




HOR\$ENSE

"The PRICE-PERFORMANCE LEADER in thoroughbred handicapping software" SM

Presents the **Expert-ease** newsletter

Are you in? Or are you on the fence?
Remember what you LOVE about the sport!!!



Joe's Corner: It's about ALL of us

Welcome to the NEW YEAR! Let's make it count!!!

This newsletter was always intended to be a mixed bag – silly humor & sincere seriousness, righteous anger & biting sarcasm, valuable insights & useless information – and I plan on keeping it that way! **Sorry to disappoint...** 😞

The overriding theme for this year will be on ideas both old and new, and my wish is that you find it "good enough" to keep your interest in racing going for a while longer...

Some of you are die-hard horseplayers who continue to support the game with your passion for the sport. Others are casual fans; there are former die-hards and some are just getting into the sport. Finally, there are those who no longer play, but have enough interest to keep accepting my emails. **Truth be told, the game needs ALL of you...**

As for **Expert** itself, I've decided to keep it going for as long as people keep telling me that they use it. I don't sell enough copies to make any real profit, but that won't stop me from always working to make it better. If you use it as part of your handicapping toolkit, I'll help you get the most out of the program by providing my insights, tips & tricks. I'll also keep you posted on what's going to be new (and improved). If you're not using **Expert**, or just want some "old-school" tips, I'll provide some that you can hopefully put to good use. **Are you ready for a big year? I AM!!!**

Yours in Racing,

Joe

What I Almost Tried...

Hanging out at race books...

So, there I was, in the October issue, making a **BOLD** statement that I'd be once again frequenting the local Las Vegas area casino race books. I was also going to report back... **HA!**

Life is funny; as I say "You want to make God laugh, just tell Him your plans!" I didn't come remotely close to a racebook. **Why?** I forgot about holidays, hockey games, fall racing and everything else. **HA! Take 2...**

So... when things get slow for me in early 2026, I'll scout some locations (aka snoop around) and report back!

I'll try to do better this time...

Nostalgic Ramblings

Who was the 2nd best EVER?

I may be showing my age, but my vote goes to **Alydar**. His 1977-78 campaigns, at ages 2 and 3, were just short of amazing! **Just short...**

As a two-year old, he was 10-5-4 and 6-2-4 in graded stakes. But... he lost **4** times to **Affirmed**. **And then...**

As a sophomore, he was 10-6-4 in 9 graded stakes. And, still... **4 more** times he lost to **Affirmed**, including all of the Triple Crown races...

He was never the same again... 😞



Featured in Expert: What I'm STILL Working On

Here's the 1st update of "what has my attention" for the 2026 release

Overall, progress has been slow... but it's nothing I'm worried about. I'll start back up in January, when wintry conditions and fewer tracks running allow me to "dig my work".

NOTE: the STATUS of **NC** is for "no change" in my progress.

Pre-Race Screening:

- Dirt and All-Weather surfaces have been separated in the Pre-Screening Profile layout. This should have been done ages ago... my bad. **STATUS: NC; tested and ready for 2026**
- Adding a second check for optional claiming races, where the datafile "race code" considers them claiming races, even when there are horses who are not in for the claiming tag. **STATUS: in the earliest stages of initial testing**
- Refining the PASS/PLAY rating for the "Distance on the Surface" part of the overall playability rating. This should result in more PLAY races. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**
- For the PASS/PLAY decision, adding additional AI checks (only under certain conditions). This will result in more PLAY races. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**

Evaluation:

- Adding an additional FINISH factor, using the difference in stretch distances between a race and the PP being evaluated. Based on the PACE/TRIP ("FUMO") definitions, it will impact the FINISH position. **STATUS: completed the formulas, working on tracks with two finish lines**
- In the early stages of using 4½ furlong PPs in 5 and 5½ furlong races. This will allow more PPs to be used. **STATUS: NC; data has been gathered and formulas are being reviewed**

Analysis:

- Assigned a lower threshold for positive in-the-money records (from 25% to 20%). This will increase the number of IN-MONEY positives scores, and affect the DIG DEEP (individual) analyses. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**
- Looking at adding more "smoothing" for predicted race fractions, based on sprint and route pars for distance subsets (short, medium, long). This is a major refinement and will require a lot of testing. **STATUS: NC; will start testing in early 2026**
- Evaluating a series of PP-related bonuses to apply under specific conditions. Unsure of impact. **STATUS: NC; still gathering information**

Overall:

- Work for the new All-Weather surface at Belmont Park: The internal workings have been completed, and now I have to wait for races to be run (which will start in September of 2026²). **STATUS: NC; will analyze race data from late-2026, for the 2027 Expert release**
- Work for the new Pimlico Race Course: My initial internal impact evaluation is done, and now I have to wait for the Maryland folks to commit to a date (currently targeted for spring of 2027). **STATUS: NEW; will move forward when the details on the new surfaces are finalized, then I have to analyze race data from those surfaces in 2027, for the 2028 Expert release**

I've made some progress & I'm staying ahead of things. I'll have MUCH more to report back on in the next issue!!!



Randomness: It'll Be Just Like the Word Implies...

What is this going to be, Joe? I wish I knew, I really do...

Each issue it will look a little different... or maybe not. Sometimes it will be multiple "odds-n-ends". Other times it'll be a single subject... and maybe even evolve over multiple issues. Whatever it is, it WILL be random! **Let's not waste any more time!!!**

Let's start with a hodge-podge of articles that I collected...

On a recent visit with a Vegas HRF (horse racing friend), knowing I liked to see tracks, he told me that Hastings Park (serving Vancouver BC) would be closing soon. I was ready to go next spring! Ah well, it wasn't meant to be... it closed a few days later, on December 5. The article¹ stated that the end came just days "after a provincial government official said it would end slots subsidies for purses". The casino & racetrack operator called it "strictly a business decision". **My take is...** horse racing needs more/better relationships with casinos (aka becoming racinos). With the monetary support, Kentucky and Oaklawn are on a par with NYRA for purses. Without some help, the "have-not" circuits – especially California, with their "death march to oblivion" – currently have lower purses, and the threat of closure is becoming real.

On the subject of hanging in there, an 89-year-old Australian man (who has been going continuously for 75 years), shared his story³. Max Fowler was born walking distance from a racetrack, and his dad worked part-time in the stables. A man after my own heart, he says *"I like a bet, but I'm a small punter (bettor)."*

I found a well-written letter to the editor⁴ that explained the current landscape of the Computer Assisted Wagering (CAW) accounts that are driving away even the heartiest "core" horseplayers. Simply put, these CAW accounts get [1] refunds from the takeout AND [2] a host-fee reduction, which average 12% return to their accounts. As a "core" player, I certainly dislike the lower post post-time payouts they create AND the fact that they're not actually handicapping the race; algorithms do a bulk of the work for the CAWs.

Not quite ready to leave the CAW conversation, I also got the view from the racetrack executives who were asked some very pointed questions⁵. The responses from "inside of the fortress" didn't sit well with me: [1] the current CAW model can't change that much because "no rebates OR late CAW wagers" means an eventual end to racing, [2] takeouts can't be reduced because no "national takeout standards" exist, [3] blaming bettors who will just put the takeout rebates into another bet (shouldn't they want that?), and others. **Why?** My belief is that the CAW "syndicates" will eventually find other places to make bigger money, and too many "retail" players may have walked away by then. **Then where will the tracks be???**

The latest installment of Stronach Racing not actually caring about actual horse racing...

Just the profits from it!!! A consulting firm – who, not coincidentally, worked their magic in Maryland for Stronach (1/ST Racing, to be precise) – came up with five scenarios for the new Thoroughbred Racing Initiative⁷. Among them are two North Florida options – expanding Tampa Bay Downs OR a new track in Ocala – that do NOTHING for South Florida racing. Of the other three, one of them requires that Stronach sell Gulfstream Park (to the "very interested" Mike Repole?)... and the other two are really one idea.

Since 1/ST Racing would probably rather sell the property for much more money as something re-zoned, the dual option to re-open Hialeah – a mere 18 miles southwest of Gulfstream, and much closer to Miami proper – is the only candidate likely to have any viability... assuming that the current owners want to play. The property currently has a casino and (oddly?), the grandstands and paddock are still there and could be refurbished, plus the track layouts still exist. Covering \$90 million cost would have to be addressed. While stabling could be an issue for year-round racing, the (Stronach owned!) Palm Meadows Training Center could pick up that slack. The timing for this was not shared. **And, no surprise, I have a take...**

If the funding can be bridged, then I say "why not"? Open up the bidding for the wagering – where 1/ST Bet would have to compete with CDI and other operators – and keep racing alive in South Florida!!! I'm seeing first-hand what a "1/ST Bet driven single-circuit" looks like in California... and it's not pretty!!!



I'm a Travelin' Man, I Get Around... to Tracks!

Part of my retirement involves travel... and every trip I take – whether it's alone or with my wife – I try VERY HARD to visit a race track. Big or small, I want to see them ALL!!! So, where in the world is Traveler Joe???

After a very busy Summer of race track visits... I didn't make a single track visit during the Fall! **So, Joe... what's THAT all about???**

Nothing... just multiple plans to Southern California fell through. No Breeders' Cup, no late Del Mar visit, no Los Alamitos... nothing!

So, now I can set my sights on 2026!!! But... I have both **WANTS** and **NEEDS**! While I **WANT** to return to Kentucky Downs, Keeneland, Del Mar, Santa Anita, Oaklawn, and many more... I also **NEED** to visit Laurel (before they close for good), Belmont (the re-opening meet AND a hockey game next door), Century Mile (in Edmonton), Thistledown/Presque Isle/Mountaineer (a road trip three-fer), and maybe even Los Alamitos (for the thoroughbred meeting ONLY).

While I expect to fulfill more **NEEDS** than **WANTS**... the beauty of my travels visiting race tracks is that surprise trips can't be ruled out!!!!

Headline that caught my eye... and sources!

Welcome! This space is for [1] my take on quirky or hard-to-believe articles, and [2] providing literary credit when it's due (long overdue). **Here we go!**

Did you hear about the wrong-way ambulance that nearly ran over some horses? Well, it's true⁶! On the evening of November 22, the horses loaded into the gate for an 870-yard race at Evangeline Downs. After a clean break, the field headed towards the far turn...

All of a sudden, the #1 horse pulled up and started to move away from the rail, looking like it was pulling out of the race. But, NO, that wasn't the reason... it was to avoid the wrong-way track ambulance!!!

Watching the replays, I'm happy there were no injuries. There was a plausible explanation... but a lot of issues with what happened. Since, it was the only race of the night with a turn, the ambulance possibly realized too late that they were in the wrong spot. I can understand that, but why did they go the wrong way? Plus... what about the track officials? How could NONE of them notice that the ambulance was out of position? And, is that not on the pre-race checklist? **Oh My!!!**

Footnotes:

1. Ray Paulick. 'Strictly A Business Decision': Hastings Racecourse's 133-Year Horse Racing Run is Over, *PaulickReport.com*
2. NYRA Press Release. After Belmont Festival, Saratoga to Race 46 Days in '26; NYRA will unveil the new and reimagined Belmont Park in the fall., *Bloodhorse.com*
3. Ben Dories. 'Racing gives me something to live for': Meet the 89yo super fan, *racenet.com.au*
4. Mark Paul. Letter To the Editor: 'There Are Piranhas in the Pools!' – Part 2, *PaulickReport.com*
5. Ed DeRosa. Symposium CAW panel affirms commitment to retail bettors, *horseracingnation.com*
6. DJ Digital. Wrong-Way Ambulance Goes Viral at Evangeline Downs Racetrack in Louisiana, *KPLE965.com*
7. Carter Wilke. Study Analyzes Options to Secure Horse Racing's Future In Florida, *PaulickReport.com*

It's a wrap... my Best Ever Wagering Year!!!

With a 23.7% Win% and 22.4% ROI – buoyed by TWO big longshots of \$57.80 and \$70.60 (#3 and #1 all-time) – I closed out a stellar year with a net profit of \$302.72! **The bar is set VERY high for 2026...**



UNIQUE SOLUTIONS SOFTWARE

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Quick Hits

Places to Be

At the Track	Get there!!!
NOT at the Track	Anywhere!!
Race Books	Find one!
In-person Tourneys	Try it & Love it!

Things to Do... now & forever

- Keep accurate wagering records!
- Skip a race now and then!
- Stop and smell the roses!

"It's a Fact, Jack"!

Once again, there will be no Triple Crown racing for me... I'm psyched for the return of "4-year-old and up" racing!!!