



Ontario Horse People,

I hope you are well and staying safe.

It's hard to believe that it's been almost a year since the pandemic started in Canada. It certainly has presented many challenges, but these difficult times have also brought us closer together as an industry which bodes well for the future of horse racing in Ontario. When this all started, I said that we would come out of this stronger and I still firmly believe that we will. We are obviously continuing to face challenges due to the pandemic, but there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Hopefully there will be an update next week from the Ontario Government about its plans to re-open parts of the economy including when horse racing will be permitted to safely resume. In the meantime, I wanted to provide you with some important updates.

Advocating for the Safe Resumption of Horse Racing

We continue to advocate for the safe resumption of horse racing. We also truly appreciate all of the horse people who have taken the time to reach out to their local MPP to do the same. Our collective voices are always much stronger than just one voice. It's not too late to reach out to your local MPP. Ontario Racing has easy to use tools and templates that have been shared with the respective horse people associations. Here are links to information that [COSA posted](#) and the [HBPA posted](#).

Our advocacy efforts continue to ensure the government understands our industry and has confidence in our ability to operate safely. When they do start to re-open parts of the economy, we hope our efforts position us well to be included in the first phase much like what happened in June of last year. As soon as we receive an official update on when we will be permitted to resume racing, we will be sure to notify you.

Equine Benefit Payments

As a result of industry partners working together, Standardbred and Thoroughbred horse people in Ontario now have the opportunity access equine benefit payments if they meet the specific requirements. These benefit payments are being funded by the purses from the Long-Term Funding Agreement that were originally allocated to the cancelled races as a result of the imposed government restrictions. We certainly hope that live racing is permitted to safely

resume soon, but in the meantime, we are pleased that there is some financial support for horse people in Ontario.

For more information on the Equine Benefit Payments for Standardbred horses, [please click here](#).

For more information on the Equine Benefit Payments for Thoroughbred horses, [please click here](#).

Opening of the Backstretch at Woodbine Racetrack

As previously communicated, we are planning on opening the 2021 Thoroughbred Meet on Saturday, April 17, subject to the latest government restrictions. To prepare for the opening of the season, we intend to open the Woodbine backstretch on Wednesday, February 24. Trainers will be permitted to work horses and have official works recorded.

As was the case last year, it will remain absolutely critical that everyone follows the COVID-19 Prevention Protocols that are in place. Thank you in advance for your ongoing understanding and cooperation in this regard.

Should there be any changes to the schedule, we will inform you as soon as possible.

Here are the key dates:

Monday, February 22 – Backstretch re-opens for set-up

Wednesday, February 24 – Horses begin shipping in

Thursday, February 25 – Sand Ring and Training Track open (weather permitting)

March – Main Track opens (weather permitting, and date TBC based on spring thaw)

Saturday, April 17 – Opening Day

Training at Woodbine Mohawk Park

We appreciate that some horse people are requesting we open Woodbine Mohawk Park's track for training purposes which we intend to do in advance of when we are permitted to safely resume racing. I am hoping that we will open the track for training very soon and certainly no later than February 25.

Stakes Schedules

Over the last couple of weeks, we announced the stakes schedule for [Standardbred Racing at Woodbine Mohawk Park](#) and [Thoroughbred Racing at Woodbine Racetrack](#). Both schedules are subject to the latest government restrictions, but we are very excited about the stakes programs we put together.

Mohawk Million

Last year's inaugural Mohawk Million was a huge success thanks to the slot owners and everyone who contributed to it. This event has the potential to build a legacy in our sport that can have a large impact on all parts of our industry, including our racetrack, owners, breeders, sales and fans. I hope our industry rallies together again to make it happen in 2021 so we can build on the momentum we started last fall.

Please be reminded the deadline to purchase a slot in the Mohawk Million is quickly approaching on Monday, February 15. The race is for two-year-old trotters and follows a "buy-in" formula with nine slots available for purchase, each priced at \$100,000 CAD. The million-dollar race is scheduled for Saturday, September 25.

Any requests for information or purchases of a slot can be directed to Bill McLinchey, Director of Standardbred Racing, at bmclinchey@woodbine.com.

Sports Betting

Last December, the Federal government introduced single event sports betting legislation, which was announced by Federal Justice Minister, David Lametti. As part of the proposed bill, the horse racing industry is protected by language that would prevent any fixed odds wagering on horse racing, which is a big win for our industry. However, there is a lot of heavy lifting required to ensure our industry is not only protected from this significant change in the sports betting market in Canada, but to benefit from it so horse racing continues to be a beloved sport at the centre of an industry that supports more than 50,000 jobs nationwide.

As part of this approach, we have consistently stated publicly that the horse racing industry is supportive of the legalization of sports betting so long as we are provided an opportunity to participate in a meaningful way. In fact, we believe that our industry is well-positioned to be a key partner to deliver sports betting to Ontarians should it be legalized. We have decades of experience in being a trusted provider of legalized sports betting. We could also provide the government with an opportunity to leverage our technology and physical locations through Ontario racetracks and the Champions Teletheatres. Further, we would also provide the government with a partner that does not have shareholders and can re-invest the profits from sports betting right back into the economy through the provincial horse racing industry.

Working with Ontario Racing, we are having positive discussions with government officials and will continue to represent the interests of horse racing throughout this process. We will provide you with updates as required.

On behalf of Woodbine Entertainment, thank you for the resiliency you have shown throughout the pandemic. We are excited to return to racing and hope to share news on that front in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Jim Lawson