



# American Turf

MAGAZINE

February 2017

## OAKLAWN PREVIEW 2017

*Also...*

8th Annual "Connie" Awards

Horse of the Month: Classic Empire

The \$12 Million Pegasus World Cup

Freshman Stallion: Animal Kingdom



## Articles

- 4 Feature  
Oaklawn Park
- 8 Midwest Memo  
Jon Court with 4,000 Wins
- 12 Horse of the Month  
CLASSIC EMPIRE
- 16 Betting Freshman Stallions  
ANIMAL KINGDOM
- 30 Contest Central  
The Eighth Annual "Conny" Awards
- 34 Over the Turf  
Consistency-Based Automatic Spot Plays
- 36 West Coast Notebook  
Q&A with Frank Mirahmadi
- 38 East Coast Update  
Gulfstream Ready to Host World's Richest Race

- 42 Skeptical Handicapper  
Free Money, Maybe
- 44 Turf Investor  
Go Against the Tote Board with the Product of  
Your Handicapping Efforts – The Unique Result

## Extras

- 19 William F. Hudgins Jr.'s Turf Selections
- 20 Horses To Watch
- 27 Stop Watch and Shed Row
- 28 Index to Fit & Ready, Shed Row  
and Stop Watch

  
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# Oaklawn Park

## The Midwest's Best Winter Dirt Racing

By Michael Leon

**W**INTER DIRT RACING IS IN FULL force at Oaklawn Park, and the best part of the meet is still yet to come over the course of February, March, and early April as the track marches on to Arkansas Derby Day on Saturday, April 15. When the weather heats up, so does the action at Oaklawn.

Oaklawn Park is just one of the many pathways to the Kentucky Derby, with prep races like the Southwest Stakes and the Rebel leading up to the Arkansas Derby. This again will be highlighted this year, as this was the pathway taken by American Pharoah in 2015 on his road to the Triple Crown.

Oaklawn's \$500,000 G3 Southwest Stakes for 3-year-olds assumes its regular President's Day spot on the calendar this season on Monday, February 20. The Southwest is followed by the final local prep for the Arkansas Derby, the G2 Rebel Stakes on Saturday, March 18.

Looking farther down the road at this meet at Oaklawn Park, the Arkansas Derby is the centerpiece of the track's "Racing Festival of the South," a closing-week, stakes-filled mega event from April 8-15, when the track runs nine stakes races, including five Graded stakes like the G2 Oaklawn Handicap, the G1 Apple Blossom, the G3 Count Fleet Sprint, and the G3

Fantasy, and of course the G1 \$1 million Arkansas Derby.

The 3-year-old stakes scene at Oaklawn Park always gets a major boost each year with the constant presence of Bob Baffert, who ships in regularly from California with prime contenders – usually the favorites and often the winners – of races such as the Southwest, Rebel, and Arkansas Derby.

### Oaklawn Handicapping Guide

Oaklawn Park generally does not get the notoriety of the other key winter meets from around the country, due in large part to the fact that Oaklawn does not have a turf course. Nevertheless, the day-to-day dirt racing at Oaklawn,

featuring big fields, is nearly on par with anyone else running at this time of year, especially in the Midwest.

Handicapping at Oaklawn Park has its nuances, and it pays to pay attention to the daily happenings at the meet. While the racing surface is mostly regarded as fair at Oaklawn, the track does have some prevailing biases to watch out for, in addition to some occasional track biases that tend to pop-up here and there in terms of inside or outside paths, or speed or off-the-pace running style biases as the weather tends to change track conditions from day to day.

The Oaklawn dirt course is a one-mile oval with two different finish lines

### Oaklawn Park's Racing Festival of the South Stakes 2017 Schedule

DATE	STAKES RACE	PURSE	CONDITIONS
April 8	Carousel Stakes	\$150,000	4 & up, fillies and mares, 6F
April 8	Arkansas Breeders	\$100,000	3 & up, Ark.-bred, 11/16M
April 13	Bachelor Stakes	\$150,000	3-yo, 6 furlongs
April 14	Apple Blossom-G1	\$600,000	Fillies and mares, 1 1/8 miles
		The Fantasy-G3	\$400,000
April 15	Count Fleet Sprint-G3	\$400,000	4-yo & up, 6 furlongs
	Arkansas Derby-G1	\$1,000,000	3-yo, 1 1/8 miles
	Oaklawn Handicap-G2	\$750,000	4-yo & up, 1 1/8 miles
	The Northern Spur	\$150,000	3-yo colts & geldings, 1 mile

– the traditional finish line, and an auxiliary finish line at the sixteenth pole which serves as the finish for one-mile races. This makes the run-up into the first turn longer at a mile and therefore lessens the disadvantages to outside posts. The second finish line has, in fact, made a big difference for Oaklawn horseplayers, raising the overall success rate for outside gates in route races to be nearly equal to inside posts, which in the past had always been strongly advantageous over outside draws in Oaklawn routes.

Inside posts, and particularly the rail, are generally still good at all distances. However, the drop-off from inside-to-outside is not really as dramatic as it used to be at Oaklawn, especially in route races where the inside posts once ruled, but now, thanks in part to the auxiliary one-mile finish line at the sixteenth pole, horses can have relatively fair shots from almost any gate.

Instead of using post positions to help you narrow down the fields when handicapping Oaklawn, a better idea

these days is to use horses' running styles, and combine them with a careful eye on the track's changing track biases when hunting for Oaklawn winners.

At Oaklawn, the tried-and-true prevailing running-style bias is always toward horses with early speed, or at least tactical speed, who can stay within no more than 2-3 lengths of the early lead. Due to the one-mile Oaklawn track layout and relatively short stretch-run in comparison to other tracks (even shorter stretch-run at one mile), Oaklawn always has been this way and probably always will be – except on days when the bias changes and noticeably favors one particular running style over another, on days when weather wreaks havoc, or in races that feature speed duels or hotly-contested paces.

I suggest using track bias information in your continued handicapping at Oaklawn and keep track for yourself how the track plays daily. When you see a horse exiting a race on a bias day, check the horse's running style, post

position, or inside/outside trip on the bias day in question. When a horse exits a race where it benefited from running with a track bias, downgrade that horse in the race you're currently handicapping. When you see a horse that exits a race where it was hurt by running against a track bias, then go ahead and upgrade that horse in the race you're currently handicapping. This is a great way to find good-odds winners and to ensure that you are betting live overlays while at the same time ignoring bad underlays.

### Oaklawn Jockeys and Trainers

Trainer STEVE ASMUSSEN and jockey RICARDO SANTANA JR. both enjoyed highly successful meets in 2016, topped by Creators's victory in the \$1 million Arkansas Derby. Asmussen earned his seventh leading trainer title with 46 wins and an Oaklawn record \$3,448,729 in earnings, while Santana earned his fourth straight leading riding title with 80 wins and \$4,064,073, also an Oaklawn earnings record.



*Oaklawn Park*



### *American Pharoah Took the Oaklawn Route to the Triple Crown in 2015*

Both Asmussen and Santana should be able to once again lead the way in their respective leaderboards throughout the Oaklawn season.

In the jockey standings, the real battle probably will be for second between Ramon Vazquez and a guy like CHANNING HILL, who was fourth in the 2016 standings with 33 wins including four stakes. Vazquez, however, should get the best mounts behind Santana after racking up 42 wins in 2016, just a year after losing the jockey title by only two wins to Santana in 2015. In terms of win percentages, it is all Santana on top with 22% wins in 2016. Vasquez earned only 14% wins, and it was Hill actually who was second behind Santana in this category amongst regular riders with an 18% win percentage.

The other jockey to watch this season will be the subject of this month's feature article, JON COURT, who won 29 races at Oaklawn in 2016 (sixth place) and is on the comeback trail in 2017 after an injury riddled 2016.

Trainer STEVE ASMUSSEN, as mentioned was 2016's leading trainer and won his third Arkansas Derby in 2016 with Creator. If anyone is to challenge the new hall of famer, it probably will be CHRIS HARTMAN who was a distant second to Asmussen in 2016 but before that had been 2015's leading trainer at Oaklawn with very strong numbers (129-34-21-14, \$1.1 million, 26%/53%). The top five trainers are likely to be rounded out by BRAD COX (23 wins and a 26% win percentage in 2016), FEDERICO VILAFRANCO (22 wins, 17%), and RON MOQUETT (24 wins, 18%).

One trainer you definitely want to wager on at Oaklawn, who may or may not be in the top 5 in the standings, is ROBERTINO DIODORO, who won 22 race from 70 starters at Oaklawn in 2016 for a giant 31% wins. With a smaller stable locally, AL STALL was also extremely dangerous in 2016 and worth betting in 2017 with 7 winners from 20 starters for a

big 35% win percentage.

#### **Summary**

There are three months of great racing at the Oaklawn meet, so there will be plenty of time for to get your slice of the pari-mutuel dough as long as you don't overlook this great annual winter meet. Keep track of your own horses to watch, as well as the horses to watch offered every month in American Turf Magazine and every week in our American Turf Club weekly newsletter, and use the tips in this season preview article to help you cash-in on some seriously good tickets at Oaklawn Park. Make sure not to miss Oaklawn's upcoming premier 3-year-old stakes races on the road to the Kentucky Derby, and of course keep an eye out for Oaklawn's best week of racing at the Racing Festival of the South, including the Arkansas Derby, at the beginning of April. Best of luck, and enjoy the meet!







# Jon Court with 4,000 Wins Looks For More at Oaklawn Park in 2017

By David Zenner

ON DEC. 3, 2016, JON COURT scored the 4,000th victory of his illustrious career when he guided Without Pity to the Turfway Park winner's circle. The milestone score topped an up-and-down 2016 season that saw the Florida-born rider twice sidelined by injury; the first in an off-track accident in June and the second in September when he broke three vertebrae and two ribs in a spill at Churchill Downs.

"I was really delighted [to get win No. 4,000]. I just wanted to get there and I was beginning to wonder for a while [if I was going to get there]. I had a couple of things hold me back but I ended 2016 basking in a career milestone."

At 56-years-old most riders have hung up their tack, but Court is healthy, still putting up good numbers, and enjoying the game and as such sees no reason to even consider calling it a career.

"The thing that keeps me going is that I started doing something I enjoy," said Court, who began his career at the old Centennial Park in Colorado in 1980. "I still like riding and I love winning, and as long as I'm capable of doing it consistently [I'm going to keep riding]. The key thing in anything whether you like it or love it or just getting through the day-to-day task

of something is not getting sour – just trying to keep it fresh or keep it real and take one day at a time.

"The thing about this industry is we have the opportunity to pursue the goals and the dreams that exist from the day it attracted us – those are the races that always keep people excited from the Derby and Triple Crown series to the Breeders' Cup races. But I also enjoy the small things, and I'm fortunate enough to have that."

Court is positive almost to a fault and so well-liked by his peers that it's easy to see why they honored him with the 2007 George Woolf Memorial Award.

"I try to have a positive approach since you're going to have the ups and downs in life," Court said. "The best way is to not get too sour or let something steam you – that just doesn't sit well with you. That is not the healthiest way to go about it so I try to stay with a positive mental attitude as well as a physical healthy attitude.

"Fifty-six is not as old as people think," Court said. "I'm in pretty good shape and I compete with these young guys. I didn't get my first riding title until I was 26 or 27 but I really didn't hit my best stride until I was past 36 and on into my 40s. One of the keys to my success is not beating myself up physically or mentally. As long as I can compete, produce the results and enjoy

the game, I'm going to stick around for an extended period of time."

Court has ridden numerous graded stakes runners and winners including capturing back-to-back Arkansas Derbies is 2010-11 with Line of David and Archarcharch, the latter of whom took Court to the Kentucky Derby where he finished 15th.

"It's great to get to the dance [the Kentucky Derby]. Anytime you get there you have a chance even if you have the odds stacked against you," Court said. "I've enjoyed the races I've had the opportunity to ride, especially the ones I've been fortunate enough to have some success with like the Arkansas Derby. I enjoyed going over to Japan. I was invited there and I won [the 2003 Japan Dirt Cup with 48-1 outsider Fleetstreet Dancer]. Those are all behind me and every day is a new day to pursue the dream that lies ahead."

What lies immediately ahead for Court is the Oaklawn Park meet in Arkansas where he won a title in 2000 and has been a more or less regular rider there since his first meet with the bug in 1981.

"I like it here," he said. "I've been riding here since I had the bug in 1981. I did winter a few years in other places. Oaklawn is one of the premier meets and has become to me the premier

meet in the country this time of year. The fanfare down here is awesome, the people treat you really good and it's just a great place to be.

"I have a lot of people who have rallied to support me and I have some clientele that keeps me in the game. It definitely helps generate the excitement for me of being involved in one of the premier meets in the country. I can be daunting though if you're riding but not having any success but there are those times you just have to grind through it. You know you're going to find yourself in the winner's circle sooner or later."

Another bonus of riding at Oaklawn is being close to family. His father in law is longtime trainer and Oaklawn mainstay W. H. "Jinks" Fires.

"I was on five this morning for Jinks," Court noted one recent morning after training hours. "I went out there and he asked me if I had I had time to get on one, and that turned out to be five.

The weather is pretty foul here right now. It's cold and wet so he wanted to beat the weather before it gets any worse. There are those seasons where we miss some days [racing and/or training] but there have been some seasons that we've gotten through that have been quite pleasant. We just have to deal with mother nature on a day-to-day basis."

Court has ventured elsewhere including riding for several years in Southern California.

"I've enjoyed everywhere I've ridden. Santa Anita – the Great Race Place – is a lot of fun. I went out there and stayed over five years. It was a great place and great weather but at the same time I desired to get back to Churchill.

"I'm riding my favorite schedule now residing the Kentucky circuit most of the year and down here in the winter. I'm happy where I'm at. Kentucky is where we made our home, but Oaklawn is our home away from home. If

you're happy with what you're doing and where you're at, it will carry you a long way."

JON COURT finished sixth in the 2016 Oaklawn jockey standings with 29 wins from 206 mounts for a 14% win percentage (37% in the money). Overall in 2016, Court won a total of 66 races for purse earnings of \$2.33 million. In addition to his multiple Arkansas Derby wins, he's also been aboard Graded Stakes victories for horses such as Frivolous, Oxbow, Optimizer, Will Take Charge, and even Wise Dan in the 2011 Firecracker Handicap at Churchill Downs. At Oaklawn, Court's best jockey/trainer combinations are with trainers BRAD COX and WILLIAM FIRES, so if those trainers have big meets, look for Court in the winner's circle early and often at Oaklawn in 2017.



*Intense Jon Court at Oaklawn*



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# CLASSIC EMPIRE

“He hasn’t been easy. He’s an extremely smart horse who sees things that other horses don’t.” – trainer Mark Casse.

By Ellen Parker

SOMETIMES, LIGHTNING REALLY DOES strike twice. When American Pharoah came along in 2015 to finally win a Triple Crown after a 37-year drought, there was a yearling by his young sire, Pioneerof the Nile, waiting in the wings.

Sold for \$425,000 that year at Keeneland, the beautifully balanced colt was spotted for owner John Oxley by trainer Mark Casse. From the same family that had produced such good horses as Cryptoclearance, Harlan’s Holiday, Revidere and Princessnesian, the bay colt was out of the winning Cat Thief mare Sambuca Classica. Cat Thief, of course, achieved immortality by winning the 1999 Breeders’ Cup Classic.

Sambuca Classica was out of the G1 stakes placed mare, In Her Glory, by the outstanding broodmare sire Miswaki, so the sale price of the youngster was more than justified and it did not take him long to prove trainer Casse an oracle.

Making an unusually early start,

Classic Empire debuted not long after his March 21 birthday in a 4 ½-furlong maiden special weight race over a sloppy Churchill Downs track on May 4 – the Wednesday before the Kentucky Derby. The colt broke a bit slowly under Julien Leparoux, who would become his regular rider, and finished “full of run” to win by 1 ½ lengths.

The win suggested plenty of promise and the colt was next entered in the \$100,000 G3 Bashford Manor Stakes, also at Churchill Downs. Although it was an impressive effort, Classic Empire gave a preview of what was to be a subsequent problem, ducking in at the start. The slow beginning, coupled with a wide trip into the stretch, would have given him an excuse had he lost. But his determined effort got him home by ¾ lengths over favored Recruiting Ready.

Said rider Leparoux, “The first time he won at 4 ½ furlongs, he was almost too quick and still won. But today at six furlongs, he was useful and while he’s still a baby and a bit green, he finished

very professionally.”

But Classic Empire was not quite done being a ‘baby’. In his next start, the G1 Hopeful at Saratoga under Irad Ortiz Jr. (who was perhaps not ready for him) the colt wheeled and dumped the unfamiliar rider. Said trainer Casse, “We think he saw a second starting gate that they keep along the course and when he sees something, he reacts.”

Casse and his team got right on the problem, not wanting the colt to form any bad habits. After all, as the Canadian Hall of Fame trainer noted, “I’ve been training for 37 years and this is the most impressive two-year-old I’ve ever had.”

Equipping the colt with blinkers, “We took him out to the track the next day,” recalled Casse’s son and assistant trainer Norm Casse. “He’s trained with blinkers on from that point. This horse looks at everything and he doesn’t just look, he looks and reacts and so if he sees something, he stops.”

Repeated trips to and out of the gate with the new hood on was a successful

therapy for the colt's overactive gawking and when Classic Empire appeared next in the \$500,000 G1 Breeders' Futurity at Keeneland and, united with Leparoux, he raced as a more seasoned competitor.

"Today he broke sharp and was all business," said Leparoux. He ran a big race. I was a bit surprised to be where I was (stalking the pace), but he did it easy and he was happy where he was. He got a little bit tired at the end, but it was his first two-turn race."

Classic Empire ran the 1-1/16 mile in 1:43 2/5 over a fast track and his margin of victory was three lengths over stakes winner Lookin at Lea. The win earned him a berth in the \$2 million Breeders' Cup Juvenile as well as upping his career earnings to \$385,920.

A trip across the country to Santa Anita was accomplished without incident – the colt did most of his prep work at his Churchill Downs base. Despite his excellent record, the colt went off second choice to Not This Time in the 11-horse field. Among the challengers was Practical Joke, who had won the G1 Hopeful when Classic Empire had wheeled and lost jockey Ortiz.

When the colt broke alertly, Leparoux allowed him to prompt the pace of Champagne Stakes second-place finisher, Syndergaard. By the half, he had taken the lead but Not This Time was a menacing shadow that got within a neck of Classic Empire at the wire. Practical Joke was 7-1/2 lengths back in third. The final time was 1:42 3/5 for the 1-1/16 miles and the winner's

share of the \$2 million purse upped the colt's bankroll to \$1,485,920.

Most importantly, all the hard work the Casse team had put into the Oxley color-bearer had borne fruit and the trainer was delighted that he had been able to bring out the best in "the most impressive two-year-old winner I've ever trained."

Casse explained, "What really amazes me is this horse's ability to have such a high cruising speed. And maybe that's another thing that makes this so special. He's an extremely smart horse and he tends to see things others don't so you never know what he's going to kind of do."

Added Leparoux, "We really love him and we know he was going to run good, so I'm so glad we got the win."

Now it's all about the history. The



*Classic Empire, Looking Forward to His 3-Year-Old Campaign*

body of work is there, the 2yo Eclipse is almost certain to follow and the sire already has a Triple Crown winner to his credit. Can it happen again? Casse mused about his plan to ready the handsome colt for his sophomore campaign.

The colt will winter in Florida and will likely begin his run to the Crown in the Feb. 4 Holy Bull Stakes (G2) followed by the March 4 Fountain of Youth Stakes (G2), both at Gulfstream Park. There is consideration being given to both the G1 Florida Derby and the Blue Grass Stakes at Keeneland, which has been downgraded for 2017 to a G2. This lowering in prestige seems to be the crux of the problem.

"I was really looking forward to taking Classic Empire back to Keeneland since he likes the track (having won the

Breeders' Futurity). It's a nice adjustment that time of year. You are starting to have spring and horses do extremely well in Kentucky in the spring. If we stay in Florida, the weather is different and I don't think it's quite as good. But right now we have to get past the first two steps before we decide."

If Classic Empire trains on at age three like American Pharoah, it very likely will not matter which race his connections choose. Owner Oxley has already had a Derby winner in the late Monarchos, so he understands what it takes to get to the big day and to feel the immense satisfaction of earning the roses.

Dynasties tend to come in Thoroughbred sire lines as well, and the Fappiano male line that gave us Kentucky Derby winner Unbridled, his son

Empire Maker, a Belmont winner, and Empire Maker's son Pioneerof the Nile, is showing every sign of being just such a sire line. It is noteworthy that Classic Empire shares with American Pharoah some juvenile quirks that required adjusting (Pharoah needed cotton in his ears) and that he was described by trainer Bob Baffert as having a "high cruising speed," just as Casse described Classic Empire.

So yes, this is a horse of dreams – born of a dynasty and with a similar juvenile record to his paternal Triple Crown-winning half sibling. Racing is, after all, about fanaticizing the big moments. Classic Empire seems just the horse to step forward and fulfill such dreams.





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# ANIMAL KINGDOM

## (Leroidesanimaux-Dalicia, by Acatenago)

By Lauren Stich

AGE	STARTS	1ST	2ND	3RD	EARNINGS
2	2	1	1	0	\$33,800
3	5	2	2	0	\$1,904,900
4	2	1	1	0	\$388,800
5	3	1	1	0	\$6,060,000

**I**N THE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE 2011 Kentucky Derby, there wasn't much talk about ANIMAL KINGDOM, a strongly-bred turf horse who won the Spiral Stakes over Turfway's synthetic course. But the word was out in the weeks leading up to the Derby that he was training exceptionally over Churchill's main dirt course.

Making his dirt debut in the Kentucky Derby, Animal Kingdom exploded in the stretch to win with authority over Nehro, Mucho Macho Man, and Shackelford. He proved that victory was no fluke when he was second to Shackelford in the Preakness. Limited to just two starts at age 4, he won an allowance race and was a game second in the Breeders' Cup Mile behind Wise Dan.

Prepping for the Dubai World Cup at age 5, he was heavily favored to win the Gulfstream Park Turf Handicap, but after racing strongly, he was no match for Point of Entry. It turned out to be the perfect prep, however, as Animal Kingdom was again his brilliant self, winning the Dubai World Cup in his next start.

**Tail-Male Sire Line (Leroidesanimaux – Candy Stripes – Blushing Groom).** Leroidesanimaux, and his entire European tail-male line, was strongly bred for turf, and he lived up to his family's prevalence for grass as he was champion turf horse in the U.S. While Candy Stripes also sires more turf winners than dirt, he notably sired Horse of the Year, Invasor,

who was a very special animal on dirt. Blushing Groom was a prolific sire of turf stakes winners, but he also sired Grade 1 quality runners on dirt, such as Arazi, Blush With Pride, Blushing John, Morning Bob, and champion racemare, Sky Beauty.

**Tail-Female Line (Dalicia – Dynamis – Diasprina).** This entire female family descends from German stock, which is all about stamina, mainly on turf. Breeding Dalicia to Leroidesanimaux created a near outcross, with the only name repeated twice in five generations was of Northern Dancer's champion son, Lyphard. Dalicia was a stakes winner in Germany and was stakes-placed in France. Dynamis did not win at 3 or 4 but produced Darwinia, the dam of Daveron, who won the Ballston Spa Stakes, Beaugay Stakes, and who also was second in the Long Island Handicap and third in the First Lady Stakes, all on turf. Third dam, Diasprina, was a stakes winner at 2 and produced Desidera, a champion filly at 2 in Germany, who in turn, is the

dam of stakes winner, Dickens, who was second in the Group 1 German Derby, as well as stakes winner, Daressalam and stakes-placed Desirao. Diasprina also produced Diacada, winner of the German One Thousand Guineas, and herself, the dam of stakes winner, Dak-tani.

**How to bet Animal Kingdom's offspring:** Animal Kingdom's babies should win on dirt, but they will likely be bred for classic distances and be much more effective as late-blooming juveniles, and at 3 and older when they stretch out in distance over all surfaces. It goes without saying that they will be very strong on turf, but he should be as versatile a sire as he was a racehorse. Much will depend on who the mare is, because if she is by a known turf influence, this will only underscore turf ability.

*Representative 2-year-olds by Animal Kingdom:*

**AGASAYA**, filly is out of a Seeking the Gold mare and second dam is a full sister to stakes winner and sire, Hennessy. May win on dirt, but is powerfully bred top and bottom for turf.

**MALKIA**, filly is out of a More Than Ready (speed on dirt and turf) mare, and second dam is by strong turf influence, Giant's Causeway, and who is a half-sister to Comic Strip, Lucayan Prince, and Silver Comic.

**SIMBA'S PRIDE**, colt is out of stakes winner, Spice Island, making him a half-brother to Ice Box. Second dam, Crown of Sheba is also a half-sister to 1985 Kentucky Derby winner, Spend a Buck.

**VILLAMAY**, filly is out of a Ghostzapper mare who is a half-sister to Breeders' Cup Juvenile-winner Action This Day.

**WILD WILD KINGDOM**, colt is out of an Arch mare, which is turf over turf breeding. The class of this colt is significant as his third dam is outstanding

racemare, Gorgeous. Champion 2-year-old filly, Golden Attraction, international star, Fantastic Light, and Key to the Moon all descend from this high-class female line.

*(Beginning her career in racing at The Morning Telegraph in 1970, Lauren Stich was the longtime pedigree handicapper and bloodlines columnist for Daily Racing Form, and has written for The Racing Times, American Turf Monthly, Today's Racing Digest and Breederscup.com. She was founding member and pedigree analyst/columnist for Gradeoneracing.com, and was the founding racing and bloodlines editor for Horse Society Magazine. Stich is the author of "Pedigree Handicapping," "Bet With the Best," and "Bet With the Best 2: Longshots" and has been featured in seminal handicapping books by James Quinn, Steve Davidowitz and many other prominent Thoroughbred authors. She was also a bloodstock consultant for trainer, Michael Dickinson. She can be reached at lsstich@aol.com).*



*Animal Kingdom (above and on the cover)*

William F. Hudgins Jr.'s  
**NORTH AMERICAN TURF**

Given the wealth of information available to handicappers nowadays it behooves the serious punter to take a moment and readily understand what indeed is pertinent data and what facts/figures are, under the prevailing scenario being scrutinized, essentially useless. Trainer stats are a prime example. Extremely valuable under the right circumstances – with their respective consideration being utilized after confirmation of the basal fundamental handicapping factors of good current form, suitability of the horse to the distance / footing of today's event, and accepting that the horse is not unrealistically placed in terms of class level – trainer stats can serve the player well when the delicate art of separating contenders is at hand. The key, at least for this turf handicapper, is to focus on the statistical categories wherein the trainer wins at a percentage at or above 29-30 percent and – and this is important – has earned that solid percentage with a minimum of at least three wins within the respective category. Time and experience has taught me that when these two minimums are met in a relevant evaluative category the horse being studied should be given credit above it's basic qualification status, and if it is one of the only entrants with qualified fundamental factors to achieve these additional meritorious kudos then it becomes more than just another player in the cast – it in fact rises to the status of a legitimate contender. Here again, the essentials should be factored into the evaluative process first and foremost. Supplementary statistical analysis is wasted on an unfit entrant, or one poorly placed in terms of distance, footing, or class level. A little food for thought rascals. Good handicapping my friends!

*"hudg"*

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**North America's Top Fifteen Turf Routers  
( 9-1/2 Furlongs And Longer )**

- #1 Kaigun (Can) – Heads into the new year as the ranking top stayer.
- #2 Da Big Boss – Much expected from this first-class professional turfer.
- #3 Wake Forest (Ger) – Some outstanding efforts going long last year.
- #4 Money Multiplier – Solid pro can compete with the best of 'em when on.
- #5 The Pizza Man – Hoping to see this one crank it up this season.
- #6 Bullards Alley – Everything in place for a really good 2017 campaign.
- #7 World Approval – Loves firm courses and will thrive out West.
- #8 Deauville (Ire) – Youngster from Europe made waves here last year.
- #9 Ashleyuvssugar – Formidable stayer loves Santa Anita and Del Mar.
- #10 Kasaqui (Arg) – Admirably handling his assignments against this level.
- #11 Grand Tito – Pops up rock-solid efforts versus top infield stock when right.
- #12 Si Sage (Fra) – Legitimate contender at the elite level; Warrants respect.
- #13 Generosidade (Uru) – The longer the better for this one.
- #14 Quick Casablanca (Chi) – Properly placed can get the job done.
- #15 Renown (Eng) – Fits with the good turf mammals – needs clever handling.

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**Grass Routers To Watch Over North American Courses...**

A ROSE FOR LIZZY – Granddaughter of the mighty Sadler's Wells; Respect.  
APACHE BRAVE – His best efforts have all been short dashes; Playable.  
BENEVOLENT PRINCE – Turf debut was "okay" – stretching him out would help.  
BUTTER UP KATIE – Bred to stay a distance of turf; Worth a flyer.  
CONVICT PIKE – Plenty of upside for this Rusty Arnold trained colt.  
COURT OF LOVE – Nicely-bred miss still finding her way; Follow.  
KRAMPUS – Pedigree suggests he'll thrive the longer they go; Tab.  
MERGER ARBITRAGE – Continued improvement expected; Worth watching.  
MORE THAN TEDDY – This colt should get better as the distances get longer.  
PAPACHO – Has the clear-cut look of a natural turf sprinter.  
PSALMODY – Pletcher trained filly has a bright future on the lawn.  
READY TO ZAP – Daughter of More Than Ready can certainly better her rating.  
SANFILIPPO – Youngster already flashing good signs; Interesting.  
STADIUM – Liked the way his turf debut looked; Promising sort.  
WANNABEPLAYER – Very nice bloodlines and workouts are pretty good as well.

## GULFSTREAM PARK

**BRONSON:** Got up for second in a 5F turf sprint comeback prep race off a five-month layoff. Ready next time out.

**CHUBBY STAR:** Pressed and set a fast two-turn pace and held on gamely to be best of the speeds in third. Try again for low-profile barn.

**DEREK'S SMILE:** Got hooked in a 4 ½-length-gap speed duel and held on to prevail in return from a six-month layoff. Likely to repeat in a 5F turf sprint.

**ELLOREE GAL:** First starter hustled up the rail into contention after drawing the inside post in 5F turf career debut, steadied, then got back going and ran solid for third. Just needs to get off the rail draw.

**HOPEFUL ANGEL:** Hot the gate at the break to spot the field three lengths, but didn't run bad after that despite finishing off the board due to the early travails. Too early to give up on her.

**INSPECTOR LYNLEY:** Ran an underrated fifth in the Tropical Park Derby against a good field, getting pinched back at the break and buried in traffic until too late in the stretch. Don't overlook in next.

**JACALA:** Finished third behind the loose lone speed horse and the 1-2 favorite, and had the worst trip with some traffic into the lane before being forced out in the stretch run.

**JUST SASSY:** Gained ground but too late, but still outran 26-1 odds for third as the only closer to make a dent after chasing a crawlingly slow pace. Don't ignore.

**LIPSTICK CITY:** Did all the hard running in a z-pattern fourth-place finish, showing good interest early when too close to a fast pace, and late after steadying and waiting in traffic. Better luck next time.

**PROMOTIONAL:** Was unlucky to get no pace to chase when trying to rally from 11th, but still got up for fourth after getting out of traffic down inside in deep stretch.

**SHIAWASSEE:** Was making the same move as the eventual 1-2 finishers, but while those horses got through unscathed, this one got bogged down until upper stretch and settled for third.

**WOODROW:** First starter destroyed maiden claimers, getting out to a lead and not looking back, geared down in the stretch. Likely to repeat despite claim away from Pletcher.

**BEST BET: TIZ BOBBY:** Lost ground four wide on the first turn but made a strong late move off a mild pace for a clear second behind a winning 4-5 favorite.

**LONGSHOT: SLAIMY:** Broke slow and was too far back behind a crawlingly slow pace in 7 1/2F career debut prep for Pletcher, but was gaining quickly late to finish sixth but lose by less than two lengths.

## TAMPA BAY DOWNS

**CATEGORY:** Late run ran out of steam when needing a race in return from an 11-month layoff. Ready to re-join the win category.

**EPIC JOURNEY:** Pressed a fast pace and outran 14-1 odds for second as the best of the speeds behind a closing winner. Worth another try.

**GOLDEN DIAMOND:** Got hooked in a three-length-gap battle for the lead and went down in flames as the favorite as a result of those early efforts. Still ready to shake loose for maiden win.

**MOONSHINE PROMISE:** Hustled up to press the pace and took over, only to get tracked down by the perfect set-up deepest closer. Finished second, four lengths clear of third as by far the best of the speeds.

**PAMPERED VOW:** Broke last in a 10-horse field and had traffic troubles in the stretch and finished fifth, but nevertheless outran 34-1 odds to finish less than a length out of second. Don't ignore.

**PUZZLED LOOK:** Foreign invader returned from a year+ layoff only to have the rider bumped out of the irons at the break. Too early to give up on her.

**SCHADDEI:** Chased a loose lone speed wire-to-wire winner and did as well as possible in that spot for second, eight lengths ahead of the third horse.

**SOUTH TO THE SEA:** Battled for the lead and beat that challenger but couldn't hold off the perfect trip 9-5 favorite, settling for second while 10 lengths clear of the third horse. His turn next time.

**BEST BET: SCHEMA:** Got hooked in a three-way speed duel and held on best for second, five lengths clear of the third horse. Set to graduate.

**LONGSHOT: PINCHBECK:** Steadied on the first turn and again in the stretch when buried in traffic. Don't overlook after the seventh-place finish, because he was only 1 ½ lengths out of second and she had the worst trip.

## TURFWAY PARK

**ATTAIN:** Late rally got interrupted on the turn but he kept on for fourth, just a head out of third in a track record 5 1/2F race he needed off a year layoff. Ready to attain the winner's circle in return from the sidelines.

**BLUEMIND:** Only closer in his race to make a dent, nearly catching the 4-5 favorite. Ready to break case of second-itis.

**CITY WITHOUT PITY:** Lunged at the break to get away behind the field and lose all chance at the start. Toss out last-place finish and try again.

**MONGOL BULL:** Finished third in z-pattern trip after steady back on the turn behind a fast wire-to-wire winner.

**MY CALENDER GIRL:** Missed the break when not handling the rail post and started far behind the rest of the field, but recovered for third and just needs to get off the rail draw to win.

**PATTY'S MISCHIEF:** Dueled for the lead and nearly held on for a repeat win but lost by a nose. Can rebound vs. local competition.

**QUIET SCORE:** Had to send from the rail and set a pressured pace, but still held on best for second behind a perfect-trip 9-5 stalker. Worth another try.

**SNOW LEOPARD:** It took a new 5 1/2F track record to beat him, finishing a length and a tail behind while five lengths clear of the third horse. His turn next time.

**UTMOST INTENSITY:** Pressed and set the pace and held on for second in a race where closers finished 1-3-4. Sitting on a win at present.

**BEST BET: QUIGLEY'S CORNER:** A long way from Quigley's corner but showed up here off a four-month layoff and nearly caught a loose leader who shook loose up front, and may have won if not for possible interference in the stretch.

**LONGSHOT: LABRADOR:** Got shuffled back in z-pattern 5F fourth-place finish. Ready to graduate with a clean trip.

## AQUEDUCT

**BECKER'S GALAXY:** Battled for the lead and got bounced off the rail when interfered with by his early challenger in the Alex Robb. Needs a better trip and some class relief.

**BENEVOLENCE:** Broke poorly and then was pinched back further at the start to begin at too much of a disadvantage. Finished fifth, but it's too early to give up on him.

**CATAPULT JACK:** Nice effort for second after falling to his face at the break to start last in a 12-horse field. Ready to clear the maiden hurdle.

**FRATELLO DEL NORD:** Got caught in a duel for the lead from the start and outlasted the challenger by a nose when beaten by a perfect-trip stalker that sat off the duel. Worth another shot.

**FRONTIER TOWN:** Needed a race off a five-month layoff and lost his chance when squeezed badly at the start. Toss out the return race and give him another try.

**GREY GLORY:** Finished off the board but was just a head and a neck out of second behind a runaway lone speed winner. Can rebound immediately off the Rodriguez claim.

**IS SHE HOT:** Ran well in the mud to be second in return from a five-month layoff behind only mud-loving winner Natalie Victoria. Finished clear of the third horse and will improve in return from the sidelines.

**JAY'S WAY:** Pressed the pace of a rival that tired to last, but this horse stayed on to just get nipped a nose on the wire in a good return effort off a three-month layoff.

**LYNNIE B:** First starter was unable to catch the favored leaders on a speed-biased muddy track, but did close for third after a wide trip and was 10 lengths clear of fourth. Prepped and ready.

**MIGGSY:** Tried to rally into a strong headwind in the stretch and settled for second again. Ready to graduate.

**RING KNOCKER:** Closed well into a headwind to score in a good winning effort. In fine form at present.

**SARATOGA GIRO:** Hooked up in a duel from the start and raced nosed apart with the pace rival all the way to the finish in a race that set up for the perfect-trip stalker. Stick with him.

**WILDCAT BELLE:** New Year's eve wasn't her day after she acted up and broke through the gate before the start, then couldn't gain into a headwind. Don't overlook.

**BEST BET: TUG OF WAR:** One of the only horses to close on the speed-biased muddy track on 12/29, rallying from last-to-second behind a runaway loose speed horse. Try again.

**LONGSHOT: RED SPARK:** Ran a solid fourth in career debut 6F prep for trainer David Donk, who doesn't try with first starters. Moving toward maiden win, perhaps with more distance.

## PENN NATIONAL

**BATTERY CREEK:** Chased wide and gave out to finish a distant fifth as the favorite when in with winners for the first time and making just his second start since last-June most recently; lightly raced, has upside.

**MEDALLICIOUS:** Didn't show much when ninth in search of repeat most recently, but was asked to return on short notice once again; form can be erratic, but must be respected, especially if price is square.

**MRS. PEEL:** Has finished third in each of her two career starts now, most recently off a wide trip on move to open company maiden level; lightly raced 4YO filly is learning on the job.

**PHILANTHROMISTER:** Has been first and third in a pair of starts since in from WO, and most recently stretched his form to a route of ground off a bobbling start; keeps moving forward.

**RHYTHM BLUES:** Might have been in touch tough at ALW level when in off claim by way of WO for his latest, and finished 11th of 12; good to see B. Kulp barn (22% wins last year) show confidence, and gelding can improve from here.

**BEST BET: PLATINUM AFFAIR:** Showed fair interest in fourth-place finish on turn back to sprint trip in just her second start since last-October; moves forward again.

**LONGSHOT: INNER DEMONS:** Lagged early and passed tired rivals for fifth in her latest, but is capable of more; proven mare from solid Bernie Houghton barn (19% wins last year) can surprise.

## PARX

**ALTURIST:** Chased and gave out to finish a distant fifth in his latest, but was making his first start since mid-November and caught sloppy ground in his first career dirt start; another shot for WO invader.

**EL GRILLO:** Stalked, tipped out, and finished up for second while no threat to dominant winner in his latest over sloppy strip; note, gelding had stretched to route and can benefit from conditioning gained.

**JOHN'S AFLEET:** Turned in half-mile gate work on Jan. 5 as he moves closer to racing debut; 3YO son of Afleet Alex might be one to follow.

**JOKER MAN:** Stalked, took over, opened up, and remained clear for score when back as fresh face for Dec. 26 score; kept edge with half-mile breeze over sloppy ground on Jan. 4 and figures ready for return.

**RES JUDICATA:** Chased and weakened after he threw his head at the break in last start in late-November at PEN; proven veteran has trained strongly here of late.

**BEST BET : MISS AVALON:** Hasn't raced since sixth in below par try off wide trip on Oct. 11 here; recently returned to workout tab and can return running.

**LONGSHOT: NICE TUNE:** Didn't have much racing luck ("bumped, pinched start, four wide," according to chart) when fourth at LRL in his last start on Dec. 9; worked solid half-mile here on Jan. 6 and can surprise.

## SANTA ANITA

**BRAINSPIN:** Ready to get over the hump after winning a three-way speed duel and outlasting the 1-2 favorite before yielding to a perfect-trip closer.

**GROUND RULES:** Not ready for the start and perhaps not ready for the 1 1/8 miles in return from a nice-month layoff. Worth another shot in comeback.

**GUST:** Return from seven-month layoff wasn't as bad as it looks, finishing fourth but less than a length out of second behind a runaway wire-to-wire winner when needing the race. Can win in comeback off the claim by Baltas.

**ICE KAT:** Broke slowest in an 11-horse field and got a tepid pace to chase from too far back, but rallied best of the closers for fourth and just needs a clean start to graduate.

**IKE WALKER:** Got a slow start in return from nearly a six-month layoff, but closed well for third despite needing the race. Try again.

**LUCKY DOLLY:** Graduated via DQ in what was nevertheless a fine effort that sets him up to win at the next level, battling for the lead and never getting a breather up front but holding on to finish 8+ lengths ahead of the rest of the field. Looks good in return from three-month layoff.

**MAJESTIC QUALITY:** Knocking on the door vs. maidens after another in-the-money finish, beaten only a length by a 3-5 favorite. Ready to graduate.

**PRINCESS ASHLYN:** Finished in-between a pair of in-form rivals for second in a live 6 1/2F time after the rider lost the whip in return from a 70-day layoff. Don't overlook.

**RIVER HOSS:** Finished with interest for a dead heat for fourth and lost by just a half-length after being struck by a rival's whip in the stretch. Live overlay vs. similar.

**SHAZARA:** Steadied at the break and trailed early, but closed best of all for second behind only a loose-on-the-lead wire-to-wire winner.

**SPOOKY WOODS:** Didn't break sharply but still ran a solid second behind only a 3-5 wire-to-wire favorite. Just needs a better pace to chase.

**BEST BET: UCANTHANKMELATER:** Closed well from last-to-second and came within an unlucky nose of catching the loose lone speed horse. His turn next time.

**LONGSHOT: ROCKANTHAROS:** Got hooked in a four-way, then two-way duel for the lead and finished by far the best of the speeds for fifth in a race ruled from off the pace.

## GOLDEN GATE

**ALLABOUTACTION:** Dueled for the lead in very fast 6F fractions going :44.4 to the half-mile. Finished fifth, but was beaten less than a length and looms a threat to shake loose up front.

**CODE FOR GLORY:** Got hooked in a back-and-forth battle for the lead and held on for second behind only the perfect-trip stalking 9-5 favorite. Can overcome recent case of second-itis.

**HEKILI STORM:** Dueled for the lead, beat the early challenger by 10+ lengths, but settled for second as a result of the early efforts. Remains in tip-top form at present.

**IZ INVINCIBLE:** Broke poorly to spot the field three lengths and lose all chance at the start. Recovered well to finish third and just needs a clean start to win next.

**MISS MARINI:** Outran 17-1 odds for third as the longest shot on the board holding off separate challenges for the lead and finishing an unlucky third, beaten just a head and a neck.

**MOJAVE DESERT:** Returns from an 11-month layoff as an 8yo, and ran well for second in comeback despite being overbet. Makes more sense in second off the layoff and can make amends.

**TOP PIRANA:** Chased a fast pace and finished the best of any of the close-to-the-pace horses for third, beaten just a nose and a neck by the two closers.

**UNCLE HAL:** Got hassled up on the lead the whole way and couldn't hold off the 6-5 odds late closer. Outran 11-1 odds and can't be ignore again.

**WISCONSIN KATE:** Came from SoCal and was an instant maiden claiming contender here, dueling for the lead and beating the early challenger before yielding to the perfect-trip 9-5 favorite.

**BEST BET: TRICKED AGAIN:** Got caught trying to close from last but could understandably only make it to second behind a loose lone speed wire-to-wire winner. Her turn next time.

**LONGSHOT: THE DANCE IS MINE:** Got caught in a three-way, four-length-gap speed duel and held on best of the front-runners for fifth, just a length out of second.

## OAKLAWN PARK

**BLACK SHERRY:** Battled for the lead with separate challengers and never got a breather up front when second in return from a seven-month layoff. Ready to win off the claim in comeback.

**CONQUEST WILDCAT:** Broke slowest against a tough field in first race back from an eight-month layoff. Needed the race, beware next time.

**LAMU:** SoCal invader beat up on the local claimers with a sharp rally from post 11 in a two-turn route. Likely to repeat. **NOW AND ZEN:** Picked up right where he left off after a four-month layoff, finishing second again in a race that looked like a prep. Ready next time

**RUNAROUND DANCING:** Pressed a live pace and percolated into a three-length-gap speed duel in return from a five-month layoff, but still held on for second and fits well vs. the local competition.

**SIGHTFOR SORE EYES:** Showed early speed in a route, checked into the first turn and raced far back but then came again for third in a solid z-pattern effort as the longest shot on the board in a nine-horse field. Don't ignore.

**SPECIAL JO:** Got caught in a four-way battle for the lead and never got a breather up front when needing a race off nearly a six-month layoff. Held on for third can win off the claim by Villafranco.

**TEMPO SEEKER:** First starter hesitated at the start to break last in an 11-horse field, but still ran a nice debut for third and got win next off the claim by Caldwell.

**VANDELAY:** Broke slow when not handling the rail post but closed well behind the two front-runners for third. Just needs to get off the rail draw.

**VICKIE WINS:** Dueled for the lead and lost by a neck only to the pressing odds-on favorite that took advantage of this horse's early efforts. Clear for second, het turn next time.

**ZIP VAN WINKLE:** Just missed by a pair of necks due to a bad trip when cut off at the start, moved up, and then steadied far back before coming again in a z-pattern effort. Don't sleep on this one.

**BEST BET: MOUNTAIN HOME:** Well-bet first starter dueled for the lead and held on for second behind a perfect-trip 8-5 Churchill shipper. Won't be a maiden for long.

**LONGSHOT: RHYTHM PARK:** Got hooked and cooked and emptied out in a six-length-gap speed duel. Toss out the ninth-place finish and try again because he looms a threat up front.

## FAIR GROUNDS

**CASTLE ZIP:** Broke a beat slow, raced wide, and finished in fair order for third over sloppy ground (zero-for-three on wet tracks now) by way of EVD for her first start since last-August; lightly raced 6YO mare moves up.

**FLASHY LYNN:** Chased, challenged into the stretch, and weakened to third when it counted over sloppy ground most recently; can move forward in upcoming third start back from August-layoff.

**HESINFRONT:** Was bumped at the break, took the first turn three wide and turn for home even wider, and managed third in off-the-turf mile over sloppy ground most recently; next time for classy veteran.

**NARVAEZ:** Stalked from wide spot in third throughout his latest sprint and couldn't make an impact when it counted late; veteran with solid overall profile can do more at this level.

**OUT OF THE TRAPPE:** Overcame rocky start and gained too late to pick up second from behind slow pace when taking meaningful class drop for his latest; hard to look past next time.

**BEST BET: LUCKY SUMMER:** Stalked, took over, and held for half-length score when stretched to mile for her latest; daughter of Summer Bird still has room to move forward.

**LONGSHOT: SPARKY SPARKLES:** Overcame some traffic and put in wide run for fourth when E. Ramirez barn (24% wins last year) showed confidence with class hike off claim; dangerous moving forward.



## LAUREL PARK

**BOURBON AND BEER:** Missed by only a nose when second in his first attempt with winners most recently; gelding put in wide run and can atone for favored loss.

**INNER FIRE:** Never got on track from extreme outside draw (11 of 11) with wide trip on turn back to sprint trip most recently, and finished sixth; can do more.

**KILT CHASER:** Hasn't done much running in either of her last two, but both times on wet tracks (now zero-for-three on wet ground); might surprise with right group.

**SATURDAY SUNSHINE:** Chased from second and finished a distant third when he tired on his left lead in most recent start; must be figured in mix with similar crew next time.

**TO BLAVE:** Offered mild run for fourth when in from PRX for his latest, and can improve upon the effort; brings touch of class and ability to bring back checks.

**BEST BET: LEGEND'S HOPE:** Moved forward to gain fourth off wide draw (14 of 14) and trip in his second start back from two-month break most recently; stay with son of Not for Love.

**LONGSHOT: CANDYCOATED DAME:** Put in a wide move between rivals and gave way to finish fourth behind blowout winner when back from break of nearly two months most recently; upside.

## SAM HOUSTON

BELLA JOY  
DAY SIX  
KISSTHATBABYGOODBY  
KOLBYSEEGOLD  
MENHAL'S LADY

MISS PENNY HENNY  
MULA RUN  
NOLA'S FIREBALL  
TAYLORS ANGIEL  
WORTH THE EFFORT

## MAHONING VALLEY

AMANDA MARIE  
CRUZLINE  
FOUNTAIN RUN  
LAUGHS N KISSES

LO TIDE  
QUEEN OF BEAUTY  
ROLLIN AWAY BABY  
WIN TUSCANY

## CHARLES TOWN

GONE MOUNTAIN  
IN MID HEIR  
KANTERO KAT  
ONE MOVE

OUTZAP  
QUEEN OF THE HILL  
STRONG LIKE BULL  
UPHILL CAT

## TURF PARADISE

CHIEF CICATRIZ  
DA JENIUS  
HERETOPLAY  
MEMO FROM PAT  
POPPIN' TAGS  
RED ZEUS

RIDE HARD KOWBOY  
ROSIE'S RENEGADE  
SACEY BOW  
THAT'S GIN  
TICABOO  
WOODLANDSWAY

## DELTA DOWNS

BLING IT ON BABY  
BUCK BOY  
CHARBONNET  
GOODROCKINGIRL  
HUGINN  
KAPENTA

LUVINMEISEASY  
REVENUENEUTRAL  
SOUTH WASHINGTON  
TIZ CHERRY WINE  
TRULY YOU  
WISHIHADA

## SUNLAND PARK

AFFIRMED TOWER  
ATILLAS GIFT  
BIG A'S DARLIN  
CLARITA'S QUEEN  
DANI'S SECRET

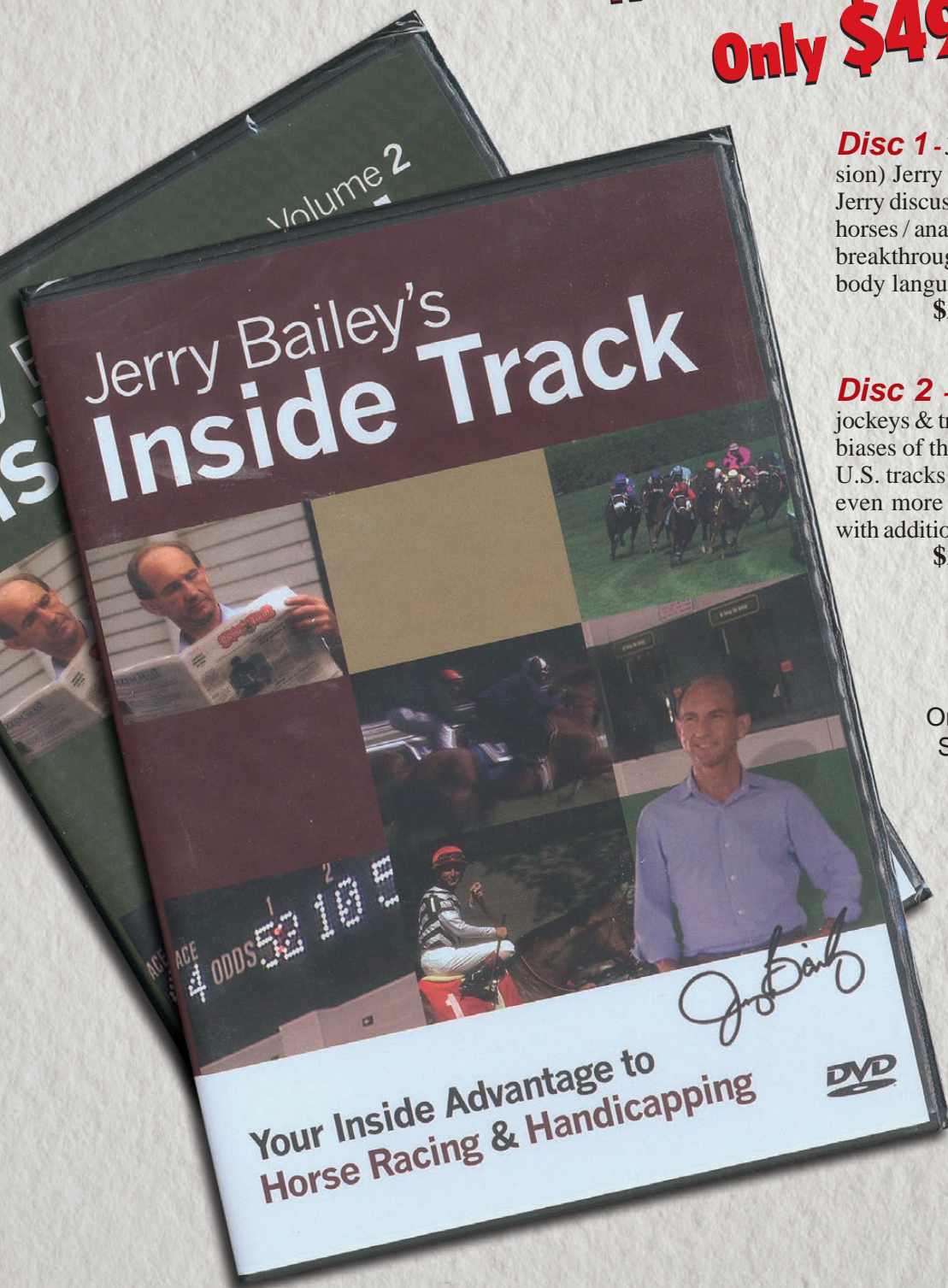
GO BRUISER GO  
MC MIRACLE  
ROCK THE SUN  
SIDEWINDER SALLY  
YOU'VE BEEN DUPED

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## SHED ROW

Winning reports from our trackmen at major ovals

### OZONE PARK, NY

#### *Ladies and gents:*

TUG OF WAR will be ready for a fight. MALIBU PRINCESS can get hot in a hurry. Pedigree says to be patient with SPRING ON CURLIN. D'YER MAK'ER makes it happen at a price. Don't sleep on READ THE DREAM. COURAGEOUS LINZ had excuses in debut. STORM THE SHORE made the trip from Southern California. Early speed makes RANGER LADY dangerous. ZEN PAPA will be spotted appropriately. TALKN TIL MIDNIGHT backs up our words.

### HALLANDALE BEACH, FL

#### *Power to the patrons:*

Woodbine invader CAPE MIST made a nice first impression in late December. MEARS is starting to put it together with experience. AQUA TEEN has been facing tougher. DUJAC fits nicely in those top-level optional claimers. The wise guys love MO' GREEN. ALEXANDRAS JOY outran 38-1 odds on debut. DREAMOFJEAN E. loves getting her picture taken. FRIENDSWITH K MILL takes care of his followers. CATANOVA seems to prefer running on the green stuff. UNION WAY has some nice upside for patient barn.

### TAMPA BAY, FL

#### *Greetings:*

Hearing nothing but good things about SYNTHESIZER. MY FIRST HONEY sweetens the pot. LIL RUM TUM has never been closer; one more try. MOMENT OF TRIUMPH gives reason to celebrate. Don't hold CATSKILL FLYER's record against her. HAZEL W has run well over the turf course here. EASTER ACT is quietly holding her own; get on board. Well-traveled gelding ENSIGN ELI fits well here. OVERDRIVEN POWER hooked a very deep group first out. FLIGHT PATTERN flies under the wire first.

### BENSALEM, PA

#### *Fellow horseplayers:*

The ball is in your court with HE'S A SLAM DUNK. CONQUEST KRONOS runs well fresh. No need to thanks us for UNBRIDLED GIFT. BERTRANDA continues to outrun her odds; take note. FAVOR FACTOR gets it done versus nickels. FOOLED BY MAGIC pulls off a disappearing act. INVOCATION shows up every time; respect. Today is the day for UP ALL NIGHT. EXOTIC APPEAL has some very interesting recent form. MAGIC CASH fattens the wallet.

### NEW ORLEANS, LA

#### *Hello racing fans:*

ROUSTABOUT may have a future on grass. STARR BEAR will be the star of the show next time. GO STELLAIRE goes on with it. Easy to make a case for KITTY'S ARGUMENT. FIRE LAKE fires out of the stalls first and never looks back. DEGREES OF FREEDOM sets your bankroll free. DREAMING OF JOEY will be a nightmare for his rivals. OUR SWEET SYDNI sneaks in under the radar. Follow SPEAK UP SAILOR off the claim. SOCIETY BEAU is coming along at his own pace.

### ARCADIA, CA

#### *Attention ATM readers:*

LADY VALEUR (IRE) continues to overachieve versus tougher. Make some room for CROWDED WAY. Hard not to like where VEGAS BOUND is headed! MAJESTIC QUALITY is quietly coming into her own. PRINCESS ASHLYN took her time to graduate, but looks like she's figured it out now. We really dig PICO CHICK. DR. FAGER'S GAL couldn't be in better hands. TOP OF THE GAME kills them with confidence. CISTRON is going places on the lawn for Sadler. COLIN THE COPS may get pulled over for speeding.

## STOP WATCH SPECIALS

### NEW YORK

FEATHER IN MY CAP: Headed the right way.  
IS SHE HOT: Well-rested for winter.  
LIL RENEGADE: Use in gimmicks.  
MY WON LOVE: For the 'Love' of the game.

### FLORIDA

CUT TO ORDER: Gets a big piece.  
KEEP ME GROUNDED: Lands on his feet.  
SILENT ADMIRER: Silent, but deadly.  
SKY GUY: Things are looking up.

### PHILADELPHIA

BALTIMORE BEAUTY: Looking good.  
CHANGE OF SEASONS: Value play.  
HOT SPICE GIRL: Adds flavor to the exotics.  
ROCKY THE KID: Comes out swinging.

### MARYLAND

GHETTO FABULOUS: Keep it real at the windows.  
HOLIDAY BLUES: Very sharp since layoff.  
IN ARREARS: Looking forward to the future.  
LEMON LOVER: Worth the squeeze.

### KENTUCKY

BELL BOTTOM GIRL: Comes out on top.  
GRACE'S DEVIL: The 'Devil' is in the details.  
MASKED TALENT: The ability is there.  
QUIET SCORE: Puts some points on the board.

### LOUISIANA

BLAZE STAR: Ready to shine.  
FLY FRIENDLY SKY: Loves this turf course.  
RIVER BOBCAT: Early foot makes him dangerous.  
WHITE OAK SWAMP: Much better on grass.

### NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

DOCS LEGACY (IRE): Prescribing a victory.  
MANYSHADESOFGRAY: Gets the green.  
MIRROR IMAGE: Like what we see.  
WHY NOT BE PERFECT: Price play.

### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

DRE DAN: Brought \$975k as a 2yo.  
SASSY ROSE: Try one more time.  
SHARP HOLIDAY: Belated Christmas gift.  
TOUGH SUNDAY: Still improving.

# INDEX TO FIT & READY, SHED ROW AND STOP WATCH

This index can be used to locate horses listed in this month's Fit & Ready, Stop Watch and Shed Row pages. Track abbreviations are as follows:

AQUEDUCT:AQU	SANTA ANITA:SA
CHARLES TOWN:CT	SHED ROW:SR
FAIR GROUNDS:FG	STOP WATCH:SW
GOLDEN GATE:GG	SUNLAND PARK:Sun
GULFSTREAM PARK:GP	TAMPA BAY DOWNS:TAM
LAUREL PARK:LRL	TURF PARADISE:TUP
MAHONING VALLEY:MVR	TURF SELECTIONS:Trf
OAKLAWN PARK:OP	TURFWAY PARK:TP
PARX:PRX	TURF SELECTIONS:Trf
PENN NATIONAL:PEN	SHED ROW:SR
SAM HOUSTON:HOU	STOP WATCH:SW

AFFIRMED TOWER:Sun	BRAINSPIN:SA	COURAGEOUS LINZ :SR	GO STELLAIRE :SR
A ROSE FOR LIZZY :Trf	BRONSON:GP	COURT OF LOVE :Trf	GOLD CHROME:TAM
ALEXANDRAS JOY :SR	Bullards Alley :Trf	CROWDED WAY:SR	GOLDEN DIAMOND:TAM
ALLABOUTACTION:GG	BUTTER UP KATIE :Trf	CRUZLINE:MVR	GONE MOUNTAIN:CT
ALTURIST:PRX	CANDYCOATED DAME:LRL	CUT TO ORDER:SW	GRACE'S DEVIL:SW
AMANDA MARIE:MVR	CAPE MIST :SR	D'YER MAK'ER :SR	Grand Tito :Trf
APACHE BRAVE :Trf	CASTLE ZIP:FG	Da Big Hoss :Trf	GREY GLORY:AQU
AQUA TEEN :SR	CATANOVA :SR	DA JENIUS:TUP	GROUND RULES:SA
Ashleyluvssugar :Trf	CATAPULT JACK:AQU	DANI'S SECRET:Sun	GUST:SA
ATILLAS GIFT:Sun	CATAROUX:OP	DAY SIX:HOU	HAZEL W:SR
ATTAIN:TP	CATEGORY:TAM	Deauville (Ire) :Trf	HE'S A SLAM DUNK:SR
BALTIMORE BEAUTY:SW	CATSKILL FLYER's :SR	DECISION REVERSED:OP	HEKILI STORM:GG
BATTERY CREEK:PEN	CHANGE OF SEASONS:SW	DEGREES OF FREEDOM :SR	HERETOPLAY:TUP
BECKER'S GALAXY:AQU	CHEF SCOTT:TAM	DEREK'S SMILE:GP	HESINFRONT:FG
BELL BOTTOM GIRL:SW	CHIEF CICATRIZ:TUP	DOCS LEGACY (IRE):SW	HOLIDAY BLUES:SW
BELLA JOY:HOU	CHUBBY STAR:GP	DR. FAGER'S GAL :SR	HOPEFUL ANGEL:GP
BENEVOLENCE:AQU	CISTRON :SR	DRE DAN:SW	HOT SPICE GIRL:SW
BENEVOLENT PRINCE :Trf	CITY WITHOUT PITY:TP	DREAMING OF JOEY :SR	ICE KAT:SA
BERTRANDA :SR	CLARITA'S QUEEN:Sun	DREAMOFJEAN E:SR	ICY GENTLEMAN:TAM
BIG A'S DARLIN:Sun	CODE FOR GLORY:GG	DUJAC :SR	IKE WALKER:SA
BLAZE STAR:SW	COLIN THE COPS :SR	EASTER ACT :SR	IN ARREARS:SW
BLUEMYMIND:TP	CONQUEST KRONOS :SR	EL GRILLO:PRX	IN MID HEIR:CT
BOOGIE GAL:TAM	CONVICT PIKE :Trf	ELLOREE GAL:GP	INNER DEMONS:PEN
BOURBON AND BEER:LRL	COPPER HILL:OP	ENSIGN ELI :SR	INNER FIRE:LRL
		EPIC JOURNEY:TAM	INSPECTOR LYNLEY:GP
		EURODEVILWOMAN:OP	INVOCATION :SR
		EXOTIC APPEAL :SR	IS SHE HOT:AQU
		FAVOR FACTOR :SR	IS SHE HOT:SW
		FEATHER IN MY CAP:SW	IZ INVINCIBLE:GG
		FIRE LAKE :SR	JACALA:GP
		FLASHY LYNN:FG	JAY'S WAY:AQU
		FLIGHT PATTERN :SR	JET AWAY SUE:OP
		FLY FRIENDLY SKY:SW	JOHN'S AFLEET:PRX
		FOOLED BY MAGIC:SR	JOKER MAN:PRX
		FOUNTAIN RUN:MVR	Kaigun (Can) :Trf
		FRATELLO DEL NORD:AQU	KANTERO KAT:CT
		FRIENDSWITH K MILL :SR	Kasaqui (Arg) :Trf
		FRONTIER TOWN:AQU	KEEP ME GROUNDED:SW
		Generosidade (Uru):Trf	KILT CHASER:LRL
		GHETTO FABULOUS:SW	KINKY VOW:TAM
		GO BRUISER GO:Sun	KISSTHATBABYGOODBY:HOU

# INDEX TO FIT & READY, SHED ROW AND STOP WATCH

KITTY'S ARGUMENT:SR	MULA RUN:HOU	RES JUDICATA:PRX	STRONG LIKE BULL:CT
KOLBYSEESGOLD:HOU	MY CALENDER GIRL:TP	RHYTHM BLUES:PEN	SUDDENBREAKINGNEWS:OP
KRAMBUS :Trf	MY FIRST HONEY :SR	RIDE HARD KOWBOY:TUP	SYNTHESIZER:SR
LABRADOR:TP	MY WON LOVE:SW	RING KNOCKER:AQU	TALKN TIL MIDNIGHT :SR
LADY VALEUR :SR	NARVAEZ:FG	RIVER BOBCAT:SW	TALMADGE TAP:OP
LAUGHS N KISSES:MVR	NICE TUNE:PRX	RIVER HOSS:SA	TAYLORS ANGIEL:HOU
LEGEND'S HOPE:LRL	NOLA'S FIREBALL:HOU	ROCK THE SUN:Sun	THAT'S GIN:TUP
LEMON LOVER:SW	ONE MOVE:CT	ROCKANTHAROS:SA	THE DANCE IS MINE:GG
LIL RENEGADE:SW	OUR SWEET SYDNI :SR	ROCKY THE KID:SW	The Pizza Man :Trf
LIL RUM TUM :SR	OUT OF THE TRAPPE:FG	ROD MCLEOD:OP	TICABOO:TUP
LIPSTICK CITY:GP	OUTZAP:CT	ROLLIN AWAY BABY:MVR	TIZ BOBBY:GP
LO TIDE:MVR	OVERDRIVEN POWER :SR	ROSIE'S RENEGADE:TUP	TO BLAVE:LRL
LOOKS SUPER:OP	PAMPERED VOW:TAM	ROUSTABOUT:SR	TOP OF THE GAME :SR
LUCKY DOLLY:SA	PAPACHO :Trf	SACEY BOW:TUP	TOP PIRANA:GG
LUCKY SUMMER:FG	PATTY'S MISCHIEF:TP	SANFILIPO :Trf	TOUGH SUNDAY:SW
LYNNIE B:AQU	PHILANTHROMISTER:PEN	SARATOGA GIRO:AQU	TRICKED AGAIN:GG
MAGIC CASH :SR	PICO CHICK:SR	SASSY ROSE:SW	TUG OF WAR :SR
MAJESTIC QUALITY :SR	PINCHBECK:TAM	SATURDAY SUNSHINE:LRL	TUG OF WAR:AQU
MAJESTIC QUALITY:SA	PLATINUM AFFAIR:PEN	SCHADDEI:TAM	UCANTHANKMELATER:SA
MALIBU PRINCESS :SR	POPPIN' TAGS:TUP	SCHEMA:TAM	UNBRIDLED GIFT:SR
MANYSHADESOFGRAY:SW	PRETTY PRODUCTION:TAM	SHARP HOLIDAY:SW	UNCLE HAL:GG
MASKED TALENT:SW	PRINCESS ASHLYN :SR	SHAZARA:SA	UNION WAY :SR
MC MIRACLE:Sun	PRINCESS ASHLYN:SA	SHIAWASSEE:GP	UP ALL NIGHT:SR
MEARS :SR	PROMOTIONAL:GP	Si Sage (Fra) :Trf	UPHILL CAT:CT
MEDALLICIOUS:PEN	PSALMODY :Trf	SIDEWINDER SALLY:Sun	UTMOST INTENSITY:TP
MEMO FROM PAT:TUP	PUZZLED LOOK:TAM	SILENT ADMIRER:SW	VEGAS BOUND :SR
MENHAL'S LADY:HOU	QUEEN OF BEAUTY:MVR	SIZZLE FACTOR:OP	Wake Forest (Ger) :Trf
MERGER ARBITRAGE :Trf	QUEEN OF THE HILL:CT	SKY GUY:SW	WANNABEAPLAYER :Trf
MIGGSY:AQU	Quick Casablanca (Chi) :Trf	SLAIMY:GP	WHAT A REWARD:TAM
MIRROR IMAGE:SW	QUIET SCORE:SW	SNOW LEOPARD:TP	WHITE OAK SWAMP:SW
MISS AVALON:PRX	QUIET SCORE:TP	SOCIAL DOLL:TAM	WHY NOT BE PERFECT:SW
MISS MARINI:GG	QUIGLEY'S CORNER:TP	SOCIETY BEAU :SR	WILDCAT BELLE:AQU
MISS PENNY HENNY:HOU	RAISING RUMORS:OP	SOUTH TO THE SEA:TAM	WIN TUSCANY:MVR
MO' GREEN:SR	RANGER LADY :SR	SPARKY SPARKLES:FG	WISCONSIN KATE:GG
MOJAVE DESERT:GG	RARIN TO GO:OP	SPEAK UP SAILOR :SR	WOODLANDSWAY:TUP
MOMENT OF TRIUMPH :SR	READ THE DREAM:SR	SPOOKY WOODS:SA	WOODROW:GP
Money Multiplier :Trf	READY TO ZAP :Trf	SPRING ON CURLIN:SR	World Approval :Trf
MONGOL BULL:TP	RED CLAY MAGIC:OP	SPRINGBOARD:OP	WORTH THE EFFORT:HOU
MOONSHINE PROMISE:TAM	RED SPARK:AQU	STADIUM :Trf	YOU'VE BEEN DUPED:Sun
MORE THAN TEDDY :Trf	RED ZEUS:TUP	STARR BEAR :SR	ZEN PAPA :SR
MRS. PEEL:PEN	Renown (Eng) :Trf	STORM THE SHORE:SR	

# The Eighth Annual "Conny" Awards Recognizing the Best in Handicapping Tournaments in 2016

By Noel Michaels

**T**HE YEAR 2016 IS OVER AND A NEW year is just beginning, so this seems like the perfect time to look back on the past year in order to recognize the best in handicapping contests and tournaments. Broadway has the Tonys, television has the Emmys, the music industry has the Grammys, motion pictures have the Oscars, and the recently concluded

Golden Globes... And now, annually and only in American Turf Magazine, handicapping contests have the Connys – honoring excellence in the world of horse handicapping tournaments.

The consensus biggest and best horse handicapping tournaments in the world are the National Handicapping Championship (NHC) and

the Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge (BCBC). They are so obvious, they speak for themselves, and require no additional award recognition. Therefore they are both recipients of the "Lifetime Achievement Award" and now excluded from individual award categories. This column is about the tournament world that extends beyond the big two.

And so, gentlemen dust off your tuxedos. Ladies put on your finest evening attire. Maestro strike up the band! Let's get the show on the road. Move over Eclipse Awards – these are the eighth annual... Conny Awards...

... *The envelopes please* ...

## **Top Tournament Award:**

**The Conny goes to:**

### **The Horse Player World Series**

The 12th annual Coast Casinos' Horseplayer World Series handicapping tournament was held in 2016 with a new \$1,500 entry fee, and total prize money in the venerable Las Vegas mythical-money tournament reaching \$799,200. The leaderboard paid down to 60th place, and daily



• HANDICAPPING TOURNAMENT •

money worth nearly \$96,000 (roughly \$32,000 per day) going to each individual day's top 10 finishers and ensures players who are far behind in the overall standings on Saturday still have plenty to play for. The Orleans' takeout from the prize pool was only 10% – not a bad price to pay for cheap rooms and three days of free brunches at the contest.

The 2016 HPWS champion was Dan Kaplan, who topped a field of 592 entries to take home the first prize of more than \$319,680 in the prestigious three-day tournament held at The Orleans hotel and casino in Las Vegas on Thursday through Saturday, March 31-April 2, 2016. Including daily purse money of \$5,328 for second on Thursday, Kaplan's total 2016 HPWS prize earnings reached \$325,008. The runner-up, meanwhile, finished both second and third and won second prize of \$119,880, third prize of \$55,944, and combined daily money totaling \$15,985 for a total weekend haul of \$191,809.

Final scores were based on a total of 45 all-optional and mythical \$2 win-and-place bets (15 races per day) on

the races from several tracks relevant at the time of the tournament including Aqueduct, Gulfstream, Hawthorne, Laurel, Oaklawn, Santa Anita, and Tampa. After so many unnecessary mandatory bets dominating the contest at the NHC in January, the Horse Player World Series' all-optional format comes as a breath of fresh air two months later in March.

**Top On-Track Tournament Award:  
The Conny goes to:  
Hawthorne Race Course**

This prestigious annual award to the deserving folks at Hawthorne, nonetheless, in recognition of the track's dedication to spectacular tournament offerings that total 8 NHC spots throughout the year with a grand total of zero dollars in entry fees. That's



roughly a \$70,000 gift that Hawthorne Race Course gave to tournament players in 2016.

That's right, at Hawthorne, you can compete in multiple NHC qualifying contests on weekends throughout the year (spring, summer, fall/Thanksgiving), and you win one of 8 available NHC berths that track pays for without ever charging you an actual entry fee. The Hawthorne concept is simple: buy-in with your contest betting bankroll, and play what you want to play that day on your tournament entry player's card. If your final bankroll ends up one of the highest – you win. Plus, of course you keep your winnings.

When other tracks are charging you a takeout in order to pay for your NTRA entries, Hawthorne not only isn't doing that, they're also not even charging you an entry fee. The various Hawthorne contests throughout the year will generally cost you between \$250-\$350 to play, but all of that money is your bankroll. Each contest offers between 2-4 NHC qualifying spots, plus trips to various other contests, including the HPWS, as prizes.

Hawthorne is not a place you want to go to for cash winnings – you're only playing for your own bankroll plus qualifying spots. However, if what you want is to find a place offering multiple chances at multiple NHC qualifying berths – often multiple separate chances on the same weekend – it is difficult to do any better than Hawthorne's extensive and value-packed tournament schedule.

#### **Top Online Tournament Site Award:**

**The Conny goes to:  
Horsetourneys.com**

The Connie in this category once again goes to Horsetourneys, which has maintained its spot as the industry leader in online handicapping contests for another year atop a crowded landscape of worthy adversaries including DerbyWars, DRF Tournaments, and TwinSpires.com (plus HorsePlayersQualify, which completed its final year in 2016).

HorseTourney.com continues to offer

a well-designed website for well-run online handicapping tournaments. Their offerings run the gamut from daily feeder contests for as low as \$12, to weekly \$5,000 and \$7,500 contests, plus frequent richer contests offering \$25,000 or more in prize money. HorseTourney.com also offers more than 20 annual qualifying berths into the National Handicapping Championship throughout most of the year, and leads the way in offering qualifying berths into tons of other major contests in Las Vegas and at racetracks and casinos everywhere.

Horsetourneys also exclusively hosts feeders and the finals of the big-money, prestigious "The Big One" tournament, a two-day extravaganza at Laurel Park awarding up to 10 NHC spots, 5 Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge spots, plus cash purse money of \$200,000.

Horsetourneys.com features the lowest tournament take-out structure of any of the major online sites, and offers free past performances (BRIS) with tournament entries. They offer a wide array of "live" and "Pick and Pray" format contests, and their feeder contests are great because they give you the option of playing multiple tracks, or just one track (i.e. races 3-10 at Gulfstream) if you specialize in one circuit.

Generally speaking, HorseTourney.com contests offer the best online handicapping contest experience for players trying to win money and/or qualify for the NHC (or other contests) while racking-up NHC Tour points with a good variety of low-cost events.

#### **Top "Super Qualifier" Tournament:**

**The Conny goes to:  
TwinSpires Online Handicapping  
Championship**

TwinSpires.com blows the doors off what anyone else does in terms of offering a single contest that offers 50 Las Vegas trips, including 15 "seats" into the National Handicapping Championship this past year, plus 35 more into the Horse Player World Series.

The year-long TwinSpires.com Online Handicapping Series leads to

the TwinSpires Online Handicapping Championship in November, which also offers \$50,000 in purse money including \$10,000 to the winner. TwinSpires.com sets up an extensive online contest schedule that lasts most of the year from March to November. Contests with \$10 and \$25 weekday buy-ins lead up to \$50 and \$100 buy-in weekend contests, which offer prize money and entries into the Twin Spires Online Handicapping Championship – a \$500 value (limit 2 finals entries per person).

From March to November, more than 100 contests are offered, including 35 Saturday prize money contests and 8 Saturday month's-end prize money contests that also offered NHC qualifying berths and NHC Tour Points. A series of last chance Satellite qualifiers were also held in November to get last-minute hopefuls entries into the Online Handicapping Championship. The popularity of TwinSpires Series and Online Handicapping demonstrate that handicapping contests and tournaments – both on-site and online – are still the primary growth sectors relating to horseracing's fan base.

#### **Best New Tournament Award:**

**The Conny goes to:  
Kentucky Derby Betting Championship**

Sure, this tournament might cost \$20,000 to enter for 2017, but it's about time that the Kentucky Oaks/Kentucky Derby weekend at Churchill Downs has its answer to the mega Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge [BCBC] held each Breeders' Cup weekend.

This contest debuted in 2016 with a field of 53 entrants and a cash prize pool of \$200,000 plus 3 NHC qualifying spots and 3 BCBC qualifying spots going to the top 6 finishers overall. Of the \$20,000 entry fee, \$15,000 will go to a player's live tournament bankroll for the 2017 version of this contest. Players also receive prime on-track accommodations at Churchill Downs for the two biggest live race days of the year. The first-ever winner of this tournament in 2016 was Ron Myeress, who won \$100,000 and also took home



his \$42,752 final tournament bankroll (players obviously keep what they win).

The tournament includes win, place, show, exacta and trifecta wagering only. A minimum of \$1,200 per race must be wagered on at least 5 races on Oaks Day, and a minimum of \$1,800 per race must be wagered on at least 5 more races on Derby Day. For more information, you can go to the contest's own website at kentuckyderbybetting-championship.com. Several qualifying contests with feeders will be hosted all winter/spring leading up the event on TwinSpires.com.

### **Best Customer Service Award:**

**The Conny goes to:**

**NYRA (Aqueduct, Belmont, Saratoga)**

Led by tournament director Donny Nelson, the NYRA staff that runs the popular no-takeout tournaments at Aqueduct, Belmont, and particularly Saratoga led the way in customer service at contests in 2016. Nelson is willing to go out of his way to bend over backwards in order to fill-up these contests, and is very receptive to player wishes and requests in circumstances when it's under his control to help. The NYRA contest's switch to real-money formats away from its mythical-money formats that had existed there since 1999 may not have been heralded by everyone, but Nelson does his best to listen and respond to customers while putting on the best contests possible – all with no take-out and still offering additional perks like food and beverages, particularly at Saratoga. Now if NYRA's checks could just arrive a little faster . . .

### **In Memorium:**

**The Conny goes to:**

**Horse Players Qualify**

Horse Players Qualify [HPQ] held online contests from 2008 until the end of 2016. The tournament website was a pioneer in online contests, as the first site to offer online packages including entry fee and travel to brick-and-mortar contests like the Wynn Las Vegas, Santa Anita, Keeneland, other tracks, and particularly the Horse Player

World Series at The Orleans. Horse Players Qualify was also the first online site to create its own brick-and-mortar contest, The Players Challenge, along with J. Randy Gallo and the folks at Bettor Racing in South Dakota, which hopes to continue now into its 7th year (hosted by a different website). HPQ also was the first site to introduce alternate picks and Locked N Loaded (i.e. Lockdown, Pick N Pray) contests.

Contest Central would like to send the very best wishes along to Kevin and Lee Geraghty, the driving forces behind HPQ for nearly a decade. The site will be sorely missed by many readers of this column.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE CONNY AWARDS (2009-2015)**

### **Top Overall Tournament**

2015 – The Players Challenge, presented by HPQualify.com and Bettor Racing  
2014 – Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge  
2013 – Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge  
2012 – Wynn Handicapping Challenge  
2011 – The Players Challenge, presented by HPQualify.com and Bettor Racing  
2010 – Wynn Handicapping Challenge

### **Top Online Tournament**

2015 – Horsetourneys  
2014 – DerbyWars  
2013 – Horsetourneys  
2012 – HorseTourneys.com (Ellis Park)  
2011 – TwinSpires.com Online Handicapping Series and Championship  
2010 – PublicHandicapper.com and HorsePlayersQualify.com  
2009 – Xpressbet.com

### **Top On-Track Tournament**

2015 – Belmont Park  
2014 – Santa Anita  
2013 – Battle of Saratoga (NYRA)  
2012 – NYRA (Aqueduct and Belmont)  
2011 – NYRA (Aqueduct and Belmont)  
2010 – NYRA (Aqueduct, Belmont, and Saratoga)  
2009 – NYRA (Aqueduct and Belmont)

### **Best New Tournament**

2015 – Mountaineer Park

2014 – Los Alamitos  
2013 – The Big One  
2012 – Gulfstream Park Handicapping Challenge  
2011 – Isle of Capri Casino Racing At Pompano Park  
2010 – Saratoga Handicapping Challenge  
2009 – New York State OTB Handicapping Championship

### **Top Tournament Destination**

2015 – Surfside Race Place at Del Mar  
2014 – NYRA (Belmont, Saratoga, Aqueduct)  
2013 – The Orleans (Coast Casinos)  
2012 – The Orleans (Coast Casinos)  
2011 – Wynn - Las Vegas  
2010 – Surfside Race Place at Del Mar  
2009 – Coast Casinos - Las Vegas

### **Top "Super Qualifier":**

2015 – Hawthorne Race Course  
2014 – Monmouth Park  
2012 – Hawthorne Race Course

### **"Welcome Back" Award**

2014: Prairie Meadows

### **Top Real-Money Racetrack Tournament**

2013 – Hawthorne Race Course

### **Top Real-Money Tournament**

2012 – Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge

### **Top Tournament Road Trip**

2012 – Keeneland -to- Turfway Park (December)  
2011 – Race Palace -to- Saratoga  
2009 – Keeneland -to- Turfway Park (December)

**Other Awards:** The Best of the Best: The National Handicapping Championship (2009); Best Innovation: The NHC Tour (2009), Top Tournament Town: Las Vegas (2010); Most Improved: Saratoga (2012), Beyond the Call of Duty Award: Keeneland (2010); Top Tournament to Leave the NHC Tour: Delaware Park (2010); Top Tournament No Longer With Us: Autotote Sports Haven (2009).



# Consistency-Based Automatic Spot Plays

## Situational Turf Goodies

By William F. Hudgins, Jr.

**A**N EXTREMELY INTERESTING QUESTION was posed to me late last year at one of my handicapping seminars over at Parx Racing in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. A relatively knowledgeable punter – a gentleman who makes a point of joining us whenever and wherever we convene to discuss Thoroughbreds – asked me if I had what one might term as an “automatic” wagering scenario. I confirmed that I did indeed have one such magic bullet, so to speak, in my handicapping arsenal although at that time I simply couldn’t go into an indepth dissertation of its mechanics and merits. I did however promise him that early this year I’d put it in print for him and, to that end, I’ll offer it to all my loyalists this month.

Consistency has always been at the forefront of my handicapping methods. It remains one of the prime factors in determining overall class in a Thoroughbred, especially in turf horses. Young, lightly-campaigned grass runners who like to win or “try to win” are always worth a long second look when analyzing an upcoming heat. It’s a sign of inherent class, an intangible which only actual racing performance can really quantify. Entrants who have finished either first or second, while winning at least one time, in at least half their respective races both lifetime and over the turf are the first ones I’ll check off. This type of race horse need only to show me a couple more attributes before moving into the coveted position as a

potential automatic investment. It’s a tall request, one that many will fail to pass muster when placed under scrutiny.

The final requirements are thus: 1) A quick glance at the horse’s two most recent races should show that it had indeed lived up to what the lifetime and career records hinted at, finishing either first or second in each (with both races run on the turf). 2) The rider who piloted the horse in question last time out should be aboard once again for this outing. That’s the whole thought process in a nutshell. One last thing – if our automatic selection(s) happens to be the post time favorite, we’ll bypass the race. We want a price for all this consistency, but we want it all to ourselves.

### FIVE KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Turf races, other than maiden or straight claiming events, carded at distances of six furlongs or longer, offer the best potential wagering opportunities.
2. Toss out all entrants with more than 10 career starts.
3. Eliminate from further consideration any potential selectee whose lifetime and career turf records fail to show that it has finished first or second a minimum of three times or more – while also winning at least once – and the combined total of these “tries” represent at least 50% of its starts.
4. Dismiss any runner who has not finished first or second in each of its latest two races, over the grass, and who is not being ridden today by the same jockey who was astride in its most recent trip postward.
5. Finally, disregard any otherwise fully qualified contender if it emerges as the betting favorite.

These five basal guidelines, derived from experience and constant back research, are the foundation of my personal "automatic" handicapping spot play methodology.

in terms of an instant investment vehicle. Those horses that do indeed pass the tests represent potentially top-quality infielders that are in decent form,

duration of the racing season, speculation on top shelf turf runners of this ilk prove far more reliable and profitable than any others over the long haul.



Wild About Harry \$12.60

Own: Edition Farm
White, Green Braces, Stirrup And 'Ef'

Dk. b or br f. 3 (Jan)
Sire: Henrythenavigator (Kingmambo) \$8,058
Dam: Duchy Night (Cactus Ridge)
Br: Edition Farm (NY)
Tr: Rice Linda

Table of racing results for Wild About Harry, including race dates, distances, and performance metrics.

Summary statistics for Wild About Harry, including lifetime record, earnings, and win percentages.

Queen Caroline \$11.00

Own: Amy N Moore
Royal Blue, Red Band On Yellow Sleeves

Dk. b or br f. 3 (Apr) KEESEP14 \$170,000
Sire: Blame (Arch) \$25,000
Dam: Queens Plaza (Forestry)
Br: Morgan's Ford Farm (Va)
Tr: Matz Michael R

Table of racing results for Queen Caroline, including race dates, distances, and performance metrics.

Summary statistics for Queen Caroline, including lifetime record, earnings, and win percentages.

Light the Night \$9.40

Own: Live Oak Plantation
White, Red Dots, Black Sleeves, Red Cap

Dk. b or br c. 3 (Jan)
Sire: Street Cry 'T're (Machiavellian)
Dam: Namaste's Wish (Pulpit)
Br: Live Oak Stud (Fla)
Tr: Trombetta Michael J

Table of racing results for Light the Night, including race dates, distances, and performance metrics.

Summary statistics for Light the Night, including lifetime record, earnings, and win percentages.

Desert Princess \$14.60

Own: Marshall E Dowell
Black, Black Cuffs On Orange & White

B. f. 4 (Feb) OBSAUG13 \$90,000
Sire: Desert Party (Street Cry 'T're) \$4,000
Dam: Impressive Jewel (Outfankler)
Br: Whisper Hill Farm (Ky)
Tr: Bailes W Robert

Table of racing results for Desert Princess, including race dates, distances, and performance metrics.

Summary statistics for Desert Princess, including lifetime record, earnings, and win percentages.

Lucy De \$13.20

Own: GGG Stables
Shocking Pink, Blue 'Ggg' And

Dk. b or br f. 4 (Apr)
Sire: Decarchy (Distant View) \$4,500
Dam: Stormin Lucy (Native Storm)
Br: GGG Stables and Magali Farms LLC (Cal)
Tr: Puype Mike

Table of racing results for Lucy De, including race dates, distances, and performance metrics.

Summary statistics for Lucy De, including lifetime record, earnings, and win percentages.

# Q&A with Frank Mirahmadi

By Steve Sherack



**L**ONGTIME TRACK ANNOUNCER FRANK Mirahmadi splits his time in the booth between Golden Gate Fields in Northern California and Monmouth Park on the Jersey Shore. The 49-year-old native of Los Angeles called his first race at Hollywood Park back in 1992. Mirahmadi has also served as the voice of Oaklawn Park, Hialeah Park, and Louisiana Downs.

**Q:** *Growing up in California, were you always a fan of racing? How did you catch the bug?*

**A:** My dad used to like to go to the races. And we would go as a family. It became an event for me and my brother and my mom and dad at a young age. By the time I was eight or nine I was absolutely fully into it. When I was nine years old in 1977, I was devastated that my dad wouldn't take me to watch Seattle Slew in the Swaps. I just loved it and then I started becoming fascinated with the announcers. We had some great ones in California and I started imitating them at a young age.

**Q:** *How would you describe your*

*announcing style? Any announcers that you look up to?*

**A:** I try to keep my announcing very simple. I would say that certainly Trevor Denman is my idol in race calling and I've tried to emulate the way in which he calls the race, which is to keep it simple, but also keep you posted on things that are developing.

I feel like I read a race well and I try my best to describe it instantly without expressing too much opinion and that's a very fine line. No one wants to hear opinions, particularly when they're wrong.

I try my best to avoid filler words to buy time, too. I find that very difficult to listen to. I like announcers that give you the names of the horses as soon as possible without expressions such as toward the inside, moving up the rail is, etc. I just try to keep it simple, accurate and exciting when necessary.

**Q:** *Is there a specific type of race you prefer calling?*

**A:** Well, I think it's a lot easier to call route races. From the standpoint that it gives you time to watch the race develop. Because turf racing is so unique, it's certainly fun, but I think it's more difficult to call those. But, it's more of a challenge and fun. The last :30 seconds is what it's all about. There's certainly a level of gratification when you get 'em right because things develop so quickly.

**Q:** *How much time do you put in*

*preparing to call a day of races?*

**A:** I don't really dig deep into the Form on every single race. Certainly I look at the Form, but I don't try to predict exactly how the race is going to unfold. I try to be objective instead of thinking so and so should be to the front. One could argue that it's better to be more prepared. Tom Durkin would have it to where he had everything in his mind exactly the way everything was going to develop. I need to try my best not to do that. I try to just let the race tell the story because that way I'm not biased toward what I think should happen. But I'm certainly open to the idea that maybe I don't have the right philosophy. It's just the way I do it. I don't like to overanalyze it beforehand.

When the horses come out on the track, I color the silks into my program. I do it then, not beforehand. I'm no artist, but I just scribble the silks in there. The process of that – just like when we were kids in school – you write something down and you have a better chance of remembering it. The very process of just coloring in a certain thing helps you remember who that horse is.

**Q:** *With some time to reflect now, what was it like to call Triple Crown winner American Pharoah's Haskell and also his pair of runaway wins at Oaklawn in the Rebel and Arkansas Derby?*

**A:** His Arkansas Derby performance was so amazing. It was just something special to watch. There are moments

that become defining moments and important moments in one's career and in one's life. And that race, I had never seen a performance so spectacular. And I called Tiznow's Super Derby win when he shattered the track record and I called him a superstar in the making. I knew with the Pharoah, I had seen something better.

[Owner] Mr. Zayat texted me and said, "You better come to the Derby." I hung out with them the entire week, then I photo bombed him in the winner's circle by accident! It was somewhat surreal to live through.

**Q:** *On your Twitter handle, @FrankMirahmadi, you describe yourself as a "Pizzaholic." Explain.*

**A:** I have very unique eating habits. I'm a vegetarian—I don't eat meat, chicken or fish – and I really don't eat a whole lot of vegetables, either. I've been basically a "pizzaholic" my whole life since I was a little kid. I only eat plain cheese pizza—I actually prefer light cheese—and my favorite is Sicilian style.

**Q:** *You've also done some work on television as an analyst for TVG. If you can put on your hat as a handicapper now, what are some of your favorite betting angles?*

**A:** I love maiden races more than anything because it gives you a chance to look up pedigrees. For example, if there's a race on turf, I love to watch and see what the dam did on grass and also what their siblings have done.

There are also certain sires, of course, and connections to consider as well.

For a couple of years when I was [announcing] at Louisiana Downs, I did some freelance work for Daily Racing Form writing the 'Closer Looks.' I really enjoyed that. It was really perfect for me. It was a lot of fun. Even though it was harder work, I used to tell them to give me the maiden races.

To me, when it comes to handicapping, the first thing I always look at is the trainer. That is the number one, most important thing--trainer intent and patterns. For example, a Shug McGaughey horse runs second or third in the debut. I'm almost always going to pick that horse on top because his horses just seem to always improve with experience. It's uncanny the way that happens.

I love lightly raced horses facing tests and also watching them develop. If there's a beautifully bred horse who just broke their maiden versus a horse with way better figures but has nine starts, I'm almost always going to go with the more lightly raced/pedigree angle.

I love European imports, too. A Graham Motion or Chad Brown horse with two or three starts overseas coming here for the first time--those things stick out.

I guess we all try to find that next star or very talented horse. I think horses that just broke their maiden going in to tackle winners is one of toughest stumbling blocks in racing. I fall into that trap frequently. Many very good horses

get beat first time against winners, and if I was going to critique myself, I think I go for probably too many of those types. But I can't help it because you want to find that next rising star.

**Q:** *Is there a certain meet(s) or circuit you pay particular attention to or like to handicap on a daily basis, not including the sites of your announcing jobs?*

**A:** I love New York racing. I think New York racing is fabulous. I absolutely look at the New York cards every single day. And Southern California as well, of course. The Keeneland baby races and maiden races, everyone watches those, but to me, every day, I'm a New York and California man.

**Q:** *Any other sport or team that you're a fan of?*

**A:** When I was a kid, I was a Reds fan and it was kind of the tail end of the "Big Red Machine."

My first mitt that I ever had was a Johnny Bench catcher's glove. I really can't say that I'm a Dodger fan, I'm really more of a fan of... I have certain pitchers that I absolutely love. So, to me, it's all about who's on the hill. My favorite pitcher is Jacob DeGrom. He's number one, for me. I don't really have a particular team that I'm passionate about.





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GULFSTREAM

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# Gulfstream Ready to Host World's Richest Race

## \$12 Million Pegasus World Cup on January 28 Headlines East's Top Winter Meet

By Michael Sherack

**G**ULFSTREAM PARK'S CHAMPIONSHIP Meet began on Saturday, December 3, with a Claiming Crown program that featured nine stakes races worth \$1.11 million in purses, and will run through Sunday, April 2 (before transitioning to its summer meet), with the penultimate day highlighted by the Grade 1, \$1 million Florida Derby. The track has already hosted its share of important races at the meet, but the racing world is currently fixated on the Grade 1, \$12 million Pegasus World Cup on Saturday, January 28 as a stage for a possible heavyweight rematch between its top stars, ARROGATE and CALIFORNIA CHROME.

As popular and talented as California Chrome is, the discussion for the Pegasus should start with ARROGATE. He handled California Chrome on the square in last year's Breeders' Cup Classic when better by a half-length. He was a 3-year-old versus older rivals at the time and making just his sixth lifetime start, while also being asked to

stay 10 furlongs in his first start since a devastating win in the Travers in August. He will be fresh for the Pegasus and riding a five-race win streak for trainer Bob Baffert.

CALIFORNIA CHROME will be making the final start of his career before he heads to stud, and as it always seems with this horse, there will be much talk and debate on how "great" he is and where his place is in history. Why this is always a conversation after every race is a bit puzzling, and why it can't wait for a while is probably the better question.

Trainer Art Sherman deserves high praise for his work with the 6-year-old who has posted career totals of 26-16-4-1 (\$14.5 million in purses), and has typically always given his best while traveling and maintaining a heavy work load.

Of course, it's difficult to place him with the best of all time, and for now we'd put him somewhere near a horse like Skip Away, who ended his career in 1998 with a mark of

38-18-10-6 (\$9.6 million). Skip Away, also trained by an older and respected horseman in Sonny Hine, might have been underappreciated at times and certainly brilliant as he raced from 2 through 5 and also traveled and raced plenty. He strung together nine straight wins at one point starting with the Woodward in September 1998 through the following year's Jockey Club Gold Cup in October, with the streak comprised of all Graded wins, seven of them Grade 1.

Oh wait, there will be other horses in the Pegasus besides Arrogate and California Chrome? Apparently there will be. They just may all be overlooked. For the most part, deservedly so.

Of the probable runners, NEOLITHIC, SEMPER FORTIS, and WAR ENVOY are all eligible for non-winners of three lifetime spots, as is KEEN ICE, the 2015 Travers winner, who has otherwise repeatedly proven himself to be a notch slower than top company. ERAGON, an Argentine invader, might get some attention as an unknown, but

the charge for third money will likely be lead by SHAMAN GHOST, a Grade 1 winner of more than \$1.3 million.

In addition to the Pegasus at 1 1/8 miles on dirt, the January 28, program will offer an additional \$1,150,000 in stakes money. The six undercard stakes races include a trio of Grade 3 races – the W.L. McKnight and La Prevoyante handicaps at marathon distances for older horses, and Hurricane Bertie for female sprinters at 7 furlongs. The three other stakes are a pair of turf sprints for older horses, and the \$400,000 Poseidon at 1 1/8 miles for

older horses.

The Saturday prior to the Pegasus, January 21, will also offer a strong card bolstered by the Sunshine Millions Day stakes. The \$250,000 Classic for older runners at 1 1/8 miles on dirt is one of five stakes worth a total of \$900,000.

The aforementioned Florida Derby, at nine furlongs on dirt for 3-year-olds, is a proven final step on the road to the Kentucky Derby. The day of racing at Gulfstream will be supported by eight other stakes races, five of them Graded.

Of course, the way of the day in racing is now to jam several stakes on

cards and create “Super” programs. In addition to those already mentioned, another worthwhile day at the races will be Saturday, February 4. Five stakes races, four of them graded, will offer \$950,000 in purses. Three-year-olds will have the spotlight in the Grade 2, \$350,000 Holy Bull at 1 1/16 miles on the road to the Kentucky Derby. The Grade 2 Swale and Grade 2 Forward Gal, both worth \$200,000 and at 7 furlongs on dirt, will be offered for sophomore males and females, respectively.

On Monday, February 20, the racing card is scheduled to offer 12 starter



*California Chrome Will Attempt to Go Out On Top in the Pegasus World Cup*



stakes races, all worth between \$50-60,000.

Familiar names are at and near the top of the current trainer standings through press time, Sunday, January 8. TODD PLETCHER seems a cinch to win another trainer's title with a commanding 12-win lead over JORGE NAVARRO. Pletcher's numbers are very imposing (71-24-10-6) with a 34-percent win rate and 56-percent in-the-money mark. As followed and supported as Pletcher's runners are, he somehow has still produced a flat-bet profit at the meet with a \$2.21 return

on investment [ROI].

Navarro (52-12-1-7, 23/38, \$1.79) can be counted on to keep a spot near the top and entry clerks in the racing office busy. MIKE MAKER (62-11-10-8, 18/47, \$1.60), is currently third in the standings, and should also continue to produce respectable numbers.

CHAD BROWN, currently tied for sixth in the standings, has typically strong stats (21-6-3-1, 29/48, \$2.08) and is certainly a trainer to fear as the meet's biggest races come up during the prime January-through-March portion of the stand. Expect his barn to get

busier and stay successful, of course.

Some trainers who will not have the volume of the top outfits, but are off to good starts and might not get as much attention at the windows include: CHRISTOPHE CLEMENT (24-4-6-3, 17/54, \$2.47), EDDIE KENNEALLY (13-4-4-0, 31/62, \$2.21), and KIARAN MCLAUGHLIN (15-4-3-2, 27/60, \$1.54).



*Pegasus World Cup Challenger, Shaman Ghost*

# Free Money, Maybe

By Barry Meadow

ON TELEVISION OR ON THE INTERNET or in your local newspaper, racing analysts are consumed by handicapping. To increase your bottom line, they say, bet this horse or play this pick 5.

But as someone who bet horses for a living for more than twenty years, I considered gambling to be a business. To increase the bottom line, every business has to either increase revenues, or decrease expenses – or both. And that comes before you worry about picking winners.

Handicappers mostly talk about increasing revenues through making winning bets, but promotions and bonuses increase revenue as well. And every expense you decrease puts more money in your pocket, so we can't forget that side of the ledger, either.

Every bet has a cost, the takeout. It generally hovers between 15 and 25 percent, depending on the jurisdiction and the type of bet. Although there are some exceptions, win-place-show takeouts are usually closer to 15, while superfectas are generally closer to 25. A few places offer an occasional bet at a lower take, while a few usurious spots (Pennsylvania, hello!) soak players of some bets for 30%. For every \$1,000 you invest in the trifecta at Parx,

you get back on average only \$700; at Keeneland, the same play gets you back on average \$810.

So one way to decrease your expenses is to stick with tracks, and bets, that offer better takeout rates. An up-to-date list is available at [horseplayersassociation.org/2015Sortable.html](http://horseplayersassociation.org/2015Sortable.html).

Carryovers offer the possibility of a reduced takeout, depending on how much is bet the next day. Sometimes the expectation goes from -25% down to -15% or -5%, and occasionally creeps into positive territory. If the carryover is tiny, or it involves having to hit a jackpot as the lone ticket holder, there's no point chasing it. But if it's \$20,000 or above for a non-jackpot pentafecta or a pick 5, or \$100,000 for a non-jackpot pick 6, consider getting involved. And if it's a mandatory payday, do more than consider it.

One expense you might be able to recoup is the money that's withheld from your signers. Keep accurate records so that if you hit a \$12,000 pick 4, for instance, you can deduct losses up to that amount on your federal tax return. If you simply say you lost that amount, you may have some explaining to do to some unsympathetic official. Save your losing tickets and print your ADW records. (Note that you cannot

deduct the other expenses of racetrack gambling – travel expenses, Racing Forms, the cost of a workout service, etc. – unless you declare yourself to be a professional gambler).

If you go to the track, parking and admission can quickly add up. While some tracks offer these items free, others don't – but there are ways to save nevertheless. Get on the track's e-mail and snail-mail lists (just call the marketing department), and you'll often get discount coupons or passes. Or check local papers or tourist magazines or coupon sites such as [groupon.com](http://groupon.com).

When it comes to increasing revenues, head for the ADW's. If you're using one now, are you getting rebates? Can you switch to one that offers something more, or at least something? It used to be you'd have to bet \$1 million or more annually to score big rebates at places such as Racing and Gaming Services in St. Kitts. But these days, smaller shops such as Idabet, BetAmerica, Premier Turf Club, and Amwager, among others, offer lucrative rebates without having to bet seven figures a year, although residents of some states may not be eligible.

It's easy to open a new account and score a signup bonus, not only at the rebate shops but at the standard ADW's

as well. Recently, I opened an NYRA Bets account and earned a \$300 bonus simply by betting \$300. Then there are the occasional reload bonuses; my Xpressbet account ran a promo in November that offered me a \$100 bonus if I deposited \$1,000, which of course I did.

Are you checking for promotions for races you ordinarily bet, or perhaps would bet if the promotion was strong enough (such as a 10% bonus on a Wednesday for the pick 4 at Nearby Downs, or a 20% rolling double bonus

reduced prices for past performances, or rewards points that can be used for T-shirts or caps.

Sometimes the big races – the Triple Crown and Breeders Cup – bring out especially creative bonuses. TVG offered a premium in 2016 to all its customers for the 13 Breeders Cup races – if you bet a horse to win and it finished second or third, you'd get your bet refunded, up to \$15. I didn't play this particular promotion, but it might have made sense to play \$15 to win on every favorite (since, on aver-

more winning favorite would have put you into the black.

Are you participating in free contests? Some offer prize money, others a seat in a major, big-money handicapping tournament. Some pay contests offer low rakes, though sometimes the takeout is dependent on the number of entries.

Not every promotion is worth playing. Sometimes the caps are limited. If you have to bet several races and the most you can score is an additional \$10, who really cares? And if you find yourself betting unfamiliar tracks just to try to hit a bonus, it had better be worthwhile.

OK, you can return to handicapping now.

*Barry Meadow is the author of Money Secrets At The Racetrack. For seven years, he published the newsletter Meadow's Racing Monthly. In 2014, he won the first-ever Ron Rippey Award for handicapping media. His newly revised website, [trpublishing.com](http://trpublishing.com), features a number of free handicapping articles. To be notified about his upcoming book, send an e-mail to [barry@trpublishing.com](mailto:barry@trpublishing.com) requesting to be on his mailing list.*

**“One way to decrease your expenses is to stick with tracks, and bets, that offer better takeout rates.”**

at Someplace Park)? Twin Spires offers these frequently. Last year, I wrote about a promotion in which Xpressbet offered a 25% bonus payoff on winning late-double bets, which had me going from betting zero dollars to thousands for the few days the promotion was offered. At the very least, keep an eye out for benefits such as

age, favorites win one-third of the time and finish second or third another one-third). Had you done so, even though only one favorite won, eight others finished second or third. Your bet of \$195 returned only \$72 for your lone winner, but another \$120 in refunds, so you just about broke even instead of losing most of your money; just one



# Go Against the Tote Board with the Product of Your Handicapping Efforts – The Unique Result

By Frank Cotolo

**M**OST HANDICAPPERS WRESTLE WITH their tasks. Sure, some stick with “X” number of angles, and single-minded arguments about horses that should win under regimented rules of engagement.

However, most handicappers engage in the data accumulated in their individual brain calculator, which weighs and balances successful combinations of fact to arrive at their evaluations. One-third of the time, no matter how accurate their cranium calculators compute data, it presents one of two conclusions – a choice that is based solely upon the esoteric data accumulated in their individual brain calculator, or, the favorite.

The unique result, based upon individual experience and hopefully some statistics agreeing with strong possibilities, represents a promising effort that has been proven to produce a profit. The “favorite” result, however, represents a mortal waste of time. Human nature may disagree, trying to justify any and all work a handicapper has done to come up with a winner, no matter what that winner pays, but human nature only clouds the truth to make a person feel he or she has earned a reward for extensive work; human nature places a layer of rationale upon the emotions, keeping out the distractions around reality much the way blinders work for a racehorse. Sometimes, in any endeavor, no less

handicapping a horse race, a person cannot see beyond his or her own nose. Yet, the proverbial “gorilla in the room” is breathing heavily into their faces.

## The Telltale Tote Board

Consider the obvious (which is something that a pari-mutuel bettor often refuses to admit is a strong factor), if you make no effort handicapping at all, the consummate consistency of the pari-mutuels system will reveal the favorite. Any energy expended to arrive at the conclusion that the most likely winner is the same entity the majority of handicappers have chosen is not time well spent. After all, in the relative history of pari-mutuels, the gift of being presented the public’s most likely winner is correct a third of the time. You can count on it, you can bank on it, and bet on it without breaking a sweat.

As well, the tote board will follow suit and display, in order, the next best possible horse that could win and then the next and then the next until each horse’s odds (chances) based on a consensus of methods used by all of the bettors is flashing before a player’s eyes. Their second choice averages wins around 20 percent of the time and their third choice wins an average of 14 percent of the time and on and on as the mathematics of probability dictate.

So, a neophyte may say, “Why learn

to handicap at all if the obvious winners are always in the first three public selections?” Once again, the answer rests with mathematics, which provides the remainder of the chances for the other horses involved in the contest: there is a 33 percent chance that the 67 percent chances – the first three public choices will win, but don’t win. The tote board also displays that fact because the tote board is only loyal to the facts. Still, the focus of the masses is upon the “most likely winners.”

## The Unique Result

Look back, now, at the other product of your handicapping efforts – the unique result, based upon individual experience and hopefully some statistics agreeing with strong possibilities, represents a promising effort that has been proven to produce a profit. This is something the tote board may only insinuate, since it is unique and all other displays of possibilities are acceded related to a consensus of opinions. The unique result is honest; it is not a product of a common poll, it is a distinct evaluation that, for all due purposes, is shared with few, if any. The unique result is difficult to measure for this reason; its value is suspect, since it is a minority opinion. That factor is represented by the tote board and it is a figure to celebrate because it may mean the difference between failure and success.

Success need be described by the simple meaning of profit, which is: “The excess of revenues over outlays in a given period of time.” The obvious win-wagering result (supporting the sole public choice) produces an excess of revenues, at best, 33 percent of the time. Who needs a cranium or Texas Instruments calculator to figure that out? Time alone will tell you that there is less money coming in than going out.

The unique result, however difficult it is to thwart human nature’s debilitating purpose, affords rewards,

that is, profits, since the pari-mutuel system demands that the fewer bettors who win will share the greatest amount from any betting pool. Going against the crowd’s decision, then, will not spark a lot of winning moments but the winning moments that occur will be affluent.

This is not to say that you should support any or all of the 33 percent possibilities that defeat public opinion (the top 3 horses in the tote board odds). A unique handicapping result does not depend upon constant participation.

A smart handicapper passes all betting action when he or she strongly agrees that the public is correct about the majority’s choice. “Not playing a race,” as one wise old bettor and sharp money manager said, “is a win.” Let the public have its 3-5 shot and let the bridge-jumpers pour the show bets on a 1-9 offering. Turn the page and find a spot to play a unique handicapping result, a profitable possibility.

Sometimes, though, a unique result can agree with the second or third choice and be given a fair shake at a decent win price (which, of course, is your judgment). If your unique result is armed with strong evidence a second or third public choice that is 3-1 or more against a 3-5 shot can win, then don’t pass; let the public cheer if the odds-on horse wins and makes them happy because if you are right, you can shout over their tears.

It is important to be locked and loaded with unique wagering approaches that you have proven to be signature wagers, which deliver profits. If, then, you are going to do any extensive handicapping work, study those races where the toteboard does not reflect you are a member of the great majority, which may win races but not money in the long run.

**“A unique handicapping result does not depend upon constant participation. A smart handicapper passes all betting action when he or she strongly agrees that the public is correct about the majority’s choice. ‘Not playing a race,’ as one wise old bettor and sharp money manager said, ‘is a win.’”**

