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JANUARY 2015

TURF *IN A* NEW LIGHT



Down *with*
Redboarding

5 TOURNEY TIPS

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The Horseplayer Monthly January Issue

Cover Story- View Turf Racing in a New Light



By [Craig Milkowski](#)



Dirt racing is king in American horse racing, but turf racing is closing the gap. It wasn't until 1953 that a year-end award was designated for this surface by the *Daily Racing Form*, naming Iceberg II as Champion Grass Horse that year. Round Table was the first grass champion to be named Horse of the Year in 1958, but that was due in large part to his performance on dirt that year as well. There were years afterwards where there was no "champion" grass horse. Dr. Fager was the next horse to complete the double in 1968, but again, most of his success was on dirt. In fact, he ran in only one turf race, the United Nations Handicap at Atlantic City Racecourse, and his victory was enough to earn the turf champion label. Two years later Fort Marcy became the first true turf horse to be named Horse of the Year.

It wasn't until the early 1980s that turf racing took another leap forward with the emergence of John Henry. The gelding that had raced for a claiming tag several times as a three year old was named Horse of the Year as a six year old in 1981. He did it again at the age of nine in 1984. He was a multiple Grade 1 winner on dirt, the bulk of his success came on the lawn. He made turf racing cool, highlighted by his win in the inaugural Arlington Million. Another turf horse, the great female All Along won the title between his awards in 1983. Despite those successes, it continues to be tough for turf horses to win the Horse of the Year award. Only Kotashaan in 1993 and Wise Dan in 2012/13 have done it since John Henry. So how is it that the gap between dirt and turf racing is closing? Bettors and racing secretaries prefer big fields, and without question grass races attracts more entries. Bigger fields attract more gambling dollars and return bigger payouts as well. Horsemen like turf racing because it is easier on horses. At tracks that can handle frequent grass

racing, dirt races are often outnumbered by turf races. This happens at several elite tracks including Belmont, Saratoga, and Gulfstream. These as well as some others have multiple turf courses or very wide ones that accommodate many different rail settings to keep courses from being worn down. There have been turf only meets conducted at the Meadowlands and Atlantic City. Kentucky Downs, formerly known as the Dueling Grounds, conducts a popular meet at its turf only facility. Turf races are going to be run as often as conditions permit, and as handicappers it pays to understand them

This isn't meant to be a history lesson, but rather to show that grass racing is something that can and should be mastered by today's bettors. At the most popular circuits, it is tough to find a Pick 3 wager without at least one grass race. It is almost impossible for a Pick 4 or Pick 5. Individually, as mentioned earlier, turf racing draws bigger fields and produces better payoffs which are something that all bettors should embrace. But the racing needs to be understood before that can be exploited. There are lots of ideas on why turf racing is so much different. Regardless of the reasons, the data below paints a clear picture of some of the differences.

This table shows the average margin of victory for all dirt and grass races in the United States spanning 2010 to 2014.

Surf	Dist	#Races	Avg Win Margin
Dirt	Sprint	99147	2.59
Dirt	Route	42114	2.95
Turf	Sprint	7817	1.57
Turf	Route	15010	1.52

The average margin of a victory in a dirt route is nearly double that of a turf route. The difference in sprints is similar when distance is considered. Turf races are noticeably more contentious. This is vital information. With margins much tighter in turf races, trips become extremely important. Losing ground on turns, traffic trouble, and expending energy in a non-efficient manner can doom any horse in a grass race. The biggest take away from the above should be clear. A horse that loses a turf race by a defined number of lengths is not comparable to a horse that loses by the same number on dirt. While many speed figures (not all) use different values for a beaten length on turf and dirt, it is very possible that even that does not go far enough. None are using double for a turf route, but the data says that is not unreasonable. Just as an example, if a G1 dirt race is assigned a speed figure by Company X of 100, and a horse is beaten by five lengths, the speed figure for the beaten horse could be 95. If that same thing happened on turf, the data above

(continued on next page)

shows it is very likely that figure should not be a 95, or a 93, but closer to a 90. The point...don't overrate horses that show little but finish relatively close in turf races. If a poor trip or other extenuating circumstances figure into the beaten length margin at the finish, bettors should absolutely take that into account.

Another big difference between the surfaces is that while the pace of the race is often discussed when races are handicapped, it is not nearly as important in turf racing. When races are classified by pace scenarios, average winning margins for dirt route races (one mile or over) look like this:

Surface	Dist	Pace	#Races	Avg Win Margin
D	Route	Fast	5820	2.32
D	Route	Avg	35032	3.03
D	Route	Slow	1262	3.53

A fast pace brings the horses together at the finish, a slow pace spreads the horses out. The difference between a slow and fast pace is nearly a length and a quarter on average. Turf, however, looks quite different:

Surface	Dist	Pace	#Races	Avg Win Margin
T	Route	Fast	2547	1.41
T	Route	Avg	12043	1.53
T	Route	Slow	420	1.63

The difference in margins on turf between races with a slow pace and a fast pace is less than one quarter of a length. Pace does not seem to change the spread at the finish on turf much like it does on dirt. Turf racing is much more strategic and the contenders tend to adapt to varying pace situations much more readily than on dirt. Does pace matter on turf? Certainly! A slow pace will aid a good frontrunner, and a fast pace will hurt the same while aiding closers. But the above indicates pace shouldn't be a primary factor when handicapping turf races. The pace of turf races is also much more unpredictable than dirt races. If a bettor is making a bet on turf primarily due to pace forecasts, it might be time to rethink that strategy.

There is much to learn about turf racing. Handicappers have adapted over time, but there is still room for improvement. Much of our competition tries to apply dirt methods to turf, and it doesn't work. The above data is just a start, but leads to two conclusions that are tough to deny. First, margins in turf races are tighter, and horses often are not as good as the finish will appear if traditional dirt standards are applied. Second, the pace of a turf race is much less important on turf than it is on dirt. In many cases, it is inconsequential. View turf races in a new light, your wallet or ADW account will be greener for it.

Quick Hits #1

John O'Neil Wins NHC

This year's National Handicapping Championship went to 74-year-old John O'Neil from New York. O'Neil took home \$800,000 for his triumph, which came over a field of 606 entries.

According to bloodhorse.com O'Neil amassed a winning score of \$327.20 over the three-day tournament from 47 mythical \$2 win and place bets: 15 each on Friday and Saturday, 10 in Sunday morning's Final 50 contest, and seven in the climactic Final Table contest exclusive to the overall top 10.

For more on O'Neil's NHC victory, please click [here](#).

CHAMPION	
MAODUR	MARK MCGUIRE
RUNNER UP	
Spongworthy	Jason Mangrum
FINAL FOUR	
Fantini33	Ed Peters
Skezzer	Damian Verno
ELITE EIGHT	
Bodkenny	Ken McMahon
Glasgowmike	Mike Glasgow
Mike_Y	Mike Yarusso
Wrongway	Ed Ramsey

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2014 Handle Down Almost Three Percent

The calendar has changed to 2015 since the last time we put out a Horseplayer Monthly, but the handle news from 2014 was not good. According to a DRF article by Matt Hegarty, "Total handle on U.S. races in 2014 dropped to its lowest level since 1995, unadjusted for inflation, though the drop was mitigated by an even greater decline in the number of races held at U.S. tracks during the year.

Total handle for 2014 was \$10.55 billion, including wagers from foreign jurisdictions commingled into U.S. pools, a drop of 2.8 percent compared with handle of \$10.86 billion in 2013, according to the figures. The total figure is the lowest since bettors wagered \$10.42 billion in 1995, a figure that amounts to \$16.15 billion when adjusted for inflation.

For further information, please click [here](#).

Paulick Report Launches New Horseplayer Section

Our friend Ray Paulick and his crew at [paulickreport.com](#) announced that they will now be hosting a horseplayer-centric area on their website. This section will include pieces from previous Horseplayer Monthlies and other news.

"Our survey indicated that our two biggest reader demographics – horse owners and horseplayers – said they would find additional content in their areas of interest extremely beneficial," said Paulick. "These two new sections are a perfect complement to our existing news categories – The Biz, People, Bloodstock and Racing."

To visit the new horseplayer area, please click [here](#).

How to Handle a Redboarder

By Barry Meadow

"How could you miss that one?"

Who hasn't heard this at a racetrack—and who hasn't said this to themselves?

Redboarding probably began in ancient Rome. How could you not use Ben-Hur in the pick 3?

Yes, after a race is run, you can probably make a case for the winner. After all, he had the third-best power rating, he had a good Beyer four starts back, and the jockey-trainer win percentage was a strong 18%. So what? With just the slightest bit of effort, you can make a case for almost anyone in a race. Good back numbers? Trainer upgrade two back? Positive post switch? Fuel for the redboarder.

You'll find him front and center after every superfecta or pick 6. But here's the reality: You can't use every horse that has some positive angle, or you'll be going all in every leg. You have to make decisions. Sometimes you decide against using a horse because you just don't like him, sometimes because you think he'll be an underlay and destroy the value of the ticket, and sometimes because it would make your ticket too expensive.

For instance, let's say you have a ceiling of \$500 for your pick 6 plays. To stay within your budget, you single the 6-5 favorite in one leg. He gets beat by the 5-2 second choice, which *of course* you would have used had you known he was going to win. You knew you were weak in that leg, and you also knew that the second choice was the most likely horse to beat you—yet you *still* couldn't use him.

Yes, sometimes you have to leave out Javier Castellano or Joel Rosario. Sometimes you have to leave out the horse with the best recent Beyer. Sometimes you have to leave out a horse even though he figures for a good trip.

Redboarders don't seem to understand this. Most of us who do this seriously assess the pluses and minuses of every horse in the race *before* the race, and we don't get surprised that much. If we use three horses in a pick 3 leg, it's not because we've forgotten about the other seven entrants. Maybe we've thrown out the favorite not because we thought he had no chance, but because he offered poor value. Maybe we singled a horse in the pick 4 because we wanted to go deep elsewhere, and why triple the cost by using the next two choices?

A typical comment of a redboarder after some big superfecta or pick 3 hits—"All you had to do was A and B, and you would have hit that giant payoff!" Thank you, Captain Obvious. Yes, sometimes you could have wheeled the favorite and cashed an \$8,000 super, but that's not usually true. Every cockamamie idea is right every so often—but if you follow dopey strategies over a long period, you will eventually lose.

If a redboarder tells you something you *did* miss--the favorite had a poor workout pattern, his good races were at six furlongs but he had never done much at seven, the horse's regular jockey took off to ride someone else--the question is why did you miss it? You don't need to spend six hours handicapping a card, but you should certainly make some effort to answer the most important handicapping questions. Among them (and this is far from a complete list):

- What is the horse doing in this race? Is he in to win, for a prep, to get claimed, or for some other reason?
- Is he suited by the conditions? Is he eligible for easier spots? Is he being dropped suspiciously?
- Is he capable at this distance? If not, has he indicated he might like it? Or was there probably nothing in the condition book for what he likes?
- How does he do on this surface? If he hasn't tried it, is he bred for it? Has he worked over it?
- What *numbers* has he been running? If his numbers don't stack up, are there other indications (improved workouts, trainer changes, etc.) that might suggest he can improve, or can run back to good previous numbers?
- Is there reason to believe he's going to improve, or regress? What's been his recent workout pattern, compared with usual? What about his time between races?
- Who's the trainer? Does he do well under these circumstances (layoff, first-time starter, etc.)? Is he using one of his regular go-to riders? Is his stable hot or cold?
- Who's riding the horse? Has the jockey had success with this horse in the past?
- What about the pace scenario? Have you considered everyone's running styles?
- Is there anything in his looks or demeanor on the track that suggest he's going to run better, or worse, than the form might indicate?

And those are just a few of the handicapping considerations, before you look at prices.

The main point--nothing should surprise you. When you make a bet, it should be based on your judgment about *everyone* in the race--and the odds. And if you do your work, you can safely ignore whatever the redboarders have to tell you, because you'll already know it.

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, trublishing.com, features a number of free handicapping articles.

Picking the Right Pool



By [Lenny Moon](#)

Deciding which wagering pools to bet into should be dictated on two fronts. The first, which will be covered here, is the size of your bankroll. The second, which will be covered in another issue of Horseplayer Monthly, is your success (profitability) in a given pool.

Risk vs. Reward

Before diving into the specifics let's begin by taking a look at the entire spectrum of the wagering menu. Each wager type offers a varying degree of risk and reward. The less risk involved with a specific wager the less the likely reward and vice versa.

The chart below illustrates where each of the wager types falls on the spectrum.



The wager types on the low risk/low reward end will generally result in a higher success rate and the wager types on the high risk/high reward end will generally result in a lower success rate. The size of your bankroll, as you will see below, should play a major role in determining which of these wagering pools to bet into.

Small Bankroll (\$50 to \$100 per session)

If you are playing with a small bankroll your primary concern should be to maintain a high win rate. The best way to do that is to focus on the wager types at the low risk/low reward end of the spectrum.

Win, Place, Show

Win and Win/Place bets on your top selection or the selection offering the best value are the ideal wager if you have a small bankroll. Unless you are constantly betting

long shots you should have no problem cashing enough tickets to keep you in the game. Personally I do not bet to Show unless there is a negative show pool as the return is often not worth the risk, especially when one or two well bet horses finish in the top three. My rule for deciding between a Win bet and a Win/Place combination is dictated by the post time odds of the horse I am backing. If the horse is below 8/1 I generally only bet to Win. If the horse is 8/1 or higher I generally bet to Win and Place. You should create a similar rule using whatever odds you feel are appropriate. Many experts shun the idea of splitting your wager between the two pools but I would rather get back \$7 or \$8 on a Place bet than nothing when my 8/1 selection finishes second.

Exacta, Quinella, Daily Double

If you want to dabble in exotic wagering pools I would recommend limiting yourself to Exacta, Quinella and Daily Doubles only. Since each of those only involves two places/legs you are limiting your risk while increasing the reward as compared to Win, Place and Show bets. The only caution I give is to remember not to invest too much on a given race because it is very easy to turn these simple exotic wagers into a costly exotic wagers. While the minimum wagering amount in the Exacta, Quinella and Daily Double is either \$1 or \$2 (depending on the track) both can easily escalate in cost if you use too many horses.

Grand Slam

The Grand Slam is currently only offered by NYRA (Aqueduct, Belmont and Saratoga) and is not widely discussed because it usually produces a modest return. For a small bankroll player it gives you the opportunity to place a bet that covers four consecutive races while not having to pick the winner in each race to stay alive. To hit the Grand Slam your horse must finish in the top three in the first three races and you must have the winner in the fourth and final race.

I bet the Grand Slam occasionally and only under two circumstances. I will bet the Grand Slam if I really like a horse in the final race of the sequence and the horse is not the favorite. I will also bet the Grand Slam if I think an odds on favorite (less than even money) will finish out of the top three in one of the first three races of the sequence. Those two situations generally produce overlaid returns.

Medium Bankroll (\$200 to \$500 per session)

If you are playing with a medium bankroll you can begin to expand your options into the next level of exotic wagers. You should still consider the wagering options covered in the small bankroll section above but you can now take a little more risk because you have more money to play with.

Trifecta

Many tracks now offer \$0.50 Trifectas so the cost is half of what it used to be but just like Exactas and Daily
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Doubles the cost can quickly escalate if you are boxing or wheeling the whole field underneath your top choice. My preferred Trifecta bet is to key one or two horses in first with three to five horses in second and third. This strategy has worked well for me over the years and while I lose if my key horse runs second or third the ability to use more horses in the second and third slots creates a greater opportunity for a big return.

Pick 3

Like the Trifecta many tracks now offer a \$0.50 minimum on Pick 3 wagers. This has lured in many small bankroll horseplayers because they see the opportunity for a good return with less of an investment as was previously the case. While this is true the success rate will begin to fall with each added leg to a multirace wager and with it your bankroll will begin to erode quicker. If you are playing with a medium bankroll I would suggest picking a few Pick 3 pools to bet into or find one you really like and crush it. My rule is to only bet a Pick 3 if I have a single in one or more of the races in the sequence. This allows you the flexibility to add horses in the other legs that would not make the cut due to cost constraints, which in turn increases the chances of winning and the chances of a big return.

Place Pick All

The Place Pick All is not offered at every track but it can provide a very generous return if a favorite or two finish out of the top two. Unlike other exotic wagers the Place Pick All risk can change from day to day and from track to track depending on the number of races in the sequence. An eight race card means you must be right eight times while a ten race card means you must be right ten times. I rarely play the Place Pick All because it is more difficult than you might think to pick the first or second finisher in eight or more consecutive races. If you are playing with a medium bankroll I would suggest limiting your play in the Place Pick All to only those situations where you have several key horses that you feel strongly about.



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Large Bankroll (\$1,000 or more per session)

If you are playing with a large bankroll all wagering options are open to you.

Superfecta

Some may question why the Superfecta is not appropriate for small or medium bankrolls because of its near universal

\$0.10 minimum but the degree of difficulty makes it a money drain. It is hard enough to pick the first two or three finishers in a race let alone the fourth place finisher. Even with the ultra-low dime minimum it can get be quite expensive to take down a Superfecta. Also the dime minimum is a double-edged sword because the lower minimum means there will likely be more winners, which drives down the return. Personally I almost never bet the Superfecta but if/when I do I use the same strategy as the Trifecta. I will key one or two horses in the top spot and spread underneath.

Super High 5

I have written before about the Super High 5 being a failure as a wagering option because of the high degree of difficulty combined with modest pool size. The Super High 5 is only worth playing if there is a multi-day carryover into the six figures and if you really like one or two horses to key on top. Like the Superfecta you may question why I put the Pick 4 in the large bankroll section and like the Superfecta it is because of the degree of difficulty in hitting it.

Pick 4

The Pick 4 is the most talked about wagering pool on TVG and HRTV and is pushed on many horseplayers that are not sufficiently bankrolled to play it properly. Sure you can take the lazy approach and bet a "caveman ticket" using every horse you like on a single ticket but this leads to two things. First the cost is usually going to be high because spreading in two or three legs increases the number of combinations exponentially. Second you will have to leave out a few horses that you give some chance of winning but not enough to merit including them on a single ticket.

You will probably cash a caveman Pick 4 from time to time but without a major score every few weeks you will quickly find yourself with a thoroughly depleted bankroll. The Pick 4 should therefore be left to those with large bankrolls. The proper way to play the Pick 4, in my opinion, is to use a multi-ticket approach that puts more money on your key horses and less on your fringe contenders. This is beneficial for two reasons. First you are rewarded more when you are right (your top selection wins). Second you can spread in one or two races and include a few fringe contenders that those playing caveman tickets will not include. You might only hit the Pick 4 for \$0.50 or \$1 under this scenario but the return will be huge.

Pick 5

The Pick 5 is the fastest growing wager in the United States because it offers the potential of a huge return with a low \$0.50 minimum and it typically has a low takeout rate. Like the Pick 4 it has been heavily discussed on the major racing networks and in print media and like the Pick 4 it has lured in unsuspecting horseplayers that are not
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properly bankrolled to play it. You might think that adding a single race is not that big a deal but that one race increases the number of possible combinations exponentially. This means higher risk (lower win percentage) but also means higher reward. The Pick 5 at major tracks almost always produces a signer (\$600+ for a \$1 bet) and more often than not produces a four figure return.

You might be thinking with a \$.50 minimum (at most tracks) and a low takeout rate that this is the best bet in racing and it is if you have a sufficient bankroll. Let's say you play the typical (I say typical because this the typical ticket I see on TV) ticket of \$60. At a \$.50 minimum you cover 120 combinations. If the sequence has average fields of eight horses per race there are 32,768 possible combinations. Your \$60 ticket covers 0.3% of those 32,768 combinations. Still think it is a good bet for your small or medium bankroll? How often do you think you will hit the Pick 5 under those conditions? What happens when the races have more than eight horses per race? The Pick 5 is a disaster waiting to happen to a small or medium bankrolled player. Unless you are extremely lucky and hit a big Pick 5 right away you will be out of money quickly.

Pick 6

The Pick 6 was once the Holy Grail on the wagering menu because it always paid well. With a \$2 minimum and an extra race it was tough to hit even when logical horses won. Now many tracks offer lower minimums or have converted it to a jackpot wager in which it only pays out if there is a single winning ticket. The traditional Pick 6 is still a good bet for the largest of bankrolls at a select few tracks (namely those in Southern California or in New York when there is a multi-day carryover) but for everyone else it is a terrible bet.

Every time I see a \$120 ticket on TV for a Pick 6 I cringe. At a \$2 minimum that ticket only covers 60 combinations. Under the same average situation as the Pick 5 above the six race sequence of eight horses per race has 262,144 possible combinations. That \$120 ticket only covers 0.02% of the possible combinations. Have you been struck by lightning? No? Go outside during the next thunderstorm because you are 50% more likely be struck by lightning than hitting that Pick 6 with a \$120 investment. The bottom line is if you are putting in under \$1,000 in the Pick 6 you are really up against it and will need to be the luckiest person in the world to hit it.

Not Suitable for Any Bankroll

There are one class of wagers that are, in my opinion, not suitable for any bankroll except under one very specific condition. Jackpot wagers are terrible bets on any day other than when they must be paid out due to the end of a meet or end of a year. Let's take a look at the most popular jackpot wager to see why I say this.

The Rainbow 6 is Gulfstream Park's version of the Pick 6. The pool is paid out only when there is a single winning combination purchased.

On days when no one picks all six winners or when more than one horseplayer picks all six winners 70% of that days pool is paid out and 30% is carried over and added to the jackpot. Of course those percentages are after the 20% takeout has been applied.

To make this simple let's say the pool is an even \$100,000. After the 20% takeout is removed there is \$80,000 left. If no one has all six winners or if more than one horseplayer has all six winners another 30% is taken out leaving \$56,000 to be distributed. So we started with \$100,000 and after the takeout and carryover we are left with \$56,000. That equates to a 44% takeout rate, which is in line with state and national lotteries in the United States. We complain about 20% takeout rates on a regular basis yet many horseplayers regularly bet into a wagering pool that typically carries a 44% takeout rate hoping that they will get lucky and be the one to win the jackpot. My advice is to stop betting on horses and invest that money in the national lotteries that offer a much bigger return for the same takeout rate albeit with a lower chance of winning.

Exceptions

There are always exceptions to the rules so let's go over a few, which should ease the concerns that some of you may have developed while reading this. First if you want to play wagers that are out of your optimal range on big days (i.e. Triple Crown, Breeders' Cup, etc.) go ahead but plan accordingly. I played the Pick 6 the last two years on Breeders' Cup Saturday even though I am not a large bankroll player because I liked the sequence. I had 5/6 two years ago and tripled my money but missed this year so I am still ahead. My near five-figure score two years ago did not change my normal wagering strategies because I know that I am not sufficiently bankrolled to play the Pick 6 on a regular basis. Second if you want to take a shot on a jackpot bet on a mandatory payout day than go ahead and do so. On that day the takeout rate will be nullified by the carryover money being paid out. Third these are only suggestions based on my experience. It is up to you to decide which wagering pools to bet into based on your experience, success rate and comfort level.

The Next Step

As mentioned in the opening few sentences there is a second part to the equation in determining which wagering pools you should be betting into: record keeping. Your bankroll in conjunction with your success in any given pool or situation should dictate where and how you bet your money. The only way to know that is to track and evaluate your wagering history.

Lenny Moon is the founder of Equinometry.com, a site dedicated to educating horseplayers of all levels about handicapping, betting and handicapping contest strategy and about issues within the horse racing industry that directly affect horseplayers such as takeout rates and lack of transparency by industry organizations.

Notes from the HANA Desk

Welcome to the Horseplayer Monthly.....

Fresh off the NHC (congrats John!) we are extremely happy to have two tournament players – **Jerod and Ross** – contribute articles this month. Both excellent horseplayers, and tournament players, they always have interesting and well-thought out opinions.

For pure handicapping and money management, **Lenny Moon and Craig Milikowski** do not disappoint. As a player who concentrates on pace (probably too much), I can relate to what Craig offers and will be looking at Turf racing in that new light. Lenny thoughts on pool choice can literally save us thousands upon thousands a year as a group. Thanks to both of them.

We scoured the Internet, as we do each month, and stumbled upon **Neal Benoit's** neat piece on player education. Thanks for letting us use it Neal! **Dave Valento** – as sharp as they come, and lead handicapper for the “Play of the Day” in Ray Paulick’s new Horseplayer section – gives us a lot to think about in his piece. **Barry Meadow**, well what can we say. Thanks for another great article Barry.

Meanwhile in harness, the Meadowlands is back with their support, and writer **Garnet Barnsdale** adds his prose (while grabbing a new DRF gig). Remember us little people here Garnet. Just kidding. Thanks to everyone who contributed this year. It’s welcomed and invaluable.

In upcoming issues, we’ll have our 9th Annual Track Ratings. We’re looking forward to those; it’s always fun to see what tracks improved, and which regressed.

As always, we rely on you to visit the advertisers (just click on the links right here in the pdf if you are connected to the net), if you are interested. And we thank you for passing the magazine along on socialmedia, chat boards, email and at the track. Thanks to you all, and good luck at the windows.

We always want to hear from you. Please email horseplayersassociation@gmail.com for any questions or comments.

Our cover: Thank you to Norm Files ([@NormF66](#)) for this month’s cover photo. Norm has an extensive photo gallery from his horse racing-related travels available on his [Flickr](#) page.

The NHC Can't Satisfy Everyone



By [Jerod Dinkin](#)

In recent memory, each and every year in the week leading up to the National Handicapping Championship (NHC), an interesting mix of opinions are voiced through social media and other outlets. While it’s virtually impossible to summarize all the relevant issues this particular affair evokes, there are two clear camps: “everyday horseplayers” and “contest players”, each viewing this event through a different lens.

In part, what makes handicapping so unique are not only the myriad of opinions and methods used to select the “right horse(s)”, but the manner in which wagers are created to maximize value in a landscape of utterly usurious takeout. One cannot be successful in the long term without tremendous discipline, patience, and quite frankly, mastery over your pari-mutuel opponents. For the sake of argument, I believe this is the rallying cry of the everyday horseplayer. That is, those grinding it out in a game that is increasingly harder to beat day in and day out.

On the flip side, in general terms, the contest player enjoys the NHC and other Tour and contest events for camaraderie, entertainment, a chance to win big money, and the test against fellow competitors. In the era of fantasy sports competition, incessant listing of everything in society and life (Top 10 Places to Retire, Top 50 Companies to work for, etc.), and short term attention spans (24 news cycle, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Millennial behavior, etc.) contests provide some instant gratification as well as a different form of enjoying the handicapping endeavor. As well, perhaps some handicappers have given up on trying to beat the pari-mutuel game and have turned entirely to contest play as an alternative.

Once again, in general terms, the everyday horseplayer looks at the NHC as a luck-filled stab-fest and is affronted by its anointment as a championship test. The winner of the NHC is crowned Handicapper of the Year, which offends the sensibility of the gambler that knows a weekend of selecting mostly longshots (at least to be successful under the format) is a recipe for long term failure. The feeling is that it doesn’t mimic everyday play and therefore shouldn’t be considered the championship event of horseplayers.

For my money, the best pure handicapping test is the
(continued on next page)

format of the Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge where the contestants use a live bankroll into the actual pari-mutuel pools (Win, Place, Show, Exacta, Trifecta) with set minimum betting requirements (must play 5 races each day - \$600 minimum per race on Friday and \$900 minimum on Saturday) over a two day span. I would like to see this as the marquee event because it involves betting strategy, money management, and contest strategy, or in other words, it's just like a regular day at the races with added layers.

I believe the NTRA errors by giving the NHC winner the title of Handicapper of the Year and instead should either award it to the player that wins the NHC Tour point race during the year (which involves a high level of consistent play) or to the winner of the Breeders' Cup Betting Challenge. However, since we're usually characterized as degenerate also-rans rather than the cog that keeps that keeps game running, the fact that a horseplayer is recognized at all is a big accomplishment. This is a sad statement on the state of affairs in this business, but it's entirely true.

There will be ample complaining no matter what format the NHC uses. *Jesus Crist* (a hybrid of Jesus and Steve Crist) couldn't formulate a system that would appease more than 60% of the people involved. If you ask 1,000 horseplayers where the sun rises, 75% will say in the East, 5% will say in the West, 15% can't hear the question, and 5% would like to know where they can pick up their free T-shirt.

I'm also fascinated by the dichotomy of the NHC. Have you ever tried to explain to a complete layman what it entails? So let me get this straight.....You are flying from New York, a place with live horse racing, to Nevada, a place without it, to sit in a big ballroom for three straight days, 8-10 hours at a time, and watch televised races simulcast from all over the country (including New York) and you're not actually betting any real money on those races but are participating in a contest that mirrors the results?

And yet, as ridiculous as it might seem to an outsider, and despite the criticism it gets from a number of everyday players, it's popular, viable, and a focal point to many in our world. Given the difficulty of qualifying for the NHC, to subsequently best more than 600 players (most of which are very good handicappers and some of which are just plain incredible) over a three day span is a huge accomplishment that should be respected in spite of any preconceived bias against the format. In my mind, it's about the context. You are given a set of rules - the winner is the best contestant over the course of that event. If you don't like the rules, you don't have to play. There are plenty of differing contest formats to choose from and avenues in which to do it. In fact, choice is a huge positive for the player in the modern era. If you are against the format of the NHC, play a live money contest or stick with

everyday regular betting and ignore it altogether.

I like the NHC and the excitement it creates and salute the 2015 winner John O'Neil on a tremendous accomplishment.



Mike Watchmaker, John O'Neil, and Alex Waldrop – NTRA Photo

Jerod Dinkin is an obsessed weekend handicapper, contest player, and fan. As well, he is also a former Canterbury Park Handicapper of the Year, a 3x NHC and 8x HPWS qualifier, and is currently in the Top Ten Lifetime on publichandicapper.com. To tell Jerod how wrong he is about everything written here; please contact him via Twitter [@J_Dinks](https://twitter.com/J_Dinks).

Ode to a Sponsor

We like to be up front here at HANA, and [Derby Wars](#) has been a regular advertiser here for a long time. So we put that out there.

With Daily Fantasy Sports getting so much press, with multi-million dollar funding from the who's who of venture capital, over \$1 billion of handle in 2014, and tons of advertising dollars, it's been the darling new business of 2014. Many in the sport of racing, like in this month's column about Daily Fantasy, are wondering how this sport can capture similar using the DFS model.

Well, we already have it.

Almost each day of the week we can compete through tournaments with the exact same format as DFS at [Derby Wars](#). They've been offering it for years. Like sports leagues have noticed, keeping people interested in a sport is important. Often times we get frustrated as horseplayers and want to take a break. To keep us engaged, a lower cost tournament on a Saturday is a nice way to do that. [Derby Wars](#) provides that.

Horse racing needs all the help it can get to promote its product to the masses. We're happy to have [Derby Wars](#) aboard here each month at the Horseplayer Monthly.

Let's Appreciate What We're Watching

I, like millions, watched the NFL Divisional playoffs. Two-Sunday-ago's games were of the epic variety. In the first, we had the catch/non-catch and in the second, we had the upstart Colts defeat a Broncos team handily. Although the first game made most of the headlines, the second game might have signalled the end of the line for one of the greatest players in NFL history – Broncos QB Peyton Manning. Manning, in a word, was awful. According to Chase Stuart of Football Perspective, using advanced analytics, it was his worst game since week three of his rookie season. Although Manning led teams do not have a good won-loss playoff record, his average playoff ESPN "QBR" over his career is a very good 74.2. For the Colts game, it was 27.9.



This is not a new thing, I guess. Since week 9 of the season, Manning has not performed, well, like Manning. The man who has the best modern red-zone completion percentage, saw that fall to 39%, third worst in all of football. On SI.com, it was reported that also since week 9, he overthrew receivers at a rate never seen for him, or many. In fact, only two quarterbacks overthrew receivers more during that time frame – Jag's rookie Blake Bortles and the much maligned (and often benched) Robert Griffin III. Before week nine, he led almost all the categories he was now close to worst in.

According to research done by Advanced Football Analytics' Brian Burke, when a top quarterback goes bad, he goes bad fast; it is not a gradual decline. A couple of years ago after his study he wrote, "The bottom line is that very successful quarterbacks like Manning aren't going to become bad slowly. All of sudden one year, they'll have significant drop-off in performance. Successful, established QBs will generally continue to be successful until one day they're not. We won't see it coming."

There are rumors that Manning was hurt after week nine, and numerous other rumblings to explain his performance drop-off. Maybe they're right and he'll not retire and be good again. But many are not holding their breath.

I got to thinking just how similar Brian Burke's quarterback research is to horse racing. More often than not, the great horses of the modern generation do not simply lose it gradually. It's not a Beyer drop of one or two here, then months later another couple. It's generally over quickly.

When Rachel Alexandra returned at four, the excuses in

her first two losses were formidable; "fitness" and weather, and competition. No worries, we were told by the connections. Common sense said different. She was never the same and retired a couple of months later.

This past year, Will Take Charge was beginning to be a fan favorite. He won the Oaklawn Handicap in April but really went downhill from there. There was obviously a problem, and over his next three starts he was saying "no mas" where he likely could not have beaten a hot claimer. He too was retired.

Go through the list of some of our favorites the last ten years, more often than not it was over before we could even appreciate them. For every Zenyatta that have held form for years, there are others who lost it one day, one week or in one race, never to be the same. 2015 is upon us, and we could be in for a real treat. Joining aged stalwarts like Wise Dan – who is always fun to watch – are California Chrome, Shared Belief, Bayern, Tonalist and a handful of others with talent. All of us hope these horses come back well and have a great year or years. But remember, in a flash it could be over for one or all of them and we won't even see it coming.

Fifteen years ago a quarterback was drafted by the dismal Indianapolis Colts and he changed the game. He was an offensive coordinator on the field, set record after record and was one of the few quarterbacks who defensive coordinators did not only have to gameplan against, but somehow outthink. I watched most of his games the last two years, because I knew one day he would be gone. In horse racing, this year I will be less concerned with year-end award arguments, or wondering if horse A is as good as historical horse B. I am just going to watch this sports' stars and appreciate the athletic talent and fierce will to win that they have. They might not be at the top of their games for very long.



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Learn the Lingo

Steam, as in "hey Pete, that's a steam horse!" is a horse who is taking a whole lot of money quickly. This should not be used to describe solely smart money (although sometimes it is). In last year's Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint, Stonetastic was the steam horse, primarily due to the perceived inside speed bias up until that point. Stonetastic ended up being overbet steam, and Judy the Beauty backers were rewarded handsomely for not paying attention to it.

2015 Horse Racing Prop Bets

From the Hana Desk

With the Super Bowl coming up this weekend, prop bets are the rage. Some are interesting for betting purposes (receiver catches, QB completions), and some are just downright strange (what color Gatorade will be dumped on the winning coach).

We think racing needs to get into the act, so here are a few 2015 prop bets for our sport. What side are you on?

- Number of times we hear a work was “exactly what we were shooting for” before any major 2015 stake, O/U 49.5
- Number of Derby Hopefuls that will be retired to stud before the Derby, O/U 6
- Number of Derby Hopefuls retired to stud accompanied by the trainer saying “He was one of the most talented horses I have ever trained and will make a great sire”, O/U 4.5
- Number of times we hear the “Wood Memorial is a bad Derby prep race” on social media, O/U 36.5
- Current odds that Saratoga or Kentucky Downs unseats Keeneland as number one in the 2015 HANA rankings, 4-5



Racing at Keeneland - photo by [Penelope P. Miller](#),
[America's Best Racing](#)

- Number of the 20 Kentucky Derby trainers who will be quoted saying “he cleaned up the feed tub” before post time, O/U 19.5
- If any trainer does not say his or her horse “cleaned up the feed tub”, odds the horse will be retired to stud within 48 hours, -210
- Odds that the above horse will be retired with an accompanying comment of “he was the best horse I ever trained”, -120
- Number of industry press columns we’ll read that say “the Triple Crown will be won this year” if a horse wins the Derby by greater than 4 lengths, O/U 12.5
- Number of times we’ll see Kentucky Derby not linked with the word “Yum” from now in all Churchill Downs

Inc. Press Releases until May, O/U 0.5

- Number of times we’ll see a replay of the start of the Breeders’ Cup Classic when Bayern and Shared Belief knock heads again, O/U 22.5
- Will Kegabus make an appearance at the Preakness (includes drunk kids dressed like Kegabus in the infield)?, Yes +190 No -190
- Will Frank Stronach make an appearance at the Preakness with Kegabus and or cases of Frank’s Energy Drink on NBC? Yes +450
- Will Todd Pletcher be spotted at any Triple Crown race after noon not wearing an expensive tie? Yes +350, No -350
- When a trainer is caught with his or her 37th or more lifetime infraction in 2015, he or she will: Be suspended immediately for more than six months +540, Asked to be more careful next time and given probation -540
- Number of rap hip hop artists that no one in racing’s core demographic has ever heard who will be interviewed by NBC on the Derby Red Carpet O/U 3.5

If you want to bet any of those – and hey, let’s face it, why wouldn’t you – they may be available at your nearest racino soon; but probably at slightly higher juice than we listed.

This Month's Funny

Thanks to Seth Merrow at [Equidaily](#) for this month’s humorous picture, featuring an unfortunate abbreviation for the Frontier Utilities Turf Sprint at Sam Houston Race Park.

Oh, we'll just stick with calling it the "Frontier Utilities"...



Daily Racing Form

Sam Houston (1/24/2015)

5 Sam Houston

FUTrfSprnt75k

5 Furlongs (Turf). (:56") THE FRONTIER UTILITIES TURF SPRINT. Purse \$75,000. For Four Year Olds And Upward. By free subscription, \$750 due At Time of Entry. \$2,000 Supplemental nominations may be made At Time of Entry and shall include all fees. The \$75,000 Guaranteed to be divided; \$45,000 to the winner, \$15,000 to second, \$8,250 to third, \$4,500 to fourth and \$2,250 to fifth. Weight: 123 lbs. Non-winners of a Sweepstakes since September 24, 2014 allowed 3 lbs. Two races since November 24, 2014 allowed 5 lbs. Starters to be named through the entry box by the usual time of closing. This race will be limited to Twelve starters with preference to horses with the highest career earnings at time of entry.

Learn the Lingo

The chalk is a fun one, well-used at a racetrack near you, and you can look like a professional bettor with millions in the betting account when you use it. Where did the use of that phrase to describe the favorite come from? According to Yahoo Answers: “Before the tote boards came into existence, the odds were and any other changes (weight, equipment, etc) were written on a blackboard with chalk...”

Each horse would be listed on the chalk board and before the race, the odds would change constantly, as it does nowadays. There was always two or three horses that received the most play until finally before the race, the racetrack, bookmakers, would have a favorite, which often would have the most chalk, from being constantly erased, next to its name listed with the odds.”

Gallo's Five Tournament Tips

by Ross Gallo for AGameofSkill.com

I've been a professional handicapper for over 30 years, playing tournaments for the last 15. I've qualified 10 times for the NHC, finished second on *The Tour* in its inaugural season, and am a member of the NTRA Player's Committee. In recent years however, my time has been at a major premium. I recently married the love of my life, and have a brand new, BIG family who I adore as well. In addition, my son is 11 now, and there is kick boxing twice a week, jujitsu another day, band practice, concerts, homework and much more.



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It occurred to me that there are many of you out there who love this game, love to play tournaments, but are in the same or similar situation as I am. With the current tournament landscape being so internet heavy (online tournaments far outnumbering brick and mortars), it is still possible to play and compete even when your schedule says "no." Recently, a perfect example presented itself to me, and the idea for this article was borne.

On November 29th, Twinspires held their annual monster NHC qualifier. The top 20 earn a spot, and the next 30 receive Horse Player World Series packages. Fifty trips to Vegas in all, and I didn't want to miss it. Being the Saturday after Thanksgiving (why schedule a tournament like that right after the holiday?), Maria, Ethan and I were visiting her family in New York. It was a great time, as Ethan hadn't seen snow since he was age 3 (we live in Florida). Thus, sledding was a big deal and the food and company were spectacular. But I had to play in the tournament and Maria is always very supportive, which is huge for my state of mind. I appreciate that very much by the way, but how could I hope to be competitive under the circumstances? Here are a few things that helped me, hopefully they will you as well.

Get your handicapping materials as early as possible

Under normal circumstances, I can handicap a tournament the day before rather comfortably. When you know you're going to have time issues, getting your choice

of handicapping products as early as possible can get you an important head start. DRF PP's, the sheets, HTR, BRISNET, et al, often have their info available two or three days in advance. And while you may not know the exact tournament races that far out, most of the time you know the tracks to be used, so if there is a big field turf race or major stakes, you can be fairly certain they'll include it. You should be able to figure out at least half of the races they're going to use.

Maximize your time

If you're flying, the plane is a great place to handicap. If your obstacles are closer to home, get up an hour earlier and get some 'capping in. Go sledding, take the kids to the movies, make dinner, put up the tree, but set aside a half hour here or there to do a race. Or my favorite, wait until everyone goes to bed and handicap in the peace and quiet until you can't keep your eyes open. Sure you'll have some bags under your eyes the next morning, but you may just find that 20-1 shot you dearly need.

Put all your picks in (but be ready with alternatives)

Unless you're playing a Pick and Pray (where picks must all be in by a set time), most, if not all, of the other online contests let you change your picks. I know they suggest putting all your picks in for the day anyway, and this is probably good advice for any contest, but I've never liked the practice personally. Doing so, leaves you open for taking a winner out (an optimist might think putting one in too, see below), and the last thing you need is something else to possibly aggravate you. But in the case of limited time, I believe it is a wise idea.

Of course, if you're absolutely out for the day, you'll need to 'Pick and Pray' anyway, but with smartphones and tablets available to most players, keeping tabs of your picks is at your fingertips. At the least, try to have a backup list of longshots and/or favorites to change to according to the circumstances. Example: you only have a minute, but you check the standings quickly. A bankroll of \$90 is leading with two races to go, you have \$30 and a 2-1 shot in the next race. You have to change out of that pick to something longer. A simple list of alternatives, especially for the later races, is crucial.

Keep handicapping on the fly

Obviously if you're totally off the grid, there is nothing you can do, but even if you get back to business with only a few races to go, keep working. Your time was limited, so you certainly could have missed something. Case in point from my Twinspires experience. I had hit a 7-1 shot and a couple of places about two thirds of the way through the contest, and was wallowing in the middle of the pack. There was a race coming up that I was okay with the horse I had put in already, but the following race was a big field, competitive turf race at Del Mar that I didn't have time to handicap thoroughly.

I do a lot of tape work, so I watched a few races I didn't

(continued on next page)

get to. Sure enough, jockey Joe Talamo was on a second time turfer who had broke his maiden in what, on paper, appeared to be inferior to some of the contenders. I found the effort eye catching and at over 20-1 he seemed well worth a shot. Got a perfect trip, came up the fence and won convincingly! Now I'm in the hunt. Without continuing to grind, I NEVER find that horse.

Don't beat yourself up

This is good advice no matter the situation, but even more so when you've had little time to prepare and your margin of error is very small. I got in front of the computer with 5 races to go, and was a hero with my change to a 20-1 shot winner. I proceeded to hit a 5-1 in the next race to get to 21st place and less than \$1 from qualifying for the NHC with two races to go. I fanned the penultimate race, so it was a one shot contest and I needed about \$6 to qualify.

My advance picks had me on a 7-1 shot, the 12 horse in a two turn race at Hawthorne. After further handicapping I noticed the jockey was 4 for 74 and the trainer wasn't much better. Thinking it would be very difficult for this jockey to work out a winning trip from out there, I changed my pick for the second time that day. That didn't work so well this time as the '4 for 74' jock rode like Javier Castellano and drew off, while the 3-1 shot I ended up on (with a supposedly superior jock) got stuck down on the rail, trapped behind horses the whole stretch.

I was understandably pissed, would've finished top ten if I left it alone, but my brother told me a long time ago "You plant your feet, make your pick, and whatever happens, happens. Good or bad you have no more control over it."

Despite the result, I think my logic was sound; I finished up with a credible 39th place finish out of over 500 entries. The HPWS package was not quite the result I'd hoped, but under the circumstances not horrendous, and I battled to the end.

This last tip maybe the hardest and most important to follow because you have to fight human nature. We all feel that disappointment when bad things happen, but it is imperative to keep your focus if you want to have success in this difficult game of ours, and dwelling on adversity can even carry over to your next tournament if you allow it to. Keep the demons at bay.

So there you have it. When those inevitable times come up when your life is as frenetic as possible, but you still just HAVE TO play that tournament, hopefully these little suggestions will help you. And who knows, maybe you just might steal one from the Shurmans, Weiners, Goodalls and Nilsens of the handicapping world. Why not you, right?

Ross Gallo is considered one of the top horseplayers in the country and is in select company, having qualified 10 times for the NTRA National Handicapping Championship. Ross occasionally pens education pieces at www.aqameofskill.com.

Popcorn Time

If you are a fan of horse racing related movies you may be surprised at what one can find on Youtube. Here is a taste.

Charlie Chan at the Race Track (1936)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn59t0A_t7Q

IMDb description: When a friend of Charlie's is found kicked to death by his own race horse on board a Honolulu-bound liner, the detective discovers foul play and uncovers an international gambling ring.



Here is a rare gem: Two Dollar Bettor (1951)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3Rfvj_3Uq4

IMDb description: An honest bank employee gets hooked on horse racing, and starts to embezzle bank funds in an attempt to recoup his losses.

Watch for Barbara Billingsley (The mom on *Leave It to Beaver*, who appears in the credits missing the "g" in her last name) and Carl Switzer, who was Alfalfa in the original *The Little Rascals* series.

"The Last Night of a Jockey" (1962) from The Twilight Zone series starring Mickey Rooney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZF1x5DHRMY>

IMDb description: A washed-up jockey gets his wish while waiting for the results of his race fixing hearing.

If you need a good chuckle: The Longshot (1986)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXOo21NhgFo#t=1456>

IMDb description: Four losers borrow money from gangsters to bet on a "sure thing", but lose. The gangsters go after them to get their money.

This one teams up Harvey Korman and Tim Conway.

If you've watched the first four videos, you are probably itching to make a bet. Wait. Watch *The Trainer's Edge* first. It could be the best video guide to horse racing body language ever made. Even though it was produced in the 90's, it is a wealth of timeless information. This might even make you a more efficient horseplayer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15UjGDSVRT8>

You Are Racing's Best Hope for Growth

When compared to ease-of-use and churn focused fantasy sports start-ups like Fan Duel and DraftKings, racing is simply not yet built for the newbie skill game gambling market

By Dean Towers, originally published in the Thoroughbred Daily News

Fantasy sports – drafting, fielding and managing a team made up of players in all major sports – has been on a tear. Back in 1988, according to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, approximately 500,000 people were playing games in some form. In 2003, with the help of the Internet and a growing set of dedicated websites, magazines and software, that number grew to 15.2 million. In 2014, over 40 million people field NFL teams weekly. This market will spend upwards of \$1.7 billion in 2015 on the craft.

CHAMPION	
MADURE	MARK MCGUIRE
RUNNER UP	
Spongworthy	Jasen Mangrum
FINAL FOUR	
Fantini33	Ed Peters
Skeizer	Damian Verno
ELITE EIGHT	
Badkenney	Ken McMahan
Glasgowmike	Mike Glasgow
Mike Y	Mike Yarusso
Wrongway	Ed Ramsey

\$25,000 HEAD-TO-HEAD CHAMPIONSHIP
QUALIFY TODAY FOR FEB. BRACKET!

The [Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act](#) of 2006 (UIGEA) provided a carve-out for horse racing, as we all know, but fantasy games too had their own carve-out. Being a game of skill, fantasy sports met the smell test for regulators and their grey area in terms of gambling was something that smart companies chose to exploit. Only two years ago, two new start-ups – FanDuel and DraftKings – entered the fantasy market with weekly or daily “cash games”, where a team is chosen and fielded and money is wagered (don’t let them tell you it’s not wagering because it is). DraftKings sponsored a Breeders’ Cup race last month.

These new entrants have a business model that is almost no different than a Vegas casino offering NFL parlay cards, player prop bets or a punt on a Super Bowl coin flip. It’s about enticing people to gamble on sports, and they’ve been getting that done. It is estimated that FanDuel will payout over \$1 billion in 2015, with Draft Kings not too far behind. Investors in FanDuel, which include Shamrock Capital Advisors, NBC Sports Ventures, KKR, Bullpen Capital, Comcast Ventures, Pentech Ventures, Piton Capital, Scottish Enterprise and Richard Koch, look to be pretty shrewd.

How have these companies been growing? How have they attracted users with an average age of 34, 78% of whom have college degrees, who spend upwards of 10 hours per week just consuming fantasy sports? What’s the secret, if any?

They have brought in a demographic who were playing a game with their friends, in a basement or on a computer that lasts a season long, and made it a weekly, or nightly, pastime. This shift has not occurred by accident. Both FanDuel and Draft Kings are funded and the bulk of their spending lies in marketing; you can’t turn on a football show on NFL Network or CBS and not see an ad.



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Marketing spend is just a very small part of it, however. Converting marketing spend – turning a tire kicker into a car purchaser – is the key goal. They’ve achieved that in a number of ways.

- They created a very good user experience and user interface. The money behind the sites is formidable, you can get every stat imaginable, and they are easy to use. Playing a game and watching the stats roll in real time makes it exciting. This is further enhanced by the fantasy sports ecosystem. There are hundreds of sites in cyberspace with player simulators, API’s (application programming interface), value based line up generators and similar tools.
- They have not been handcuffed with too many cooks in the kitchen, or bogged down with state or country rules, or myriad other barriers to entry. And they have taken advantage of it. A 33 year old plumber from Dawson City in the Yukon can play a 70 year old retiree from the Villages in Florida.
- Their payouts are priced close to optimal. 28% of people in a most recent association survey said that pricing is the main factor in their decision to play cash games. FanDuel and DraftKings takeout rates range from 6% to 10%. They often trumpet what is paid out as a marketing tool and your bankroll can last at these sites; even if you aren’t a winner you can feel like one often enough.

(continued on next page)

FanDuel and DraftKings' marketing funnel reads like a how-to guide for growing a business. They bring new players in via marketing and a newbie feels right at home. For as little as 25 cents, one can get off and running and play in an afternoon game. In "50/50" games, half the field gets paid near double what they wager, adding to the churn, and making people happy (winning cash and having your opinion verified is the crux of all gambling). Meanwhile in horse racing things are not as easy, or rosy. Racing has not done what fantasy has done with their UIGEA carve-out. They have not streamlined use, cannot accept people from everywhere via ADW's, do not have little infighting, do not pay prizes out at a low takeout, do not have free statistics, do not spend marketing at burn rates to get people to gamble. There's a good chance none of that may happen anytime soon, either.

For racing, those who do get placed into the top of the sales funnel as a newbie (see racing on TV, go out with their friend's to the track for the first time, or go to the Kentucky Derby infield) are then struck with having to excel in a game that is not built for them.

To land these new potential customers, racing tries to convert them via a red herring. "They need quick action" or "they need simple bets" are two famous horse racing funnel laments; like somehow if the sport runs races every five minutes and allows for an easy to understand spread bet, things will improve. Both are far too simplistic, and in my view are wishful thinking. Racing already has quick action. There are 40 tracks running on a Saturday, where customers can bet every two or three minutes if they want to. This is probably beside the point anyway. Skill games by definition are not quick action; in fantasy, the user would not be spending ten hours a week studying to play a fantasy football cash game that lasts upwards of 48 hours (Sunday and Monday games) if that was important. As far as newbie bets go, it's clear that simple bets work well at DraftKings and are a huge part of converting in their funnel (the 25 cent games I mentioned), but that's a whole different ball of wax. In racing, a new bet is a Grand Slam, or a once-or-twice-tried odd even bet. They're already here, they have been tried, and few players bet them. When something new does come along in horse racing that may attract this demographic, or this type user, it then seems to spiral into the horse racing abyss where it goes to die. Exchange wagering is a good example. That medium was and is a hit with younger users because it had a few major things going for it. It's win betting so churn is higher, the takeout is lower, it's fairly fun and exciting and an easy way to be a new customer. You'd think racing would want that. However, when it is broached we're told the takeout needs to be higher so the exchange pays their fair share; this despite the fact that nobody knows what a fair share is. The takeout being double or triple what the exchange needs to thrive kills the main marketing driver and the entire enterprise. That certainly defeats the purpose doesn't it?

When we look at racing's structure, in terms of attracting newbies and converting them into long term players, it's a formidable hill to climb. Marketing money is happily spent on billboards, or on food trucks, or getting people to watch horse racing on TV. I believe that focus makes us feel good, but it does little more than that. It simply does not work; if it did, it would've worked already.

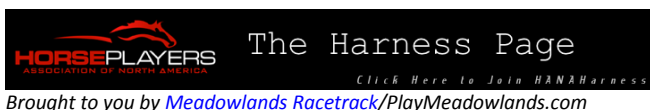
I believe that horse racing, unlike DraftKings or FanDuel, needs to focus on the existing fan and betting base to achieve one main goal:

- Get the once or twice a month player to become a weekend warrior, get the weekend warrior to play during the week, get the fellow or gal betting \$50,000 a year to bet \$500,000, get the better betting \$500,000 per annum to bet \$5 million

To achieve that, it will take a complete 180. Racing must be priced better so these people can stretch bankrolls and some of them can win, or perceive they can win. The conduit needs improvement so players can sign up everywhere to online betting and all tracks need to be offered at all ADW's; don't stifle competition, foster it. An environment needs to be created where new mediums like a betting exchange do not end up on the cutting room floor. The culture must be changed by benchmarking, for example, that a \$20 billion handle at 10% of the boat is better than a \$10 billion handle at 20%, because as pool size goes up, bet size goes up and with more money in the pools, and racing offering a better gamble, it can attract other gamblers.

FanDuel and DraftKings have created a system that depends on newbies. They need to ensure their customers come back; to play this new game long term. Almost everything they do is focused on that goal, and thus far it has worked. Racing cannot beat fantasy sites at their own game, and newbies will not lead it to the Promised Land. Racing must leverage the existing fan base, long time bettors, those who have left racing and are willing to give it another shot, and others who gamble. To achieve that it probably doesn't need to spend millions on TV or billboards, food trucks or bands. Racing needs to create, foster and promote a new gambling environment that focuses on their needs, caters to them, and entices them to bet more money.

Dean is a Board Member of the Horseplayers Association of North America and Director of a Toronto-based marketing firm. He has been a frequent speaker at industry and gambling conferences in both the US and Canada. He wrote his university thesis on off-track betting and has authored a white paper on exchange wagering.



The Benefit of Trip Notes



By [Garnet Barnsdale](#)

Recently I had the very good fortune to get the opportunity to take on the role as the Woodbine/Mohawk handicapper for the *Daily Racing Form's* harness division – known as “DRF Harness”. While I am typically a very confident handicapper – as any worth their salt should be – I knew I had to change the way I do things to feel fully confident I would succeed in this new high profile role. It's one thing to post selections on a blog that may or may not get read or give out picks on an internet radio show with a small group of cult listeners but this.....this is the *DAILY RACING FORM*! Almost immediately I realized that I needed to start doing my “homework”. That meant watching every replay at least once and making trip notes.

Now, I imagine at this point some of you more seasoned and successful bettors might be saying out loud: “What, you weren't already doing that idiot?” Well, give me a chance to explain. While it makes obvious sense to make these notes based on close observation – believe me I am REALLY seeing the value the past week – I typically play the races on the same limited nights, mostly Friday and Saturday and have always given myself credit (too much I am finding out) for seeing things during races that I will remember the next week and use to my advantage while making wagers. I have found out in just a week that couldn't be further from reality. Where I may have filed in my memory bank – or inputted in my “virtual stable” – one or two horses per week that might have encountered trouble or shown improvement, making trip notes on every race opened up an entire new and beautiful handicapping world for me. By making objective observations and recording them I have not only given myself the ability to identify good future wagers, but equally importantly I am identifying horses that are likely to be overbet that will offer poor value.

The very first note I transcribed from Jan 8's opening race produced a next-out Best Bet winner that paid \$8.80. The note simply read: “Good Luck Kathy pulled first-up at the half and was a very game second at the wire” and I placed a star beside her name. Now, I wouldn't typically pick a seven and a half-length loser as my best bet next

time out but I knew what I saw and had I not watched the replays and made the notes there is no way I would have remembered how Good Luck Kathy gutted it out against a blowout winner and while that one was drawing away from the field engaged in a separate race for second and held off all the closers including those with fresh legs that did no work until the final sixteenth after riding the rail behind cover throughout. I knew when the mare that beat her didn't show up the next week that Good Luck Kathy was a very good bet, especially considering her main foe and favorite in the race was coming in off a 24-day break. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Good Luck Kathy was sharp and ready to win. If her main foe also had a recency disadvantage I figured, why not load up?

Why not indeed as Good Luck Kathy made her own luck by carving out a pocket trip behind the chalk and getting up on the wire. Additionally, trip notes on two separate horses in the same race produced a \$400 windfall next out when they both showed up in separate halves of the late double which I bet for \$20 based solely on this inscription: “Total Lee wins well off terrible cover. She is improving every start...and...Dianna Santanna had too far to come off bad cover and was a wrapped up third at the wire. She looks sharp.” Obviously every notation made isn't leading me to next-out winners or losers but what this work is doing is training me to watch every horse and how trip, pace and race flow affects their chances. It has helped me select 17 of 42 winners on top in my selections and produce an overall R.O.I of \$2.82 on \$2 wagers on every top pick in the 42 dashes.

Can I keep picking winners at a 41% clip that produce a 41% R.O.I.? Only time will tell. But one thing is for sure: if I don't it won't be because I haven't done my homework. This commitment to doing this work has been a real eye opener. No one, no matter how sharp they are can remember everything that happens on the racetrack several days or weeks later. I've been watching races for close to 40 years and I am confident that I know what I am looking at and how to interpret it. Of that I have no doubt. Without the notes created from these observations though it's almost like firing blanks and leads to missed opportunities. That's not going to happen again. You can follow my daily selections and analysis of the WEG harness races here: <http://www.drf.com/news/garnet-barnsdale>

Garnet has been an avid fan, handicapper and bettor of harness racing for almost four decades. He is an honors graduate from the Humber College School of Journalism (1988) and contributes to various print, broadcast and web media with feature articles, columns and selections. Garnet is a co-host of North American Harness Update which airs every Friday night (9 p.m. Eastern) [here](#) and his Woodbine/Mohawk selections can be found [here](#). Garnet was also selected by Standardbred Canada as the 2014 "I Love Canadian Harness Racing Fan Club" Ambassador.

Meadowlands Jackpot Super Hi-5 Paying Dividends

The Meadowlands Jackpot Super Hi-5 has gotten off to a fast start, as it paid out over \$200,000 in just the first 16 days of the Winter Meet. Thanks to an industry-low eight-percent (8%) takeout rate on the wager, more money is paid out each night, especially when the Jackpot is hit. However, even on nights when there are multiple winning tickets, the payouts have still been robust as 75% of the pool is paid out in a non-jackpot scenario, which is unique as more of the pool is paid out each night than a typical jackpot wager.

The average jackpot win has returned over \$18,000, while even the non-jackpot winning combinations have averaged a payout of over \$1,700.

Recently, a second Jackpot Super Hi-5 was added to the fifth race each night. That race will feature a 12-horse field and contested at 1 1/8th miles, while the last race Jackpot Super Hi-5 will be a standard one mile event with a 10 horses.

"We added the second Hi-5 to give the bettors a bit more of the wager as they responded well to it, but also to determine how the wager works best," said Director of Racing Operations Darin Zoccali. "When we made the switch to 12-horses in the last race, the jackpot was being hit often, which is great since it carries just an 8% takeout rate and our customers are seeing more dollars returned to them.

"But we also know there are bettors that want to see big carryovers, so by adding the second Jackpot Super Hi-5 the bettors have one 12-horse field which creates a higher probability of having the only winning ticket, while having the last race feature 10 horses, which creates a scenario to more likely result in a carryover. If we are all lucky enough to build a carryover pool throughout a large part of the meet and have a Hambletonian Day that features a massive carryover on a wager that has just an 8% takeout, we are confident it will produce the largest single pool harness racing in North America has ever seen."

Through 16 programs, the Jackpot had been hit five times between the two Jackpot Super Hi-5 wagers. Going into the Thursday, January 8th program, both wagers feature a carryover. The 5th race Jackpot carryover is at \$10,645 while the last race Jackpot carryover stands at \$28,076.

The Meadowlands offers a The Jackpot Super Hi-5 as a \$.20 cent minimum bet and the wager is offered in the 5th and last race each night. The two Jackpot pools are separate from one another and any carryover would apply to the corresponding race on the next racing night.

(Meadowlands Press Release)

Pool Size in Harness Racing

As Lenny Moon wrote in this month's feature story, knowing what pools to bet is paramount for us as bettors. Sometimes it is simply not mathematically sound to bet into some pools – especially the hard to hit ones. In harness racing, pool size at some tracks is a major issue. But there are a couple that are good, right across the board.



Racing at The Meadowlands – Lisa Photo

The Meadowlands is the King of harness betting, and harness bettors flock to this track as much as any, now, and in the past. Their betting menu - from win through the pick 5- all supply the bettor with pool size. There is no pool that needs to be avoided at the Big M. It's not called the "Mecca" for nothing.

Up at Woodbine, pool size is much better than average, and almost every pool can be exploited. However, with low minimums, the pick 3 pools are worth analyzing to fit your style of play.

At most other tracks, and circuits, check the pool size in each bet, and don't let the looks of a track on the simo screen sway you without digging more. Northfield, for example, might look like a smaller track with pool trouble, but its handle is large. Tioga, with excellent takeout rates and a beautiful setting, can be taken advantage of to grind, but check the serial bet pool size to be sure. Like with anything in betting, do your homework, because at the end of the year it can be the difference between winning or losing.

Barnsdale Wins HANA Contest

Regular Horseplayer Monthly contributor Garnet Barnsdale took home top honors in this year's HANA Harness' 2014 Grand Circuit Shoot-Out contest with a net profit of \$4,553.40, over \$3,000 ahead of second place Mark McKelvie who had a net profit of \$1,276. In a last minute move, Brian McEvoy managed to nail Bob Zanakis for the show position, thanks to his \$250 win wager on McWicked in the Progress at Dover Downs.

For full standings and the complete release, please click [here](#).



THE BEST
BANG
FOR YOUR
BUCK!

**20¢ JACKPOT
SUPER HI-5**

Industry Low 8% Takeout
Hit 5 Times in 14 Nights
Average Jackpot
Payout \$18,000
Average Non-Jackpot
Payout \$1,700

50¢ Early Pick 4

Average Pool Size \$50,000
15% Takeout

50¢ Late Pick 4

Average Pool Size \$75,000
Average Payout over \$2,000
15% Takeout

50¢ Pick 5

Now Bigger & Better!

Average Pool
Size \$50,000
Average Payout
over \$3,600!
15% Takeout


MEADOWLANDS
RACING & ENTERTAINMENT

New Ideas Needed

By [Track Phantom](#)

Is there anything more important to the health and longevity of horse racing than to attract new horseplayers? Which initiatives or improvements the horse racing industry should focus on is open for debate. While takeout rates, tax laws, wagering integrity, drugs and participation costs are serious and discussion worthy, it seems they pale in the face of declining interest.

A survey of a few thousand horseplayers was conducted to get their ideas on what can be done to improve the *on-track* racing experience. Most, if not all, of the “at-home” players who responded felt there was little that could draw them back to the track on a daily basis. They did feel that lower takeout for on-track players would be enticing. On-track only contests had some appeal, as well.

For the periodic or casual fan, simplifying the handicapping and wagering information and addressing the gap between races seemed to be the most common areas of concern.

Veteran horseplayers do not want easy, simplified information. The more difficult the critical information is to come by, the bigger the edge for those willing to put in the hours required to find it. But for people trying to learn the nuances of the game, the information overload can be daunting and ultimately off-putting. Tracks should print simple, dumbed-down versions of the past performances in the program (along with a tutorial). Newer players can feel like they have something to lean on when making decisions and will eventually graduate to the more sophisticated information found in places like the Daily Racing Form.

Betting is another animal altogether. Most newbie players I’ve been with are confused by the myriad of wagering options and most often bet win, place or show instead of trying to figure out the exotic pools. Tracks should have betting machines specifically for newer players which have more onscreen help. The current betting machines are certainly not intuitive.

One of the biggest drawbacks for many players is the extended gap between races. The time goes by quickly by for dedicated players as they are sharpening their handicapping and betting opinions. For people not nose deep in the Racing Form, this time can be pretty boring. There is usually between 26 and 30 minutes between races. This is quite a long time for a society used to immediate gratification and constant stimulation. Tracks should consider new ideas to bridge the gap between races. Things like live music, voucher drawings or table trivia were some of the ideas for time fillers. If possible, shortening the time between races might be worthwhile.

Race tracks need to think outside of the box in how they present their product. No longer can they lean on just the racing itself as the draw. Many years ago, Las Vegas was a gambling destination. Now, through rebranding, it is considered an entertainment destination. Kudos to tracks

like Canterbury Park for having “buck night” on Thursdays during their summer months of racing. This is designed at attracting a college-aged audience. It is not uncommon for Canterbury to have 5,000 to 7,000 people in attendance on these nights. The more unique ideas to enhance the presentation, the more the product will be exposed to newer audiences.

Odds and Ends

Congratulations to those who managed and covered the recent **National Handicapping Championship** at Treasure Island Casino in Las Vegas. For the first time, I tuned into the live streaming coverage put on by Daily Racing Form and was quite impressed by the delivery. There were knowledgeable insiders commentating on the format and tournament, interesting interviews with contestants and a live “look-in” to the final table on Sunday.

It was quite an accomplishment for the 74 year old winner of the NHC, **John O’Neil**. In an interview following his win, he stated he works 60-70 hours per week with his construction trucking business. He appeared hard working, well-spoken....and now rich! Congratulations on his life-changing performance.

It was fun rooting for fellow Austin-ite, and friend, **Jonathon Kinchen** in the NHC. He accomplished the remarkable task of getting two entries in the top 10. Kinchen was in a great spot to win the tournament (5th into Sunday) but couldn’t produce any momentum on the final day. Kinchen is a very nice guy with a great backstory not to mention an obviously talented player. At 32, he’ll be at this for a long time and it isn’t likely we’ve seen the last of his name on a Sunday leaderboard at the NHC.

Southern California three-year olds may be dominant right now. There are a number of exciting prospects on the West Coast. Any one of these colts could blossom into the 2015 version of California Chrome:

- **American Pharoah** (Baffert)
- **Calculator** (Miller)
- **Dortmund** (Baffert)
- **Firing Line** (Callaghan)
- **Ocho Ocho Ocho** (Cassidy)
- **Texas Red** (Desormeaux)
- **Bolo** (Gaines)
- **Om** (Hendricks)
- **Punctuate** (Baffert)

The Robert Lewis (Feb 7th) is turning into quite a race as a prep for the Derby. It appears Dortmund and Firing Line will be there in a rematch of their nose to nose finish in the Los Alamitos Futurity. In addition, recent runaway winner of the Sham Stakes, Calculator and impressive turf winner, Bolo might also be on-hand.

Speaking of **Bolo**, he might be the most interesting three-year old to make his next start. He won with complete authority in back to back turf races. He romped in a MSW and then again in the Eddie Logan Stakes. He will try the dirt next out (likely in the Robert Lewis) and if he can transfer his talent to the main track, he will add his name to the serious Derby candidate list.

An Educated Fan Is a Dedicated Fan

By [Neal Benoit](#)

I started my website as a challenge to myself, to give something back to a sport that I have loved for my entire adult life. And, to satisfy an internal drive I have to teach people about a sport that I feel is often misunderstood. As I look into the future of 2015, the future of *The Sport of Kings* is very much in doubt. For those of you who only know Saratoga, Keeneland, or Del Mar ... you might not fully realize that fact. But, every serious study within the equine industry shows steady decline in attendance, handle, and fans. As a whole, the racing industry in North America is struggling.

Why? That is a complex question, and I don't proclaim to have all of the answers. But, as a fan of more than 35 years, I feel compelled to do my part to figure it out. And, if possible, help to remedy the situation. In a study reported by Jockey Club a couple of years ago, I found the following line of Yes/No questioning to consumers very revealing. These questions pertained to consumer attitudes about Thoroughbred Horse Racing vs. other major sports.

How easy is it to understand how the sport works?

Other Sports – 76%

Horse Racing – 28%

Are there many ways to learn about the sport?

Other Sports – 80%

Horse Racing – 22%

Is there easy access to the information you need to follow the sport?

Other Sports – 71%

Horse Racing – 2%

If you summarize this information, relative to other sports, Horse Racing is ...

1. More difficult to understand than other sports.
2. Has less ways for fans to learn about it.
3. And it's nearly impossible for a fan to find the information required to follow it.

So, what can one person do? Well, in starting my website, I'm trying to show that he/she can do a lot. My focus for the first 100 blog articles was very much on education. And, while I will continue with that focus in the future, I plan to expand on my other offerings with more stories, travels, and meetings with interesting people involved in horse racing on a daily basis. Why?

I believe that education should be more than just the glossary of terms in a racing program or an odds chart with

payoff amounts. Education should help fans to understand "why" trainers, jockeys, and horses do what they do.

Education should explain the opportunities and adventures that become available to a fan after it all starts to make sense. Education should transport fans to majestic places and reveal the sights, sounds, and emotions that await them.

I'm constantly bewildered at how little investment is made by major racetracks to educate potential new fans. Well, if they think education is expensive, how much is ignorance costing them?

Other sports understand the importance of fan education. That is why they invest so much money in pregame and post-game shows where experts discuss game strategy, players and coaches are interviewed, and video replays are marked up to help fans understand what took place on the field. How effective has this strategy been? Do a random sampling of your co-workers and family members and ask how many of them are involved in player fantasy leagues, weekly football pools, poker tournaments, etc. Then ask how many of them were doing the same thing ten or twenty years ago.

A quick anecdote here ... for many years when I was an avid NFL fan, I had to BEG my sister-in-law to put the Thanksgiving Day NFL games on the television. Here's what I got for my plea: a 13-inch TV in the kitchen with the sound muted! Today, the games are played on her big screen television in the living room, with full surround sound. And this past Thanksgiving, I heard her and another sister-in-law comparing notes about their various fantasy football leagues, survivor contests, and weekly pools. I asked them if the weekly pools were picking winners "straight up" or using the point spread. They replied in unison, "the point spread of course!" Of course ... thinking to myself that ten years ago neither of them even knew what a point spread was.

The Bottom Line: An Educated Fan is a Dedicated Fan.



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Quick Hits 2

Mayo & Rippey Headline First NHC HoF Class

Horseplayer advocate Mike Mayo and 2006 champion Ron Rippey, who both passed away in 2014, were the first inductees into the National Handicapping Championship Hall of Fame on January 25.

"Both Mike and Ron left indelible marks on the National Handicapping Championship and, through it, contributed to the widespread promotion of Thoroughbred racing in general," said NTRA President and CEO Alex Waldrop.

For more information, please click [here](#).

Jockey Club Tour on FOX Begins February 7

Four races, headlined by the San Antonio Handicap at Santa Anita Park and the Donn Handicap at Gulfstream Park, will comprise the first edition of this year's Jockey Club Tour on FOX. New to this year's broadcast is a pick four sequence made up of the races that are being aired (including the San Marcos at Santa Anita and the Turf Handicap at Gulfstream).

For more on this story from the DRF, please click [here](#).

CHAMPION	
MAJULRU	MARK MCGUIRE
RUNNER UP	
Spongworthy	Jasen Mangrum
FINAL FOUR	
Fantini33	Ed Peters
Skezzar	Damian Verno
ELITE EIGHT	
Backenny	Kon McMahon
Glasgowmike	Mike Glasgow
Mike Y	Mike Yorusso
Wrongway	Ed Ramsey

Turfway Bucks the Trend

In the first section of Quick Hits on Page Two of this edition of Horseplayer Monthly, we noted that 2014 handle was down almost three percent. Well, one track that went against the grain was Turfway Park, as their Holiday Meet finished up over 21%.

According to an article on bloodhorse.com, "Total handle in December 2014 was \$31,135,521, up from \$25,637,320 for December 2013. Average daily handle on the live product was \$1,945,970, up 36.62% from December 2013."

"The meet exceeded expectations," Turfway general manager Chip Bach said in the same article. "The goal here is to keep seeking the sweet spot by taking advantage of the right days and post times to maximize handle."

For the full story, please click [here](#).

Over a Billion at Gulfstream Park

Earlier this month Bloodhorse.com and a Gulfstream Park release reported that over \$1.2 billion was wagered at the south Florida racetrack this year. Per the track, that number represented an increase over the \$826 million that was wagered in 2013.

"We're happy with the progress we made in 2014,"

Gulfstream president and The Stronach Group's chief operating officer Tim Ritvo said in the release. "None of this would be possible without the bettors and horsemen. We believe with no head-to-head competition this coming year our commitment to grow the sport of Thoroughbred racing in Florida will produce even greater results."

For more, please click [here](#).

Hawthorne Also Up

Another track that found wagering success in 2014 was Hawthorne Racecourse. Bloodhorse.com reported on New Year's Day that, "Officials at the Illinois racetrack said average daily all-sources handle was up 6.95% to \$2,126,759."

For the rest of that story, please click [here](#).

LaMarra Looks at Field Size

Tom LaMarra from bloodhorse.com had a look at field sizes in 2014 and found out that only three tracks have field sizes that exceed nine. According to his article, "Kentucky Downs, at 10.18 horses per race, and Atlantic City Race Course, with 9.67, topped the list, according to The Jockey Club Information Systems stats. Only one other track—Remington Park (9.29)—had nine or more starters per Thoroughbred race.

After Kentucky Downs and Atlantic City, both of which offer only turf racing, and Remington, the top 10 was rounded out by Oaklawn Park (8.96); Evangeline Downs Racetrack & Casino (8.90); Delta Downs Racetrack, Casino & Hotel (8.87); Keeneland and New Meadowlands (both at 8.75); Del Mar (8.66); Gulfstream Park West and Sunland Park Racetrack & Casino (both at 8.64); and Retama Park (8.61)."

For LaMarra's full article, please click [here](#).

Pricci Says the Horseplayer Is Racing's Man of the Year

Before the New Year, John Pricci lauded the effort of horseplayers in 2014.

Pricci wrote, "The story of the year in racing did not happen on any racetrack no matter how much one admires exploits of a dual classics winner, the improbable winning return from colic by a defending Horse of the Year, or the retirements of his and her legends of the game.

Instead, this distinct honor goes to the most unlikely individual or group of them all: the American horseplayer. Their voice was heard early and often in 2014; from a stewards stand at Gulfstream Park, to a board room at Churchill Downs, to the keeper of racing's data in Lexington.

Horseplayers were able to shine a light on officiating by examining the adjudication process leading to disqualifications, to putting the hurt on a public company for raising the tax on wagers, to yesterday, stating that they are concerned as hell and are not going to accept inaccurate running times anymore."

For the rest of Pricci's piece, please click [here](#).

The Back Page

The NYRA "14 Day Runback Rule" instituted this winter has caused quite a bit of chatter. We thought, in this month's back page, we'd look at some runback stats over much of the last couple of years.

All Horses, By "Racedays"

By: Recent Activity- Days Last Start

>=Min	< Max	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact
0	5	-197.70	782.00	0.7472	55	391	.1407	1.0599
5	10	-11440.20	49264.00	0.7678	3278	24632	.1331	1.0027
10	15	-38088.40	144924.00	0.7372	9339	72462	.1289	0.9711
15	20	-35896.90	135044.00	0.7342	8959	67522	.1327	0.9997
20	25	-38282.20	155602.00	0.7540	10447	77801	.1343	1.0117
25	30	-26139.90	104148.00	0.7490	7185	52074	.1380	1.0396
30	35	-11092.70	54488.00	0.7964	3845	27244	.1411	1.0634
35	40	-10478.00	45912.00	0.7718	3342	22956	.1456	1.0969
40	45	-10449.50	38486.00	0.7285	2682	19243	.1394	1.0501
45	50	-3079.50	22496.00	0.8631	1655	11248	.1471	1.1086
50	55	-2732.00	14348.00	0.8096	1000	7174	.1394	1.0503
55	60	-2735.70	14018.00	0.8048	985	7009	.1405	1.0589
60	65	-1630.50	10744.00	0.8482	779	5372	.1450	1.0926
65	70	-2385.10	6776.00	0.6480	403	3388	.1189	0.8962
70	75	-1243.20	6212.00	0.7999	424	3106	.1365	1.0286
75	80	-983.60	5518.00	0.8217	346	2759	.1254	0.9449
80	85	-637.00	4264.00	0.8506	253	2132	.1187	0.8941
85	90	-1384.30	3322.00	0.5833	195	1661	.1174	0.8846
90	999999	-25390.60	84266.00	0.6987	4593	42133	.1090	0.8214

All Horses < 20 days between starts, workout since, no works

By: Workout Since Last Race

Value	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact	
0	-7000.20	31314.00	0.7765	2026	15657	.1294	0.9871	Worked Since
1	-78623.00	298700.00	0.7368	19605	149350	.1313	1.0014	No Works Since


< 20 Days with a New Fig or Pace Top. The "Bounce"?

Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact			
0.7394	15406	121726	.1266	0.9655	PaceTop: FALSE	FigTop: FALSE	
0.7669	3034	19297	.1572	1.1994	PaceTop: FALSE	FigTop: TRUE	
0.7222	2140	16364	.1308	0.9976	PaceTop: TRUE	FigTop: FALSE	
0.7312	1051	7620	.1379	1.0521	PaceTop: TRUE	FigTop: TRUE	

< 20 Days By Class

By: Class Descriptor

Value	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact	
0	0.00	0.00	0.0000	0	0	.0000	0.0000	
1	-45607.90	190184.00	0.7602	12783	95092	.1344	1.0255	C (claiming)
2	-1774.80	7214.00	0.7540	561	3607	.1555	1.1864	CO (Opt Clm)
3	-2873.00	11032.00	0.7396	724	5516	.1313	1.0012	AOC
4	-16961.30	59910.00	0.7169	3703	29955	.1236	0.9430	M (Maiden C)
5	-7135.40	22122.00	0.6775	1327	11061	.1200	0.9152	MSW
6	-6018.10	22016.00	0.7266	1448	11008	.1315	1.0034	A (Allowance)



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< 20 Days By "Form Ranking"

Rank	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact
1	-4590.90	25848.00	0.8224	2411	12924	.1866	1.4231
2	-7442.20	39430.00	0.8113	3486	19715	.1768	1.3488
3	-10452.50	46448.00	0.7750	3758	23224	.1618	1.2344
4	-10759.80	49772.00	0.7838	3706	24886	.1489	1.1360
5	-13380.90	48386.00	0.7235	3146	24193	.1300	0.9920
6	-12898.20	42320.00	0.6952	2250	21160	.1063	0.8111
7	-9906.20	32050.00	0.6909	1453	16025	.0907	0.6917
8	-7542.80	21372.00	0.6471	777	10686	.0727	0.5547
9	-4031.30	12824.00	0.6856	387	6412	.0604	0.4604
10	-2754.60	7156.00	0.6151	174	3578	.0486	0.3710
11	-1149.60	2808.00	0.5906	55	1404	.0392	0.2988
12	-597.60	1282.00	0.5339	24	641	.0374	0.2856
13	-4.60	206.00	0.9777	4	103	.0388	0.2962
14	-112.00	112.00	0.0000	0	56	.0000	0.0000

< 15 Days, Belmont and Aqueduct, By Trainer

BY TRAINER sorted by wins Run Date: 1/22/2015 3:30:41 PM

Trainer	PLAYS	WINS	WIN PCT	WIN IMPACT	WIN ROI	PLACES	PLACE PCT	PLACE ROI
*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****	*****
JACOBSON DAVID	242	48	0.1983	1.8722	0.6215	96	0.3967	0.7436
PERSAUD RANDI	290	25	0.0862	0.8138	1.1247	60	0.2069	0.8903
CONTESSA GARY C	112	17	0.1518	1.4332	0.8531	30	0.2679	0.7571
RICE LINDA	55	14	0.2545	2.4028	0.8318	26	0.4727	1.0091
RODRIGUEZ RUDY R	56	11	0.1964	1.8542	0.7598	27	0.4821	1.0884
BROWN BRUCE R	31	7	0.2258	2.1318	0.9355	12	0.3871	0.6629
ENGLEHART CHRIS J	48	6	0.125	1.1801	0.8667	18	0.375	1.049
GULLO GARY P	39	6	0.1538	1.452	0.6449	17	0.4359	0.8962
ESLER NICHOLAS	12	6	0.5	4.7205	1.5458	8	0.6667	1.4417
SCIACCA GARY	63	5	0.0794	0.7496	0.7913	10	0.1587	0.6476
BARBARA ROBERT	39	5	0.1282	1.2103	0.4744	9	0.2308	0.6205
NESS JAMIE	13	5	0.3846	3.631	1.2077	6	0.4615	0.7654
GALLUSCIO DOMINIC G	37	5	0.1351	1.2755	0.7622	11	0.2973	0.7568
BARRERA III OSCAR S	50	5	0.1	0.9441	0.867	8	0.16	0.508
AQUILINO JOSEPH	34	4	0.1176	1.1103	2.1015	6	0.1765	0.9294
TOSCANO JR JOHN T	40	4	0.1	0.9441	0.935	8	0.2	0.7975
ARAYA RENE A	26	4	0.1538	1.452	1.3846	5	0.1923	0.6558
RYERSON JAMES T	25	4	0.16	1.5106	0.998	6	0.24	0.902
GARGAN DANNY	16	4	0.25	2.3603	1.0812	7	0.4375	0.9219
CHATTERPAUL NAIPAUL	57	4	0.0702	0.6628	0.4482	9	0.1579	0.6982
REYNOLDS PATRICK L	16	3	0.1875	1.7702	0.6	4	0.25	0.5063
BALSAMO DIANE	15	3	0.2	1.8882	0.5067	5	0.3333	0.7333
JERKENS JAMES A	5	3	0.6	5.6646	2.06	3	0.6	1.13
NEVIN MICHELLE	7	3	0.4286	4.0464	1.4786	3	0.4286	0.7929
OBRIEN LEO	45	3	0.0667	0.6297	0.6211	7	0.1556	0.6644
ROMANS DALE L	7	3	0.4286	4.0464	1.5	4	0.5714	1.4714
SCHOSBERG RICHARD E	11	2	0.1818	1.7164	0.4909	4	0.3636	0.9227
BARKER EDWARD R	20	2	0.1	0.9441	0.3475	5	0.25	0.655
KELLY PATRICK J	17	2	0.1176	1.1103	1.1765	5	0.2941	1.6529
BAKER CHARLTON	13	2	0.1538	1.452	0.9231	5	0.3846	1.0538
GRANVILLE PEDRO	39	2	0.0513	0.4843	0.7487	5	0.1282	0.6795
PLETCHER TODD A	9	2	0.2222	2.0978	0.5944	3	0.3333	0.6167
ROJAS OSVALDO	35	2	0.0571	0.5391	0.8143	8	0.2286	1.3271
ORTIZ PAULINO O	15	2	0.1333	1.2585	1.2467	2	0.1333	0.42
MARTIN CARLOS F	30	2	0.0667	0.6297	0.1883	8	0.2667	0.9417
FERRARO JAMES W	19	2	0.1053	0.9941	0.9974	5	0.2632	1.7132
GONZALEZ MANUEL V	10	2	0.2	1.8882	1.595	3	0.3	1.185
UBILLO RODRIGO A	11	2	0.1818	1.7164	0.6409	2	0.1818	0.3591
DILGER MICHAEL	2	2	1	9.4411	3.4	2	1	2.125
KLESARIS STEVE	4	2	0.5	4.7205	2.4875	3	0.75	1.825
LOSTRITTO JOSEPH A	9	2	0.2222	2.0978	3.1556	4	0.4444	1.75
DISANTO GLENN B	26	2	0.0769	0.726	1.2135	6	0.2308	0.9692

ALBERTRANI THOMAS	6	2	0.3333	3.1467	2.5417	3	0.5	1.35
HUSHION MICHAEL E	5	2	0.4	3.7764	2.03	2	0.4	1.11
DALESSANDRO RALPH	14	2	0.1429	1.3491	1.2321	3	0.2143	0.6357
FRIEDMAN MITCHELL E	25	2	0.08	0.7553	0.418	7	0.28	0.748
SMITH DAVID J	13	2	0.1538	1.452	2.5962	3	0.2308	0.8769
ENGLEHART JEREMIAH	C7	1	0.1429	1.3491	0.7714	1	0.1429	0.3286
SHEVY MICHAEL J	12	1	0.0833	0.7864	0.475	3	0.25	0.5792
TORELLI STACY	3	1	0.3333	3.1467	8.5833	1	0.3333	2.9
HEFFNER WILLIAM	2	1	0.5	4.7205	4.4	1	0.5	1.75
CHIN PETER A	7	1	0.1429	1.3491	0.55	2	0.2857	0.7929
HINDS LESLIE	14	1	0.0714	0.6741	0.3429	2	0.1429	0.2321
HIZO PABLO E	13	1	0.0769	0.726	0.2346	3	0.2308	0.7923

< 15 Days, Belmont and Aqueduct By Proprietary Form Rankings (Clean, no red flags, Xform, some red flags, Cantrun, red flags)

By: CANTRUN/XFORM Attribute

CANTRUN	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact	
0	-500.80	1876.00	0.7330	119	938	.1269	1.1977	CLEAN
1	-710.80	2856.00	0.7511	169	1428	.1183	1.1173	XFORM
2	-559.80	876.00	0.3610	9	438	.0205	0.1940	CANTRUN

< 15 Days, Belmont and Aqueduct By Class Shift

By: Class Shift (Using Purse Value)

Value	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact	
0	-398.10	1988.00	0.7997	112	994	.1127	1.0638	no change
1	-931.40	1754.00	0.4690	67	877	.0764	0.7213	class riser
2	-441.90	1866.00	0.7632	118	933	.1265	1.1940	class dropper

< 15 Days, Belmont and Aqueduct By Equipment Change

By: Equipment Change

Value	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact	
0	-1698.10	5278.00	0.6783	282	2639	.1069	1.0089	No Change
1	-61.70	220.00	0.7195	8	110	.0727	0.6866	Blinkers On
2	-11.60	110.00	0.8945	7	55	.1273	1.2016	Blinkers Off

< 15 Days, Belmont and Aqueduct By Age of Horse

By: Age Of Horse Years

Age Yrs	P/L	Bet	Roi	Wins	Plays	Pct	Impact
2	159.50	162.00	1.9846	9	81	.1111	1.0490
3	-542.00	1976.00	0.7257	92	988	.0931	0.8791
4	-714.10	1804.00	0.6042	101	902	.1120	1.0571
5	-313.20	946.00	0.6689	54	473	.1142	1.0778
6	-222.60	440.00	0.4941	22	220	.1000	0.9441
7	-71.10	152.00	0.5322	10	76	.1316	1.2422
8	-37.90	86.00	0.5593	7	43	.1628	1.5369
9	-26.00	38.00	0.3158	2	19	.1053	0.9938
10	-4.00	4.00	0.0000	0	2	.0000	0.0000

CHAMPION	
MAGURU	MARK McGUIRE
RUNNER UP	
Spongeworthy	Jasen Mangrum
FINAL FOUR	
Fantini33	Ed Peters
Skezzzer	Damian Verno
ELITE EIGHT	
Badkenny	Ken McMahan
Glasgowmike	Mike Glasgow
Mike_Y	Mike Yarusso
Wrongway	Ed ramsey