

THE BUCKEYE Harness Horseman

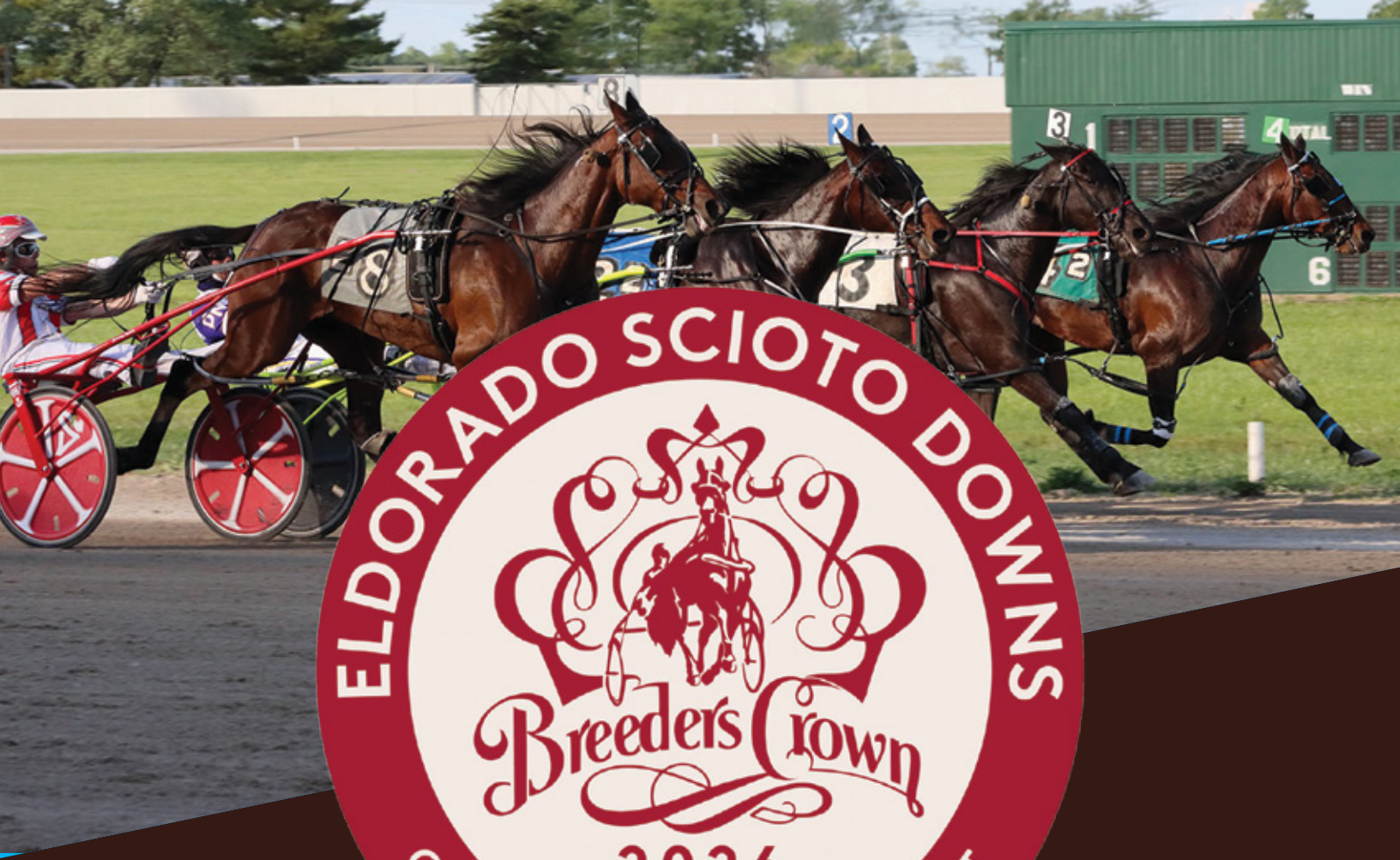
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The Official Publication of the
Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association

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Don'ttruckwithme proves first
impressions aren't everything





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'This is Big for Ohio'

Scioto Downs Readies for 2026 Breeders Crown

By Wes Mayberry



This year marks a momentous occasion for Ohio harness racing. For the first time in over 30 years, the Breeders Crown — the most prestigious Standardbred event in North America — is returning to the Buckeye State, bringing all 12 championship divisions to Eldorado Scioto Downs for the first time ever.

"We've never hosted all 12 divisions before, so this is big for Ohio," says Jason Roth, director of racing at Scioto Downs. "The excitement and the atmosphere that we will bring — I don't think the Breeders Crown has ever seen it before."

Northfield Park was the last Ohio track to host a Breeders Crown event, doing so in 1995. Scioto Downs last did so nearly 40 years ago in 1988, and even then it was just one division. So this year promises to be

something special. Following two nights of eliminations on Oct. 16-17, Scioto Downs will host the four finals for 2-year-olds on Friday, Oct. 23, and the eight finals for 3-year-olds and older horses on Saturday, Oct. 24. The purses for the 12 championship races total more than \$7 million.

Those nights will mark the culmination of lots of hard work by Roth and his staff and millions of dollars in investments from the venue's parent company, Caesars Entertainment.

"We've invested nearly \$50 million into the racing side of things in the last four or five years trying to bring Scioto Downs back to the standard the Breeders Crown is looking for," Roth says. "The 65-plus-year-old facility has definitely received a transformation in the last few years."

Some of the most visible improvements include the \$30 million grandstand that opened in 2023 and the \$16 million paddock that was unveiled in 2025. Those enhancements alone made Scioto Downs an attractive venue for the Breeders Crown, but the track has continued to see improvements such as a new viewing area near the paddock as well as LED lighting, an infield video board, and renovations to the bathrooms underneath the clubhouse.

In addition to those large-scale projects, the staff at Scioto Downs has been hard at work fine-tuning the smaller details as the date of this year's Breeders Crown draws closer.

"It's the fine details that we're working on — getting flowers for tables, deciding how we're going to decorate and what we're going to sell and making sure that merchandise is

ordered, and getting shuttle buses to shuttle people from hotels,” Roth says. “There are a lot of fine details that go along with the Breeders Crown, and the staff has worked very hard on making sure everything is lined up and that we don’t forget the little details that matter.”

It’s the combination of all those little details that will help make the 2026 Breeders Crown a highly memorable one for those in attendance, and Roth is expecting a big crowd. As tickets were about to go on sale earlier this year, John Campbell, president and CEO of The Hambletonian Society, which administers the Breeders Crown, cautioned Roth about drawing disappointing conclusions from a lack of early demand.

“One of the first things he said to us was that the Breeders Crown has a late-arriving crowd to book tickets,” Roth says. “So when we said we were going to put tickets on sale in March, he said to not expect much until it gets closer to the time of the Breeders Crown.”

As it turned out, there were no disappointing conclusions to come to. Saturday tickets for both the clubhouse and the enclosed VIP area on the patio underneath the clubhouse were sold out by mid-July.

“I think we’ve bucked the trend,” Roth says. “I think we’ll pack the place.”

Scioto Downs promises to offer a little something for everyone during the Breeders Crown. Paid ticketed areas include the clubhouse, VIP area, and beer tent, but there will also be free admission in the grandstand and benches on a first-come, first-served basis. Clubhouse tickets include access to a buffet meal and gift bags. The VIP area will also have a buffet in addition to black carpet, chandeliers, and several TVs. It will be heated and offer easy access to the patio to watch the races. At the 300-person beer tent, patrons will be treated to a band and appetizers as well as a \$10 voucher redeemable at one of several food trucks there that night. Fans can also buy tickets for seating along the top row

of the grandstand or at the picnic tables on the patio, both of which come with a voucher.

But that’s not all, as there will be plenty of other entertainment for both adults and kids, including a movie theater-sized projection of the races on the back of the grandstand as well as an opportunity to interact with four past stars of the sport boasting a combined 227 career wins and over \$15.4 million in purse earnings.

“Behind the grandstand, we’re going to have Millionaires’ Row where we’re bringing in Foiled Again, Pinkman, It’s Academic, and Golden Receiver, so people can come see the champions of the past,” Roth says. “We’ll have Foiled Again plushies to give away to the kids, and there will be a petting zoo and a bounce house and carnival games.”

Roth is also excited for the Breeders Crown Charity Challenge. Since its inception in

2019, the initiative has raised nearly \$2 million for local charities in the communities hosting the annual Breeders Crown. This year’s iteration, presented by Greg Luther and Prolific Equine, will involve four local influencers to help raise money for charities in central Ohio.

“I’m hoping this is the best Charity Challenge the Breeders Crown has ever seen,” Roth says, adding that it all adds up to two incredible nights of championship harness racing.

“You’re going to see the best horses and drivers in the country, if not the world. With our banked turns at Scioto Downs, anything can happen. You’re going to see blistering halves, fast miles, and close finishes,” he says. “I think people are going to be very impressed with the facility and the show we put on and hopefully very impressed with the way the races play out.”



“The excitement and atmosphere that we will bring — I don’t think the Breeders Crown has ever seen it before.”

— Jason Roth, director of racing at Scioto Downs

'He's Definitely a Fast Horse'

With Freshman Struggles Behind Him, Gypsy's Brother Breaks Pair of Track Records at Ohio Fairs By Wes Mayberry



Gypsy's Brother and connections in the winner's circle at Bellefontaine on July 14
Photo: Conrad Photo

Gypsy's Brother didn't inspire much confidence during his freshman campaign in 2025.

"He didn't turn out near as good as I thought he would based on the way he trained," breeder, owner, and trainer Herman Hagerman says. "He wasn't focused on what he was doing when he got to the races, so I just quit with him and gelded him."

Gypsy's Brother made seven starts that year, hitting the board just once with a third-place finish in a fair race at Mount Vernon and finishing with \$1,425 in earnings. But Hagerman knew the horse was capable of much more. Turns out he was right, as Gypsy's Brother's sophomore season has been a completely different story.

Early Struggles

Gypsy's Brother is the third foal out of the mare Blueridge Adalia, who was the first yearling Hagerman ever bought. The son of Racing Hill, he is so named because he is a full brother to Cold Hearted Gypsy, who racked up 19 wins and over \$285,000 over the course of her career from 2021 to 2025. Hagerman was hoping for similar success from Gypsy's Brother but recognized fairly early on that top finishes were not going to be plentiful.

The colt finished seventh in an Ohio Sires Stakes race at Northfield Park in his first career purse start and followed that with the third-place finish at Mount Vernon. He closed out the season with finishes of seventh, fifth, seventh, and eighth while adding a DNF in a Buckeye Stallion Series race at

Eldorado Scioto Downs. Those results told Hagerman to end Gypsy's Brother's season following his final start on Sept. 5.

"He started off really good, but he was kind of big and growthy, and he just got sore on me, so I only raced him a few starts," Hagerman says. "He was a ridgling, so I gelded him and turned him out."

Much Improved

That break proved to be just what Gypsy's Brother needed. Based on Hagerman's experience during offseason training, things were looking up for 2026.

"He came back really good," he says. "I had him at Hawkinsville, and he trained down really well down there. He was older and stronger, and I didn't have any soreness issues out of him training him down."

As those positive signs predicted, it didn't take long for Gypsy's Brother to reach the winner's circle. He finished third in an overnight race at Miami Valley Raceway in his season debut and followed that with his first career win one week later at the same track.

"He was showing me what I thought about him all along — that he could be a nice horse," Hagerman says.

Gypsy's Brother added another victory on June 6 in the BSS at Northfield Park, winning by more than seven lengths in 1:52.

"He was really good up there that night," Hagerman says. "To be a bigger horse, he gets around a half-mile track really well."

He was perhaps even better at Scioto Downs on July 2, winning an overnight race in a lifetime-best 1:51.4. But with Ohio's fair-racing season heating up, there were still big things in store for the rapidly improving gelding.

Record-Breaker

Gypsy's Brother made his first fair start of 2026 a memorable one. At the Logan County Fair in Bellefontaine on July 14, he won race three by over seven lengths in 1:56.1 to break the previous pacing track record of 1:57.1 set by Chance I Might in 2017. Perhaps more meaningful, though, was what he did on July 27 at Hagerman's home track at the Knox County Fair in Mount Vernon. The gelding broke yet another pacing track record, winning race six by more than three lengths in 1:55.2 to smash the prior mark of 1:57 shared by Mr I Am and Drinkinmybabygdbby.

"I train at Mount Vernon, and I know that's a big mile there," Hagerman says.

Emanuel "Manny" Miller was in the sulky guiding Gypsy's Brother in each of those track-record performances, and the pair added another win on Aug. 5 at the Wood County Fair in Bowling Green.

"Manny has been driving him for a few starts now, and he has some confidence in him," Hagerman says. "He gets along well with him, and it's working out pretty good."

Yes, things have turned out well for Gypsy's Brother. His gait is much improved from his freshman season, Hagerman says, adding that he's been a joy to work with.

"He's good-mannered and doesn't do anything wrong," he says. "He has a good attitude and is easy to jog and train."

With his win at Bowling Green, Gypsy's Brother improved his seasonal record to 6-2-1 in 15 starts with \$41,746 in earnings. Track records and all, he was showing everyone else the type of horse Hagerman knew he could be.

"Honestly, I'm not worried about track records, but I know he has that kind of speed," Hagerman says. "He's definitely a fast horse."



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From 'Impossible' to a 'Doll Baby'

Don'ttruckwithme Proves First Impressions Aren't Everything

By Wes Mayberry



Don'ttruckwithme wins The Next Generation at Scioto Downs on July 4

When Daren Harvey first started training Don'ttruckwithme, he had one word to describe the horse.

"Impossible," he says.

The 2-year-old Catch The Fire gelded pacer out of Age Of Consent proved difficult to work with in just about every way.

"He wasn't the barn favorite, that's for sure," Harvey says. "When he was out on the track, he did his job. But to put his bridle on... impossible. To put his halter on... impossible. To walk into his stall to give him water... impossible."

Looking back, though, Harvey doesn't regret adding him to his stable one bit.

"I watched most of his siblings race, and they were all tough, so I really wanted the horse," he says. "One of the owners, Wayne Mast Jr., pushed for me to try to get him, and I'm glad I did."

Those sentiments are a far cry from the frustrations Harvey expressed early on. Winning does tend to have that effect.

First Impressions

Actor Will Rogers once said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." While that may be true, Don'ttruckwithme has come a long way in turning around his connections' thoughts of him.

A \$37,000 purchase at the Ohio Selected Jug Sale from breeder Judy Roegner in September 2025, he didn't inspire a ton of confidence in his new owners early on.

"He was a little ornery," Mast Jr. remembers. "The trouble was more in trying to get him to settle down in the barn. It seemed like when he hit the track, he was normally focused on what they were trying to do with him."

Mast Jr., of Dundee, is one of Don'ttruckwithme's three Ohio-based owners along with Eden Acres Farmstead, of Millersburg, and Kirk Nichols, of London. He was initially drawn to Don'ttruckwithme because of the horse's pedigree as a son of Catch The Fire and half-brother to I'll bet your boots, who scored six wins and banked over \$165,000 in 10 starts as a freshman last year. But he was also impressed by the horse's stature.

“He was a nice-sized colt and was just what we were looking for,” he says.

Little did he know that Don'ttruckwithme would prove so troublesome in the barn. That's where Harvey came in.

“He's still ornery and a handful, but Daren has done a wonderful job with him to keep him well-mannered and focused in the right direction,” Mast Jr. says.

So much so that in the span of just a few months, the horse has gone from being described as impossible to something completely different.

“He's really evolved — the girls that take care of him have really transformed him. He's kind of a doll baby now,” Harvey says. “He still has his moments, but he's not the horse that first showed up.”

Preparation

Don'ttruckwithme took to the track for his first qualifier on June 8 at Eldorado Scioto Downs. He finished fourth, pacing the mile in 1:59 with Harvey in the sulky. Next was a qualifier at Northfield Park on June 25, which he won with Kurt Sugg in 1:56.2. That performance told his connections that he could be a viable contender in the Ohio Sires Stakes, so Harvey knew to have him ready for the first leg on July 12. But a last-minute decision resulted in a change of plans.

“That was one of the most impressive qualifiers I've seen in my life, and based off that qualifier, we thought we'd take a shot at The Next Generation,” Mast Jr. says. “The Next Generation is something we

normally don't do, but I thought he was ready, and Daren thought he was ready but said he would've done a few things differently if he knew we had planned on going.”

That decision ended up paying off.

The Next Generation

Harvey saw no reason not to enter Don'ttruckwithme in The Next Generation, and the horse was subsequently in the field of eight for the \$150,000 race at Scioto Downs on July 4. With Sugg unavailable that night, the trainer saw driver Chris Lems as a solid alternative.

“Chris has driven a good bit for me over the years, and he's a great horseman who is great with babies,” Harvey says. “We just wanted someone who would get everything out of him that he can but keep him in hand too.”

With Lems in the sulky, Don'ttruckwithme left from post two as the 2-1 second choice. In the pocket behind leader Atlantic Ivey and inside of North Rim, he was in third place entering the final stretch. As North Rim faded, Don'ttruckwithme moved to the outside of Atlantic Ivey and used a late surge to win by half a length in 1:52.2.

“I've watched it now for five years and always hoped to be the guy that wins,” says Harvey, who was making his debut as a trainer in The Next Generation. “The performance that the horse gave on top of winning the \$150,000 race was amazing — I got chills.”

Mast Jr. was just as ecstatic that night.



Don'ttruckwithme and connections in the winner's circle at Scioto Downs after The Next Generation on July 4

“That’s a night I will never forget,” he says. “That was one of the most impressive wins I’ve seen. For most of the horses that go into that race, it’s their first start, and you really don’t know if they’re going to perform or not, and he performed. It was a phenomenal experience.”

Next up was the first leg of the OSS at Northfield. Could Don’ttruckwithme possibly be as good there as he was in his debut? That question was certainly front of mind for Mast Jr.

“I was probably more worked up for the first leg of the Sires Stakes than the Next Gen as far as being nervous for the horse,” he says. “My way of thinking is to keep respect, he had to go out and perform in that next race.”

‘Stars in Your Eyes’

Don’ttruckwithme was one of nine horses racing for a \$75,000 purse in the second division of the opening leg of the OSS for freshman colt pacers. He again drew post two, and with Lems back in the sulky, he left no doubt as to who the top horse in the field was. Atlantic Ivey, his top competition in The Next Generation, was a non-factor after an early break, and he ended up leading gate to wire and winning by three lengths in 1:53.3.

“That night was incredible, and the horse’s performance was outright amazing,” Harvey says. “You get stars in your eyes — you start thinking even a little bigger than where you are.”

Mast Jr. described the victory as relieving, calming the nerves he had for Don’ttruckwithme to back up his win in The Next Generation with another victory in a race featuring high-quality competition.

“He did not disappoint,” he says. “He was very impressive.”

But Don’ttruckwithme couldn’t rest on his laurels for long. The second leg of the OSS was on July 25 followed by the Ohio State Fair Stakes — the first leg of the Ohio Triple Crown — on Aug. 1, both at Scioto Downs. He was as impressive as ever in those races, winning by two and a half lengths each time in 1:52 and a life-time-best 1:51.4, respectively, with Lems in the bike. He returned to Northfield on Aug. 8 to get seasonal win No. 5 in the third leg of the OSS, crossing the line in 1:53.3.

“Every mile is unbelievable,” Harvey says. “I just hope he continues to do what he’s doing.”

It wasn’t that long ago that Don’ttruckwithme’s connections would’ve dismissed a 5-for-5 start and \$228,460 in purse earnings as crazy. Especially so considering the level of competition he faced in those races. But the horse has completely turned around those early negative perceptions about him.

“If we can keep him healthy and sound and get a little lucky with some draws, I think he’s going to be a pretty nice colt,” Mast Jr. says.

Don’ttruckwithme has certainly given credence to the messages embodied in the many maxims about the erroneous nature of first impressions. But perhaps this one sums him up best — “The first impression is not the last impression; they often mislead. The journey to truly knowing someone (or, in this case, a horse) begins with giving them the chance to unfold.”



Don’ttruckwithme wins an Ohio State Fair Stakes race at Scioto Downs on Aug. 1

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'A Leap of Faith'

Mississippi Native **Dee Sanders** Making a Name for Himself in Ohio Harness Racing

By Wes Mayberry



Dee Sanders records his first pari-mutuel win on June 9 with Hagrid at Scioto Downs **Photo:** Conrad Photo

Looking back on his journey in harness racing, Dedrick "Dee" Sanders describes it as one of humble beginnings, determination, and, ultimately, happiness.

"I started from scratch when I moved up here to Ohio three years ago. Nobody knew me at all, and I felt out of place. I was just a 19-year-old kid trying to find a way," he says. "But now things are different. I walk in the paddock, and I get a 'Hey!' from almost everybody, and I greet them back. I feel comfortable in the space now."

Sanders, 22, has come a long way — both in distance and development — since being first introduced to horses as a child. He grew up in Walnut Grove, Mississippi, and took a leap of faith in moving to Ohio in pursuit of his dream of becoming a harness racing trainer and driver. Now with a horse of his own and having secured his first pari-mutuel

win in June, Sanders feels well on his way to achieving the life he set out for. But it's taken a lot of grit to get there.

Beginnings

As a youngster in Mississippi, Sanders was introduced to Standardbreds and harness racing through family friend Calvin Harris. Known as "Quan" as a shorthand for his middle name, LaQuan, Harris lived in Forest, Mississippi, and worked as a groom before earning his trainer/driver license and racing at pari-mutuel tracks and multiple fairs.

"When I was really little, he would pick me up from the barn every day, and that's what drew me in," Sanders says. "He was a big inspiration because he was a young guy that was going to go places in the sport."

Harris compiled a combined 56 wins and nearly \$100,000 in earnings as a trainer and

driver. But the potential Sanders saw in him ultimately went unrealized, as he passed away in 2020 at the age of 25. Sanders didn't let that tragedy deter him from remaining involved in the sport, though, and he quickly took a liking to caring for Alabama Howard, a horse owned by his uncle, Adrian Fortune. If it was Harris who planted the seed of Sanders' interest in harness racing, Fortune and Alabama Howard helped that seed germinate.

"I was about 14 or 15 years old and didn't have a car, so I just walked to the barn every day, and once I started taking care of that horse, it just stuck with me," he says. "I was so intrigued by the sport and wanted to take myself to new heights."

It was around that time that Sanders' mom, Amanda, connected him with Harness Horse Youth Foundation Executive Director

Ellen Taylor. As part of its programming, the HHYF offers a camp in Goshen, New York, that includes several activities for kids interested in harness racing. Amanda had saved enough money to fly Dee to New York City to participate in the camp in 2019. But her support didn't stop there, as she made the more than 18-hour drive with her other three children from Mississippi to New York to pick Dee up at the airport and serve as his chauffeur during the seven-day camp.

"I didn't have a lot of money, but I wanted to make this happen for him," Amanda told the USTA's Rich Fisher in 2023. "He had some sponsors, and they laid everything out. I didn't have to pay for my hotel room or buy anything. It was an experience."

During the camp, Sanders networked with others in the industry, learned the ins and outs of horse care, visited Goshen Historic Track, and watched Lather Up pace a 1:46 mile and Forbidden Trade win the Hambletonian. Another highlight was teaming with one of his favorite drivers, Hall of Famer Tim Tetrick, and winning a race at the Meadowlands on Hambo Day.

"That experience was great," Sanders says. "It opened my eyes and made me want to take my involvement in harness racing more seriously. It showed me what the future might bring."

That germinated seed continued to grow.

"That experience had a really big impact on me. It made me think outside the box and made me want to take it to the next level," he says. "It actually made me take a leap of faith."

Leap of Faith

With that seed of a career in harness racing now a midsize plant, brothers Greg and Todd Luther provided the nurturing it needed to blossom. But Sanders didn't immediately take that leap of faith after graduating from high school.

Instead, he attended Blue Grass Community and Technical College in Kentucky as he considered a career as a veterinarian. When he discovered the college route didn't suit him, though, he returned to pursuing his harness racing dreams. Todd Luther, who trains horses owned by Greg, noticed Sanders' resume on Facebook and invited him to come to Ohio to discuss a job working for the Luther Stable at Winners Circle Training Center in South Bloomfield. It was time to take that leap of faith, Sanders thought.

"I always wanted to be a driver and trainer, and I was always intrigued by watching horses develop. So I said, 'Why not Ohio? Why not try something different?'" he says. "You don't know what you can become unless you try, and so that's what I did. I took a big leap of faith — I was 20 years old and had never really left Mississippi before and was by myself 12 hours away from home."

That leap of faith paid off, as Sanders moved to South Bloomfield and was hired immediately. He started working for the Luther brothers in 2023 and hasn't looked back.

"Working for the Luthers was a great experience. They're very good people who have been a blessing to me, and it just gave me a whole different feel and outlook of what can be done in this sport," he says. "I started training a horse by the name of Hysterical, and I got to drive in the Terry Holton Youth races, and it just took off from there."

Open to drivers between the ages of 16 and 29 with a Q/F license and contested at Ohio fair tracks, the Terry Holton Youth Driving Series allowed Sanders to start making a name for himself as a driver. He had five starts in the Holton Series in 2023, all with horses from the Luther stable, and recorded a pair of wins and two runner-up finishes before taking the final in the sulky with Larry Karr.

Sanders quintupled his number of driving starts the following year, going from seven to 35, and continued showcasing his skills in the Holton Series with a third-place finish followed by a pair of victories leading up to winning his second straight final, this time with Cant Stop Lou. That success really boosted his resume and exposure as an up-and-coming driver.

"It's so hard to get drives now because the trainers and owners already have their set drivers they prefer to use. That's OK, but for



the sport to keep growing, we have to have a new generation of people willing to step up because the current group is getting older,” Sanders says. “That series helps with that. It gives people the chance to watch young guys go at it, and it gives young guys a chance to have fun and sit behind a horse and go behind the gate and race against people their age and their caliber. I really love that series and hope it continues because it did wonders for me.”

Sanders continued driving in the Ohio fair circuit in 2025, finishing the year with two wins and two seconds and \$9,956 in earnings in 13 starts. But there was still something he wanted to cross off his wish list — a pari-mutuel victory. With that in mind, he bought 5-year-old gelded pacer Nine One Oh Six in January for \$6,200 from Burke Racing Stable and Weaver Brussemi. He drove that horse to a runner-up finish in an overnight race at Northfield Park Racino in his first start of the year in April, coming from last place and over 13 lengths back of the leader at the quarter pole to do so. That caught the attention of Dustin Arledge, trainer and co-owner of Hagrid, another horse racing that night. Ten days later, Sanders was in the bike qualifying Hagrid at Winners Circle Training Center.

“Dustin said, ‘This horse needs somebody like you with patience to get along with him,’ and gave me the chance to qualify him, and he qualified really well (in 1:57),” Sanders says.

Sanders proceeded to drive Hagrid in a trio of overnight races and a pair of qualifiers, all at Scioto Downs, but was unable to find the success he was seeking. Then came June 9. Back at Scioto, Hagrid and Sanders left from post two as a 51-1 longshot in race seven that night and scored an upset victory in 1:53.2.

“It felt amazing to cross that line,” Sanders says.

Hagrid paid \$104.60 to win. But more importantly, it was the first lifetime win for the sophomore gelded pacer and first pari-mutuel victory for Sanders.

“I needed that first win to feel like I could really do this, and now I feel like I can,” he says. “It’s amazing how far I’ve come these past few years from having never sat in a race bike to winning some fair races and getting my first pari-mutuel win.”

Thankful

Sanders is proud of how far he’s come in harness racing but is quick to thank everyone who has played a role in helping him achieve his dream. His appreciation starts with his family, including his mom, wife (Destiny), brother (Dylan), and cousin (Quan) as well as sisters (Madison and Cloei) and nephew (Dayton).

“They are huge supporters of me and mean a lot to me because they’ve really kept me going,” he says. “They’re really amazed by my progress because I came from nothing. But without them, I don’t think I would’ve made it this far because there have been many days I’ve wanted to give up.”

He is also hugely appreciative of the opportunities afforded him by the Luthers, as he was able to work with such standouts as Tarapasta, Why Not Now, Burnout, Prolific Fire, and Ohohoh Im On Fire. As of mid-July, those horses had combined for 76 career wins and nearly \$2.8 million in earnings.



Dee Sanders, Tim Tetrick, and Dee’s brother, Dylan
Photo: Amanda Fortune

“Greg and Todd Luther have had a really big impact on how far I’ve come. I told them that I aspired to be a trainer and driver but that it was all new to me, and they threw me out there and gave me a chance,” he says. “They gave me hope because I was training these great animals, and sometimes I even qualified them. When you get a chance to sit behind those types of animals, it feels pretty good.”

He is also grateful to the Bill Dailey Foundation for funding his racing colors, which are blue and white with a touch of pink as an homage to his favorite driver, Chris Page, and his late cousin, Alivia.

The Road Ahead

Sanders now lives in Groveport, Ohio, and works for the Ronnie Gillespie stable. Gillespie won the Ohio Triple Crown last year as trainer and driver of Big Ranger and, like Sanders, is a native Mississippian. Sanders admires everything his new boss has accomplished and describes him as an excellent mentor.

“Ronnie really gives me hope. He gets results every year, and I want to be like him,” he says. “He’s always been good, but now he’s got Grand Circuit horses and is really getting noticed.”

While he enjoys working for Gillespie, Sanders has bigger goals in mind.

“I really want to open up my own stable in October,” he says. “Unfortunately, I don’t have a truck right now, so I’m looking for a truck. If I get a truck, that will open up plenty of doors for me.”

Sanders also had plans to drive Nine One Oh Six throughout the rest of this season, but the horse was sidelined with a coffin bone injury. As of mid-July, Sanders’ career driving totals included 12 wins in 66 starts and nearly \$33,000 in earnings. He admits to taking a day-by-day approach, but former boss Todd Luther believes his future is bright.

“Dee is a great person to have in the barn — he has a great work ethic and is eager to learn,” Luther says. “When I first saw him in the race bike, I thought he looked like a natural, and he never fell short in the opportunities he had to drive. I think, with the right opportunity, he will no doubt be a force to be reckoned with.”

What once was just a seed has turned into an almost fully blossomed flower. All because of a leap of faith and plenty of support from others.

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Hard Work Pays Off

Polly Loney Succeeding as a Horsewoman, Student, and Golfer

By Wes Mayberry



When someone suggested the Nordon High School girls' golf team as the beneficiary for this year's inaugural Hunter Myers Memorial Golf Tournament, Amy Hollar was quick to support it.

"Unfortunately, the girls' golf team isn't at the top of the list when it comes to funding, so I thought it was perfect because I knew Hunter would've liked it too," says Hollar, the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association's track representative at Northfield Park Racino.

As if that wasn't reason enough, Northfield Park and Nordon High School have an impressive young woman tying them together — 17-year-old Polly Loney. A regular presence in the horse barn and a rising star on the golf course, Loney has made a name for herself in two sports, all while excelling academically. For Hollar, helping the NHS girls' golf team with additional funding as Loney enters her senior year was a no-brainer.

"She grew up around the barn, and she's doing so well in school and on the golf course. I couldn't be prouder of her," Hollar says. "I fully expect to one day say that I knew Madam President. That's how much I think of her."

That's high praise. But apt. While the presidency isn't on her radar, she has her sights set on playing collegiate golf and pursuing a career as a neuroscientist. Achieving those goals are fully within her grasp thanks to a work ethic and determination forged through her involvement in harness racing.

"When I'm in college, taking a break from the horses is really going to show me how much it did for me," Loney says. "It instills a work ethic in you that you never get rid of, and that pushes me forward with golf too because I've had such a background in working so hard."

Family Legacy

Loney is a fourth-generation horsewoman and has been working with horses her entire life with her parents, Brian and Renae. As of mid-July, Brian and Renae had a combined 3,122 career wins and over \$13 million in earnings as trainers, giving Polly strong role models in the industry.

"I see how hard my parents work, and it instills in me a work ethic where you overperform and do everything you need to do, and if it doesn't work, you do it 10 times better the next time," she says.

With those values serving as the bedrock of her formative years, she quickly immersed herself in the family business. She says she participated in horse shows before she could even walk and remembers helping with some tasks in the barn.

“One of my youngest memories was that I had a little pink wheelbarrow, and I would go in and do stalls with my parents, and I thought that was fun,” she says with a laugh.

That task isn’t so much fun anymore, but it’s part of the many duties Loney continues to help her parents with even as her responsibilities with school and golf have grown. She takes it all in stride, though, because being with the horses is something she loves. The on-track success is simply a bonus that rewards her family’s hard work.

“So many people think that you just send the horses out on the track, but there’s so much work that goes into it that not everybody realizes and appreciates,” she says. “I’ve done it my entire life, but recently, I really started to see how much work it truly is. So when the horses win, you see the work you’re doing behind the scenes paying off. It shows that what you’re doing is working, and you want to keep doing it.”

Loney has had her groom’s license from an early age and has been an owner since 2020. Over the years, she has co-owned the likes of Midnight Matt, Mother Of Dragons, Shrimp And Grits, and Twin B Stingray with her dad. She has loved all those horses, but Shrimp And Grits was a personal favorite.

“Shrimp And Grits was one of the best horses I’ve ever owned. He did so much for me and my family,” she says. “He was great to handle in the barn and was awesome on the track.”

Much of Loney’s involvement in harness racing is done behind the scenes, and she believes females are often overlooked in what is a male-dominated industry. She points to women such as Lauren Tritton — a 32-year-old driver with over \$2 million in career earnings — and Hollar as some of her role models, as they are impacting the sport in more visible ways.

“Lauren Tritton is out there driving in fields full of males, and seeing a woman that strong shows me and other young girls that we are allowed to be on a big stage,” Loney says. “And being around someone like Amy Hollar shows you how big a voice a woman can have in this industry.”



A young Polly Loney sits atop a horse alongside her mother, Renae



That’s why she encourages other young women to not shy away from playing an active role in the sport.

“Don’t be afraid to step in even though the sport is dominated by males,” she says. “Women are more powerful than they think and can have a big voice in the industry.”

Multi-talented

As Loney continues to make her mark in harness racing, she remains just as dedicated to her education and establishing herself as one of the better high school golfers in Ohio. Balancing all those commitments can be difficult at times, but she loves how accomplished it makes her feel at the end of each week.

Loney’s first serious foray into golf came when she was in eighth grade. She saw golf as a sport that fits her athletic profile.

“I started because I thought it would be easy because the ball is sitting still, and I don’t have good hand-eye coordination,” she says.

Loney initially learned under Nordon High School graduate and current Saginaw Valley State University golfer Christina Nagy and has since been playing under head coach Greg Harris at NHS.

“I love him so much,” she says of Harris. “Being around him really instilled the work ethic that I have, and even in the biggest moments, he’s making jokes and being lighthearted to show me that a tournament doesn’t define who you are.”

Loney has really grown as a golfer under Harris’ tutelage. She earned Most Improved Player honors as a sophomore and was named to



Polly Loney stands with her father, Brian (left), along with Nordonia High School girls golf head coach Greg Harris (right) and his son, Greg at the Hunter Myers Memorial Golf Tournament.

the All-Suburban League Second Team as a junior last season when NHS won the conference title. In June, she won the Penn Ohio Junior Golf NCJT Jim Dawson Match Play Championship at Punder-son State Park Golf Course with her dad serving as caddy. Now much is expected of her as she enters her senior season as the No. 1 seed and team captain at NHS. But she's ready for what her final year of high school golf will bring.

"It's bittersweet because it's my senior season, but I'm so excited to teach the new girls coming up," she says.

She's also eager to continue working to improve her distance off the tee, putting, and scoring average as she aims to qualify for the state tournament and ultimately earn a place on a collegiate golf roster. With plans to major in neuroscience and biology and wanting to stay close to home, she named The College of Wooster and Ohio Northern University as her top choices for the next step in her journey. The women's golf head coaches at both schools know she has what it takes to succeed in the classroom and on the course at the next level.

"Polly has been such a joy to talk to over the phone, and when I learned that she was involved in horses, I didn't question my efforts to recruit her," Ohio Northern's Chad Bucci says. "Growing up being around the Congress Quarter Horse show and a barrel rider myself, I know you can't hide behind anyone. You need to be accountable and have complete control of your effort and attitude in both sports, just like in real life, and you get that in Polly. She is also a young lady that people gravitate to, and that's a kid I want to represent Ohio Northern in the classroom and on the golf course."

Wooster's Dave Mottice has similar sentiments.

"Polly is a tremendous student-athlete," he says. "She excels not only on the course but in the classroom and her community and possesses the talent, work ethic, and mental toughness that we as college coaches value. Her golf game continues to improve, and she definitely has the potential to compete successfully at the collegiate level."

While harness racing may take a back seat to golf in college, Loney has no plans to relinquish her involvement with the family business.

"I'll definitely be at the barn when I come back on weekends and summer break," she says.

Hunter Myers Memorial

Under Hollar's stewardship, the horsemen and women of Northfield Park sponsor an annual golf outing to raise money for a worthy cause. This year, organizers christened the outing as the Hunter Myers Memorial Golf Tournament in honor of Myers, a popular and successful driver in the Northfield colony who passed away last year at age 27. The event is an extension of the goodwill and camaraderie Myers exhibited in his life, and since he enjoyed following Loney's golf career, her team made perfect sense as this year's beneficiary.

The Loney family has been affiliated with Northfield Park for several years, and Polly was ecstatic to learn that the funds raised at this year's outing would go to her high school golf team.

"Thinking about it was life-changing," she says, adding that the money would go towards equipment and team bonding activities.

This year's outing, held June 30 at Raccoon Hills Golf Course in Kent, Ohio, included lunch and dinner as well as prizes for the top team and players, a 50/50 drawing, and numerous gift baskets and other raffle items. Hollar was proud to say that 57 golfers and about 20 additional supporters braved the heat that day to help raise \$5,000.

"Horsemen always step up to the plate," Hollar says. "When I ask for prizes and donations for causes like this, I always get an overwhelming response, and that's all because of the horsemen's generosity."

Among those in attendance that day was last year's beneficiary, Emma Hershberger.

"She was going through leukemia treatments last year but felt well enough to come out and golf with us this year, and it was heartwarming to see her out there," Hollar says. "Hunter would've loved seeing her back out there on the course and enjoying her life."

Naturally, Loney was also present for the festivities, as were her parents and high school coach. She said she can't thank everyone enough for their efforts and generosity in helping her continue pursuing a multi-sport life.

"At the track, everybody is competitive. So for everyone to come together and be so lighthearted and do something that significant for our golf team is awesome," she says. "I love the people at the track and grew up with them. Seeing that we're all one big family and people stepping up to help when one of us is in need is awesome."

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Joey Kramp (kneeling, right) with competitors in the International Amateur Race

'An Opportunity I Wasn't Going to Say No to'

Joey Kramp Spends Memorable Week in Europe

By Wes Mayberry

Earlier this year, Joey Kramp was offered an opportunity he couldn't refuse.

"It just sounded like one of those opportunities that no matter what you have to do, you have to somehow figure out how to make it work," he says.

A weeklong trip to Europe and the chance to represent the United States in the 2026 International Amateur Race in Sweden? Kramp was all in.

"That was an opportunity I wasn't going to say no to," he says.

Kramp, a 34-year-old horseman from Northfield, Ohio, had done some international traveling before to places such as Canada and the Caribbean but had never been to Europe. So while he didn't know exactly what he was in for, he was excited. And he had some big plans of his own beyond the racetrack.

From Hockey to Harness Racing

Kramp was born in Akron, Ohio, but has spent most of his life in Northfield. He credits his dad, Joe, for introducing him to harness racing. As a trainer and driver, the elder Kramp boasted a combined 421 wins

and over \$1.8 million in earnings as of the end of July.

"He got into it when he was young in Bowling Green at the fairgrounds," the younger Kramp says of his father. "Ever since I was young, I remember going out to the barn with him."

Harness racing wasn't a true priority for him initially, though, as he had a greater passion for a different sport.

"I really fell in love with hockey and ended up playing hockey through college," he says. "That was one of the main reasons I ended

up going to the University of Akron because I knew I could play on their club team.”

At UA, Kramp studied engineering before switching to business, which led to a job at nearby Firestone Country Club. He parlayed that experience into an opportunity working for a golf course construction company and didn't end up completing his degree requirements. Instead, he used any time off from his job to help his dad with the horses.

“That's when I fell in love with it was helping him train the babies down,” he says. “I love seeing the babies progress and learn their jobs. The lightbulb goes off, and suddenly they know what they're doing.”

He later wanted to try his hand at driving and made his first purse start in 2022. He has since compiled a record of 14-32-39 in 266 starts with earnings of over \$178,000 following a win in the Great Lakes Amateur Driving Series at Northfield Park on Aug. 1.

While the sport has provided a number of memorable moments, owning and helping

his dad train Enforce The Law was particularly special. The Triumphant Caviar gelded trotter won the Buckeye Stallion Series Championship Final and Ohio Sires Stakes consolation in back-to-back starts as a sophomore in 2020 and is now 9 years old with 30 victories and over \$300,000 in earnings to his credit.

“We still have him,” Kramp says. “We broke him as a baby, and he's still the best horse we have in our barn. We got really lucky with that guy.”

Going Overseas

The European trip came at the invitation of fellow horseman Larry Ferrari. With an itinerary in place, Kramp and his girlfriend, Sarah Patrick, packed their bags and boarded a plane for a more than eight-hour flight from Cleveland to Munich, Germany. After a short layover, they had another two-hour flight to Stockholm, Sweden.

Kramp and Patrick arrived in Sweden on May 30 with a busy schedule ahead. Over the next seven days, Kramp was set to drive in three races in Sweden and one more in the Netherlands in addition to attending

other associated events and meeting with prominent European horsemen.

First up was the International Amateur Race at Solvalla Racecourse in Stockholm on May 31. Kramp arrived early enough the previous day to preview that track.

“I got to look at the track and watch some of the races to get a feel for the racing style, so I kind of knew what I was getting into,” he says.

During the drivers' meeting on race day, Kramp was instructed on all the rules, some of which were different than what he was accustomed to in the U.S.

“The whipping rules are way different over there, and the way they post parade is different,” he says.

Perhaps what stood out most, though, was the huge crowd in attendance that day for a race card that included one of the world's biggest trotting races, the Elitloppet.

“Seeing all the people in the stands, I got a little nervous. I was in the fourth race that day, and by that time, the stands were





packed,” Kramp says. “That’s probably the biggest crowd I’ll ever race in front of. I think I saw somewhere that they had the lowest turnout in 50-some years, and it was still over 15,000 people. It was pretty wild.”

While Kramp didn’t fare as well as he would’ve liked in his race, the day was still a memorable one as he got to witness former North American stakes star Allegiant win the Elitloppet in world-record fashion.

Kramp proceeded to get drives at Halmstad and Jägersro racetracks and visit with Swedish trainer and driver Johan Untersteiner before flying to Amsterdam, Netherlands, and taking a bus to Wolvega. The next day, he and his girlfriend enjoyed some free time walking the streets of Amsterdam and taking a canal boat tour of the city. Kramp participated in a horse clinic and met Dutch horsemen Paul Hagoort and Bas Crebas the following day. During his final full day in Europe, June 6, he drove in a race at Victoria Park Wolvega, giving him one last shot to reach the winner’s circle and bring some long-held plans to fruition.

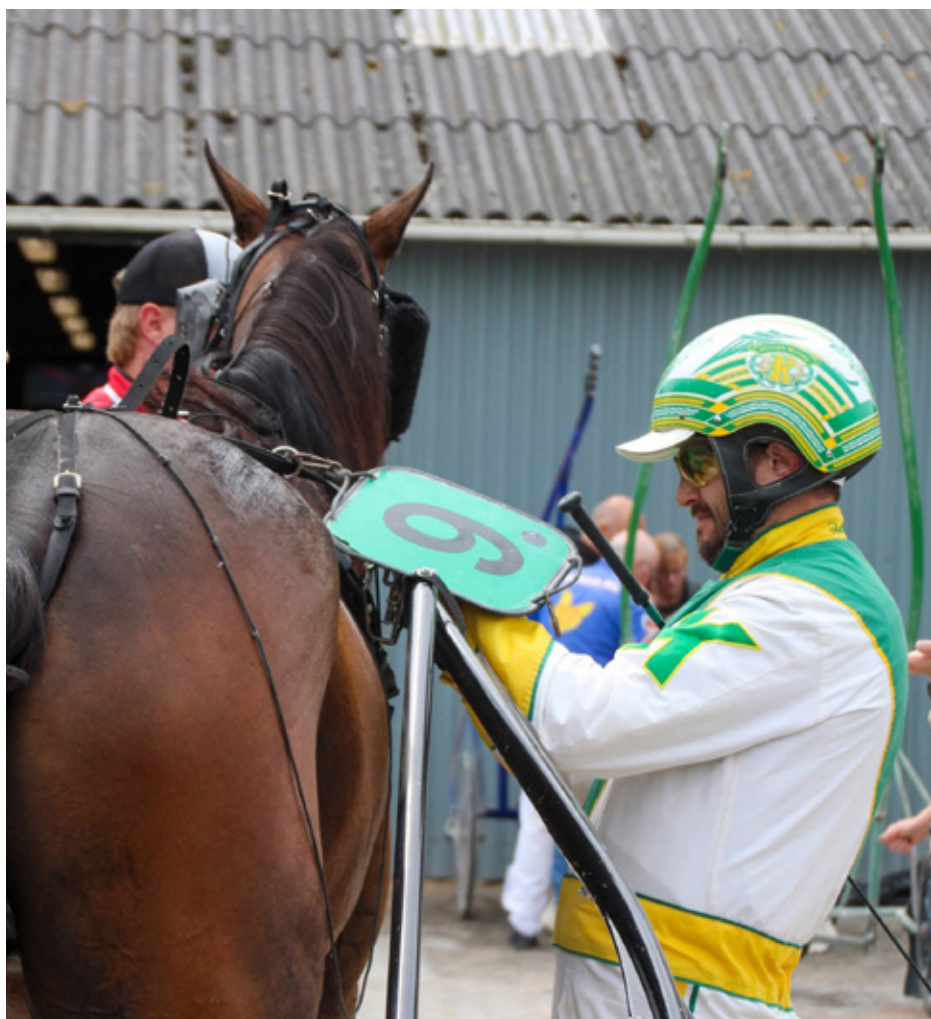
“As soon as I got asked to go on the trip, I asked my girlfriend to go with me, and I planned on proposing,” Kramp says. “During my drives, I had the ring in my boot thinking I’d hopefully get a win and end up proposing in the winner’s circle, but that didn’t work out. So I went to plan B.”

Plan B turned out to be just as special.

“Wolvega is a small horse-racing town, and there was a cobblestone road through the downtown area with horseshoes that light up at night,” he says. “I walked my girlfriend into the middle of the street and proposed to her.”

Kramp and Patrick departed Amsterdam on June 7 as a newly engaged couple, making the trip a highly memorable one. Looking back on that week in Europe, Kramp says the experience is something he’d definitely recommend to other amateur drivers as a tremendous learning opportunity.

“I’d tell others to go into it with an open mind and to take everything out of it that you can and ask all the questions you can ask because there are things I learned over there that I’m implementing in my barn now,” he says. “I really enjoyed it.”



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Equine Health Spotlight: EPM

By Wes Mayberry

Special D was a frequent visitor to the winner's circle early in his 3-year-old campaign in 2009. He opened the year winning six straight starts and seven of his first eight. But then things started to change.

"That horse was really nice early on, but I had to start adding earplugs and knee boots, and he ended up with two headpoles," says Brian Brown, who trained Special D at the time. "He wore none of that stuff and drove perfect in his early races, but he started getting sore. We would fix one thing on the right side, and then he'd look sore on the left side. We had a lot of money in vet expenses on that horse."

Brown says a veterinarian suggested treating Special D with Baycox medication, and the recovery was rather swift.

"In about three days, that horse started to turn the corner, and after maybe 10 days, he had improved a lot," Brown says.

A week after being scratched from an overnight race at Northfield Park, the gelding finished fourth in a leg of the Ohio Sires Stakes and ended up making the OSS final for sophomore colt pacers. If not for some bad luck, he might've won that race.

"He was second over and looked like he was going to be a sure winner, but coming off the

last turn, the horse in front of him made a break and took him out," Brown remembers.

Special D wound up finishing fourth that night but found his way back to the winner's circle in his next start, the Ohio Breeders Championship at Delaware. He went on to race two more years, finishing his career in 2011 with 13 wins and \$82,586 in earnings before retiring to become a riding horse.

Later, Brown noticed similar concerning symptoms in another of his trainees, Oakwoodannabella IR. He started training her in August of her sophomore season in 2021, and she closed that year with a 4-2-2 record and \$109,498 in earnings in eight starts. But she started acting differently as a 4-year-old.

"She was hard to jog and hard to hold going the slower training miles," Brown says.

Baycox was again the recommended treatment and proved just as effective as it had with Special D, as Oakwoodannabella IR recorded five wins and over \$87,000 in

earnings in 15 starts during her 4-year-old campaign.

So, what exactly ailed Special D and Oakwoodannabella IR? It was determined to be Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM).

According to Dr. Laura Hostnik, associate professor of equine internal medicine at The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, EPM is a parasitic infection that affects the central nervous system of horses. It is caused by exposure to one of two parasites, *Sarcocystis neurona* or *Neospora hughesii*, with the former being more common in Ohio. Hostnik says exposure to these parasites is quite common while noticeable symptoms are rare.

"In Ohio, likely around 50% or more of horses have exposure to the parasite that causes EPM, but actual infection causing neurologic symptoms only occurs in about 0.1 to 0.2% of those exposures," she says, adding that the high exposure rate can make EPM difficult to diagnose. "Since most horses have been exposed to EPM, a positive blood test is not



Special D **Photo:** Conrad Photo



Oakwoodannabella IR **Photo:** Conrad Photo

very predictive of actual infection within the nervous system."

In lieu of a blood test, Hostnik suggests other methods of determining an official EPM diagnosis.

"There are different types of antibody tests that can be performed on both blood and spinal fluid, which have varying levels of accuracy," she says. "Your veterinarian can help best determine the most accurate test for your horse and may also recommend ruling out other causes of neurologic disease that may be more likely or better support a diagnosis of EPM. However, it is generally not recommended to test horses that are not showing neurologic signs."

According to Hostnik, the parasite that causes EPM is passed in opossum feces, which is then ingested by the horse through contaminated pasture or other food and water sources. After ingestion, the parasite can migrate from the intestine into random locations within the central nervous system, including the brain and spinal cord, which causes inflammation and can ultimately lead to a variety of neurologic symptoms.

"The most common signs are incoordination, weakness, and muscle loss because the organism tends to migrate to the spinal cord," Hostnik says. "However, because the organ-

ism can travel to and affect random locations, signs tend to be asymmetric, and areas of the brain or the nerves of the head and face can also be affected in some cases."

To try to prevent infection and resulting symptoms, Hostnik recommends strategies that reduce the risk factors associated with EPM.

"Effective prevention strategies include reducing wildlife access to horse pastures and stalls and keeping grain and forages in enclosed areas, and feeding off the ground and providing separate water sources for horses may decrease the likelihood of exposure to opossum feces," Hostnik says. "Optimizing your horse's immunity by maintaining overall health and reducing stress may also prevent the development of clinical signs, as known risk factors for development of EPM include heavy exercise, transport, concurrent illness, and foaling."

Hostnik adds that intermittent administration of anti-protozoal medications can be helpful in reducing or preventing clinical disease in high-risk environments but notes that medication cost and the development of resistance should be considered before doing so.

Following a diagnosis of EPM, treatment often entails the use of oral anti-protozoal

medications that penetrate the central nervous system to target and kill the parasite. If such treatments prove ineffective, Hostnik recommends investigating other possible causes of the horse's neurologic symptoms and poor performance such as those involving the respiratory, cardiac, or musculoskeletal systems.

"If your horse is diagnosed with EPM, treatment can be effective and result in a return to racing depending on the clinical signs and response to treatment," she says. "However, if your horse is not responding to treatment, it may be useful to explore additional diagnostics."

Hostnik says approximately 70% of horses diagnosed with EPM improve within two months, but treatment is often administered for up to several months to see complete resolution of symptoms. While some cases of EPM can be career-ending, the good news is that recovery stories such as those of Special D and Oakwoodannabella IR are more typical.

"Prognosis for a return to racing depends on the severity of neurologic signs, but improvement is common and a full recovery is possible," Hostnik says.

'The People Around Me are What Made Me Successful'

Brent Reitz Reflects on Career Upon Retirement from Northfield Park

By Bob Roberts



As it turns out, Cleveland was never a one-horse pari-mutuel town for Brent Reitz.

For equine balance, he's worked both breeds on both sides of Ohio State Route 8 on the city's east side. Reitz started his racing career with Thistledown and recently ended it with trotters and pacers at Northfield Park. His retirement began on July 10.

Reitz is just the third person to be the general manager of both a harness and a Thoroughbred track in Ohio. Dick Wilson was the first to do so. He managed Northfield Park and then Beulah Park. Mark Loewe was next, calling the shots (at the same time, no less) at both Dayton Raceway and Mahoning Valley Race Course.

Reitz, 64, didn't step down before sharing his career path and highlights as well as his views and visions for racing in the Buckeye State.

His horse racing career began at Thistledown in 1992. He previously spent six years in the sales department of the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers, which ended after a conversation with Cavs' legendary play-by-play announcer Joe Tait.

"He asked me if I ever considered leaving the team," Reitz says. "He knew I wanted to get into sports management and said he had a guy he wanted me to meet. It was Thistledown general manager Steve Sexton. I met him at the track, and he offered me a job as the head of sales and marketing. Less than two years later, Sexton left to go to Lone Star Park in Texas. I stayed on, and in 2006, I became assistant general manager. Bill Murphy, the GM, then left to become the head

of Gulfstream Park, and I became the Thistledown general manager in 2008."

Reitz's run as the head person at the Thoroughbred track, located just eight miles north of Northfield Park, included keeping a stiff upper lip when Magna-owned Thistledown filed for bankruptcy. His stay ended in 2011 when he was approached by Brock Milstein, owner of the harness half-miler.

"Thistledown was put up for sale, and Brock became a prospective buyer. He came for a tour of the plant, and that's the first time I met him," Reitz says. "Caesars Palace ended up buying the place, and things didn't go the way I thought they would go. I thought it was then time to start looking for another job."

Reitz inquired about working for the Ohio State Racing Commission. It was an inquiry that alerted Milstein of Reitz's availability. The timing was right because long-time Northfield general manager Tom Aldrich was about to retire.

"We met at a Starbucks in Beachwood, and he asked me to come work for him," says Reitz, who insisted on speaking to Aldrich first. "I wasn't going to come in here and stab him. I met with Tom, and he told me this was a great company and that I should join it."

Reitz became Northfield's vice president of operations. Two years later, in March of 2013, he was named the track's vice president and general manager. He enjoyed a run of over 13 years as Northfield's day-to-day operator.

"It would be hard to find a nicer guy in racing," says former Thistledown and Gulfstream general manager Bill Murphy, now an executive with Xpressbet.

As for the difference between Thoroughbred and harness racing as viewed from the general manager's office, Reitz points to the history of harness racing.

"It's more grassroots, has a family feeling to it," he says. "There's a lot of family involvement. They come to the races, they hang out on the apron, and they do our events and promotions. I saw that on big days at Thistledown, but harness horsemen are outstanding to work with. You couldn't find a better guy than Frank Fraas, the OHHA executive director."

As for the future of harness racing in Ohio, Reitz is confident of a long and successful run.

"I think the sport is as strong as can be. I really do," he says. "With all these fairs, and Northfield having its niche, and Scioto Downs having the Breeders Crown, we just keep plugging along. We get over 100 shippers a night racing here."

Reitz has heard from fans who fear that video lottery terminal revenues will be divorced from racing, thus deflating purses, but he doesn't buy it.

"I don't see it happening, at least not on this (the harness) end of it," he says. "If the harness end stays in it, doesn't that mean the Thoroughbreds will stay in it? I hope so. Thistledown seems to be doing OK. I think we're lucky up here to have two tracks going. We combine for 300 days of live racing."

Reitz, who admits he's never ridden a horse, not even petted one, whetted his appetite for racing when he was a student at Bowling Green State University.

"We would go to Raceway Park in Toledo, and I believe we also drove up to Windsor Raceway in Canada," he says. "Those were the days when you didn't need a passport to get over the bridge or the tunnel from Detroit."

Once employed by the racing industry, he quickly gained respect for those who toil in the backstretch barn area.

"Nobody realizes how hard they work," he says. "Man, I respect the hell out of those people. They are here at five in the morning, they are gone by 10 and then back at night for racing, up to midnight."

Reitz doesn't need much time to reveal what he'll miss most about giving up his front office chair.

"No doubt about it, it's the team," he says. "I was blessed at Thistledown with a great team, friends I still have today, and then here. To think about coming in, I was the outside guy. You're talking about

people that were here 20 to 25 years, some 55 years, and they all welcomed me with open arms. The people around me are what made me successful."

As for advice for racing as he heads for the door, Reitz says, "My biggest problem with horse racing is that it needs to be promoted. I think it needs to have marketing behind it, and I think you need to talk to these casino companies who own these tracks to get things done."

As for his retirement plans?

"I love to cook, so my wife, Caroline, is going to get a break," he says. "We like to do small trips, visit a casino or two, perhaps go to a farm market."

But not on a Tuesday.

Reitz, even in retirement, has agreed to work one day a week at Northfield.

That's what can happen when there's 34 years of racing in your blood.



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‘Something Different’

Isowantapetrock is Making Waves for Standardbreds

By Dot Morgan



Isowantapetrock has proven to be an outstanding ambassador for Standardbreds, both on the racetrack and under saddle.

Bred by Midland Acres, Robert Schmitz, and John Sugar, “Iso” was purchased as a yearling for \$35,000 by partners Kyle Robinson, David Hollis, Country Club Acres, and AWS Stables. Brian Brown trained the classy son of Pet Rock, who competed successfully in the Buckeye Stallion Series, winning a leg and finishing second in the final during his 2-year-old season. Unfortunately, an injury ended Iso’s stakes aspirations, and training duties were subsequently shifted to Brown’s brother-in-law, Calvin “Buck” Hollar, at Northfield Park.

Hollar and his wife, Amy, managed the rest of Iso’s six-year racing career for the remaining partners, Robinson and Hollis. During

the winter of 2025, nagging soreness finally led to the decision to retire him to New Vocations.

“Buck had warned Kyle and David a few months earlier that it was getting close to time to retire the gelding,” Amy Hollar shares. “He stressed that Iso needed to remain sound enough to enjoy a life after racing.”

Iso continued to reveal his class at New Vocations.

“He carried himself so well and was a lovely mover,” trainer Bridget Heasley says. “Big, sweet, and pretty — he was definitely show horse material.”

Jennifer Pattillo brought a rich equestrian background to her resume that included hunter/jumpers, eventing, endurance, polocrosse, and cutting. But these days, her

passion was camping and trail riding. After seeing Iso’s online profile, she recognized his quality and decided to take the leap and adopt him.

“Getting a horse sight unseen was naturally a little nerve-wracking,” Pattillo admits. “But when Iso stepped off the trailer, he was just so calm and sweet. You immediately got the feeling that everything was going to be OK.”

Pattillo chose the nickname “Dan” for Iso in honor of a dear and wise horseman friend who had passed away. As his tendon injury continued to heal, the two built confidence together during long walks around the farm. It wasn’t long before Dan showed Pattillo just how deeply he had bonded with her.

“I showed up at the barn one day and started talking with a couple of ladies in the aisleway. Dan’s stall was right there, and even though I had greeted him, I hadn’t gone over to

pet him like I usually did. After a couple of minutes, while I was still talking, Dan started tossing his head and pacing in his stall,” she says. “Before I could walk over, he grabbed the strap of the stall-front storage bag and flung it off the door. Then he stuck his hindquarters through the window and just stared me down, as if to say, ‘Hello!’”

In addition to being exceptionally intelligent, Dan is remarkably kind and deeply in tune with both his people and his pasture mates, Pattillo says.

“My older gelding, Goose, is losing his eyesight,” she says. “Every day we’ve watched Dan not only wait at the gate for Goose to be turned out, but he also stays close to Goose, stopping to wait whenever Goose falls behind.”

When Pattillo injured her back and missed riding for a week, Dan, again, demonstrated his sensitivity.

“Once I got in the saddle and asked him to walk, I realized he was barely moving. He usually has a long-strided, loose, ground-covering walk, but that day he was taking tiny baby steps,” she says. “He stayed that way for the entire two laps we made around the barn area. Every little dip and every turn, he was so careful. He stayed quiet and soft until I got off.

“Everyone who meets Dan seems to come away smiling, whether it’s because of his looks or his personality,” Pattillo continues. “In a sea of Quarter Horses, Paints, Thoroughbreds, and other breeds, you can always pick him out in the pasture because he’s something different. We just don’t see many Standardbreds here in Alabama.”

Even the veterinarians are surprised, often assuming Dan is a Warmblood.

“One vet didn’t believe me when I told him he was a Standardbred and had to go look for his freeze brand as proof,” Pattillo says, laughing. “But afterward, they always have positive things to say about the breed — how smart, tough, and versatile they are. I haven’t heard one negative thing yet.

“Most horses, when you look at them, you see hunter, jumper, western...just one discipline. But Standardbreds can be so many disciplines at once. Dan is already showing folks in our area how wonderful this breed is. My goal is to continue that.”

Photos: Jeremy Villar



20 Questions with **Vernon Beachy**



1. Early in your life, were your parents or any of your older relatives involved in harness racing?

None of my family at all. I was raised in a cabinet shop. My dad builds custom cabinets. I grew up Amish, and that's what he did.

2. Do you have a remembrance of harness racing at an early age?

When I was 10 or 11, my dad took us to Harrington Raceway, and I saw qualifiers for the first time, and I was just amazed. That got my attention and always had my interest.

3. What led to you having a career in racing?

I always had an interest in horses. I started buying and selling buggy horses when I was younger, and we went to the racetracks and got introduced to racing horses. I later worked for Henry Westbrook Jr. at a little farm about six miles from where I grew up in Richfield Springs, New York. I used to drive a horse and buggy over there every day, and I was mainly a stall cleaner. We did farm work and made hay and raised crops. He started letting me jog and train, and that's where I fell in love with it.

4. What were your emotions when you first got to jog and train a horse?

I remember thinking that it was a lot different than what I grew up with and that going fast was fun. There's a lot of work involved in racing horses, and I loved being more hands-on with the horses.

5. Do you remember your very first training win with Mr Sigle's Dream?

That was a horse at Monticello. It was cold, and I drove three hours one way to get there.

6. When did you decide to make the move to Ohio?

2019. It was during Covid. New York wasn't giving any indication of when we would get back to racing. For a few years, I had played with the idea of moving to Ohio because I thought there would be more opportunities for trainers to train young horses. So when Covid hit, I thought, "This is the time. I'm going."

7. Your first win as a driver occurred at Northfield on June 9, 2021, with Big Sky Rocket. Why did you give up driving on a regular basis?

I just enjoy training a lot more than I do driving.

8. Your career really got a boost when you purchased a filly named Allegiant. How did that purchase come about?

I had horses for Ryan Smith. He was in the breeding business at the time and always looked for fillies that he could race and have breeding potential at the end. We went to Lexington and bought a couple, but we still wanted a couple more out-of-state horses that we could race and then breed afterwards. So we went to Harrisburg, and that's the horse we both liked, and we ended up being able to purchase her, and the rest is history. We bought her for \$50,000.

9. Was it a difficult decision to sell her?

For sure. She was a career-changing kind of horse. In an ideal world, you want her to live in your backyard the rest of her life, but when they're that good, there's just so much at stake and anything can happen. We thought she would get sold to a broodmare farm, but she ended up going a different route. She sold for \$925,000 at the sale at Mount Hope.

10. You continue to follow her career. Did you watch her win the Elitloppet this year?

Yes. I don't know if there's words to describe how I felt. Obviously, you're happy to see that a horse that you played a part in its life win that race.

11. You have a farm and training center in New Philadelphia. Why did you choose that area?

The reason we chose New Philadelphia was because that's where Ryan Smith is located, and we thought it was fairly centrally located.

12. You have a five-eighths-mile training track on the farm?

Yes. We wanted to put a bigger track in because it's easier to keep horses sound on a bigger track.

13. Do you have a favorite racetrack?

My favorite place to race is The Meadows. I like the track, the paddock, and the people, and it's a really good place to race young horses.

14. Do you have a favorite sport or team to watch on TV?

I don't miss a Green Bay Packers game. When I left the Amish, I had a cable TV, and a friend asked if he could come over and watch the Cowboys. They were playing the Packers, and Randall Cobb made an unbelievable catch in the middle of the field, and I've been a Packers fan ever since.

15. Is there anything else you love to do?

I golf when I have time.

16. Do you have a favorite food or restaurant?

There's a place in town called Craft. That's my go-to place.

17. Do you ever take a vacation?

I used to go to Fort Lauderdale for a week in the winter, but I haven't done that the past couple years.

18. Is there a race that you want to win more than any other?

The Hambletonian. I'd even take the Oaks.

19. Do you have a preference between trotters or pacers?

I like trotters more.

20. What is on your bucket list outside of racing?

I would really like to go to Alaska and go on a moose hunt and go to Colorado and elk hunt.

OHIO BREEDERS AWARD REQUIREMENTS

Mares registered in 2021 (Foals of 2022)

Mare registration date 11/30/21

Foal Born 2022

Membership Required

Mares registered in 2022 (Foals of 2023)

Mare registration date 11/30/22

Foal Born 2023

Membership Required

Mares registered in 2023 (Foals of 2024)

Mare registration date 11/30/23

Foal Born 2024

Membership Required

Mares registered in 2024 (Foals of 2025)

Mare registration date 11/30/24

Foal Born 2025

Membership Required

Mares registered in 2025 (Foals of 2026)

Mare registration date 11/30/25

Foal Born 2026

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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Be There!

BY ROGER E. HUSTON



The county fair season in Ohio is well underway for 2026. As of this writing, 20 fairs have completed their racing programs. When the season is completed at the Fairfield County Fair in Lancaster, we will have covered a total of 66.

The fairs are so important to the development of young talent, both human and equine. Many of the top drivers in the sport got their first win at a county fair. Even many announcers begin their careers at a county fair as I did in 1960 at the Warren County Fair.

Driver Chris Page got his first win at the Knox County Fair and his 8,000th at Scioto Downs. As of Aug. 7, seven individuals had recorded their first winning drives this year at the fairs — Michael Miller at the Trumbull County Fair, Alex Woolums and Joshua Rowe at the Fayette County Fair, Noah Newman at the Lake County Fair, Kristina Smith at the Union County Fair, and Stephen Moody Jr. and Amelia Smith at the Greene County Fair.

In the first 20 fairs, we saw 411 races contested with an average of 20.55 per fair. That number will grow to more than 1,500 races for the year.

It should be noted that there has been one dead heat, which took place at the Franklin County Fair. I point this out as the number of wins by drivers and trainers will be more than races contested.

There have been 93 different winning drivers through 20 fairs this year. Hank LeVan leads with 59 wins so far. The record for drivers is 166 in 2025. If Hank could continue to win at his current rate, the record could be broken.

By the way, there have been 40 drivers who have recorded just one win so far.

Winning trainers have a larger number, as 140 have recorded wins with LeVan leading the way with 56 victories. The record, set last year, is 112, so LeVan is on pace to break that record as well. There have been 67 trainers with single wins this year.

On a personal note, I missed the Columbiana, Greene, and Athens County fairs this year as I was traveling to Ireland and Wales for the Vincent Delaney Memorial Weekend. In Ohio, the fair schedule is established according to the date of Labor Day, but overseas they race the same week each year.

I am on schedule for the Meigs, Darke, Allen, Mahoning, Morgan, Wayne, Delaware, and Coshocton county fairs.

As I like to say, if there is a county fair near you, **Be There!**

Thank You to our 2026 PACER Contributors

OHHA Pacesetters as of 8/5/26

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OHHA Nominating Committee Announces Candidates for 2027 Board Terms

The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association Nominating Committee has announced its slate of candidates for three-year terms on the OHHA Board of Directors beginning in 2027. These individuals were selected based on their dedication to harness racing in Ohio, leadership qualities, and commitment to representing the interests of OHHA members.

The following candidates have been nominated by the committee:

President — Scott Mogan

Owners — John Melsheimer, Steve Zeehandelar, Rusty Vorhees

Breeders — Senena Esty, Laurie Gallatin, Brad Wallace

Trainers/Drivers — Ryan Holton, Hank LeVan, Mark Winters

OHHA members have the opportunity to nominate additional candidates. Members in good standing who reside in Ohio are invited to seek election and play an active role in shaping the future of harness racing in the Buckeye State.

The OHHA encourages all members to participate in the nomination and election process to ensure that the board of directors continues to reflect the values and priorities of the harness horsemen and women of Ohio.

For more information on the nomination and election process, contact the OHHA office at 614-221-3650.

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HELP US RECONNECT

The Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association is looking for updated contact information for the following people. If you know their whereabouts, please contact our office at **614-221-3650** or ask them to contact the OHHA.

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Cardington, Ohio

DONALD BEARD
Kent, Ohio

COURTNEY BEATTY
Xenia, Ohio

CHERYL BEST
Northfield, Ohio

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