BIG M TO ONCE AGAIN GO NATIONAL ON FOX SPORTS

The Meadowlands’ biggest stakes races of 2024 will again be televised live on the networks of Fox Sports thanks to a partnership with the television department at the New York Racing Association as part of its “America’s Day at the Races” broadcasts.

“Working with a first-class TV team like the one at the NYRA has been something beneficial to The Meadowlands and all of harness racing,” said Meadowlands Chief Operating Officer and General Manager Jason Settlemoir. “We feel that showing our biggest races to a national audience is something we are convinced is making Thoroughbred fans into harness fans, and that’s something that’s good for both industries.”

There will be nine shows from The Meadowlands during the year, and only two of them (as of now) will include coverage of Thoroughbred racing (Aug. 3 and Oct. 18). Jessica Otten of Big M TV and Gabe Prewitt of the Red Mile will be back as the on-camera talent onsite, joining Acacia Clement and Paul Verderosa of the NYRA, who will be in the studio. Additional broadcasts from harness venues other than The Meadowlands will be added in the coming weeks.

Here is the tentative schedule for The Big M broadcasts with the marquee event that will be shown. Where not listed, specific networks — Fox, FS1 or FS2 — will be determined:

May 18: Cutler, 9-11 p.m. (FS2)
July 6: Graduate finals/Meadowlands Pace eliminations, 8-11 p.m. (FS2)
July 13: Meadowlands Pace final, 8-11 p.m. (TBD)
Aug. 3: Hambletonian, 1-7 p.m. (TBD)
Oct. 18: Breeders Crown eliminations, 1-6 p.m. (TBD)
Oct. 19: Breeders Crown eliminations, 8-11 p.m. (TBD)
Oct. 25: Breeders Crown finals, 8-11 p.m. (TBD)
Oct. 26: Breeders Crown finals, 8-11 p.m. (TBD)
Nov. 30: Fall Final Four, 8-11 p.m. (TBD)

“As America’s Day at the Races continues to grow and evolve, Fox Sports and NYRA are thrilled to continue our partnership with The Meadowlands in 2024,” said NYRA Sr. Director of TV Broadcast Operations Eric Donovan. “Jeff Gural and Jason Settlemoir have been instrumental in recognizing the importance of live national television coverage for harness racing and we look forward to presenting marquee events from The Meadowlands, including the 2024 Breeders Crown.”

NYRA and Fox Sports were honored by the U.S. Harness Writers Association with the President’s Award as well as the Sam McKee Award for excellence in broadcasting. Both awards recognized overall commitment to the sport of harness racing in 2023, when America’s Day at the Races aired more than 70 hours of live coverage and analysis, including the Breeders Crown and Hambletonian.
STACY CHIODO REPLACES JACQUIE INGRASSIA AS USTA DISTRICT 12 DIRECTOR

U.S. Trotting Association District 12 Chairperson Jeff Gregory has informed the Association that trainer/driver Stacy Chiodo has been selected to serve the remainder of Jacquie Ingrassia’s term on the Board of Directors, which will expire in 2025.

Ingrassia signed for Chiodo’s license when she first started and has served as a role model for her.

“Jacquie had mentioned it to me, told me she was thinking of retiring from the position and asked me if I’d be interested,” said Chiodo. “She felt I’d be a good candidate because I own, train, drive, and breed. I’m honored. It means a lot to me because I really looked up to her for what she accomplished as a woman.”

Chiodo, who became the first female driver to break the 1:50 barrier when she guided Mighty Young Joe to a 1:49.3 victory at The Meadowlands on May 3, 2014, assumed her post as director in late March.

Her interest in horses began at Crystal Brook Training Center in Colts Neck, N.J., where she is currently stabled with her husband Bruno. Chiodo enjoyed barrel racing and qualified for the National Barrel Horse Association national finals. Today she owns a Quarter Horse and still participates in barrel racing as well as trail riding with her horse “Ray.”

It was there that she got her first job in harness racing cleaning stalls for trainer Ross Croghan. And Croghan gave Chiodo her first horses to groom. She has also worked for trainers Chris Height and Mike Russo.

A unique opportunity arose when Chiodo was asked to work on the farm of music superstar Bruce Springsteen to take care of his horses. She was only 23 at the time and had a serious stroke before taking the job. The farm waited until she recovered and Chiodo went to work for them. She also worked part time for trainer Carl Cito during that time.

Chiodo won a women’s driving championship in Norway in 2011.

Chiodo, who has been training and driving since 2002, won her first pari-mutuel race as a trainer with Dirty Harry at Yonkers Raceway on Jan. 26, 2002 and as a driver with Mighty Young Joe in the Reynolds Stake on July 15, 2005 at Pocono Downs.

MEADOWLANDS TO PAY ALL STARTERS IN OVERNIGHT RACES

The SBOA of NJ Board have at the suggestion of The Meadowlands, approved a pilot program to pay 3% of the purse to those whose horses finish from 5th to last in all overnight races (excluding the MADC races which will continue their current format which has included this policy for years).

The purse distribution percentages will be adjusted to cover the cost and change with the number of starters.

For reference, to date in 2024 there have been 217 (non MADC) races comprised of 1965 (estimated) starters with 846 or 43% of those receiving nothing for their efforts. Over the past two years Meadowlands handle has been buoyed by full fields. Recognizing that the racing is ultra-competitive and that 10 horse fields have previously resulted in 5 connections receiving no money for their efforts, the hope is that helping to defray the cost of bringing a horse to race will keep horses racing here during the most competitive time of the year in the region.

This project continue through June 1 at which time the effect will be evaluated and a decision made on its future.
### UPCOMING STAKES RACES AT THE MEADOWLANDS

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### UPCOMING SBOANJ SPONSORED RACES

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NEW JERSEY STARS SHINE AT DAN PATCH AWARDS BANQUET

Ake Svanstedt received multiple Trainer of the Year awards in his native Sweden. Accepting his first such honor in the U.S. was something completely different.

“This is not what I expected when I moved from Sweden to America, that I was going to be the Trainer of the Year . . . and give a speech in English,” Svanstedt said with a laugh, while also drawing laughter and applause from the crowd of 300 at February’s Dan Patch Awards banquet at Rosen Centre in Orlando, Fla.

“I’m very proud and thankful for this award,” he then continued. “I have won many big races and trophies in my life, but this is the most prestigious of them all.”

Svanstedt, who moved from Sweden to New Jersey a decade ago, became the fifth consecutive Garden State resident to be named Trainer of the Year by the U.S. Harness Writers Association (Jim Campbell, Nifty Norman, Nancy Takter, and Marcus Melander were the previous four). Svanstedt set career highs in 2023 with 162 wins and $9.85 million in purses. Only three trainers in history have posted higher earnings in a single year: Ron Burke, Jimmy Takter, and Mickey Burke.

Last year, Svanstedt won 53 times on the Grand Circuit with 29 different horses. Four of those triumphs came in the Breeders Crown – with Bond, Jiggy Jog S, Southwind Tyrion, and Warrawee Michelle – a trophy total second to only Takter’s record six Crowns in 2015. Three-year-old filly Bond and 4-year-old mare Jiggy Jog S were named division champs in Dan Patch Awards voting.

“I’m not alone in this,” Svanstedt said. “I have my wife, Sarah, by my side and we do this together. And then we have a great team behind us also, with caretakers, trainers, blacksmith, farm manager, bookkeeper. All of them should be proud of this award. Then we have the owners, who invest in new horses every year. Amazing horses. I have trained horses for 40 years and I never had so many good horses at the same time. This makes it very easy to get up in the morning and go to work.”

Svanstedt was among a group from New Jersey to be honored at the Dan Patch Awards banquet, with William R. Haughton Good Guy Award recipient Linda Toscano, Stan Bergstein-Proximity Award co-winner Jason Settlemoir, Amateur Driver of the Year John Calabrese, and Caretaker of the Year Margaret Gillon.

Toscano, the 2012 Trainer of the Year winner, received the Good Guy Award for her cooperation with the media and thoughtful representation of racing. In addition to her training responsibilities, Toscano is a director of the SBOANJ.

“Anything that is associated with the name Billy Haughton, the ultimate good guy, is quite an honor,” Toscano said, adding with a laugh, “It’s kind of ironic because anyone who knows me knows I’m a hair superstitious, so anytime I have a good horse I do my darndest to duck [the media]. But I really do appreciate it. I really do understand that you are the ones that shed the light on the sport that we love so much.”
Settlemoir, the COO/GM of the Meadowlands, and Brittany Farms were voted the winners of the Bergstein-Proximity Award, which is presented by USHWA for outstanding achievement in the sport. Settlemoir received USHWA’s 2006 Lew Barasch Breakthrough Award for his work at Vernon Downs and in opening Tioga Downs and was inducted into the Upstate New York chapter of USHWA’s Hall of Fame in 2011.

In 2014, Settlemoir received the USHWA Monticello-Goshen Chapter’s “Good Guy” Award, and three years later he received the President’s Award from USHWA for his dedication to the sport. In addition, he has served as a director of several top governing bodies (USTA, the Grand Circuit, Little Brown Jug, as well as being a former president of USHWA) and involving himself in community civic organizations. He also is a successful horse owner.

“Harness racing has been a blessing for me,” Settlemoir said. “I love the sport like no other. To be able to stand up here with a legendary farm like Brittany Farms and share this award with them is unbelievable and incredibly humbling to me. To stand here and accept this award named after one of my mentors growing up, Stan Bergstein, and following in the footsteps of so many great names in our sport.

“Most importantly, I want to thank our equine athletes and our great customers. Without either one of those, we certainly wouldn’t be sitting here tonight.”

Calabrese won 26 races and $243,995 in purses, both career highs, in 2023. Among the highlights was winning the NAADA Amateur Spring Series final on May 18 at MGM Yonkers Raceway and capturing the AHDC Spring championship nine days later at Freehold Raceway. He won both races with Shoemaker Hanover, a horse he trained.

He also won the Italian-American drivers race at Freehold in October, and notched a victory at Flamboro Downs in Canada later that month.

“Thank you so much to the harness writers, the voters, and all the media,” Calabrese said. “It was a great year. I appreciate all the people that let me drive their horses, and the people that helped me along the way.”

Gillon has been working with the Ron Burke Stable since 2012 and during that time has been the caretaker of some of the best horses on the track, including Atlanta, Blue Diamond Eyes, Celebrity Bambino, It’s Academic, M-M’s Dream, Southwind Gendry and TCI.

“I want to start by saying how thankful I am to be receiving this award,” Gillon said. “I’m really honored, from the bottom of my heart. I can’t believe I’m actually standing here. I want to thank Fair Island Farm for sponsoring caretakers to be a part of this wonderful evening. I’d like to thank Ron Burke for giving me the opportunity to be standing up here today, for giving me that chance in 2012 when I went and asked, ‘Are you looking for help?’ He gave me that chance and I proved myself to him.”

Ten of the 12 Dan Patch Award-winning horses honored at the banquet were connected to the state through either their sire, breeder, trainer, or owners. Those equine stars included Horse and Pacer of the Year Confederate and Trotter of the Year Tactical Approach. The rest were trotters Karl, Soiree Hanover, Bond, It’s Academic, and Jiggy Jog S along with pacers Captain Alba- no, Bythemissal, and Grace Hill.
The BCAP Medical Clinic at Gaitway Farm. The clinic offers free medical checkups, renewal of medications, blood work and more. BCAP’s Medical Clinic is located in Chris Samaha, Ph.D.’s office at Gaitway Farm (next to barn 17).

Chris Samaha’s office (BCAP: Backstretch Community Assistance Program), at Gaitway Farm is opened on Mondays during the summer months and on Monday & Wednesdays after Monmouth Park closes. Free and confidential counseling, advocacy and more assistance is provided for all N.J. licensed horsemen. Feel free to call Chris @ 732-740-5376 for further information.

TrotPAC trustees continue to attend many political leaders’ fundraisers during these uncertain times to help ensure the long-term viability of Standardbred racing. With the recent changes in Legislators it is more important than ever that TrotPAC make its presence known in Trenton. TrotPAC trustees must now educate and promote the importance of our industry to all the State Legislators. Most recently TrotPAC trustees attended the events for the following people: Senator Vin Gopal, Assemblyman Roy Freiman, Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin, Assemblywoman Ellen J. Park, Assemblywoman Lisa Swain, Assemblyman Alex Sauickie, Assemblyman William Moen Jr., Assemblyman John DiMaio, and Jim McGreevey.
It’s only spring, but it has already been a busy time for the SBOANJ.

To begin, our directors and TrotPAC have been meeting with key state legislators to gain their support for increasing the horse racing purse appropriation in the state’s FY2025 budget from $15 million, as recommended in the governor’s proposed budget released in February, to its previous level of $20 million. The appropriation would be divided equally between the Standardbreds and Thoroughbreds. Additionally, we are working with legislators to get the appropriation, first introduced in 2019, extended through FY2029.

Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, who was instrumental in getting the previous appropriations approved, has requested the SBOANJ to arrange another farm visit this year. Coughlin visited the Rutgers University Equine Exercise Physiology Lab in 2023, Gaitway Farm in 2022, and Fair Winds Farm and the Hogan Equine Clinic in 2019.

A Democrat representing the 19th Legislative District in Middlesex County, Speaker Coughlin has served in the State Assembly since 2010. Speaker Coughlin’s responsibilities include scheduling meetings and determining which bills will be considered within the Assembly. Details regarding Speaker Coughlin’s next visit will be announced when finalized.

The Grand Circuit season in New Jersey will get under way soon, with Freehold hosting the Lady Suffolk and Dexter Cup final on the afternoon of May 6 and the Meadowlands hosting the first round of the Miss Versatility Series that night. Betting has been strong at the Big M, continuing its success from 2023 when the average daily handle was $3.08 million (the best mark since Jeff Gural took over the track in 2011).

To help horsemen prepare their 2-year-olds for the upcoming campaign, the SBOANJ and Meadowlands will provide access to the Big M oval for training freshmen every Thursday in May. The track will be open from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. beginning May 2. Please call the race office at 877-782-2537 no later than noon each Wednesday with an estimated number of horses so preparations can be made.

Also, qualifiers for 2-year-olds again will be held at Gaitway Farm in June. The dates are June 10, 17, and 24. Qualifiers will not be held at Magical Acres this year.

In other news, the SBOANJ recently participated in a meeting at the Meadowlands regarding integrity issues related to the industry. Additional information will follow later.

Sports wagering revenue for the Meadowlands continued to show gains when compared to previous year. Wagering from January through March totaled nearly $199.8 million this year, an increase of 67 percent compared to the first quarter of 2023. Freehold saw a 79-percent decrease in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 2023 and showed losses for the first two months of this year before rebounding with an increase in March. We have requested an analysis from the Gaming Commission regarding the losses.

Finally, thank you to Jacquie Ingrassia for her 23 years of service as a USTA director for District 12 (New Jersey). Congratulations to Stacy Chiordo, who was selected to replace Jacquie on the board. She will serve the remainder of the term, which expires in 2025.

Mark Ford