

PONIES 24-7

VOLUME 11/ISSUE 2/2025
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Griffin Johnson

Major Horse Racing Influencer
Griffin Johnson

Racing Silks

The Story Behind
the Racing Silks

The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer



PONIES 24-7

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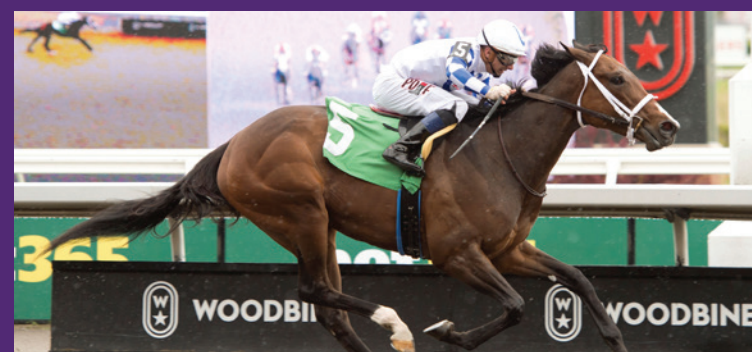
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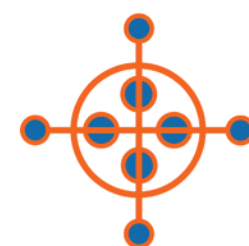


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AT THE POST



WELCOME BACK!

Welcome back to another great issue of PONIES 24-7. Well, you could say that the ride continues for our 'Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE' as recently the show became exclusive to a fourth FM channel, FM 102, Bolton and the new addition now compliments our three original broadcast points, FM 101, Orangeville, FM 101 Milton, and FM 92 South Simcoe. Live streaming on demand still remains, at

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BOLTONNOW.CA

Of course, with the addition of the fourth station, it also includes an additional 'bump' of people getting their 'PONIES fix' on Saturday mornings! We originally saw a significant increase in listenership, when we moved into 2025 when our numbers quickly hit 'North' of 160,000 avid horse racing enthusiasts, a number that includes both live listeners and those that are streaming the Saturday morning broadcast at 8 am Eastern. Since our last edition of PONIES 24-7, we are happy to report that our numbers have now soared to slightly over 230,000 listeners on Saturday morning, with several more thousand enjoying 'Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE', in an after air podcast format on platforms including Spotify and Apple Music, just to name a couple.

AND PEOPLE SAID THAT FM RADIO WAS DEAD!

On the contrary, we believe that there is something to be said for terrestrial radio

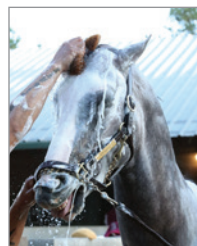
which comes with its own advantages-easier accessibility for the listener, there is a nostalgic connection with people, it remains a great medium for advertising and best of all, FM Radio is free for those tuning in! 'Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE', continues to introduce the great sport of horse racing to a plethora of new listeners on Saturday mornings and now in our fifth season, the show offers 60 minutes of action-packed interviews, handicapping selections and informative content for horse racing fans everywhere. We also remain the only Canadian FM Radio Show, covering the sport of horse racing and one of only a few shows across North America. And we are not just in it for, to put it in a horse racing term, a 'half-mile', instead we continue to introduce the radio show to new markets, including a major recent push towards the American horse racing market-so you could say, that it is our intention to go the full mile!

In the meantime, please enjoy this edition of our PONIES 24-7 digital magazine and some more, great editorial content, including an interview with leading North American horse racing Social Influencer Griffin Johnson, who is doing his part to introduce new generations to the great sport of horse racing, through his involvement as an ownership partner in the Thoroughbred Graded Stakes winner, Sandman!

Also, don't forget to check out our library of past shows and magazines at www.ponies247.com.

Until next time,

Larry Simpson
theponies247experience@gmail.com



ABOUT THE COVER

Arkansas Derby winner Sandman, enjoying a well deserved soapy bath after training.

Photo Courtesy of Griffin Johnson

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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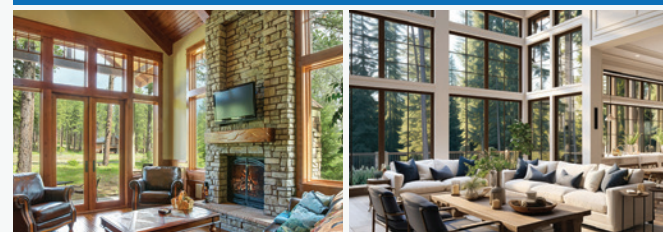
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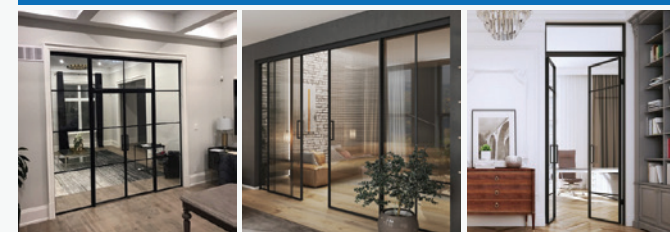
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In Conversation with Larry Simpson

GRIFFIN JOHNSON

Major Horse Racing Influencer Griffin Johnson.

Photo's Courtesy of Griffin Johnson

With over 14 million followers, Influencer Griffin Johnson is doing his part to bring major attention to Thoroughbred racing and in particular from the younger generation. You could say that it may be a tough feat to get the younger crowd involved, but Griffin even went so far to purchase a small share in the three-year-old Sandman through West Point Thoroughbreds and the winner of the Arkansas Derby went on to start in the Kentucky Derby and then finish third in the Preakness Stakes. It was actually at both the Kentucky Derby and Preakness that Griffin was able to introduce many new fans, through his on-track and backstretch experiences on Social Media and at the time, of these Triple Crown events, he had 2.7 million followers on Instagram, 9.7 million on TikTok and 1.6 million on X. And, it's a safe bet, pardon the pun, that because those Social Media numbers were derived pre-Preakness, I am going to guess that Griffin's collection of followers have increased exponentially since then. Horse Racing has been clamoring for a younger generation to embrace the sport and Griffin Johnson could be 'that guy' that helps make it happen. Recently, Social Influencer Griffin Johnson joined "Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE" Show for the first time and the following interview transpired.



PONIES 24-7: Well Griffin thanks for doing this, first off on behalf of the entire Horse Racing industry, let me thank you for doing something that many have tried and unfortunately have failed at, that is attracting the younger generation to the sport, tell me what's in the secret sauce for you to be able to achieve this?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: First of all Larry, thank you for those kind words, I really appreciate it and it's really nice to hear from people like yourself that really love the sport. I think the biggest factor that we have seen in the whole landscape of Sandman, was me getting involved early and showing his entire journey from the first two-year-old race, breaking his Maiden to all the way to the Arkansas Derby and then running in the Triple Crown. The 'horse world' I believe has been able to bring in some celebrities to the sport, people way bigger than me, but the problem was that it wasn't authentic. More than ever now people are receiving content on a daily basis, thousands and thousands of videos, which you can get with just one tap of your finger! People are also getting smarter, they are indulging and digesting a lot of different content and they can tell when things are real or not. That's the biggest thing with the Sandman story, showing off the people and I'm very passionate about showing how this 'horse world' works and just how amazing it really is and what it has to offer. I am not afraid to

be ignorant about something, I show humility I think in a big way by not always knowing the right answers and messing things up. Social Media is really a great way to make people feel included and not be scared to make an error like I have. (Laughs)

PONIES 24-7: And I guess that it didn't hurt when you actually went out and, I'm going to say, 'put your money where your mouth is' and bought a piece of Sandman, right?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: Sure, look I bought it through ABR, Stakes and Stardom and of course many people say it's like owning 2% of shares in Amazon and saying that you own the company, (Laughs). I've made jokes about it, like yeah that's a real expensive hoof out there, (Laughs), but it is all in good fun. Realistically, anyone that has a piece of a racehorse, especially on a two-year-old, you are taking a gamble. You are there 'for the ride', it's a private investment, so I wouldn't say that it is exactly like buying stock, but having these opportunities to get people involved and they are now learning that a 'kid' can do it, is interesting, right? Syndicates allow people to have the opportunity to have 'skin in the game'! You had Seize the Grey that is owned by a couple of thousand people through *MyRacehorse.com* and you get these groups going to the point where people say 'wow', it's not as distant as I thought it was!

PONIES 24-7: Of course, it's the old adage that 'nobody hates a horse', horses have been popular since almost forever, but you kind of hit the homerun, because 'A' you have a grey, and 'B', you own a piece of a horse that competed in the Kentucky Derby, finished third in the Preakness and the fact is, you made sure that your 'postings' were real'. You were also able to get behind the scenes in the backstretch with Sandman, you were there for the lead up to the Derby itself, and of course trackside for the race and the same with the Preakness. This hands-on by you had to help the sport, especially to that younger generation -they were all saying, 'Gee, I want to be just like Griffin'.

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: (Laughs), I mean it goes back to the authenticity again, leading up to the Derby, you know no one even knew this, but I was there two weeks in advance in the morning at 6 am, in the barns and helping out and learning how to groom Sandman. I spent time talking to people in the Tack Room, talking to the Vets and trying to learn more about what they do during the day and really just learning about what goes on the backside. Many people aren't even aware of what goes on in the

backstretch and the work that it takes to keep the horses healthy and happy! That was a big part of my postings, trying to give people an inside look.

PONIES 24-7: Exactly and as you know we had Mark (Casse) Sandman's Trainer on the show last week and he said right on this show that the bond that you have with Sandman is real and that you are the 'real deal'. For our new listeners, maybe you can talk about what it is like to be a horse owner?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: Well, I think the experience is based on what you want to get out of it, right and I think that everyone is looking for different things when they do become an owner. For me, it was that I wanted to understand and learn about the racing industry and about the 'space', the horses and really just get into the 'nitty gritty' of the business. For me, I will say this about Mark Casse, he's obviously a legend in Canada and a lot of people look up to what he has done in the business and they should. Mark has made this experience for me absolutely phenomenal and without his love for the game and running Sandman when he is healthy and placing him in the right spots to race and allowing me to film and do everything, well you know not every owner or every trainer is willing to do that. I always give out 'kudos' to Mark, for allowing me to do this and yes the experience of being an owner for me has been amazing. I would say that I do have a real great relationship with Sandman and I have spent as much time as I can with him and there's a different experience when you feel a connection with the horse that's 'running large', instead of having a horse that's 'just running'. For me, it's like my 'kid' out there! (Laughs)

PONIES 24-7: Exactly, but Griffin, what has Sandman taught you about horses in general?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: I think the biggest thing that he has taught me is that horses are way smarter than anyone gives them credit for! They are so emotionally in-tune with what's going on around them, all your energy, the emotions that you are feeling, they really can sense that. Obviously, I can't get into their brain and find out to what extent, but whenever I'm feeling something or saying something, I can change Sandman's entire demeanor, like hyping him up after a race, when he is much more gentle and calm and trying to get his head scratched. When it's almost race day though, you can feel the nerves and the tension and he is bouncing around more and doing his thing. It just comes down to how intelligent horses are and how much they truly love what they

are doing, because they have to be able to compete at that level. They really love to run!

PONIES 24-7: But you also had a 'horsey' background didn't you, as there were horses in your family?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: I didn't have any horses myself, but I. grew up all around them. Many of my friends had horses, the neighbours had horses and when I'm talking neighbours, they were a quarter mile away. (Laughs) I grew up in a small town in the middle of nowhere, called Paris, Illinois, just a little farm town and pretty much right on the border of Indiana. There were horses everywhere and I grew up doing decathlon and bailing hay and taking care of pretty much any livestock that you can think of. So, that was my background, I didn't have Thoroughbreds and back then owning a horse just seemed like a distant thing. You always thought that you had to be rich to go to the Kentucky Derby and even touch the track which was the mindset back then.

PONIES 24-7: Well, let's talk about what you are doing now and for us old people, like myself (Laughs), maybe you can explain what you do as a Social Influencer?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: It all goes back to being authentic and that's where I start with every single thing that I do. Like Horse Racing, is that interesting to me, yeah it is, but what makes it interesting to me? I want to get to know the horses and how the business works as I never got the opportunity to be in this sport growing up and never saw what was available to me.



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So, whenever I start making my content, that is what I backtrack from, like how can I tell the story and be authentic about it, of my experience with the horse and showing people how they can get involved. I was given a very blessed opportunity to have a piece of Sandman as my first horse who ended up being so beautiful and spectacular. My goal has been to figure out how do I share this with people and how do I make it an experience for people for free, of such an amazing horse. And that's exactly what my whole career has been about, I have been at it for six years now and have been in a lot of verticals and different niches and horse racing has been my absolute favorite, so far by a mile! That's how I approach it and then how do I share it with people and do it in a way where everyone feels a part of the experience and will also actually get something out of it.

PONIES 24-7: So, how many followers do you have now since the Preakness, Griffin?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: On TikTok I'm 'creeping up' on 10 million, I'm working on 3 million for Instagram, 2 million for Twitter and I believe through some of the others like Snapchat, Facebook, etc., I believe I'm around 17 or 18 million followers now.

PONIES 24-7: Wow, well you talk about you being an Influencer, was there someone that influenced you in your life and maybe too, someone who influenced you in the Horse Racing industry, or perhaps that might have been Mark Casse?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: That's a really good question Larry, funny enough I didn't grow up watching movies or follow any Social Media at all. I actually didn't have any Social Media until I started with TikTok and I would maybe post twice a year on Facebook. I didn't really have an idol or role model as far as Social Media went, but for horse racing, what really got me involved and to be honest I wasn't searching for it at the very beginning, but what really made me get involved was Sandman himself. He has kind of been my inspiration throughout this entire journey and just learning about him, as I didn't really have an idol in horse racing growing up, but once I saw Sandman, there was something about him, like a look in his eye and I just knew then that he was something special!

PONIES 24-7: Was there any disappointment in the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness with Sandman?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: No, with the Derby the only disappointment was that I knew he was better than what he showed, with the track conditions that he was



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given. And that's just a proud father talking, (*Laughs*). The biggest thing was that he came back healthy, as he had never run on a track that was so sloppy and we didn't know what to expect. His Preakness run was great, he was a little out of focus in the stretch run, but he still has a lot of room for improvement. Getting him to mature and focus is his biggest kryptonite right now and that's a good problem to have.

PONIES 24-7: The bottom line Griffin is that you actually had an opportunity to race in the Kentucky Derby and a lot of people can't say that, correct?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: I recognize that and even for me growing up in the Midwest that was the alma mater, for me to say that I was at the Kentucky Derby was a proud moment and just a fantastic experience. I had heard about the race so much growing up and to be running in it was just incredible and I just soaked it all in. I got a chance to do the walkover and luckily everyone was super involved in helping me get on the track and making sure that I had this one time, once in a lifetime experience. Once again I realize how grateful and special it is to make it to the Derby and that is why I was so gracious in telling that story.

PONIES 24-7: What does the future hold for Griffin Johnson, especially when it comes to horse racing?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: Look, my dream is for Grandparents to bring their Grandkids to the track, for parents to bring their Kids and for just people my age to start showing up and being able to share the moment together. For me, I'm looking to get more horses and to keep telling stories, because I think there's a five to ten year dream, where attendance at the racetrack has doubled, people are showing up to watch their favorite horses regularly and I want to build up stories and create '*Teams*', with Trainers, like a '*Team Casse*', or a '*Team Baffert*' and also promote Jockey's, so that way people can come to the track, because with Sandman it was the first time for many that they actually knew a horse. Sure, they see what he does on the track, but they also get to see his personality. I want to do that with the entire sport and really show people what horse racing has to offer. That's my dream for the next five to ten years; get more horses, continue to tell stories and to get as many people involved in the industry as possible.

PONIES 24-7: Well, when Mark Casse was on the show last week, he said he was going to try to get you up to Woodbine for the King's Plate, at Woodbine

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: Yes, he's very adamant about that and I'm really going to try and make it up there. I'm just waiting for Mark, he doesn't tell me how to do content and I just wait for him to tell me where to go! (*Laughs*)

PONIES 24-7: Well Griffin thanks for doing this, it's been a pleasure, keep up the great work and we will have to have you on the show again, maybe when you are up here at Woodbine for the King's Plate in August.

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: For sure, anytime and thank you to everyone who is listening to this show and thanks to everyone who has watched Sandman race. I always like to end each interview by saying that. It's been a lot of fun and I hope that everyone that has watched Sandman race enjoyed it, but more importantly, make sure you tell your friends about the sport and start bringing people out to the track.

PONIES 24-7: That's right and the Sandman story is not over yet?

GRIFFIN JOHNSON: It's not, we still have a long way to go!



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THE STORY BEHIND THE RACING SILKS

WOODBINE OAKS EDITION

Sophie Charalambous, for Woodbine



Ahead of the \$500,000 Woodbine Oaks Presented by Stella Artois, that took place Sunday, July 20, six owners with fillies in the field share the inspiration behind their silks and how their designs came to life.

From tributes to family legacies and lost loved ones to nods to hometown pride and personal passions, each owner brings a piece of their world to the track. At this year's Woodbine Oaks, the silks tell stories as rich as the race itself.

Elliott Logan – Reveler's Row

Reveler's Row is trained by Katerina Vassilieva and owned by TEC Racing, run by Elliott Logan. TEC Racing's silks are white with a red "L" in a blue horseshoe with "TEC" in blue. They also showcase white and blue blocks on the sleeves, with a blue and white cap.

The silks hold deep personal significance. The "T" represents Elliott's daughter Taylor, the "E" is for Elliott himself, and the "C" stands for his wife Carol. "The 'L' that is inside the horseshoe on our silks is the 'L' that my dad signed his last name with, that's how he wrote his 'L', so we replicated it in the middle of our silks. It has a lot of our family tradition and history in our silks."

Introduced to horse racing by his father, Logan has passed that passion on to the next generation.

"My dad was my horse racing buddy growing up, and now my daughter has become my horse racing buddy as she's grown up," said Elliott, who owned his first horse at 18. "She owned her first horse at age 16. She loves it just like I do. It's a family thing we do together."

The red, blue, and white in the TEC Racing silks represent sports teams that Logan is a fan of.

"I've always been a Cincinnati Reds fan growing up, so the red in the horseshoe is the colour of the Cincinnati Reds. I'm a Kentucky basketball fan as well, so the blue and white is the University of Kentucky. It's down to the colour and the letter in our silks when we came up with the design, so that's where the colour scheme comes from. It has a lot of personal meaning."



Jon Green – Winterberry and Shifty

Winterberry and Shifty are both trained by Mark Casse and owned by D. J. Stable LLC. The silks are burgundy with a white diamond hoop. There are also white diamonds on the burgundy sleeves, with a burgundy cap.

"My mom (Lois Green) wanted something with diamonds," said Jon Green from D.J. Stable. "We chose the maroon and white as they were my high school colours."



Gary Barber – No Time and War Signal

Gary Barber owns No Time and War Signal, two fillies also trained by Casse. Barber's silks are hot pink with "BB" in a black circle. The sleeves are hot pink with a black cap.



René Hunderup – Ella It Is

Casse’s fifth horse in the race, Ella It Is, is owned by Heste Sport Inc. Heste Sport’s silks are white, with a red and blue “H” in the middle, with blue sleeves and a red cap.

René Hunderup shares the personal and family meaning behind his silks.

“Red and blue are our farm colours. I’m a blue guy and my wife always liked the colour red.”

As for the “H” logo, “The significant part is the H-logo – H for Hunderup. It comprises a J and an L; J for Jacinda and Jason, and L for LaMarche. Our late daughter was named Jacinda LaMarche-Hunderup, and our son is Jason LaMarche-Hunderup.”



Lou Donato – R Canadian Apple

R Canadian Apple is trained by Mike De Paulo and owned by Lou Donato, George Gronwall, Kim Valerio, Prakash Sham Masand, and Averill Racing LLC.

The filly runs in Lou Donato’s silks, which are purple, with a gold panel. There are also purple chevrons on gold sleeves, with a purple and gold cap.

Donato has used these silks for more than 30 years.

He wanted them to be distinct and stand out, especially during the race itself.

“I’ve been following horses for a long time. I wanted colours that I could follow and that could stand out. I wanted silks that I knew where my horse was at all times. I wanted them to stand out when I’m following my horse.”

As for the gold and purple symbolism, Donato shared, “I think gold is a sign of success, and that’s why the gold is there. My wife picked the purple.”



Brent McLellan – Crystal Visions

Crystal Visions is trained by Stuart Simon and owned by Simon and Brent McLellan. For Crystal Visions, McLellan’s silks are used.

McLellan created his silks in the early 2000s. His silks are regionally inspired and personal to the Calgary native. McLellan’s silks are white, with a red and gold sash, with red hoops on the sleeves, and a white cap.

“When we moved horses over here, I’d always run my horses with Stu, and we always used his silks,” McLellan. “When I moved out here, I decided it was time to get some silks. The colours I chose were based on the Calgary Flames team uniform at the time – white, gold, and red – just a big homage to my Calgary upbringing. I always liked red and gold and white anyway.”

McLellan wanted a more traditional design, which allows the colours to pop more.

“The design itself is cross sashes, and I wanted to keep it traditional. Those designs are quite common in horse racing.”



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The Racer's Edge

A Handicapping Primer

By Larry Simpson

Some Help In Distinguishing Whether A Thoroughbred's Form Is Improving Or On The Decline

Deciding whether a horse's form is on the improve or regressing, has always been a stumbling block that handicappers of all levels of experience have faced on a daily basis. The traditional belief that an improving horse may be observed to run closer to the leader at the prestretch, stretch and final call after a layoff still holds true. However there are many other signs of improving form and probably just as many or more clues to declining form. In fact, it's probably safe to say that you could most likely fill the pages of what we would hope to be a best selling book, when talking about many of these form indicators, but for brevity's sake, we will 'drill down' on several of both below. Of interest, is that some of these indicators can be detected not just in the last running line, but they may also be prevalent in the horse's last two running lines, or even three races back. In any case though, it's important to give some extra attention to the signs of improving form and a horse who looks to be on the decline and your bankroll will thank you for it.

Let's first look at a few examples of improving form:

- The horse's comment in the last race Past Performance line reads 'bid and hung', however despite this, the horse in question did finish in front of at least half of the field.
- The horse was part of an all-out stretch drive in its last start.
- You notice that the horse won its last race by three lengths or more.
- A horse is back in to race in five days, which is rare nowadays, but is still a good

sign of improving form when it does arise.

- The horse showed an improved race last time out and has followed up this effort with a good or even better 'bullet' workout.
- A horse that is a Sprinter is making its third start off a long layoff and the second race back was a much improved effort.
- A Router that has been freshened and has raced in a couple of Sprint races, stretches out today to a familiar Route distance.
- He or she exits a very fast claiming event with a good performance.
- A 'back class' horse with some dull recent form, showed some surprisingly good early speed last start.



Photo by Michael Burns

On the flip-side, some astute handicapping can also drill down on some 'red flag' symbols that something is not right, and a horse's recent form has been in decline. These include the following:



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LARRY'S STORY

"The support Lymphoma Canada provided greatly assisted me in dealing with the ups and downs of my lymphoma journey." – Larry

Larry's journey with lymphoma began in early 2020, around the time the global COVID-19 pandemic started. Larry began experiencing drenching night sweats, fatigue and sluggishness, and unexplained fevers. He thought it might be COVID-19 - but it wasn't!

In February, new symptoms appeared. His joints were stiff and painful, and his ankle started to swell. Even more frightening was the fact that he was rapidly losing weight.

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.

Learn more about Larry's Story at www.lymphoma.ca/larry

For Larry and for all patients facing a new lymphoma diagnosis, there is a pressing need for research focused on improving patient outcomes and in identifying new treatment options. Your gift will directly fund lymphoma research resulting in new therapies and better quality of life for patients. Scan the QR code to donate today!



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- The horse has run three bad races in a row.
- After being off for a 30 day rest period, there is a drab performance in the last Past Performance line.
- There is also a decline in the horse's recent Speed Figures or if you follow them, Pace Ratings.
- The horse runs a winning race, or even a good one, which is then followed by a drop in class that doesn't make any sense at all.
- After a lengthy layoff, he or she runs what is referred to as an over-extended race, setting up today's race for the always familiar 'bounce' performance.
- The horse shows up on the track today with first time front bandages, especially Maidens and Stakes horses.
- Again, a quick look at the Comment in the Past Performance line indicates in the last race that the horse was 'lugging in' or 'bearing out' continually through the stretch, which is not a good sign.
- A horse whose last race shows an uncharacteristic

running style and lack of position, namely at the first call, especially if this is a horse that is usually on the lead or at least close to the pace. This is especially noticeable in Sprint races and is a good sign that the horse has perhaps lost a bit of its 'edge'.

There are many other signs that a horse may be either in an improving mode or regressing and as you get deeper into the science of handicapping and reading Past Performance lines, you will gradually get to recognize some or all of these. Also, as you become more astute at watching races and reading a 'Racing Form', you just may develop your own list of factors that will indicate either better or lapsing form, keeping in mind though that 'Horses are not machines' and like us humans, they do have their off days and this could be reflected in a lacklustre performance on the racetrack.



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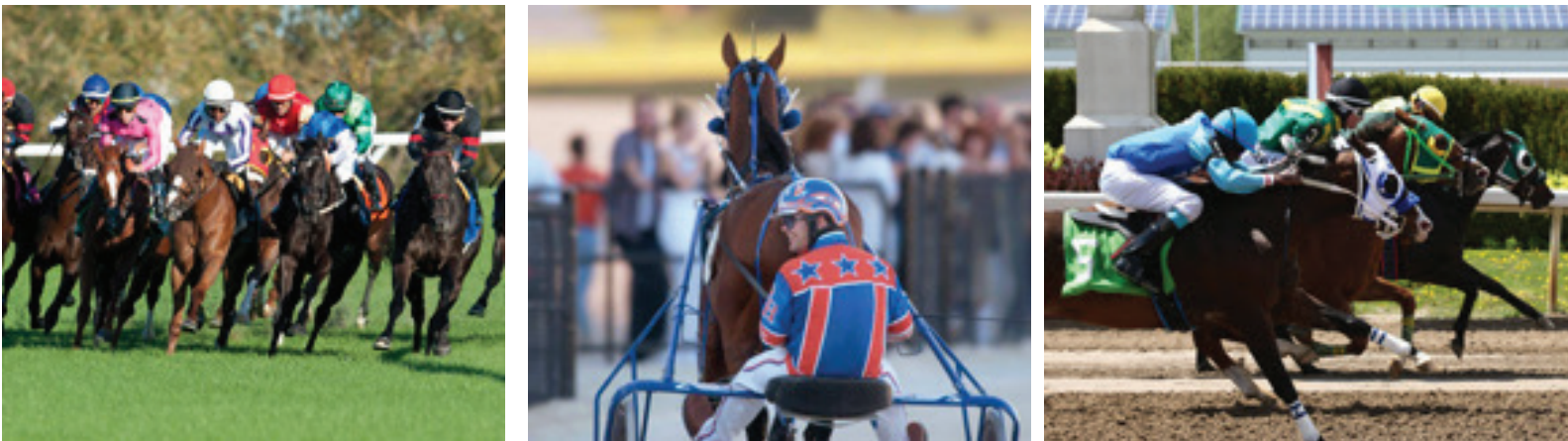
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