



Presents the **Expert-ease** newsletter

My thoughts on the Triple Crown? You know me... I'll be happy when it's over!!!



Joe's Corner: We all make mistakes

THIS newsletter is on-time!!! As you saw, the January issue was "delayed" by nearly six weeks! The culprit was... well... me!!! I forgot to send you the email... no idea where my head was... I'm just chalking it up to a "brain fart"!!!

Speaking of mistakes... once AGAIN, I won't make one (actually three) this year and will skip the Triple Crown.

Well, it's that time again... where horseplayers are treated to the "glitz and glamour" of watching the equivalent of middle school pre-teens run around in circles... **to win a flower blanket!!!** 😞

If you're familiar with my rants on the subject, you know that the races don't hold any real interest for me. Yes, there are those rare years where I seem to care. In 1987, I watched Alysheba lose in March AND got engaged to my wife at Santa Anita, and then had my biggest Derby score ever... and... that's about it...

But, why the angst, Joe? Well, let's see... in general, I despise all races for "3-year-olds only". Then there are the **actual** races:

Kentucky Derby: The only race in North America allowed to have more than 14 horses... a 20-horse cavalry charge! [**Expert** won't handicap it]
Preakness: The middle child, it's not even interesting to many of the Derby runners. And, Maryland racing went with the "Baltimore nostalgia" 1/ST Racing con-job, keeping it at the soon-to-be remodeled Pimlico; FYI, it's at Laurel this year. [**Expert** can handicap it... but why bother]
Belmont: This marathon distance only interests me IF the horse winning the first two in the series is there; BTW, it's at Saratoga for one more year, at the shorter Derby distance. [**Expert** doesn't handicap 1 1/2 miles]

So... enjoy the "thrills". I'll just steer clear of the trainwreck!

Yours in Racing,

Joe

What I'm... Tracking

Playing all-weather routes???

Every year, I look at opportunities to win more money... and I spend an entire year "playing on paper" to prove my point (one way or another).

This year has me tackling the route races on all-weather surfaces. **Why?**

Well... I've heard that this surface is closer to turf racing than dirt, so it's about time to find out if it's true...

Let's see what happens...

Nostalgic Ramblings

Remembering Hollywood Park

It was the most loved/hated racetrack in the So Cal circuit; a cool place with a beach-like infield, and a scary place where you could get mugged heading to your car... all in the same day!!!

My dad took me there when I was 12 or 13, and he told me to never act like you won there, unless you "wanna be dead"... like the guy in 1991 who took the \$88k he won on pick-3 & 6's IN CASH, was followed to a hotel near the track and shot dead in his car¹.

In the mid '80s, I invited co-workers there one sunny Saturday and we had a great time; we left early...

I hated the track extension (to 1 1/8 miles, just to get the Breeders' Cup), but loved the infield party times!



Featured in Expert: What I'm STILL Working On

Here's the final update of "what had my attention" for the 2026 release

Progress has picked up, and I'm making some significant progress. **Let's dig in...**

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

Pre-Race Screening:

- Separate Dirt and All-Weather surface screening selections for Pre-Screening Profile and Master Profile. This should have been done years ago. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**
- Adding race-screening checks for BOTH claiming race types – normal, optional – where the datafile "race code" considers them to be the opposite type:
 - Optional race (datafile), Normal race (screening): screening value is used if ALL of the horses are in for the claiming tag. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**
 - **NEW!** Normal race (datafile), Optional race (screening): screening value is used if one or more horses are NOT in for the claiming tag. **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**
- 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**
- **NEW!** Refining the PASS/PLAY criteria for the "Surface at the Track" part of the overall playability rating. This should 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: tested and ready for 2026**
- Allow use of 4½ furlong PPs in 5 and 5½ furlong races. This will allow more PPs to be used. **STATUS: reviews found SPEED & PACE are the same as 5f-5½f; in final testing**
- **NEW!** Adjusting the "second-level" AI for SPEED, by lowering the impact of manual changes to the "in-race" fractions (1st call, 2nd call, final 1/8). **STATUS: tested and ready for 2026**

Analysis:

- Assigned a lower threshold for positive in-the-money records (from 25% to 20%), increasing IN-MONEY positives scores, and DIG DEEP analysis. **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: much progress made; in final testing**
- Evaluating a series of PP-related bonuses to apply under specific conditions. Unsure of impact. **STATUS: '26 release(?); early testing indicates... more testing needed 😞**

Overall:

- The new All-Weather (AW) surface at Belmont Park: I'm waiting for races to start in September of 2026², doing the prep for the final solution in 2027. **STATUS: for '26 release; provide estimated BEL 3-yr-best times for "common" AW distances**
- The new Pimlico Race Course: I'm waiting for the Maryland folks to confirm the racing surface change, for races starting in spring 2027, leading to the final solution in 2028. **STATUS: for '27 release: initial work will be on [1] reviewing the code and design for places to make updates AND [2] provide estimated PIM 3-yr-best times for "common" AW distances**

I'm liking it all, you will too! Next up, the 2026 release!



Randomness: It's EXACTLY Like the Word Implies...

What is this, Joe? All things random, more or less...

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! **This issue, it's STORY time!!!**

This issue's runners-up of "headline-making" articles...

It's the end of an era at Del Mar this summer! After decades of 4:00 PM starts on Fridays – usually followed by a free concert – the track will now start at the same 2:00 PM time as the other days³. No reason was given, but I'll guess that the "let's party" demographic changed enough to warrant the change.

Staying in California, the former Golden Gate Fields has been sold¹⁰. A spokesman for the East Bay Regional Park District said "(It) offers a truly generational opportunity to reimagine a world-class bayside park for the Bay Area". Having seen the area, I can see why this is happening... I hope it works out.

Drones are EVERYWHERE... even at the races!¹³ At Oaklawn Park, they're using them on an every-race basis – a first in the industry – to vastly enhance the viewing experience. Once costly and reserved only for the biggest races (like the Triple Crown and the Breeders' Cup), these entrepreneurs are providing a completely different view of the action. As a tech guy, I think this will be a game-changer in the way we watch and analyze races. I hope they find a cost-effective way to get this at as many tracks as possible.

Next on the docket is this one⁷: Under an expanded "bonus depreciation" rule added to the "One Big Beautiful Bill" after lobbying from the industry, buyers can immediately deduct the full cost of racehorses before they start training or racing. The rule also covers many older horses that previously didn't qualify, making it far easier for deep-pocketed investors to justify spending big. We'll see how it trickles down...

And, who doesn't love Terry Bradshaw? Per this story⁸, in the last year, Bradshaw has jumped back into the Thoroughbred business after an absence. He is partnering on seven racehorses. "I needed a little bit of an adrenaline rush in the animals." Some people may not even know that he won four Super Bowls!

"As the Stomach Turns" (aka rich people drama)...

Apparently, Churchill Downs Inc. (CDI) decided that they wanted to compete with 1/ST Racing for being "no friend to the bettor". First, HISA declared that they would cut off "freeloading" CDI from running races at Churchill Downs as early as April, for failure to pay more than \$2.5 million in 2025 fees from the four main tracks they own⁴. This has been an ongoing issue since 2023. And that was just the start...

Not to be outdone, CDI fired back at HISA with this⁵: "We had no prior notice... which is another clear example of their poor judgment and questionable intentions in interacting with industry participants who do not blindly submit to their demands." So, we had to wait for the hearing on March 11 to find out...

At that hearing, the HISA board ordered CDI to pay \$5.3 million (the increase is from penalties and interest owed) or lose their simulcasting abilities⁶. So, it was no surprise that CDI and HISA came to an "agreement" two weeks later, and CDI will now pay some portion of a "fair share" of those millions...

Not to be outdone... ladies and gents, California racing "on the edge" (of extinction)...

A California horse owner wrote in¹², lamenting the state of what's left of racing in the Golden State. While it's a passionate and well-stated letter, it glosses over the fact that the California legislature has not been a fan of horse racing AND has been instrumental in handcuffing the industry for the last 20 years or so. To wit, this is what I say the politicians have done to racing: [1] not letting track workers be classified under lower cost agriculture jobs, [2] higher insurance costs, [3] no "racino" style supplements, [4] letting major players (like CDI and 1ST Racing) dictate how business will be done. Last track left, turn out the lights...

And, now for something completely different (channeling my inner Monty Python)...

If I had my druthers, there would be less news to share... I'll try to be a bit more random next time...



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???

This Winter was – with a musical assist from Aerosmith – just the “Same Old Song and Dance”. I thought about going to Oaklawn in March (I even booked a room). I also considered a Louisiana fun-run (two or three tracks in a week). **Ultimately, it was not to be... so I stayed closer to home... and completed my local racebook tour!**

I chose a number of “Vegas valley” race books, and came away with a clear winner! While the Red Rock Resort racebook is very nice, the 30-minute drive is too far away for it to be my “regular” home. I also tried a few options within 15-20 minutes. Green Valley Ranch lacks a horseplayer's vibe. Small racebooks... nope. The Strip spots... are for tourists. After making the rounds, the winner is... **Sunset Station!**

Why, Joe??? There are many reasons. It's a 15-minute door-to-door run. The 100% rebuilt open-air arena is well-lit and huge, with MANY screens, and has machines AND tellers. As a bonus, they have a big bar in the back... with **all-day \$3 shot & beer specials! My nirvana!**

Oh yeah... and the actual track visits in the next three months! I might head to Churchill after the Derby (to visit an HRF). And, then there's my June road-trip three-fer (Thistledown/Presque Isle/Mountaineer).

Don't forget to get out there and enjoy a live day at the races!!!

Headline that caught my eye... and sources!

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

Jockey Harry Skelton put the £500,000 prize-money he won winning last season's David Power Jockeys' Cup towards supporting the next generation of riders, creating an annual scholarship program that will support pony racing graduates⁹ (four this year). Good Show, Harry!

Footnotes: (current year unless otherwise noted)

1. Ronald Soble (1991). Winner at Track Killed in Robbery..., *LA Times*
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. DMTC Press Release. Del Mar Announces Post Times For 2026 Summer Meet, *PaulickReport.com*
4. Dan Ross & T.D. Thornton. HISA Threatens 'Freeloading' CDI with Cutting Off Ability to Race over Alleged Non-Payment of Assessment Fees, *Thoroughbred Daily News*
5. Chelsea Hackbarth. Churchill Says HISA's Actions Represent 'Troubling Pattern of Overreach', *PaulickReport.com*
6. Matt Hegarty. HISA & Churchill Downs Inc. reach agreement on unpaid dues dispute, *DRF.com*
7. Rob Quinn. Trump Tax Perk Gives Horse Racing a Second Wind, *Newser.ai*
8. Mary Rampellini. Bradshaw back in Thoroughbred racing with Oaks prospect, *DRF.com*
9. Matt Rennie. 'This can help open doors'..., *Racing Post (Britain)*
10. Gabe Fernandez. Bay Area horse racetrack to sell for \$175M..., *SFGate.com*
11. Ray Paulick. FanDuel TV To Be Phased Out; over 100 Jobs... Eliminated, *PaulickReport.com*
12. Leonard Miranda. Letter to the Editor: Can California Racing Alter Course?, *PaulickReport.com*
13. J.N. Campbell. Game Boys: Drones Heighten Season-Long Oaklawn Viewing Experience, *Thoroughbred Daily News*

It's a wrap... Bye, FanDuel Racing (aka TVG)!

In 1999, TVG hit the airwaves with created a national viewing platform. In a unique step, they had on-air folks fill the void between races, with picks and stories. While I was not personally a fan of the constant chatter to fill the silence, they helped to bring in the “less than hardcore” bettors to the game. But the horse racing landscape has changed dramatically since then, and the on-air product has not kept up. So, by the end of 2027, FanDuel Racing will be gone¹¹. R.I.P. TVG/FDR... now go get your RTN streaming account!!!



UNIQUE SOLUTIONS SOFTWARE

Joe Mainardi

Owner, Developer, Writer...
“a one man show”
jdm@ponypicker.com
uss@ponypicker.com

On the Web:

www.ponypicker.com



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”!

Pat Valenzuela returns to the saddle¹¹!!! He was approved for riding in Arizona (at 63), after a 10+ year absence. Well... okay.