anyone in the business will probably agree with me. Having said that, I encourage more people to get involved as owners and breeders, I love it and have a passion for horse racing and I will carry on with the breeding and owning horses, but I'm not so sure that I'm ready to expand it. But I certainly want to 'stay in the game'!

PONIES 24-7: Can you explain to our listeners your thoughts and feelings of the equine athletes?

JIM LAWSON: I spend most of my time and my father was the same, as we bred horses to race and horses are wonderful and smart animals and very statuesque and athletic individuals. It's very easy to fall in love with a race horse and I believe that one thing that people in the industry understand but I don't think that the public appreciates, is that no one loves and cares for these



Photo by Michael Burns



Photo by Michael Burns



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Ponies-247 8

racehorses more, than the people that own, train and groom them. Horses are bred to race and when they are a year old they are out running around in fields, as this is what they love and want to do. I think that this is an important point to remember, that this industry does care for its horses very well and I'm certainly part of this group.

PONIES 24-7: That's really how you sell this business and attract new owners, by promoting the horses as equine athletes and that they are treated very well, would you agree?

JIM LAWSON: For sure, it's a contagious industry and if one wants to recruit new owners, there is nothing better than to come down to Woodbine in the morning and go into the backstretch and see these wonderful animals train. People do fall in love with them very quickly as they are fine specimens and this is actually a big part of what we are trying to sell with our Marketing here at Woodbine now, by bringing the public closer to the horses. We are constantly finding new ways to expose our equine athletes and our jockeys to the fans and give people a better feeling about the sport.

PONIES 24-7: Jim, discuss your vision for Woodbine and where we are in terms of progress right now?

JIM LAWSON: It has certainly been an extensive project, as mentioned I got involved in 2007 because of my Real Estate background and it has been well documented that we have close to 700 acres of land here at Woodbine. We want to bring people to this vast parcel of land and expose them to horse racing and one of the ways we plan on doing this is by continuing with the development and mass transit to this site. The

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vision is to have this ‘gem’ right in the middle of the City with 30,000 housing units with parkland and mixed usage and right at the centre of everything will be the racetrack. This is the staple that is going to carry this project on for generations to come and it’s certainly an exciting vision. Also, I’m a realist in the sense that it is such a competitive world, both in sports and with the wagering dollar and it’s also a difficult industry. The pari mutuel product is challenging and someday there will be fixed odds wagering to be on equal footing with the sports wagering that has recently come in. The reality though, is that horse racing is also a challenging and consolidating business and if you are sitting where we are today, yes we do have the 683 acres of land and part of the plan is to use our assets including our land, to support the capital and revenue that is required to sustain this sport. This applies to not only our Thoroughbred product at Woodbine, but also the Standardbreds at Woodbine Mohawk Park and we also need to generate alternative sources of revenue, given the competition and what is going on within the sport. That is a more difficult conversation, yet it is one that helps with the vision that we are entirely focused on our mandate to support this sport in this province and the country. We have also made some tremendous strides in technology as well with sports wagering and our broadcasting and the outreach of our brand and I firmly believe that we need to work with the government and the OLG, on things like Historical Horse Racing, which greatly supports racetracks like the Red Mile and Kentucky Downs. We are at a major disadvantage when it comes to purses and I’m hoping that we can get to the point that we are able to offer Historical Horse Racing and also have products like lotteries and other avenues to support racing in this province,

because it does employ a lot of people. The bottom line is there are probably 25 to 35,000 people that are totally dependent on horse racing in the province and Woodbine is the economic driver and we need to make sure that this continues by pursuing and supporting the alternative sources of revenue that I just mentioned.

PONIES 24-7: Would one of the initiatives be the recent announcement with *bet365* by integrating horse racing into sports betting?

JIM LAWSON: Absolutely, we could not sit still and watch the sports betting operators come into this province and cannibalize, not necessarily the racing customer as it is today, but rather the future horse racing customer, which is the young demographic that needs to understand and be exposed to our sport and this will happen through these major sports betting operators. Yes we started with *bet365*, but I’m going to say that within the next 12 months, you will be able to get horse racing content with all of the sports betting operators. Additionally, in other provinces, British Columbia in particular, where there are lottery corporations running sports betting, we need to see horse racing content included.

PONIES 24-7: Jim, what is it like for you to walk into Woodbine as a fan to watch a race? What do you go through or feel?

JIM LAWSON: Well it depends, I love watching horse racing and I love going to Mohawk and being right up front and certainly the same feeling here at Woodbine. It starts to change a bit though when I have an interest in the race and if the horse has a good chance, whether

it’s an inexpensive horse or one in a stakes race, I get nervous just the same. It actually takes me back to my hockey days where you are pacing and nervous, so I do get very anxious and often I go off on my own to watch the race. I’m not a good host, let me put it that way! When my wife suggests we bring some people to the races, she warns them that I am not likely to be a good host that day (*Laughs*), but it’s fun. I think you have heard it said many times, there’s nothing better than watching your own horse race, there’s really no feeling like it!

PONIES 24-7: Let’s switch gears for a minute Jim and talk about Woodbine Mohawk Park, especially tonight where we have the Mohawk Million, which was an initiative that you were involved with from the very beginning. Why is the ‘*Million*’ such an important race for harness racing?

JIM LAWSON: Well, it’s unique and I am hoping that we are able to keep it going. It’s a tall task in trying to get people to buy slots for \$100,000 and as you know the final spot in the race goes to the winner of the Wellwood Memorial. The race has been a really important step for the industry and I think that people who are buying slots are clearly major players in the industry and the race continues to garner a lot of interest. It’s for two-year-old trotters and the ‘*Million*’ has certainly helped to develop more interest in trotters, as currently we

are working with the PMU in France and they are very interested in trotting races and of course there’s Sweden also. It is very important to promote trotting and this race certainly does that. We are seeing now at Yearling Sales that trotters are now in high demand and the race itself has continued to develop a lot of extra interest for us at Woodbine Mohawk Park. I hope that we can keep the Mohawk Million going next year in some capacity as it’s just been a positive experience all around.

PONIES 24-7: Jim, Harness Racing has often played a Bridesmaid to Thoroughbred racing, is that changing now?

JIM LAWSON: Well, certainly our numbers would indicate that we are expanding and I would look at it through this lens, on a global scale and on a state-by-state basis, certainly the Harness Racing product plays Bridesmaid. However, at the same time, there are pockets in Ontario where Standardbred racing is hugely popular and certain States in the US as well. Harness Racing is very popular in Ontario, Australia, in France and in certain States in the United States, but I believe that we have done a great job with the harness product and moving full time to Woodbine Mohawk Park has been a real positive. What is happening for us, is that our product continues to grow and we are taking away market share in the United States and I

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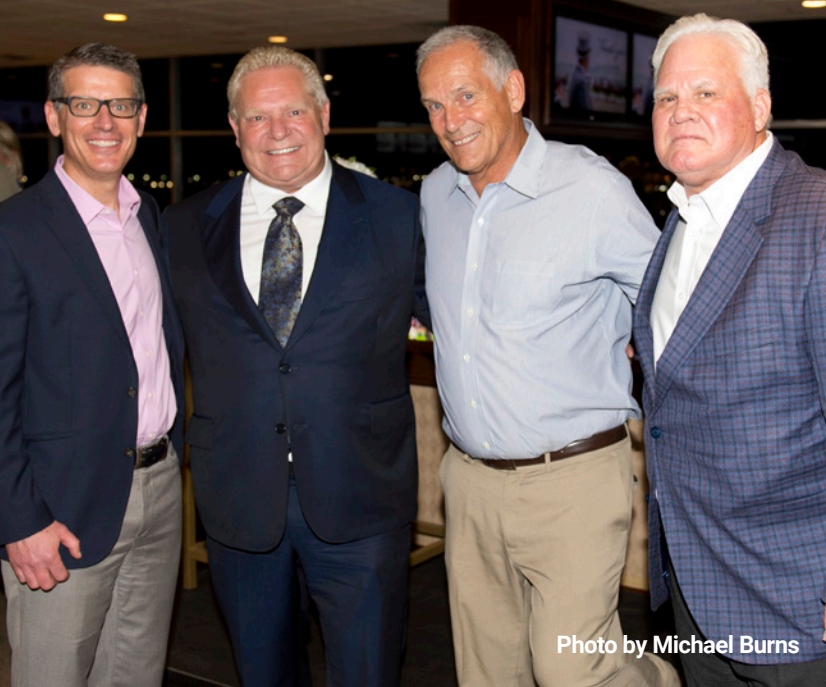


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hope that our move to adding content to these sports betting operators is going to have the effect that more and more people will be interested in wagering on Harness Racing also. I really don't think it is a stretch to say that the young sports bettor doesn't know much about horse racing and if they do it's probably the Kentucky Derby and maybe the King's Plate, we hope, *(Laughs)* but the opportunity to learn more about Harness Racing should only help the sport and I'm hoping that our movement on to these sports betting operating platforms and the marketing powers that they can provide, will expose more people and in particular the younger person to the Standardbreds.

PONIES 24-7: Jim you have been a regular on this show since day one, going forward and when you think back on your career as CEO of Woodbine Entertainment, you obviously were involved in introducing many new initiatives that have certainly helped the horse racing industry, but is there one that you are most proud of?

JIM LAWSON: You are putting me on the spot *(Laughs)*, but I would have to say that the biggest accomplishment was coming in and I'm not trying to take sole credit for this, but I came in as Chair of Woodbine Entertainment in 2012 and the industry in Ontario was in a complete state of chaos. The OLG and the Minister of Finance had given us notice that they were canceling the Slots at Racetracks Program and at the time we were deriving most of our revenue from that program. There was a huge amount of monies coming in that was supporting the industry and purses and I will even say that the industry at the time including Woodbine Entertainment was complacent because it was \$150 million Net. We had to weather a big storm and I basically moved into my office at Woodbine then and was full time within months as Executive Chair. We were forced

to restructure and unfortunately we had to let 300 people go and then work closely with the government to get some transitional funding, because I think that they underestimated at the time the impact it would have by *'pulling the rug out'* from the horse racing industry in the province. Over the next few years we got ourselves to the point where we negotiated and Woodbine was the lead negotiator with the province on the long term funding agreement. I would have to say that was the number one accomplishment, but really there were so many other things like getting through the pandemic and moving to Woodbine Mohawk Park full time for the Standardbreds and the grass course here at Woodbine-there's been many great initiatives that have occurred that I am very proud of, but when I look back, boy, it was pretty dark days here in 2013, 14 and 15. I feel though that we are on a very strong foundation now, for the future of horse racing in Ontario.

PONIES 24-7: Bravo Jim Lawson! When people leave positions like yours, they are often given a gold watch or a car or maybe even a trip, how about in your case a horse named after you?

JIM LAWSON: *(Laughs)* You know we had a Board Meeting yesterday at Woodbine where we officially confirmed the appointment of Michael Copeland as the new CEO as of October 1st and I thought about that on the way in yesterday and I would say that I feel very appreciative and honoured to step back from this industry and I'm excited to do that. I don't need any gifts and I'm really very thankful to have worked with some great people here at Woodbine. We have a great Board and horse community at Woodbine and at Mohawk and I'm very fortunate and blessed to stay in this industry even though I am stepping down. I feel really good about things!

PONIES 24-7: Well, we feel really good about you Jim because you have constantly given up your time to guest on the show on a regular basis, good luck going forward and as you say you are not going away, rather stepping away into another position. Thanks for this interview and the many from previous shows.

PONIES 24-7: And as Bob Hope would say, thanks for the memories!

JIM LAWSON: Thanks guys, as always I love being on this show and we will talk again very soon.



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CHAD BECKON

WOODBINE'S OCTOBER HORSE PERSON OF THE MONTH: CHAD BECKON

By Chris Lomon

It would be understandable if Chad Beckon lamented what might have been, but the former jockey has always opted for a much different outlook on life.

His career saddle was brief – five and a half years in all – compared to most of his contemporaries, but injuries, including an on-track spill in June 2009 that left him with multiple fractures and cranial bleeding, eventually took their toll and put an end to his time as a jockey.

Highlights were many, including his milestone first win on September 10, 2003, when he guided Lil Personalitee, a dark bay of Personal Flag, to victory at Woodbine.

There would be two Fort Erie riding titles and seven stakes triumphs, one of them coming in the 2008 Deputy Minister Stakes when Beckon piloted longshot Piper in the Glen to victory in the seven-furlong race.

It wasn't Beckon's only memorable moment of 2008. He rode Pronger, a horse trained by Woodbine-based Mike De Paulo, for the 73rd running of the Prince of Wales Stakes in mid-July. Beckon and Pronger finished third in the second jewel of the Canadian Triple Crown. In all, Beckon rode 348 winners.

Whenever he does reflect on his riding career, something he does often, the son of late jockey Dan Beckon does so with fond recollections.

"I have quite a few happy memories. I won the 2006 Puss N Boots at Fort Erie with Smiling Jordan. Then there is that first win with Lil Personalitee and Piper in the Glen in the Deputy Minister. I look back at what I was able to achieve and I'm proud of that. You look at the pictures and it's nothing but happy memories."

Although he isn't in winner's circle photos anymore, Beckon's focus has been getting as many of them as



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Along with his farrier work, Beckon is also in the irons again, working horses in the mornings for Elder.

Holding the reins has been a cherished opportunity.

"That's a great feeling, to have that emotion again, the closeness with the horses. Again, it's the comfort that they give. I can say that everything is going well."

It's a big reason why the smile, the one he seemingly always sported during his riding days, has been back for a while.

"I enjoy the industry and I'm proud of how dedicated people have been through the ups and downs. People go through tough times, but they find a way to keep going forward because they love what they do."

Just like Chad Beckon.

For more Horse Person of the Month profiles, visit [Woodbine.com](https://www.woodbine.com)



he can to stand in front of the camera with their proud connections.

"I honestly thought I'd go back into riding, but for health reasons, I wasn't able to. I had to overcome some things. I ended up working with Bruce Anderson, who helped me out. I started shoeing and I caught an immediate interest in it, the artistry of it and just how important it is to the success of the horse. Riding horses before was a great time in my life, but I still felt that closeness when I began shoeing them. I fell in love with the job and the comfort of being around the horses. I kept on going with it and I ended up in Oklahoma, where I stayed and got certified. I studied the physical makeup of the horse, and what they need from top to bottom. Then I came back to Woodbine, and I've been doing it ever since."

And doing it well.

"I shoe all [trainer] Liz Elder's horses, and I've been doing the same for Brandon Greer since 2013. So, I got to shoe the winner of the 2021 Woodbine Mile, Town Cruise, for Brandon. I have others I do it for as well. I love to see them succeed and win. It makes me very happy that I played some part in that. I just couldn't be away from the sport and the horses. I wanted to find a way to stay part of the industry."



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The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer

By Larry Simpson | Photos By Michael Burns

Understanding the 'Bounce' Theory, For The Novice Handicapper



In one of our earlier issues of PONIES 24-7, we covered the topic of the Thoroughbred 'bounce' and why it is one of the most used, yet least understood terms in horse racing, but it can at times benefit you in your handicapping. For our many new readers, I have updated the original article as follows.

The 'bounce' theory originally began many years back with handicappers who were looking for an excuse why their selection possibly didn't perform to expectations either in today's race, or perhaps even the race leading up to today's. Of interest too, is that a 'bounce' term has also become an acceptable term for Trainers to use as well now, especially when they may look for an excuse of why a horse that was maybe raced back in too short of a time period, didn't perform well, especially if that last race was a very taxing effort. We have all heard the numerous interviews after the race, where it is firmly stated that the last race just took more out of the horse than expected and as such, the horse just didn't run its' race today, or better still in simpler terms, the horse just happened to 'bounce'.

For the sake of the new handicapper though who

happens to be reading this article for the first time, a horse 'bouncing' is simply defined where a horse runs maybe a career best race in his or her last start, only to follow up that performance with a dull or sub-par one in its next start. Common causes of 'bounce' performances include as mentioned prior, races following an all-out effort, or the first start off of a significant layoff, which was good but probably quite 'taxing', perhaps an effort that produces a career high speed figure and/or a series of races with progressive speed ratings, which resulted in a sub par effort today.

First off, just to make it clear, there is a common misconception out there, that just because a horse ran a career best race last time out, that automatically qualifies it for a 'letdown' in its next start and therefore they will likely 'bounce', which is a statement that in many cases is not true! The fact of the matter is, that younger, lightly raced horses, who are still 'learning the game' so to speak, have probably not reached the point yet, where their talents have peaked and a career best race is not out of the ordinary, as they become more experienced race by race. In fact, it is not uncommon for a lightly raced horse to reel off three or four, or



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even more good efforts in a row and hold their ‘form’ in doing so. Likewise with older horses, a career best speed figure obtained in its last race, doesn’t always equate to a ‘bounce’ candidate today. Instead, the peak figure may have been assisted last time by track condition (perhaps the track was sloppy and the horse in question just happens to ‘relish’ the slop), the pace of the last race (maybe it was either too slow, or too fast for the class of the race), a distance change, or last but not least, a variation in surface. In layman’s terms, certain race conditions may have accounted for the career best race and maybe it wasn’t as ‘taxing’ on the horse as originally thought. Additionally, there is a good chance that an initial race on the turf for a horse that is ‘bred in the purple’ for that surface, will produce a lifetime best effort, as it is only natural that a horse will run better on a surface that they ‘enjoy’ and of course, are also bred for. This could account for an escalated speed rating, but may not necessarily be the ‘hard used’ career best race as we initially thought, that will result in a regression in its next start.

Confusing? Not necessarily, as yes, some horses do ‘bounce’ and in a lot of cases the ‘bounce’ is the result of another common negative factor of horse racing, that being layoffs! For example, when you see an older horse running very hard right to the wire in a modest claiming event and they happen to be making their first start after a layoff of 90 days or more, chances are that if he or she is entered back in a short period of time (three weeks or less), there may be some regression in form in today’s race, or what we commonly refer to as a ‘bounce’. That last race just took some of the ‘starch’ out of the horse and he or she probably needed some more time to recover from the hard effort. Also, a good tip-off that the horse had an excellent chance of bouncing today, is when there is not a recorded workout

since the race three weeks ago. To me, this is actually a double negative in form-back in a short period of time and the race may have been taxing and no recorded workouts since that last race- a healthy prescription for a ‘bounce’ effort in today’s race.

Yes, some horses do race well and a small percentage do win in what is considered the second race off a layoff and they may not ‘bounce’. In addition, certain Trainers do excel on the ‘second off’ angle and adding Trainer patterns and angles (found in the past performances of the Daily Racing Form) to your handicapping arsenal, is a good way to help separate the ‘bounce’ candidates, from potential winners! Some trainers become known for being adept at racing horses successfully, not only second time off a layoff, but also without a workout and over time you will get to know who they are, by doing your homework.

As with all handicapping angles and theories, one has to also seek value! With this being said, if the Trainer of our layed off horse sees fit to move the horse up in class today, which is a show of confidence, if you are getting some value on the odds board today, then you may want to consider a wager. Mind you on the flip side, if the horse looks like it is being over bet off that last out performance, it may be a better idea to toss it out and hope that it does indeed ‘bounce’.

In closing, first and foremost, the ‘bounce’ factor does exist, however I honestly believe that these cases are more limited then what handicappers wish to believe. More importantly though, an astute bettor, by using Trainer patterns, track and surface conditions, pace, etc, can use the ‘bounce’ theory to their own benefit and create some exceptional and profitable betting plays at the same time.



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			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		

December

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



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