

THE BUCKEYE Harness Horseman

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Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association

Luther Brothers, Hanners Capture First Breeders Crown Win



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P, 3, 1:48.3F \$1,626,773.....Stud Fee: \$2500

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P, 3, 1:48.2F \$1,419,464.....Stud Fee: \$2000

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P, 3, 1:49.4F \$190,828.....Stud Fee: \$1500

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January 10, 2026, 1 p.m. - OHHA Annual Membership Meeting

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'A Dream Come True'

Luther Brothers, Austin Hanners Capture First Breeders Crown Win

By Wes Mayberry



Austin Hanners wins Breeders Crown with Always B Naughty

In separate interviews after Always B Naughty crossed the finish line for a five-length win in this year's Breeders Crown, the same phrase came from trainer Todd Luther and driver Austin Hanners — "It's a dream come true."

Hanners and Luther had just secured their first Breeders Crown victory as did owner Greg Luther, of Greg Luther Racing.

"She's a great mare and was a great mare before we bought her. Nancy Takter did a great job with her when she had her," Greg Luther said of Always B Naughty. "Honestly, going down the backside, I felt we were a winner, because this mare never gets tired, and she can take a lot of air. Everything just worked out perfectly for us on this big track. It's always great to be able to celebrate with family, and this has been just a wonderful experience for us."

Held at Woodbine Mohawk Park in Ontario, Canada, on Oct. 24-25, the 2025 Breeders Crown finals featured 31 horses with Ohio connections. Always B Naughty was the lone such horse in the \$400,000 Open Mare Pace and scored a victory for Ohio three times over with Hanners (Frankfort) and brothers Todd Luther (Commercial Point) and Greg Luther (Blacklick).

"She was awesome tonight. It worked out the best way possible," Hanners said.

In an elimination race the week prior, the 5-year-old Always B Miki mare out of Ooh Shesa Badlands went off as a 39-1 longshot and won by one and a half lengths in 1:48.2 to qualify for the final.

She was the 8-5 second choice in the final after Twin B Joe Fresh — a 5-year-old mare with 36 wins in 49 career starts and over \$2.8 million in earnings — was scratched.

"When Twin B Joe Fresh was scratched, I told Austin that I thought we had a big shot and to not get away last with her," Todd Luther said. "She's been in some bad spots this year, but we've always tried to take care of her."

Leaving from the far outside in the six-horse field, Always B Naughty wasted no time in getting to the front en route to the wire-to-wire victory.

"When I felt no pressure early, I just kept on chugging, and it worked out," Hanners said.

Always B Naughty led by one and a half lengths at each of the first three calls, posting fractions of :26.2, :54.3, and 1:22, and was in front by three lengths entering the final stretch.

"I wanted to try to get away from them as far as I could," a smiling Hanners said of that point in the race.

He did just that, widening the lead down the stretch before raising his whip in triumph, knowing the victory was secure. He brought Always B Naughty across the finish line in 1:48.1, setting a new stakes record.

"Last week when we were up here, she raced great. I was headed to the winner's circle, and Nancy Takter said, 'I don't know why she's



“She was awesome tonight. It worked out the best way possible.”
Austin Hanners

40-1. She loves this track,” Todd Luther said, referring to the elimination race. “She showed that again tonight.”

He was also thrilled that Hanners was part of the equation.

“I told Greg that I didn’t want to do this unless Austin was driving,” he said. “He’s been with us from the start, and he travels with us, and he’s not scared (of the pressure).”

The win was the sixth of the season and 18th lifetime for Always B Naughty, who delivered one of the best moments in the careers of three Ohioans.

“This is definitely the highlight of 36 years in this business,” an emotional Greg Luther said on his way to the winner’s circle. “This is absolutely phenomenal.”

His brother agreed.

“This is amazing,” Todd said. “This is what dreams are made of.”

Photos: Clive Cohen

Buckeyes Bring Home Wins for

For the third straight year, more than 30 horses with Ohio connections competed in the Breeders Crown. The Buckeye State was represented in 11 of the 12 finals, including five horses in the 2-year-old colt pace division. After two nights of racing at Woodbine Mohawk Park on Oct. 24-25, 10 Ohio-connected horses hit the board with six champions, one runner-up, and three third-place finishers. Sippinonsearoc, Miki And Minnie, Loua Dipa, Warrawee Michelle, and Yo Tillie joined Always B Naughty as a champion this year.



Sippinonsearoc

Sippinonsearoc was the lone Ohio-bred to win a Breeders Crown trophy this year, taking the 3-Year-Old Colt Pace in a stakes-record 1:47.3.

After finishing as the runner-up to Louprint as a freshman in the 2024 Breeders Crown, Sippinonsearoc edged Dandy Ideal by a neck to win this year. Driven by Yannick Gingras, the Downbytheseaside colt trailed leader Dandy Ideal by three and a half lengths entering the final stretch before rallying for the victory.

"It's just an amazing time for Ohio and a great time for Sugar Valley Farm and Diamond Creek," said Joe McLead, co-owner of Sugar Valley Farm in Delaware, Ohio, where Downbytheseaside stands. "Downbytheseaside has really established himself nationally and internationally, and the partnership we have with Diamond Creek and the opportunity to be able to stand the horse from Diamond Creek at our place has been a wonderful relationship from the get-go."

The Ohio-sired colt has several other connections to the Buckeye State. He was co-bred by Alesha Binkley (Lebanon) and is owned in part by RAS Racing (Powell) and Knox Services (Mt. Vernon). He has hit the board in 21 of 26 career starts with 13 wins and \$1,360,375 in earnings.

On Oct. 30, it was announced that Sippinonsearoc will stand the 2026 breeding season at Victory Hill Farms in Indiana.



Miki And Minnie

Bred and owned in part by Bob Mondillo (Delaware), Miki And Minnie scored a second straight Breeders Crown title. The margin of victory was almost two lengths last year. This time around, the finish was too close to call.

"When they changed the camera shot from one angle to another, it looked like a different horse had won," Mondillo said in a post-race interview. "But with it taking as long as it did, we thought it might be a dead heat, and that's what it turned out to be."

It was just the second time in the 41-year history of the Breeders Crown that there was a dead heat for win, as Miki And Minnie and The Last Martini tripped the wire in 1:49.2 in the 3-Year-Old Filly Pace.

Miki And Minnie gave Mondillo his first Breeders Crown trophy a year ago when she finished in front of second-place The Last Martini in the 2-Year-Old Filly Pace. Dexter Dunn returned this year to drive Miki And Minnie, who went off as the betting favorite while The Last Martini was a 68-1 longshot. She took the lead at the halfway mark and held a two-length advantage entering the final stretch before being caught by The Last Martini at the line. Sharing the title made it no less special for Mondillo.

"It's extra special," he said. "It's something I never thought I would ever accomplish, and to have two of them is beyond my wildest dreams," he said.

Miki And Minnie became the 57th horse, and 27th pacer, to win two Breeders Crown titles. The dead heat for win came five years after the first-ever such finish at the Breeders Crown when Perfect Sting and Summa Cum Laude hit the finish together in the 2-Year-Old Colt Pace at Harrah's Hoosier Park.

An Always B Miki filly, Miki And Minnie has 12 wins and two seconds in 14 seasonal starts. She has hit the board in all 25 lifetime starts with 18 victories and \$1,873,035 in earnings.

"She's calm and very even — I've never seen her be anything other than a perfect lady in the barn, and she seems so much in control at races," Mondillo said. "She doesn't waste herself getting all excited waiting to go to the track. She just goes to the track, does her business, and most of the time, she wins."

From Breeders Crown

By Wes Mayberry



Loua Dipa

Loua Dipa won the Breeders Crown 2-Year-Old Filly Pace in 1:49.1, setting new track, stakes, and Canadian records. Ronnie Wrenn Jr., a staple in the driving colony at Northfield Park, was in the sulky.

“She’s really special. I’m just really happy to get the chance to sit behind her,” Wrenn Jr. said of Loua Dipa after the race. “These kinds of wins never get old, and hopefully it’s not my last one.”

The Sweet Lou filly took command at the halfway mark en route to winning by more than three lengths as the 1-9 betting favorite. It was her fifth straight victory, giving her nine wins in 12 career starts with \$742,241 in earnings.



Warrawee Michelle

Warrawee Michelle won the Open Mare Trot in 1:50.2, recording the fastest mile ever trotted in Breeders Crown history. David Stolz (Columbus) is a co-owner as part of the group Young Guns.

“It’s always fun when you’re with your friends, when you’re with your partners, and when you win, especially when you win a race like this where it looked like the horse was out of the race,” Stolz said afterwards. “He (Ake Svanstedt) drove the horse beautifully tonight, and it’s a thrill here.”

Warrawee Michelle, the 4-5 betting favorite, was in fifth place at each of the first three calls and trailed leader Elista Hanover by more than five lengths at the three-quarter pole. But a late charge saw her edge Elista Hanover by a head at the line.

The 4-year-old Walner mare has bankrolled \$1,491,866 with 10 wins in 29 career starts.



Yo Tillie

Co-bred by GBW Breeding Farms (Findlay), Yo Tillie won the 3-Year-Old Filly Trot by a length in 1:51.3.

“It was very exciting as the co-breeder to watch a filly like Yo Tillie race and win against the best fillies in the country,” said Brad Wallace, corresponding officer for GBW Breeding Farms. “Big congratulations to all her connections!”

The Tactical Landing filly assumed the lead going to the halfway mark and remained in front the rest of the way to win as the 6-5 betting favorite.

Yo Tillie has 11 wins and one second in 12 seasonal starts. She has hit the board in 22 of 24 lifetime starts with 19 victories and \$1,284,495 in earnings.

Photos: Clive Cohen



OHHA Annual Awards Banquet

2024 Horse of the Year Sugar Instead



Join us to celebrate 2025!
OHHA Annual Awards Banquet
Saturday, January 10, 2026
Renaissance Columbus-Westerville
409 Altair Parkway, Westerville, OH, 43082

- Reservations and payment for tickets for the banquet must be at the OHHA office by Monday, December 29, 2025.
- Tickets are \$30 each and can be picked up at the Banquet Reservation Table. **No tickets will be sold at the door.**
- Reserved tables for 8 are available. To reserve, please use the reservation form to provide your table name and guests.

January 10, 2025 Tentative Agenda

- 10:30 a.m. USHWA Ohio Chapter Meeting
- 1:00 p.m. OHHA Annual Membership Meeting
- 2:00 p.m. USTA District 1 Annual Meeting
- 4:00 p.m. Cocktail Hour - Cash Bar
- 5:00 p.m. Dinner Seating
- 5:30 p.m. OHHA Annual Awards Banquet
- 9:00 p.m. After Party - Cash Bar

Room reservations can be made in the OHHA block at a discounted rate of \$159 by **December 11, 2025.**

Use the reservation link on OHHA.com or at this address:
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Rooms may be available at the standard room rate after Dec. 11.

Banquet Reservation Form

Tickets are \$30 each. Reservations and payment must be received to the OHHA office by December 29, 2025.

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Name of Guest(s) & Meal Preference:
 (Please note B - Beef, C - Chicken, or V - Vegetarian for each guest.)

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Phone Number: _____

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2-Year-Old Colt Pace



BIG RANGER
2-Year-Old Colt Trot



SEASIDE SHUFFLE
2-Year-Old Filly Pace



SET YOUR SIGHT HIGH
2-Year-Old Filly Trot



HARRISBURG HEIST
3-Year-Old Colt Pace



LT LOVERBOY
3-Year-Old Colt Trot



PROLIFIC FIRE
3-Year-Old Filly Pace



JAILHOUSE PEARL
3-Year-Old Filly Trot

Photos: Conrad Photo

Madison Global Scores Big



Ronnie Gillespie drives Big Ranger to the win in the Ohio Sire Stakes Scarlet Championships at Dayton Raceway on Sept. 27 to secure the 2025 Ohio Triple Crown. **Photo:** Brad Conrad

When it came time to buy a new group of yearlings in 2024, the Madison Global ownership group placed its trust in trainer and driver Ronnie Gillespie to identify some intriguing options. Little did they know that Gillespie's intuition would lead them to Big Ranger and an Ohio Triple Crown in 2025.

"Ronnie is the one who gets the credit for picking out Big Ranger," says Anthony Miller, the corresponding officer for Madison Global. "We pretty much gave him free range to buy what he wanted."

Given that freedom, Gillespie went to work trying to find horses that seemed to have potential for future success on the racetrack. Early on, he liked Big Ranger's size — "For a yearling, he was very big," he said — and athleticism.

"When I watched his video, he saw a shadow or something, and he jumped to the side and never missed a trot," Gillespie says. "That sold me on him right then."

Based in Dundee, Ohio, Madison Global — consisting of Miller along with partners Wes Beachy, Reuben Hershberger, and Benjamin Shrock — didn't quite know what to expect from their new colt after purchasing him at the Ohio Selected Jug Sale for \$25,000.

"To be honest, our main goal was to recoup the money that we had put into the yearling," Miller says. "It's not like we bought Big Ranger and thought we had the best horse ever."

But they continued trusting Gillespie's instincts when it came to gauging Big Ranger's potential.

"It wasn't until we got closer to qualifying time that Ronnie started to feel really high on him and thought we had something really special," Miller says.

Big Ranger has certainly been special. The freshman colt trotter by In Range out of Big Blue Bird won all seven starts this season

while compiling \$370,610 in earnings and becoming an Ohio Triple Crown winner. After winning the first two legs of the Triple Crown in the Ohio State Fair Stake and Ohio Breeders Championship, he completed the quest with a victory in the Ohio Sires Stakes Scarlet Championship for 2-year-old colt trotters at Hollywood Gaming at Dayton Raceway on Sept. 27.

"I was at a loss for words, and my knees were weak at the Sires Stakes finals," Beachy says. "Seeing Big Ranger go undefeated in my first season is incredible. I thank Anthony and Reuben for opening this group up for me to be a part of it. But Ronnie gets all the credit — without him, this would not have happened."

Origins

Miller has been interested in horses since he was young and started owning racehorses in his early 20s. He focused mainly on older horses at first but started buying babies about five or six years ago. Miller and Hershberger teamed to own some horses

Big with Big Ranger

By Wes Mayberry

prior to the formation of Madison Global in 2024 and established a relationship with Gillespie to train Tommy Count and Sweet Harmony. They started Madison Global with the purpose of buying yearlings that they hoped would develop into successful racehorses. Beachy, of Sugarcreek, Ohio, joined the group this year, seeing it as a great entry point into ownership.

“Anthony and Reuben have done very well for themselves and have a good eye for horses, and it was just something that I figured I’d have to try at some point,” he says. “It just so happened that I picked a lucky year to join in.”

Recognizing Gillespie’s talent, the new group continued to utilize him as a trainer and driver.

“I think a lot of Ronnie. He’s always been very honest with us, and I think he has a natural talent to pick out a good horse, and he’s able to personalize his training to what

the horse needs,” Miller says. “He’s a really good trainer, especially for younger horses.”

With Big Ranger in his stable, Gillespie began conditioning the new colt and quickly recognized several positive attributes that went on to carry him to an undefeated season.

“He has a very good attitude and doesn’t let anything upset him, and you can drive him any kind of way. He’s really relaxed and responds strictly off of me,” Gillespie says. “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime horse when you get one that’s so relaxed and responds off of you — that’s what makes him so special.”

A Special Season

Big Ranger’s freshman season began with a win in a qualifier at Eldorado Scioto Downs on June 16. Gillespie says the owners turned down an offer of \$170,000 for the colt at that time simply based on his confidence that a special season was in store.

“They said, ‘Ronnie, if you believe in him and have confidence in him, we’re going to follow your lead,’” Gillespie says. “I told them, ‘I like the colt, and I think I can go all the way with him,’ and they stood behind me.”

Next up was the \$150,000 Next Generation at Scioto, which turned out to be somewhat of a last-minute development.

“We were scrambling to get a slot for the Next Generation race because that wasn’t even on our radar going into the year,” Beachy says. “Anthony and I were on the phone trying to see what was available and thankfully got a spot clinched.”

Big Ranger won that race by more than three lengths in a stakes-record 1:54, foreshadowing the success that was to come. However, the perfect season wasn’t without some adversity. After posting a win in the first leg of the OSS on July 12, he was scratched from his start in the second leg

Continued on next page



Ronnie Gillespie drives Big Ranger to victory in the Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware on Sept. 16. **Photo:** Brand Conrad



on July 23 due to an abscess. At that point, Gillespie set his sights squarely on winning the Ohio Triple Crown with Big Ranger.

In his next time on the track, Big Ranger achieved the first step in that goal, winning the Ohio State Fair Stake at Scioto in 1:56, handing Gillespie his 1,000th career driving victory. He went on to record victories in the fourth and fifth legs of the OSS before securing a win in the Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware by over six lengths in 1:56.2 to give himself a shot at the elusive Triple Crown.

Big Ranger was one of four horses seeking to claim the 2025 Triple Crown during the \$300,000 OSS Scarlet Championships at Dayton. By the end of the night, he was the only one to achieve the feat. With Gillespie in the sulky, as he had been all season long, Big Ranger led wire to wire en route to winning by more than eight lengths in 1:53.4. That marked a lifetime best and set new track and stakes records in Gillespie's first OSS championship as a trainer.

"I'm a little emotional because I beat the odds as a trainer and driver," Gillespie said in a post-race interview. "To have a horse that good at the beginning of the season and maintain him to the end of the season takes a lot of work."

That hard work didn't go unnoticed.

"From early on, Ronnie was shooting to win the Triple Crown with Big Ranger, so it was special to me for him to stick to the plan and get it done," Miller says.

Beachy agreed.

"Big Ranger had an abscess and was scratched at Northfield, and Ronnie did such a good job of bringing him back. It added to how special it was to see him get back to being his normal self," Beachy says. "Ronnie has earned his way into the spotlight. He's a very humble person who works his tail off getting these horses to the point that they are, and he's doing it with a lot less than a lot of people. I can't mention enough the appreciation and respect that I have for Ronnie and what he has done."

The respect is mutual.

"I always wanted to be a driver and knew that I had the talent. I was just hoping that someone gave me the opportunity to have a bigger stable so I wouldn't have to train the horses," Gillespie says. "But a lot of people told me, 'You're going to have to come out of your own stable if you want to win the big races.' So for Anthony and them to have the confidence in me to train Big Ranger means a lot."

Big Ranger scored several impressive wins this season, but that OSS Championship was the most memorable for Gillespie, as his family and friends made the drive from his native Mississippi to be in attendance.

"My family and friends drove nine to 10 hours up to watch and support me, which was really special," he says. "They had never done that before, so that meant a lot to me."

So, what's next for Big Ranger?

"He'll definitely race in Ohio again, but we also want to give him a chance to perform on a bigger stage, so we're going to stake him to some Grand Circuit events next year," Miller says. "You don't know if he's going to come back as a 3-year-old and continue to be at the top of his game, but we at least want to give him the opportunity."

For now, Miller, Beachy, Gillespie, and the rest of Big Ranger's connections are just happy to be along for what has already been a very successful ride.

"I've been around horses long enough to know that there's not always a storybook ending, so to be a part of this with Big Ranger has been a humbling experience," Miller says. "He might be a once-in-a-lifetime horse."

'It's really unbelievable'

Lt Loverboy takes second straight OSS Championship

By Wes Mayberry



It didn't take long for co-owners Wayne Mast Jr. and Walt Callam, of Callam Racing, to recognize they had something special with Lt Loverboy.

One week after finishing second in his debut purse start, the Long Tom gelding out of Fortheloveofindy scored his first career victory on July 5, 2024, at The Meadows, winning by a margin of more than three lengths.

"I think we have a racehorse here," Mast Jr. remembers telling Callam in a phone call following that win.

The success continued from there, as Lt Loverboy finished his freshman campaign having hit the board in all 10 starts with six wins, three seconds, and one third while earning \$304,855. He posted victories in four of the five legs of the Ohio Sires Stakes and capped the season with an impressive win in the OSS Scarlet Championship. In a battle for the lead entering the final turn, he was interfered with and locked race bike wheels just yards from the finish line. He barely missed a stride and was placed first, earning the OSS title en route to being named the 2-Year-Old Colt Trotter of the Year.

"He gave us a summer filled with great memories that will last us a lifetime," Callam said upon accepting that award.

Little did Callam and Mast Jr. know that there would be more great memories to come in 2025.

Lt Loverboy's win in the \$75,000 James K. Hackett Memorial Final at Miami Valley Raceway in May set the stage for what would become a successful sophomore season this year. He was a three-leg winner in the OSS and added a second straight Scarlet Championship title to his resume, taking the \$300,000 3-Year-Old Colt Trot race in a lifetime-best 1:53.2 to equal the track record at Hollywood Gaming at Dayton Raceway on Sept. 27.

"I never dreamt that it would even be possible for us," Mast Jr. says of owning a back-to-back OSS champion. "We feel very fortunate and very blessed with him. It's really unbelievable."

Lt Loverboy entered this year's Scarlet Championship coming off an uninspiring fifth-place finish in the Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware 11 days earlier and was the third choice among bettors after drawing post eight in the nine-horse field. After sitting

fifth at the halfway mark, he made his way up the field to lead by a nose at the three-quarter pole and stretched his advantage to three lengths at the line.

It was a celebratory night for all of Lt Loverboy's connections, including driver Brett Miller and trainer Daren Harvey in addition to Mast Jr. and Callam.

"It's a great feeling, and this is a great horse. All the credit in the world goes to Daren and Brett," Callam said after the win.

"He's just a class horse," Harvey added in a post-race interview. "We were fighting him throughout the year trying to keep him together for tonight, and we got here, and he didn't disappoint."

Lt Loverboy has tallied five wins, one second, and two thirds with earnings of \$314,879 in 11 starts this year. In his two seasons of competition, the two-time OSS champion has hit the board in 18 of 21 starts with 11 victories while bankrolling \$619,734.

A \$60,000 purchase at the Ohio Selected Jug Sale, Lt Loverboy has proven to be a great get for his owners. It was Mast Jr. and Wes Hershberger who first recognized the horse's potential.

"We both looked at the colt at the sale, and we both really liked him," Mast says. "Daren and Scott Cox, who trains for me, also looked at him, and we all agreed he was a nice-looking colt."

Fast forward to 2025, and expectations were high going into the racing season after what Lt Loverboy had accomplished as a freshman. But so too was the pressure.

"He had a solid 2-year-old campaign, and we were hoping to be able to back that up. The pressure was a little different, and we were hoping he would grow up and show some speed," Mast Jr. says. "We had a couple bumps in the road with him this year, but Daren did a heck of a job with him and had him ready for the big races."

Harvey is highly complimentary of Lt Loverboy, citing his easy-going nature and racing talent as what has stood out most during training. While the gelding had his fair share of success this year, there were a few disappointing outings, including an eighth-place finish in the Ohio State Fair Stake and placing fifth in the Ohio Breeders Championship. But when a repeat OSS title was on the line, he was the one out in front.

"We went into the season with high expectations, and we fell short in a couple races, so to get it done at the end was the highlight of the year," Harvey says. "I couldn't have asked for anything better."

Coming off such a strong showing, Mast Jr. hopes Lt Loverboy can keep it up in his 4-year-old season in 2026.

"If he comes back strong next year, we're probably going to keep him eligible for some bigger races — maybe take a shot at the Grand Circuit here and there and see what happens," he says. "Hopefully he stays sound and continues to improve."

Hanners, Travel Nurse Share Special Night in **BSS Finals**

By Wes Mayberry



The night of Oct. 4 at MGM Northfield Park was a special one for Travel Nurse and Luke Hanners.

Not only did Hanners record the 1,000th driving win of his career, but he did so in guiding Travel Nurse to her second straight Buckeye Stallion Series championship.

“That was special,” Hanners says.

Hanners was a relatively new driver for Travel Nurse. Brett Miller was in the sulky for her BSS freshman filly trot championship in 2024 and served as her primary driver this year until late July. Hanners made his debut with the Enterprise filly in the fourth leg of the BSS at MGM Northfield Park on Aug. 11 and guided her to victory for trainer Virgil Morgan Jr. and owner Joyce A McClelland Stable. She placed fifth in an Ohio Sires Stake race on Sept. 6 at Eldorado Scioto Downs and was fourth in the Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware on Sept. 15, making for somewhat of an uninspiring lead-up to the BSS Finals.

But prospects brightened with her victory in the \$100,000 OSS Gray Championship consolation race at Hollywood Gaming at Dayton Raceway on Sept. 26 with Dexter Dunn. Coming off that triumph, Hanners was back in the sulky for the \$75,000 BSS Final, and he believed Travel Nurse had a solid chance to repeat as champion.

“She was coming into it sharp,” he says. “She won the consolation a week before, so I thought she had a good shot to win. I thought she had enough respect to make the lead, and I thought she’d be tough once she got there.”

He was right, as Travel Nurse led at the first three calls in :28.3, :58.1, and 1:27.1 and held a two-and-a-half-length advantage on second-place Volstarita entering the final stretch. But third-place Pretty Lil Penny, driven by Chris Page, was not to be counted out.

“I thought I was home free,” Hanners says. “I heard Chris’ horse coming. She was trotting hard. But mine was still trotting — she wasn’t done, so I was confident in her.”

That confidence was well placed, as Travel Nurse held off a hard-charging Pretty Lil Penny to win by half a length as both horses tripped the wire in 1:56.3. It was her sixth career victory, increasing her earnings to just over \$203,000.

“When she makes the lead, she’s pretty tough,” Hanners says of Travel Nurse.

The win was all the more special since it was a milestone moment for Hanners. The cherry on top was that the achievement came in a championship setting.

“It definitely made it better that my thousandth win came in a bigger race, and it was pretty cool to do it with one of Virgil’s horses since my dad drove a lot for him,” he says.

It was an early birthday gift for Hanners, who turned 25 on Oct. 11. The Chillicothe resident began driving in 2017 and closed October with nearly \$11.5 million in earnings. He’s hoping this is just the start of a long, prosperous career.

“Just be the best I can be and win as many races as I can,” he says of his goals as a driver. “I would like to win some big races and have a successful career.”

Longshot Winner

At 24-1, Our Honor Defend Claims BSS Crown

By Wes Mayberry



When it comes to training and racing, Our Honor Defend can be a handful.

“She’s really not the easiest horse to drive or work with,” trainer and co-owner Scott Betts says.

But that doesn’t mean she can’t win races.

The Lost In Time filly had modest success as a freshman in 2024, hitting the board in five of 17 starts with two wins. Expectations for her sophomore campaign this year were set accordingly, and she ended up far exceeding them.

“She definitely overachieved,” Betts says.

Our Honor Defend closed October with three wins, seven seconds, and two thirds with over \$78,000 in earnings in 20 starts on the season. That included her victory in the \$75,000 Buckeye Stallion Series Final for 3-year-old filly pacers, where she went off as a 24-1 longshot on Oct. 4 at MGM Northfield Park.

Her longshot status was perhaps based partly on how she fared in the five legs of the BSS leading up to the final. In those five races, she recorded two runner-up performances along with a fourth and two fifths. However, her two second-place finishes each came by margins of less than a length — three-quarters of a length in the first

leg and just a head in the fourth leg — and Betts liked how competitive she was against those talented fields of horses.

“A couple times she had some bad racing luck, and there were a couple times she raced extremely well and just couldn’t get the win,” he says.

Our Honor Defend entered the BSS Final coming off an uninspiring fourth-place finish in the fifth leg at Delaware on Sept. 18, but Betts believed she had a chance to pull off an upset win. She didn’t show much promise in the early going, sitting third at the quarter pole before dropping to fourth at the halfway point and sixth at the three-quarter mark. She trailed the leader by four lengths at the three-quarter pole, putting her somewhat out of mind for Betts. Instead, he was watching stablemate Anna Loves Bananas, who was in second place three-quarters of the way through.

“Honestly, I was watching my other one to see if she was going to get up after a little bit of a rough trip,” Betts says. “Then the Red Sea parted a little bit for Our Honor Defend, and she found room and paced home. It was very exciting.”

Our Honor Defend made it four wide heading toward the finish line and edged Anna Loves Bananas by a nose to win in

1:54.2. The exciting finish saw the top five horses finish within two-fifths of a second of each other.

It was a completely unexpected outcome for Betts. He gave much of the credit to driver Case Bateson, who drove Our Honor Defend all season long.

“Case had a lot of patience with her and really did a nice job with her,” Betts says. “A lot of drivers wouldn’t want to put up with her antics and wouldn’t have the patience to race her appropriately. She doesn’t really want to go out there and be on the lead and do all the work, but she has ability. He puts her in the right spot most of the time, and when you do that, she usually kicks home pretty good.”

The improbable outcome was made even more so by the fact that Our Honor Defend was even in the field. After finishing 10th in the BSS standings, she earned her way in thanks to two horses above her in the standings not taking a spot.

The BSS champion was subsequently entered into the Grade 3 \$125,000 Courageous Lady at Northfield on Oct. 11 to see how she would fare. She made it into the field as an also-eligible and finished last in the eight-horse field after leaving from the far outside.

“She just kind of had an off night that night,” Betts says. “She was a little sick and didn’t really race that well.”

Our Honor Defend went on to race in three events at The Meadows throughout mid and late October, posting a best finish of second. She closed the month having hit the board in 17 of 37 career starts with five wins and \$92,222 in earnings, and the goal is to have her return to the track in 2026.

“I think we’re going to race her a couple more times this year and then give her a little bit of time off, but the ownership group wants to keep racing her,” Betts says.

Full Moon Howl Caps Dominant Fair Season with Championship

By Wes Mayberry



Jessica Smith couldn't have asked for much more from Full Moon Howl this season.

"When you have the kind of season he did with going undefeated in the fairs and getting a Buckeye Stallion Series win and placing in several other Buckeye races, he had a good year," says Smith, who trains Full Moon Howl and serves as co-owner with her 12-year-old daughter, Madisyn.

The 3-year-old Full Count gelding out of Howl Me In has hit the board in 15 of 22 starts in 2025, notching 13 victories and over \$78,000 in earnings. He was a perfect 11-for-11 in fair races and posted a win in the second leg of the Buckeye Stallion Series in a lifetime-best 1:56.1 en route to winning the \$50,000 Ohio Fairs Championship for sophomore colt trotters at MGM Northfield Park on Oct. 11.

That victory capped a redemption story for Full Moon Howl, who rallied from seventh place at the halfway mark to finish second in the OFC as a freshman in 2024. Last year's champion, Jet Wings, competed in the Ohio Sires Stakes this season, recording wins in two of the five legs. Meanwhile, Full Moon Howl was a regular in the BSS and at the fairs. Based on last year's results — six

wins, four seconds, and three thirds in 18 starts — expectations were fairly high going into his sophomore campaign.

"His progression last year was very good, so we were pretty excited for this year," Smith says.

Full Moon Howl competed in all five legs of the BSS and hit the board in three of them, adding a pair of third-place finishes to his second-leg win. His perfect mark in fair races was highlighted by his performance at the Warren County Fair in Lebanon, where Sam Widger drove him to victory in 1:57 to break the trotting track record by two seconds.

Later, Smith, of Xenia, scored a victory with Full Moon Howl at her home track at the Greene County Fair on July 31. Jason Beatie was in the sulky that day and was Smith's driver of choice for the OFC.

"He had been driving him for most of his starts and was with him for most of his wins, and he gets along well with Howler, so we had to stick with Jason," Smith says.

A week earlier, Full Moon Howl battled a slight illness and finished seventh in the

BSS Final at Northfield. When he returned to the northeast Ohio track for the OFC, he was ready to do what he was unable to a year prior — win the title. After drawing the far outside post in 2024, he drew the more favorable post four this year. Sitting fourth at the halfway mark and trailing the leader by more than three lengths, he began to work his way up the field. He surpassed Hydroplane'n Henry down the stretch and won by a length in 1:57.1.

While her job prevented her from attending the race in person that night, Smith was able to watch it on TV with her daughter. They both were ecstatic seeing their horse cross the finish line first.

"I work in an operating room, so unfortunately, I was on call that weekend and couldn't make it to the race. I was just hoping he could get into the right position and that he had enough pop to win," Smith says. "My daughter was cheering for him as he was coming up the stretch. I told her, 'You're Howler boy won,' and she started making a howling noise. He's pretty special to her. She always gives him kisses. She has her favorites in the barn, and he's definitely one of them."

That was the 19th career victory for Full Moon Howl, increasing his lifetime earnings to \$131,622.

"He's a tough horse that races hard and has a lot of heart and wants to win," Smith says.

Full Moon Howl is now getting some well-earned time off, but Smith plans to extend his racing career. Once he does retire, though, he may not leave her stable.

"Our future plans are to give him a little bit of rest and bring him back for Miami Valley because he has the potential to continue to race and make money," she says. "We have several in our barn that, once their racing career is done, they don't go anywhere, and he'll probably be one of them."

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Like Father, Like Son

Justin Irvine continues to follow in the footsteps of his Hall of Fame dad

By Bob Roberts



Don Irvine Jr. (center) celebrates his induction into the Ohio Harness Racing Hall of Fame in 2023.

Hey dad, want to have a catch? Or, better yet, how about a spin in a jog cart?

At the end of the 1989 sports fantasy movie *Field of Dreams*, when Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) plays catch with his ghostly father, John Kinsella, there wasn't a dry eye among theatergoers.

And, when Ohio Hall of Fame driver Don Irvine Jr. nodded his approval for his 8-year-old son, Justin, to go solo behind a believed-to-be tame filly on the training track of a friend's farm, there may have been a youthful tear or two shed, mostly, out of fear.

"I had been jogging together with my dad, but this day he said, 'This horse is OK, take her,'" said Justin. "Well, she ran off with me. Took quite a while to get her pulled up."

That was more than 15 years ago, and these days, Justin Irvine, who'll be 24 in December, isn't pulling up until he hits the winner's circle usually at Northfield Park, the suburban harness oval where his father, now 74, is a legend. And the son is rapidly becoming a highly successful spitting image of dear old dad.

Irvine Jr., inducted into the Ohio Harness Hall of Fame in 2022, has won more than 7,600 races. In less than seven seasons, Justin has 967 winners and has climbed into the list of top-five drivers at Northfield Park this year with more than 200 triumphs. Both father and son are Buckeye-breds, with Don listed as being from Mt. Gilead and Justin from Aurora.

While Irvine Jr. lists his hometown as Mt. Gilead, he's not from there.

"I'm from Chesterville (population 190), seven miles east of Mt. Gilead, but I went by Mt. Gilead all these years because nobody knew where Chesterville was," he said.

Justin was born in suburban Cleveland, spent his early years just outside Indianapolis near Hoosier Park, where his dad was a perennial leading driver, and then moved back to northeast Ohio by age 10. The family settled in Aurora, where he graduated from high school in 2020, a COVID year.

The Irvines both won their first races at Buckeye fairs, Don at Bellefontaine in 1967, behind Scotch Pixie who paid \$180 to win,

and Justin at Ashland in 2018 with Checks In The Mail. The third-generation horseman also scored a matinee victory at 15 at Goshen's Historic Track in 2016, driving *Cruzing Hill* to a 25-length laugh.

Don drove his first horse as a 16-year-old at the Pickaway County Fair in Circleville and immediately drew the attention of the presiding judge, who fined him \$10.

"I didn't have riding boots," said Irvine Jr. "I drove the horse wearing tennis shoes. The \$10 fine? Heck, I didn't have 10 cents."

Both are quick to point to their fathers for their sulky education.

"My dad raced at Toledo (Raceway Park) and Scioto Downs, and I went with him as much as I could to learn as much as I could," said Irvine Jr. "And I watched so many races as a kid. There weren't TVs in the barns or paddock, so I'd run back and forth for every race to watch them live, all night long."

If Justin is anything like his dad — and there are racetrack regulars who believe that's the case — it's because he's following fatherly footsteps.

"He's a good teacher, because if I make a mistake, it isn't so much that he's mad at me, but more like, 'Do you understand what you did wrong?'" said Justin. "Then he tells me how to do it differently. It's more like constructive criticism. But when we trained together, before I started driving, he was hard on me about rating and stuff, which is a big aspect of the game. You need to know how fast you are going. He was like, 'Hit every number, try your best.'"

At 440 feet, Northfield Park's stretch is one of the shortest on the roster of North American raceways, yet Irvine Jr., and now his son, have it measured by their internal time pieces.

“If you don’t know what you’re going to be at that quarter pole before you get there, it’s too late,” said Irvine Jr. “You should know by the clock in your head. If you’re within 50 yards of that timer and you don’t know what’s going to pop up within a fifth, maybe two-fifths of a second, it’s too late because you can’t slow down or speed up enough.”

As for the start of a race, Irvine Jr. has quite a take on a horse’s speed.

“The fastest you are ever going to go in a race is when the gate folds,” he said. “You can never go that fast again the rest of the mile. You need to know your speed from the first eighth to the second eighth. Same at the half. You need to know how much you’ve shut down and how much you grabbed up. Or, if you get to the half and say, ‘Man, 56 (seconds),’ well yeah, you should have grabbed up. If I could be between two and two-and-a-half lengths turning for home at Northfield, I can get there. On a big track, that might be five lengths.”

Neither of the Irvines are fans of the passing lane.

“It takes too much strategy out of the race,” said Irvine Jr.

“When a horse gets tired, he’s going to drift out, so if you are in the two hole, you will get a shot,” said Justin. “But with the passing lane, it’s too easy to say, ‘Oh, I’m going to do a give and go.’ Guys take shots for no reason, leaving the gate, and end up flopping into a good spot, like landing in the three hole. I like the tracks that don’t have passing lanes.”

As for matching wits on the tracks, the Irvines recall their early skirmishes.

“We did so a lot at the fairs,” said Justin. “When I started, he was driving a lot more.”

When asked who has the upper hand, Justin said “I don’t know,” but Don quickly countered with, “I’m sure he’s way behind me,” to which Justin shot back, “Yes, he was driving the good ones.”

Fair racing can be an adventure for both man and beast, with its tight turns, Ferris wheels, and French fry stands at arms and hooves’ length.

“There can be a lot of distractions for a horse, even aged ones, with all that is going on,” said Justin. “It’s great to learn on a county fair track. Starting out, you have to



Justin Irvine (center) receives the Houghton Award during the OHHA's Awards Banquet in 2022.

drive at the fairs. Even though you’re going a lot slower, it feels like you are going really fast, your bike is sliding, the track is loose.”

Irvine Jr. has a unique take on racing at the fairs.

“I think all that stuff, and I might be crazy, is good for you,” he said. “It teaches you to have quicker reactions. You don’t know if a hot dog wrapper is coming over the fence, or the Ferris wheel is starting up. You’ve got to be ready. And repetition is good for you. Doing things over and over.”

Irvine Jr. has the ultimate fair story, one with a very surprising and unhappy ending. It occurred at the 1992 Delaware County Fair, on Little Brown Jug Day, when he didn’t have a drive until late on the card and was killing time by walking the Midway with a female acquaintance.

“We were winning trinkets and eating cotton candy,” he said. “It was around the fifth race, and I didn’t have to drive until, I think, the 15th race. What I didn’t know was that I was being paged to come to the paddock. When I got back, a guy says to me, ‘Where have you been?’ I told him I was eating cotton candy, and he told me he was trying to put me on a horse in the Jug because Mickey McNichol, the horse’s regular driver, got hurt in an earlier race. The horse? Fake Left, who won the Jug. I’ll never forget that day. And I haven’t been to the Midway since.”

The future, at least the near future, is pretty much set for both Irvines.

“I’m going to try to go to The Meadows and do double duty,” said Justin. “One of

the reasons to go there is that they have a really good retirement program. The money you race for is less, but if you get a certain number of starts, you are eligible for their program.”

As for cutting back his driving in 2025 (just seven drives and two wins), Irvine Jr. says, “Why not? I’ve got him to drive. I only drive now when I want to. I’ll know when I don’t belong out there. The key will be when I go to put on my colors and helmet, and I don’t get excited. Then, it’s time to hang them up.”

Irvine Jr. is proud of Justin’s work, enough so that it’s the main reason he’s dramatically reduced his own sulky schedule.

“He’s doing a lot better than I thought he’d be doing at his age,” said Irvine Jr. “He knows better than to run a horse down (by going too fast early). His wins and purse numbers are good. So, I’ll sit in my recliner and watch the afternoon races from The Meadows that he’s driving in and then watch him drive at Northfield at night. And I’ll probably criticize some of his drives, like my dad did with me.”

As for Justin on being second-guessed by his father?

“Well, he’s never lost a race from the recliner.”

Keep an eye out, Justin. If dad finds a way to attach sulky wheels to that recliner, you might have to out-hoof him (and his remote control) in the drive for the wire at Northfield.

When Racing Ends, New Adventures Begin

By Dot Morgan



Onwindntide on an early May ride at Yellow River State Forest in Iowa. **Photo:** Kat Polking

Onwindntide retired from racing after 35 starts over two years, earning \$16,000. Owned, bred, and trained by Ngaire and Clair Umholtz, the couple cared deeply about the mare. Though she wasn't competitive enough to keep racing, they wanted her to have the opportunity to thrive in a new career.

They sent her to New Vocations, where Standardbred Program Director Winnie Nemeth said, "She was very sweet and really fancy under saddle."

Within a few months, Onwyn was adopted by Jennifer Mlocek, of Iowa, who describes her as "a lovely mare and a wonderful addition to our family — an amazing athlete, a sweet girl, and quite the head-turner."

Not long after settling in, Onwyn proved her intelligence and curiosity at a drone desensitization clinic. With drones now used to sur-

vey farm fields, she learned to stay calm amid buzzing machines, bicyclists, rollerbladers, and even laundry flapping on clotheslines.

"She took everything in stride," Jennifer said proudly. "She's remarkable."

Onwyn's good nature was on full display when Jennifer's husband decided to take her for a spin.

"They did so well together," she added. "She's truly special."

By midsummer, Onwyn was ready for a bigger adventure. Along with her stablemate Belle — another off-track Standardbred — she joined her humans for a weekend of competitive mounted orienteering at Volga State Park in northeast Iowa. The event combined trail riding with navigation, sending riders searching for hidden markers across prairies, wooded trails, and streams.

To everyone's delight, Onwyn and Belle won the short course both days.

Over those two days, the mares covered miles of terrain with the ease and stamina only ex-racehorses possess.

"Onwyn stood calmly overnight at the hitching rail," Jennifer said, "an impressive improvement from her first overnight trip, when she had the vocal energy of a howler monkey. She even slept soundly on the ground, content and confident."

Jennifer began exploring distance riding and described Onwyn as her "beautiful Pegasus" after a top-10 finish at a 30-mile American Endurance Ride Conference Limited Distance Ride, the Hillsdale Fall Blast in Kansas, where she earned A-plus scores in impulsion and attitude. She also attended a dressage clinic and was invited to join a group of four horses for a photoshoot high-



Onwindntide participates in a drone desensitization clinic.
Photo: Sandee Mckee



Onwindntide and Jennifer Mlocek are on their way to a top-10 finish at a 30-mile American Endurance Ride Conference Limited Distance Ride in Kansas.
Photo: Andy Klamm

lighting the scenic Whiterock Conservancy in Iowa.

“Onwyn even posed patiently for the family’s Christmas card, complete with garland, jingle bells, and a Santa hat,” Jennifer laughed. “She was an angel — once I convinced her to give the garland back.”

Onwyn continues to be up for all the adventures and hates being left out.

“We just spent the weekend safety riding the Open Division for the Jesse James North American Trail Ride Conference Competitive Trail Ride, easily covering 44 miles of trails around Smithville Lake in

Missouri,” Jennifer said, then laughed, “and if Onwyn isn’t picked to load in the trailer for one of these rides, she’s well known for bucking and squealing her disapproval. Seriously, could this horse be any more fun?”

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Equine Health Spotlight:

The night of October 6, 2024, at MGM Northfield Park was one that will stick in the mind of Cleveland-based equine veterinarian Dr. Michael Latessa.

“That night was heartbreaking,” Latessa remembers.

In race 10 of that night’s card — the \$25,000 Buckeye Stallion Series Consolation for 2-year-old colt and gelding trotters — Rockers Legend, owned and trained by Ohio horsewoman Sue Stockwell, went off stride coming out of the first turn. Watching the race on TV, Latessa was immediately concerned.

“I’ve seen a lot of races and a lot of horses go off stride, but I knew this wasn’t a routine break,” Latessa said. “I turned off the television and immediately got dressed to go to the track.”

When he arrived, his concerns deepened.

“The injury I saw when I got to the barn was gruesome,” he said. “It was clear to see and feel that both the superficial and deep digital flexor tendons were completely severed.”

According to Latessa, Stockwell was in shock and knew the situation wasn’t good. She explained that the track veterinarian had recommended putting the horse down. But she refused to accept that as a possibility.

“She kept saying, ‘Please do something,’” Latessa said.

However, most equine veterinarians would’ve probably agreed with the initial diagnosis from the track vet.

“Seeing the injury, that might have been my recommendation too,” Latessa said.

According to Dr. Maureen Kelleher, Trueman Chair in Equine Clinical Medicine at The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, a severe injury to a tendon or ligament that is essential for weight-bearing when standing may not be recoverable and is possibly life-ending.

“For more severe injuries, the prognosis depends on the location of the injury, the age and future expectations of the horse, and how much the owner is willing to invest in treatments,” she says.

Despite the grim prognosis, Latessa and another Lake Equine Associates veterinarian on site, Dr. Elaine Gillis, agreed that Rockers Legend would not be put down that night and that they would do what they could to help the horse recover.

“Did I truly believe that Rockers Legend’s story would end in hope and happiness? No. I was worried he would not make it,” Latessa said. “But I did know that it was going to be OK because we were all going to do everything in our powers to try to make it OK.”

After some suturing, the leg held and was back in a splint and well bandaged. According to Latessa, the wound appeared to be healed after a few weeks.



“The leg was stable,” he said. “The tendon was huge and thick, but it was setting.”

In November, horseman Nick Clegg noticed Latessa changing Rockers Legend’s bandage and offered to help in any way he could.

“I told him how I wanted to make a large wedge to put on the bottom of the horse’s foot so he could stand without the use of a splint,” Latessa said. “I did not want his leg extending all the way down, so a wedge would help restrict that.”

Together, they crafted a 4-inch wedge screwed into the horse’s hoof and applied cast material around it all. Two weeks later, they removed the cast and wedge to see if Rockers Legend could fully support himself for the first time in eight weeks.

“It wasn’t pretty, but he was trying to learn how to reuse that leg,” Latessa said.

Rockers Legend continued to get stronger as more time passed.

“Every day, we watched the 2-year-old that probably had less than

Tendon Injuries

By Wes Mayberry

a 50% chance of being alive walk,” Latessa said. “The week before Christmas, Sue walked him onto her trailer and took him home.”

Latessa had kept his promise from the night of the horrific injury — everything was going to be OK.

Tendon Injuries

According to Kelleher, the superficial digital flexor tendon (SDFT), along with the suspensory ligament (SL), is one of the most injured structures in Standardbred racehorses. She explains that the gaits at which Standardbreds race and the location of the SDFT on the back of the lower limb results in interference injuries. The speed with which their limbs are moving causes them to hit the back of one limb with another limb, resulting in acute trauma to the SDFT. Similarly, SL injury, or desmitis, is a cumulative injury caused by repetitive stress on the ligament that continues at a rate faster than the horse’s body can repair or strengthen it.

Once a diagnosis has been made, soft tissue injuries, including tendonitis and desmitis, require cold therapy, compression, and controlled exercise, Kelleher says.

“Get ice on the leg right away, wrap the leg up to put compression on it, and rest the horse and control the amount of exercise it gets, limiting it to hand walks,” she says.

After that, treatment depends on the degree of the injury and the expectations of the horse. Serious injuries may require regenerative products, shockwave therapy, or surgery. Kelleher describes the recovery process from a soft tissue injury as a long and winding road that requires plenty of patience.

“A mild strain may only take a few weeks or months of rest before the horse can get back to training and racing, but a more severe injury could need a year to completely heal,” she says. “Tendons and ligaments are not rich in vascular supply, so they do not heal as quickly as other parts of the body that can receive resources from the blood in a timely fashion.”

In the most serious of cases — a partial or complete rupture of a tendon or ligament that is essential for weight-bearing when standing — the injury is career-ending, as it was for Rockers Legend, and may be deemed life-ending. However, regardless of the degree of injury, the general course of recovery includes a gradual increase in intensity of exercise and access to turn out, Kelleher says.

“Right after an injury, the horse may be restricted to stall rest with short 5- to 10-minute walks a couple times a day to prevent further injury to the structure. As the tendon or ligament gradually improves, the time and intensity can gradually increase,” she says. “For the most part, with time and treatment, there is a good prognosis for mild to moderate tendon and ligament injuries.”

However, prevention is key. Kelleher recommends a daily inspection of a horse’s tendons and ligaments, feeling for any heat, swelling, or pain.

“Even the most subtle change, such as a slight response to pressure on the tendon, could be an indicator the tendon is undergoing some stress. When this is noted, a look at the workload should be considered,” she says. “Balancing workload with time for the body’s tissues to respond to that workload is essential for keeping the tendons and ligaments tight and strong.”

Photo: Dr. Michael Latessa



OCRA Honors Top Performers

The Ohio Colt Racing Association (OCRA) held its 92nd annual banquet at Hollywood Gaming at Dayton Raceway on Oct. 26 to honor the circuit's top performers. The OCRA is home to 19 member fairs.



Jeff Nisonger (right) receives the OCRA top driver and trainer award from OCRA Vice President Dennis Fricke.



Connections to Full Moon Howl accept the top 3-year-old colt trot award from OCRA Vice President Dennis Fricke (left).

The top 2-year-old pacing colt was Ourcoltofmancolor. Trained by Jeff Nisonger and owned by CIS Racing, the homebred earned \$26,078 with five wins in 16 starts.

Drinkson Royal Rae was honored as the top freshman trotting colt. Trained and owned by Roger Hughes Jr., the gelding hit the board in 12 of 18 races, earning \$29,627.

The top 2-year-old pacing filly was Delta Lady. She won nine of 16 starts, earning \$44,387. Walter Haynes Jr. conditions Delta Lady for Jeff Fought Racing, Brian Carsey, and Sara Haynes.

Neigh Brr Lady was named the top 2-year-old filly trotter. She hit the board in 12 of 17 races, winning seven. Trained by Brian Georges, she earned \$35,294 for Myron Koester.

The 3-year-old colt pace division was led by Clevelandtoprookie. Trained by Georges, Clevelandtoprookie made 30 seasonal starts, winning 10 and earning \$49,785. The gelding is owned by Phillip Groves.

Full Moon Howl was the top sophomore trotting colt, going undefeated in the

OCRA. Jessica Smith trains and co-owns alongside daughter Madisyn. Full Moon Howl won 13 of 22 races, including the \$50,000 Ohio Fairs Championship. He earned \$78,174 in 2025.

The Rockin Amadeus filly Spinal Cracker took home the honors as the top 3-year-old pacing filly. Dalton Walls trains for Adam Friedland. She hit the board in 13 of 24 races, earning \$43,209.

Rounding out the awards for the 3-year-olds was filly trotter Strike A Pose. The Rory Moore trainee made 15 seasonal starts, winning nine times. Strike A Pose earned \$51,698 for breeders and co-owners Moore and Susan Sandstrom.

The Ohio Colt Racing Association sponsors the Dr. H.M. Parshall Memorial Stakes held at the Darke County Fair. Named in memory of "Doc" Parshall, the stakes honor the two-time Hambletonian-winning trainer. The fastest division winner is crowned with the overall title.

Don't Tell Anyone took the Parshall Futurity for freshmen trotters. Kevin Detweiler drove for Leander Schwartz. Black And White Stable owns the colt.

In the 2-year-old pacing division, Jason Beattie guided Lovin' On The Side to victory. The filly is trained by Ryan Miller and owned by Miller Racing Stable.

The Jim Buchy Trot Parshall Stakes for 3-year-old trotters was won by Volstarita. The filly is conditioned by Cassandra LeCourt for M3 Racing Stable. Driver Luke Ebersole got the call.

Ohohoh Im On Fire and Austin Hanners captured the Gene Riegel Pace Parshall Stakes for sophomore pacers. Todd Luther trains the colt for Greg Luther Racing.

I Want My Money was honored as the Signature Series top pacing point-getter. Trained and owned by Jacob Baird, I Want My Money raced in 11 series events, winning two.

Team L was the Signature Series trotting highpoint earner, winning five of her 16 contested series events. Hank LeVan trains the mare for LeVan Stables and Rosemary LeVan. Team L previously captured this title in 2021.

This year, Nisonger scored both the top driving and training titles. Nisonger drove 65 winners while training 38.

2025 Home Talent Colt Stakes Divisional Champions

Division	Winner	Trainer	Owner(s)
2-Year-Old Colt Pace	Pumpkin Skin	Betty Clegg	Kimber Clegg
2-Year-Old Colt Trot	Smoking Anson	Edward Miller	Adrian Hochstetler
2-Year-Old Filly Pace	Laughing Two	Jim Graham	Jim Graham, Timothy Warner, Lee Winters
2-Year-Old Filly Trot	Jasmine's Diamond	Garry Martin	Sue Stockwell
3-Year-Old Colt Pace	A Legends Secret	James Day	Powerplay Racing 87 LLC
3-Year-Old Colt Trot	Lets Go To Paris	Edward Miller	Edward Miller, Ashley Dunn
3-Year-Old Filly Pace	Kyleekash	Betty Clegg	Kimber Clegg
3-Year-Old Filly Trot	Dublins Martini	Betty Clegg	Kimber Clegg

2025 Ohio Fair Racing Conference Divisional Champions

Division	Winner	Trainer	Owner(s)
2-Year-Old Colt Pace	Carmen'sohsofamous	Joe Paver	Dennis Paver, Joseph Paver
2-Year-Old Colt Trot	What Luck	Ernest Ayers	Ernest Ayers, Ellen Bellemore
2-Year-Old Filly Pace	Mt Camas	Herman Hagerman	Hagerman Racing, Melinda Hershberger
2-Year-Old Filly Trot	Toms Queen	Rosy Weaver	Heartland Acres, Rosy Weaver, Kabby D LLC
3-Year-Old Colt Pace	Believe In Tom	Steve Novak	Gerald Mijal
3-Year-Old Colt Trot	Spend The Prize	Rosy Weaver	Hickory View Farm
3-Year-Old Filly Pace	Reallyrukiddingme	Dan Venier	Daniel Venier
3-Year-Old Filly Trot	Stars In My Crown	Herman Hagerman	Anthony Miller, Hagerman Racing
Top Driver	Drew Neill (86 wins)		
Top Trainer	Rosy Weaver (54 wins)		
Spring Haven Farm Ladies Driving Series	Leslie Joyce (498 points)		

2025 Southern Valley Colt Circuit Divisional Champions

Division	Winner	Trainer	Owner(s)
2-Year-Old Colt Pace	I'm A Dancin Man	Eric Nesselroad	Eric Nesselroad, Bo Powell, Dennis Ruff, John McCort
2-Year-Old Colt Trot	Mile Range	Steve Carter	Hatfield Stables, James Crawford IV
2-Year-Old Filly Pace	VH Goldie	Tim Van Horn	Tim Van Horn
2-Year-Old Filly Trot	Supreme Dance	Rosy Weaver	Rosy Weaver, Scott Davis
3-Year-Old Colt Pace	Bounding Delight	Rosy Weaver	Rosy Weaver, Heartland Acres
3-Year-Old Colt Trot	Mister Squeeze	Steve Carter	Andrew Monti, Gregory Regan, Nicholas Michalski, Michael Kwiatkowski
3-Year-Old Filly Pace (Tie)	Racin Like A Star	Ryan Holton	Holly Holton, Adam Friedland, SCP Stable Inc., Hunter Holton
	Trunk Bay Hanover	Alicia Hanners	Hanners Racing
3-Year-Old Filly Trot	I Bee Cream	Charles Vigneron	Charles Vigneron, Donald Spencer

Success at FFA Convention for Harness Racing Industry

By Jessica Schroeder



Photo: Emily Dever



A record-breaking 73,000 people attended the 98th National FFA Convention in Indianapolis the week of Oct. 27. The harness racing booth was one of 300 exhibitors present at the FFA Convention Expo to meet the future of agriculture, educate them on our sport, and provide materials for FFA advisors.

A Standardbred Education Station asked students to identify equipment, tell the difference between a trotter and pacer, and match equine tools to the human equivalent; different types of horse feed were identified; a 360-degree video experience had many students hop in the bike for the first time; and many conversations were had about harness racing careers, off-track opportunities for ex-racehorses, and where they can find harness racing, either at their local pari-mutuel track or at a county fair.

The racing industry showed up, both working at the booth and through sponsorships. Special thanks to booth workers from the Indiana Standardbred Association and local horsemen: Tony Renz, Tabby DeLong, Emily and Sonora Dever, Rachel Leonard, Donna Loney, Marcus Miller, Joyse and Ron Rhoades, and Alexandra Sarkine; the Indiana Standardbred Breed Development Fund: Emily Adams; the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association: Ashley Dailey; the Harness Horse Youth Foundation: Ellen Taylor; and the USTA: Jessica Schroeder and Jourdan Miller. Special thanks to

the Erv Miller Stable for providing a race bike to use for the 360-degree video experience.

The booth would not be possible without the sponsorship from the USTA, Harness Horse Youth Foundation (HHYF), Indiana Standardbred Association (ISA), Indiana Standardbred Breed Development Fund, Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association (OHHA), Delaware Standardbred Owners Association (DSOA), Meadows Standardbred Owners Association (MSOA), Minnesota Harness Racing Inc. (MHRI), and Standardbred Breeders & Owners Association of New Jersey (SBOA NJ).

Planning is already underway for next year's FFA Convention and Expo, which will be held October 21-23, 2026.

The National FFA Organization is a school-based national youth leadership development organization whose membership exceeds 1.042 million students from 9,407 chapters in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Michigan, Florida, and Wisconsin saw the highest growth rates in membership compared to last year. The top five states for membership are Texas, California, Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina. The convention was first held in 1928 in Kansas City, Missouri, and was in that city for 70 years. It has also been held in Louisville and will be in Indianapolis through 2040.

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BREEDERS CROWN No. 43 FOR FOALS OF 2027 TOTAL ESTIMATED VALUE – \$7,000,000

STALLION NOMINATION FEE: Due and payable Jan. 15, 2026, in the amount of the advertised stud fee for the 2026 breeding season (\$500 U.S. funds minimum,) plus an additional surcharge as indicated below, provided, however, that for first-year stallions placed in commercial service (which would not include test breedings) after Jan.15, the nomination must be paid within 60 days after the stallion first breeds a mare. In no event will any stallion nomination fee be accepted after Dec. 31, 2026. The Hambletonian Society reserves the right to determine the stallion nomination fee of those stallions whose 2026 service is advertised as private treaty, or if the amount of the fee is not advertised. This payment covers 2026 matings (foals of 2027).

In addition to the 2026 service fee, the amount of the stallion nomination fee must include a surcharge as follows:

a) For stallions that stand for a fee from US\$3,000 to \$5,999 (or \$4,158.77 CAD (Canadian Dollars) to \$8,316.14 CAD), an additional amount equal to 40% of 2026 service fee must be paid;

b) For stallions that stand for a fee from US\$6,000 to \$9,999 (or \$8,317.53 CAD to \$13,861.16 CAD), an additional amount equal to 75% of 2026 service fee must be paid;

c) For stallions that stand for a fee of US\$10,000 (\$13,862.55 CAD), or more, an additional amount equal to **200%** of 2026 service fee must be paid.

For stallions that stand for a service fee of less than US\$3,000 (or \$4,158.77 CAD), no additional surcharge is necessary for nomination.

Note: To determine the surcharge in other than U.S. funds, the October 28, 2025 exchange rate is used; a rate of \$1.39 CAD per US\$.

Stallion nominations for other than first-year stallions that are postmarked after January 15, 2026, but on or before Dec. 31, 2026, will be accepted upon payment of an additional penalty amount equal to 50% of the above stallion nomination fee (including the above surcharge). Likewise, stallion nominations for first-year stallions that are postmarked after the above 60-day deadline, but on or before Dec. 31, 2026, will be accepted upon payment of an additional amount equal to 50% of the above stallion nomination fee (including the above surcharge).

Any payment on a stallion that does not commercially conceive a foal or breed a mare by any means during the entire 2026 breeding season may be refunded, provided, however, that it shall be the obligation of the stallion nominator to notify the Society in writing of any request for refund by Dec. 31, 2026.

Moreover, if a nominated stallion does not breed more than twenty (20) mares in 2026 or produce more than fifteen (15) registered foals in 2027, up to 50% of the stallion nomination fee may be refunded, provided, however, that it shall be the obligation of the stallion nominator to notify the Society in writing of any request for adjustment by Dec. 31, 2026 (mares bred) or by Dec. 31, 2027 (registered foals). No stallion nomination fee will be reduced to less than \$500.00 U.S. funds.

Any payment on a North American stallion that has been nominated by Jan. 15, 2026, and is subsequently exported prior to Feb.15, 2026 and that does not commercially breed a mare in North America by any means during the entire 2026 breeding season, may be refunded, provided, however, that it shall be the obligation of the stallion nominator to notify the Society in writing of any request for refund by Dec. 31, 2026. With the exception of supplemental nominations or declarations as provided in the conditions, foals of 2027 by a stallion for which the above nomination fee has been refunded will be ineligible to the Breeders Crown unless an additional amount equal to the amount of the refund is paid.

Except as provided above, stallion nomination fees shall not be refunded.

Stallion payments may be made in the local currency of the nation in which the stallion stands, or in equivalent U.S. funds (\$500 U.S. funds minimum).

Conditions for nominating yearlings will be published in the *USTA Stakes & Futurities Nomination Book*. Specific conditions for the races for which these foals are eligible will be published in the *USTA Stakes Guide* in the year of the races. The Hambletonian Society reserves the right to add to, amend or delete the conditions of all or any part of the Breeders Crown program, without liability. *For more information contact: The Hambletonian Society at (609)371-2211 or www.hambletonian.com*

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Name of Stallion _____ Age/Foal of _____ 2026 Service Fee _____

Sire _____ Dam _____ Sire of Dam _____

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(over)

20 questions with **Matt Burkholder**

1. **What is your first memory of horses?**

My dad had Hackney horses. They were fancy high steppers. He raised a few of them, and we had ponies growing up.

2. **How did you start working for Ohio Hall of Fame trainer Marty Wollam?**

I was racing at Northfield one night. My now-wife (Courtney) was talking to Marty, and he mentioned he needed help. It was supposed to be a temporary job that turned into six years.

3. **It's quite an experience to work under such a good horseman, isn't it?**

Oh, yes. He taught me so much. I was already racing horses, but I was very bad at it. Working for Marty changed my whole direction. He made me fall in love with young horses.

4. **Even when you worked for Marty, you still trained your own stable?**

Yes, after working for him, I would take care of my own.

5. **That made for some long days, didn't it?**

For sure, but I didn't mind it.

6. **You've had 81 drives in your career with one win. Do you remember that win?**

I will never forget it. It was at Cortland Fair with a horse that Marty trained named Favorite Uncle. I had the best horse but got away fifth. When going to the half, the guy behind me said, "If you're going to pull, you need to pull now." I'm not a very good driver, and that's the only way I won that race.

7. **When did you decide to give up driving?**

I hate losing. I love training horses, and it was pretty evident that I was never going to be a driver.

8. **Did you have a favorite horse from early in your training career?**

Andale Andale. He's not a great horse, but he was the first one that went on for us. We still race him. He's my wife's pet, and we will never get rid of him.

9. **You race mostly at the raceways. Did you ever race at the county fairs?**

Really only when I worked for Marty. It can be too hard to get to all the fairs when you race out of state too.

10. **Trotters or pacers?**

Trotters. They are challenging.

11. **You have a 3-year-old colt trotter by the name of Battle Hill. He's made over \$375,000.**

He's the first good horse I've had. I can't say enough about what he's done for us. I have to thank the owner, Billy Hartt, for buying him.

12. **This year, you also have Silverstein, a 2-year-old colt trotter that's made over \$320,000 with a world record mark in 1:51.4. He was third in the Mohawk Million.**

He didn't train down very good, but he figured it out when he got behind the starting gate. I never imagined he would be doing what he's doing. With David Miller in the bike, you don't have to worry a bit.

13. **You've raced in five states and Canada this year. How do you keep up with it?**

I have a great crew. I couldn't do it without my wife.

14. **Was your wife involved in harness racing before you met?**

Yes, her dad, Lee Blodgett, trained horses. She grew up in it.



Matt Burkholder

15. **You're expecting your first child? Congratulations.**

Due in February. We're very excited and can't wait.

16. **Will that change your training operation?**

We don't know yet. Everyone says it will change our life, but we're going to take it day by day.

17. **Do you have a favorite vacation spot with your wife?**

We've never really been on vacation. For Thanksgiving, though, we are going to Florida for a week.

18. **Do you have a favorite football team?**

Unfortunately, I like the Cleveland Browns. Any Cleveland team.

19. **What's on your harness racing bucket list?**

Winning the Breeders Crown or Hambletonian. Even an Ohio Sires Stakes Scarlet Championship.

20. **Anything else on your bucket list?**

I would love to skydive. I don't think there would be a bigger thrill.

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Be There!

BY ROGER E. HUSTON

More times than not, certain events in your teenage years lead to your life's work. The year 1958 turned out to be my year for the future.

My father was working for Farm Bureau in Greene County. It was the sixth year after our family switched from living on a dairy farm in Beaver Creek to living in Xenia and a new job. Dad was managing the grain mill in Bowersville where he met Fremont Whittington, a local farmer who loved attending the Little Brown Jug. That led me to my first year at Delaware thanks to a person I had never met.

That trip is so vivid in my memory, as it was the second step in my life in harness racing. The first was a purchase of a 15-year-old broodmare, Emily Martin, who was in foal to Way Bloom.

I arrived at the farm about 4:30 a.m. to make the hour trip to the Delaware County Fairgrounds. We ate breakfast at a church tent and then walked through the barn area to find the horses in the Jug. That afternoon, I watched Joe O'Brien win with Shadow Wave, who I thought was the best-looking

horse I had ever seen. To say the least, I was hooked.

A few months later, Gerald Nash, of Hagler-Nash Sound and Photo Finish, asked me to fill in for him on the PA system for a Xenia High School basketball game. That was the first of many announcing experiences leading up to that first harness race in Wilmington in 1960. Those events totally determined my life.

I never dreamed that one day I would call the Jug. I attended every year leading up to 1967, when I became the announcer for the fair races. My first Jug call was in 1968 with Billy Haughton and Rum Customer being the winning combination.

That was the first of 57 Jugs with so many great winners. The standouts to me were Nansemond, Sea Train, Happy Escort, Hot Hitter, Precious Bunny, P Forty Seven, Big Bad John, Wiggle It Jiggle It and Captain Albano.

Last year, on the stage for the Dan Patch Awards, I told Noel Daley, trainer of Captain Albano, that his win was

very big for me personally. At the time, he wasn't sure what I meant. That Jug was the last that I would announce.

I had told Jason Settlemoir earlier in the day that he would now call the Jugette and the Jug.

That decision for me was a tough call to make, and I knew that I had to have time for my mental preparation, which actually began in 2023 after that year's Jug. I told Tom Wright of my plans to continue announcing 60 to 70 races each year at Delaware but no longer the two featured events. He said that was totally my call to make and to do it the way I wanted. I guess that is why my all-time favorite song is "My Way" by Frank Sinatra.

I must thank Jay Wolf, Wendy Ross, and Frank Fraas, who all helped me make the announcement at this year's Jug.

In closing, my favorite line, "Good Lord willing and the creek don't rise," I will see you in 2026 for the Delaware County Fair.

Be There!



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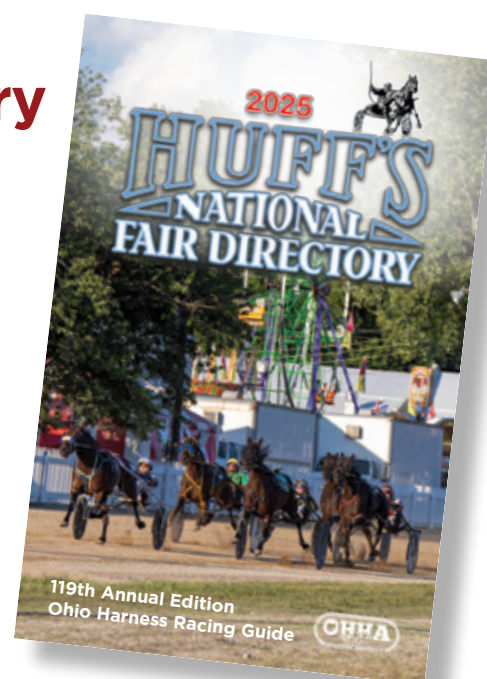
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Brown Secures Milestone Win



New Image Media

Brian Brown, of Ostrander, Ohio, earned his 2,000th career training win on Oct. 29 at Hollywood Gaming at Dayton Raceway courtesy of Groove. Driven by Cameron McCown, Groove won a \$13,000 conditioned pace by half a length in 1:55.4. The freshman Downbytheseaside filly is owned by Diamond Creek Racing. Brown, 61, picked up his first training win in the late 1980s and has over \$37 million in lifetime earnings.



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Ronald & Diane Burke	Roger Huston	Dan & Christi Noble	Enos & Alexis Weaver
Micah Burkholder	Vickie Jennings	John Oliverio	Eli Weaver
Roy Burns	Nathan Kapele	Jenna Otten	Mark Weaver
Betty Clegg	John Konesky	Dennis Owens	William Webb
Bradley Conrad	Timothy Konkle	Craig Polydoros	Gabriel Wengerd
Stacy Currie	Joseph Kramp	Marvin Raber	Larry Wills
Joseph & Fran Darmofal	Cory Kreiser	Ayers Ratliff	Dr. Dan & Barb Wilson
Patricia Davis	Michael Langer	Ross Rice	Mike & Becky Woebkenberg
Tommy Dawson	Randy & Tia Leopard	Pamela Riedeman	Atlee Yoder
Todd & Kim DeMarco	Rosemary LeVan	Travis Rinehart	Jacob Yoder
Ashley Dunn	Dr. Louis & Megan LeVan	Mary Jo & Doyle Rini-Bross	Alvin Yoder
Jeff & Senena Esty	Scott Lipps	Robert Schmitz	Kenneth Young
Kari Lynn Fagan	Anette Lorentzon	Susan Schroeder	Steven Zeehandelar
Corinne Flis	Lainey Luther	Lisa Schwartz	
Frank Fraas	Toni Dale Hollar & Todd Luther	Robert Schwartz	

Minutes of the Ohio State Racing Commission Meeting Tuesday, July 15, 2025

- (1) The Ohio State Racing Commission (OSRC) held its monthly meeting at 10:00 a.m. on July 15, 2025, at the Vern Riffe Center, Room 1948, 19th floor, 77 S High Street, Columbus, OH 43215.
- (2) Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Beth Hansen called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Commissioners Tom Winters, Greg Simpson, and Dan McCarthy were present.
- (3) Approval of Minutes from the June 17, 2025, Commission Meeting: Commissioner Simpson moved to approve the June 17, 2025, Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.
- (4) Ratification of Executive Director Approvals: Commissioner Simpson moved to ratify the Executive Director's approvals and Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. Executive Director Dragone made no comments. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.
- (5) Approval of Delaware Meet Request: Commissioner Winters moved to approve the Delaware Park meet request, and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. It was noted that this is the 80th anniversary of The Little Brown Jug. Delaware's meet request was in early and was in order. The Commission will plan to view the paddock and barn area prior to the meet. It was approved pending approval of the horsemen's group.
- (6) Resolution 2025-07 Casino Tax Revenue Distribution: Commissioner Simpson moved to approve the quarterly casino revenue distribution, and Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. Fiscal Officer Sherry White explained how the casino distribution works, and this quarter was slightly higher than the last quarter. The Commissioners commented that with the additional funds from the distribution the Commission was able to hire an additional person in the field and is in the process of hiring another person for the office.
- (7) Update on Horse Fatalities: Dr. James Robertson updated the Commission on horse racing and training fatalities at the pari-mutuel tracks in Ohio. Through July 15, 2025, there have been nine Stan-

ardbred fatalities all of which occurred during races. There have been 20 total Thoroughbred fatalities: 14 racing, and six training. The total number of horse fatalities in Ohio to date is 29. To July 10, the Thoroughbred racing fatality rate was 1.89/1000 starts; with a corresponding safety record of 99.81 %. Dr. Robertson said that this number is higher than last year at this time. Patrick Ellsworth from Thistledown spoke and said that he had requested the HISA come to evaluate the racetrack, and Thistledown's analysis did not show a commonality in where injuries were occurring. Executive Director Christopher Dragone spoke on how these are usually multifactorial and not just the racetrack surface. Commissioner Winters speculated whether the weather and air quality has an effect. Dr. Robertson commented that many things may be occurring with training methods, treatments and/or pre-existing conditions that are not evident on a pre-race assessment of records or on a pre-race examination. However, most of the injuries were bilateral sesamoid fractures. Commissioner Simpson asked if we have a heat/humidity/ air index where we do not race. There is a directive that has a mandatory cancellation of racing when an AQI index of 175 is reached. The tracks all have their internal protocols where they allow scratches without penalty at a certain

heat level, and automatic cancellation at a specific number. Some tracks use the stress index, and others use the heat index. All the tracks are well prepared to handle horses that appear to be affected by the heat with plenty of ice and water.

- (8) Monthly Financial Report: Fiscal officer Sherry White stated that fiscal year 2025 concluded with an overall gain of \$125,000. This compares to a gain of \$34,000 last year. The projection was only off \$9,000. Expenses were up approximately 2%, and tax revenues in the operating fund were down 7%, which compared to last year's 13% is an improvement. Major expenses continue to be payroll, track stewards/judges and veterinarians. Additionally, DAS is raising their IT costs for their services to our agency.
- (9) Adjudication: Commissioner Winters moved to hear the adjudication of Keith Kash, Jr., and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The Commission reviewed the Report and Recommendation of the Hearing Officer. Mr. Kash, Jr. did not file an objection, nor did he attend the commission meeting. The Commission listened to the comments of Assistant Attorney General Todd DeBoe. The Commission voted unanimously to confirm and approve the Hearing Officer's Report and Recommendation which upheld the

Northfield 2025-NFLD-100 ruling. The Chair emphasized that the Commission takes intimidation of officials seriously as it trickles down to safety, and we cannot have intimidation happening at the tracks.

- (10) Commissioners' Comments: There were no commissioners' comments.
- (11) Public Comments: There were no public comments.
- (12) Executive Session: The Chair mentioned that after the executive session, the only business that would occur in the commission meeting would be adjournment. Commissioner Winters moved to go to executive session at 10:32 to discuss pending and potential legal issues, and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.
- (13) Adjournment: In returning from executive session, Commissioner Winters moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote, and the Commission meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Date, Time, and Place of Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 1948 Riffe Center

Minutes of the Ohio State Racing Commission Meeting Tuesday, August 19, 2025

- (1) The Ohio State Racing Commission (OSRC) held its monthly meeting at 10:00 a.m. on August 19, 2025, at the Vern Riffe Center, Room 1948, 19th floor, 77 S High Street, Columbus, OH 43215.
- (2) Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Beth Hansen called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Commissioners Tom Winters, Greg Simpson, and Dan McCarthy were present.
- (3) Approval of Minutes from the July 15, 2025, Commission Meeting: Commissioner Simpson moved to approve the July 15, 2025, Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.
- (4) Ratification of Executive Director Approvals: Commissioner Simpson moved to ratify the Executive Director's approvals and Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. Executive Director Dragone addressed Thistledown saying that the air conditioning in the Stewards stand has not worked for a very long time, and this needs

to be fixed. Additionally, the Commission requested that Thistledown place the American and Ohio flags in their infield. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

- (5) Resolution 2025-06 - Drug testing costs: This was tabled until the September meeting.
- (6) Resolution 2025-08 - Perry Ouzts Commendation. Commissioner Simpson moved to approve the commendation for Perry Ouzts recognizing his accomplishments, notably being the North American record holder for all time mounts by a jockey. Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.
- (7) Meet Request: Dayton Raceway submitted their meet request, pending the receipt of their fire inspection report. Commissioner Winters moved to approve the Dayton Raceway meet request, and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. Tim Kelley, General Manager of Hollywood Gaming, Dayton Raceway, clarified that the fire inspection is to occur on Sept 4th, 2025.

The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

- (8) Resolution 2025-09: 5-year rule review for amended and no-change rules in Chapter 5. Commissioner Winters moved to approve this resolution, and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. Deputy Director Boulmetis explained the amendments of adding a waiver claiming rule, so horses that have been given at least 6 months off between races may run back in a claiming race at the same level or higher than its last start without being eligible to be claimed. Additionally, a rule was amended to say that all wins are cumulative, no matter which breed class the race falls under. Other amendments were for easier readability and efficiency. One rule about who may enter a horse was rescinded due to duplicity to another rule after that rule was amended.
- (9) Update on Horse Fatalities: Dr. Robertson updated the Commission on racing and training fatalities at the pari-mutuel tracks in Ohio. On the thoroughbred side in July there were 10 fatalities -8 racing and 2

training. In August there were two training fatalities. To this point in 2025 at all the Thoroughbred tracks, there is a total of 24 fatalities -16 racing and 8 training. Of these 24 fatalities, 23 were the result of catastrophic breakdowns and one was a sudden death (training). As of August 15th, there has been an aggregate of 9,017 starts with 16 racing fatalities for a racing fatality rate of 1.77 /1000 starts and a corresponding Safety Record of 99.82. Currently, Thistledown has a racing fatality rate of 2.2/1000 starts and Belterra is at 0.74/1000 starts. There has been a total of 10 harness fatalities which were all racing - 7 catastrophic breakdowns and 3 sudden deaths. The racing fatality rate is 0.29/1000 starts and a corresponding Safety Record of 99.97. At this point, the Ohio Total (racing and training) for both thoroughbred and harness is 34.

Casino distributions for this fiscal year (FY). A gain of \$208,000 for the month compared to last year's \$103,000 gain with the 5% Casino Revenue distribution. This increase has allowed us to add a full-time investigator as well as an additional administrative person to the main office. Expenses are up 7% driven mostly by higher payroll and testing costs. White shared the projected budget Statement of Operations for FY26 as well as the fund re-cap page, the cash balance sheet for all our funds along with the revenue and expense statements for both the thoroughbred and standardbred funds which are kept on an annual basis.

mission voted unanimously to confirm and approve the Hearing Officer's Report and Recommendation.

(10) Monthly Financial Report: Fiscal officer Sherry White stated the new fiscal year has started with the Casino Revenue Distribution aiding the operating fund in July as we will see the full impact of the greater

(11) Adjudication-Ryan Hall: Commissioner Winters moved to hear the adjudication for Ryan Hall and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The Commission reviewed the Report and Recommendation of the Hearing Officer. Mr. Hall did not file an objection, nor did he attend the commission meeting. The Commission listened to the comments of Assistant Attorney General Todd DeBoe. The Com-

(12) Commissioners' Comments: Commissioner Simpson thanked Ashley Holliday for bringing the Commissions attention to Perry Ouzts record. Commissioner Simpson also requested that tracks update the commission of any noteworthy accomplishments.

(13) Public Comments: There were no public comments.

(14) Executive Session: There was no executive session.

(15) Adjournment: Commissioner Simpson moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner McCarthy seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote, and the Commission meeting was adjourned at 10:24 a.m.

Date, Time, and Place of Next Meeting: Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 1948 Riffe Center

Minutes of the Ohio State Racing Commission Meeting Tuesday, September 16, 2025

(1) The Ohio State Racing Commission (OSRC) held its monthly meeting at 10:00 a.m. on September 16, 2025, at the Vern Riffe Center, Room 1948, 19th floor, 77 S High Street, Columbus, OH 43215.

moved to approve the 2025 Mahoning Valley meet request. Commissioner McCarthy seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

(2) Call to Order and Roll Call: Chair Beth Hansen called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Commissioners Tom Winters, Greg Simpson, and Dan McCarthy were present.

(6) Resolution 2025-06-Drug testing costs: For commercial tracks: Starting October 1, 2025, until June 30, 2026, the cost for drug testing from harness purse pools will be \$255 per race. From July 1st, 2026, through June 30th, 2027, the per race cost of testing from harness purse pools will be \$299 per race. For fairs: Starting January 1st, 2026, the cost of testing will be \$70 per race for the 2026 and 2027 fair season. For thoroughbreds: Should HISA be unable to conduct testing on thoroughbreds, the cost of testing will be \$299 per race to be deducted from the purse pools. Commissioner Winters moved to approve the resolution. Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

previous owner until the transfer of ownership after the claim occurs is completed with the USTA Another amendment was to remove the requirement that a fair must request a waiver if that fair does not want to use preference dates. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

(3) Approval of Minutes from the August 19, 2025, Commission Meeting: Commissioner Simpson moved to approve the August 19, 2025, Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Winters seconded the motion. Chair Hansen asked Commissioner Winters if he had anything to note on prior minutes, he did not. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

(7) Resolution 2025-10: 5-year rule review for amended and no-change rules in Chapter 15: Commissioner Winters moved to approve this resolution, and Commissioner McCarthy seconded the motion. Deputy Director Boulmetis explained the rule amendments preventing two-year old horses from racing too frequently. An additional amendment clarified that the claiming price is not distributed to the

(8) Update on Horse Fatalities: Dr. James Robertson updated the Commission on horse racing and training fatalities at the parimutuel tracks in Ohio. As of September 16, 2025, the total number of racing and training fatalities for both thoroughbred and harness in Ohio is 36. At all thoroughbred tracks, there have been a total of 26 racing fatalities - 18 racing and 8 training. Through September 11th, there have been 10,660 thoroughbred racing starts with 18 fatalities for a racing fatality rate of 1.69/1000 starts with a corresponding safety record of 99.83%. For the 2025 Q2, HISA reported a racing fatality rate of 1.24/1000 starts at all racetracks operating under HISA rules. This compares to a rate of 0.76 for Q2 in 2024 and a rate of 0.85 for the 2025 Q1 (this represents a 50% increase over Q1 this year). At all Ohio harness tracks, there have been a total of 38,831 harness starts with 10 racing fatalities - 7 catastrophic breakdowns and 3 sudden deaths. The aggregate harness racing fatality rate is 0.258/1000 starts with a corresponding safety record of 99.97.

- (9) Monthly Financial Report: Fiscal Officer Sherry White referenced substantial veterinarian expenses, with the additional expense of fair vets at tracks that have parimutuel racing contributing to these high costs. Also, when looking at our current structure in place for collecting testing costs, we have collected \$235,000 and paid out \$282,000. This is a loss of \$47,000 and cannot continue to be sustained. Due to these factors, August shows a loss of \$122,000. Commissioner McCarthy questioned if the discrepancy on the drug testing could be explained. White explained that we currently collect too low of an amount from the tracks to cover our actual testing expenses, and we will be able to decrease our losses with the passing of Resolution 2025-06.
- (10) Roberto Perez Adjudication: Commissioner Winters moved to hear the adjudication for Roberto Perez, and Commissioner Simpson seconded the motion. The Commission reviewed the Report and Recommendation of the Hearing Officer. Mr. Perez did not file an objection, nor did he attend the commission meeting. Commissioner Winters questioned why we continue to license him as this is his third offence in his probationary period, and Commissioner Simpson questioned why we should license him at all. Executive Director Dragone said that his license would be reviewed. The Commission listened to the comments of Assistant Attorney General Todd DeBoe. The Commission voted unanimously to confirm and approve the Hearing Officer's Report and Recommendation.
- (11) Commissioners' Comments: Commissioner Simpson noted that Dayton will be opening on September 23, with a 4:00 pm post time, and that it should be a wonderful opening day. Executive Director Chris Dragone addressed how in our sport we need to emphasize the integrity that needs to be in it to thrive. Without integrity, this sport is going nowhere but south. He said that horsemen are going to have to join forces with each other to work to preserve integrity, because if you don't have that, you really don't have a viable sport going forward. He said that the Racing Commission is going to be vigilant and the Commission is going to start thinking outside the box on how we approach things. He reminded everyone that the Commission has the ability to freeze and hold samples to test at a later date.
- (12) Public Comments: Dave Basler from Ohio HBP A spoke on HISA's proposed budget for 2026, and that discussions are being held on potentially opting out of RISA at Thistledown and Belterra Park due to the high fees that RISA mandates. Chair Hansen spoke on how she wants the commission to be a partner within these ongoing discussions as well as noting the consequences of opting out. Harness Driver/Trainer Anthony MacDonald spoke highly on the future of our sport in Ohio and emphasized the need for out-of-competition testing, and how can we come together to create a solution to level the playing field in the state. MacDonald stated he moved his family here because he felt that Ohio was on the cusp of becoming the pinnacle of horse racing, and he still believes it is. But without any out-of-competition testing, he thinks there will be some significant hurdles moving forward as to how Ohio can improve. Chair Hansen thanked Mr. MacDonald for his kind words on Ohio racing.
- (13) Executive Session: There was no executive session.
- (14) Adjournment: Commissioner Simpson moved to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner McCarthy seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote, and the Commission meeting was adjourned at 10:24 a.m.

Date, Time, and Place of Next Meeting: Tuesday, October 21, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in Room 1948 Riffe Center

OHIO BREEDERS AWARD REQUIREMENTS

Mares registered in 2019 (Foals of 2020)
mare registration date 11/30/19

Foal Age	Membership Requirement
Foal Born 2020	Membership Required
Yearling 2021	No Membership Required
2 & 3-Year-Old 2022, 2023	No Membership Required

Mares registered in 2020 (Foals of 2021)
mare registration date 11/30/20

Foal Age	Membership Requirement
Foal Born 2021	Membership Required
Yearling 2022	No Membership Required
2 & 3-Year-Old 2023, 2024	No Membership Required

Mares registered in 2021 (Foals of 2022)
mare registration date 11/30/21

Foal Age	Membership Requirement
Foal Born 2022	Membership Required
Yearling 2023	No Membership Required
2 & 3-Year-Old 2024, 2025	No Membership Required

Mares registered in 2022 (Foals of 2023)
mare registration date 11/30/22

Foal Age	Membership Requirement
Foal Born 2023	Membership Required
Yearling 2024	No Membership Required
2 & 3-Year-Old 2025, 2026	No Membership Required

Mares registered in 2023 (Foals of 2024)
mare registration date 11/30/23

Foal Age	Membership Requirement
Foal Born 2024	Membership Required
Yearling 2025	No Membership Required
2 & 3-Year-Old 2026, 2027	No Membership Required

Registration Fee: \$20 per mare. For mares registered in 2019 forward, **in addition to the \$20 registration fee per mare, registrations received from December 1st to December 31st must add a \$100 per-mare late fee. Registration will not be accepted until all fees are paid in full.**

Membership Requirements: All owners of the mare (including those in businesses or stables) are required to join as Active OHHA Members. All business entities or stables listed as owners are also required to join as Associate Members.

Mare Residency: Mare in foal to an Ohio Stallion, must foal in Ohio, and reside in Ohio for 187 consecutive days in the year of foaling.



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