

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

The **BEST** first-timers' guide to betting on—and winning at—the races you'll **EVER** encounter

WELCOME TO THE RACES!

- If you're new to the **sport** of harness racing, there's a good chance you're new to the **game** of pari-mutuel wagering, too.
- Don't let all the numbers and statistics in the racing program and on the tote board intimidate you—**they're your keys** to a better shot at **winning** at the races!
- This PowerPoint presentation, while it can't be as interactive as a trusted friend who just happens to be a seasoned racetracker, will walk you through some key things to look for to make your first time at the races a lot less confusing, a lot more fun, and hopefully **PROFITABLE!**

THE SPORT OF HARNESS RACING

Ah, the majesty of the Standardbred!

Also, how to determine which Standardbred of
a given group is fastest so we can make

WINNING WAGERS

HOW IS HARNESS RACING SIMILAR TO “THE GALLOPS”?

- Most simply, horses travel from Point A to Point B, with the horse reaching Point B first winning the race—and the owner, trainer, and on-course human teammate (jockey or driver) earning the largest share of the **purse**.
- Horses are grouped in races according to **gait, age, sex,** and **comparable ability**, with better horses racing against each other for larger purses. While top three-year-old Thoroughbreds race in the Kentucky Derby and other marquee races, Standardbreds (harness horses) have the **Hambletonian**, the **Meadowlands Pace**, and other national featured events: just the same.

HOW IS HARNESS RACING DIFFERENT FROM “THE GALLOPS”?

- Standardbreds **do not run**—at least, they’re not supposed to. Races are contested on one of two gaits: **pacing** (both left legs move together, then both right legs) or **trotting** (the legs diagonal from each other move together). A horse must stay **on gait** through the race, and if it **breaks stride** into a gallop, it must lose ground and regain its proper gait before advancing again.
- A vast majority of harness races are conducted at the same distance: **one mile**. This is one fewer variable that you have to consider when handicapping harness races!
- Thoroughbreds are **ridden by jockeys**; Standardbreds are **driven by drivers**.

PACING VERSUS TROTTING

- Roughly four-fifths of harness races are contested by **pacers**—horses that compete on a lateral gait. A pacer's left legs move simultaneously, alternating with their right legs moving simultaneously.
- While **pacing** is not a natural gait, it is the faster of the two gaits. Top pacers can cover one mile in times **faster than 1:50**. To help pacers stay on gait at race speeds, almost all pacers wear **hopples**—looped straps that guide the legs on either side to move together.
- **Trotters** make up a smaller portion of the Standardbred population in North America, as training them to maintain a diagonal gait at top speed requires more skill and more patience. However, the best trotters are justly rewarded through an equal amount of prestigious races as the pacers are availed.

CLASS

- Horses race against other horses of similar ability, and can move up and down in **class** based on recent performance.
- Much like a baseball player works his way through Rookie League, Class A, Class AA, and Class AAA on his way up to the major leagues, horses begin their careers racing against other horses which have never won a race, and advance to the next level after proving his/her ability on the racetrack.



CLASS

- Horses work their way up through the class ladder in the same manner a baseball player does.
- Each level sees the competition get tougher, but the reward is greater in the form of higher purses for each step up.

OPEN/STAKES

NW 6/100K

NW 4/60K

NW 3/40K

NW 2/20K

NW 1 RACE

MAJOR LEAGUE
NY METS

AAA
LAS VEGAS

AA
BINGHAMTON

A (ADVANCED)
ST. LUCIE

A
SAVANNAH

A (SHORT SEASON)
BROOKLYN

CLASS

While “non-winners of X races” classes only allow for horses to move up in class, horses will often make lateral moves to other types of races to enable them to eventually drop in class for a better chance to win.

OPEN/STAKES

NW 6/100K

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NW 1 RACE

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BROOKLYN

TYPES OF RACES

- “**Non-winners of X races or \$Y lifetime**” – fairly straightforward. If a horse has won the prescribed number of races **and** the amount of money, it has to move up in class.
- “**Non-winners of \$X in last Y starts**” – deals with earnings like the first type, but on a more short-term basis. Older horses and horses that have won more races than the top lifetime class allows will often race in these classes, and can move up and down.
- **Claiming races** – Horses entered into claiming races can be claimed (purchased) out of the race. This insures races will be competitive by deterring owners and trainers from putting horses in easier races and risking losing the horse for less money than it is worth.
- **Classified races** – Horses are moved up and down in class by the race secretary, based on recent performance.
- **Stakes races** – The best of the best at each gait, age, and sex.

TYPES OF RACES, ILLUSTRATED

CLAIMING

CLM50K
CLM40K
CLM30K
CLM25K
CLM20K
CLM15K
CLM12.5K
CLM10K

CLASSIFIED

OPEN/STAKES

A-1
A-2
A-3
B-1
B-2
B-3
C-1
C-2
C-3

NW \$

OPEN/STAKES

NW 25K L5
NW 17.5K L5
NW 12.5K L5
NW 8K L5
NW 5K L5

NW RACES

OPEN/STAKES

NW 6/100K
NW 4/60K
NW 3/40K
NW 2/20K
NW 1 RACE

HOW DO I COMPARE CLASSES?

- It is easiest to track class movement in horses which have raced in the same type of race in recent efforts.
- For horses that have raced at different tracks or in different types of races recently, **directly comparing the purses** of past races with each other and to today's race will often serve well to make the class comparison.
- **REMEMBER!** Don't just take into account the the highest class each horse has raced in, but make note of the highest class in which each horse has **raced well** when making your selections.

TIME

- Better horses in higher classes tend to go **faster miles**, but that's not always the case.
- The program shows the split ($\frac{1}{4}$ mile, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile) and final (full mile) times for the **leader** in each race, as well as each horse's **individual final time** and **individual last quarter mile**.
- **ADVANCED:** Often a telltale sign of a horse's ability can be found in their final three-quarters time. Take the **leader's $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile time** (reported down to the fifth of a second), **add** one fifth of a second for **each length** the horse was behind at the $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile chart call, and **subtract** that total number from the horse's **individual final time**.

RACING STYLE

- Some horses like to set the pace, while others like to race from behind.
- If a lot of horses in a race are best as pacesetters and all make aggressive moves early, this could set up better for a horse racing from the **pocket**—the spot right behind the leader, or for a stalker or closer who accelerates late after tracking **cover**—drafting behind other advancing horses.
- If only one or two horses in a race prefer to be in the lead, the initial times could be slower, leading to a short sprint for the finish at the end of the race, with the advantage being to those in front.
- Give extra consideration to horses that covered extra ground through the race, and sustained progress or held even late.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

- Good **trainers** and good **drivers** consistently get **good results**.
- A horse that is partnered with a **better driver** from its last start (drivers are nominated at time of entry, and if a driver is nominated on multiple horses, they choose which horse to drive) can often experience an **improved performance**, as the talent of a driver in negotiating a favorable trip and sustaining speed is instrumental in a good performance. Watch for horses that were driven by drivers not in the top 5 in their last start, but driven by top 5 drivers in today's race.
- In claiming races, when horses are **claimed** (purchased), they race for a **different trainer** after being claimed. If a horse is making its **first or second start** for a new trainer with strong statistics, give this horse special consideration, too.

GOOD LUCK! (AND WE MEAN IT!)

When we say “have fun and win money”, **we mean it!** We want you to make educated wagers (hence this lesson in our sport and our game), and we want you to cash on those wagers, because **winning is FUN!**

Remember, you’re betting against each other, **not the track.** (So we really do want you to have a profitable night at the races.)