

# DRC ready to open gates for start of new season

By Brian Lysaght  
staff writer

Along the backstretch at Ladbroke DRC, hope springs eternal — at least this week it does.

With good reason. Friday is opening day for DRC's 1989 season. And jockeys, trainers, owners and horse race fans have been waiting on their minds. Odds being what they are, many won't, but that's another matter.

Friday's program is a rite of spring, really, and optimism is in the air at Ladbroke, Michigan's only thoroughbred race track. The day's racing begins at 1:30 p.m., and includes a race simulcast from Aqueduct Race Track in New York.

"You know that saying, 'Winning isn't everything'?" asks Jockey Therses Powers of Westland. "Bulls—. Winning is everything."

Powers was DRC's top female jockey last year and she aims to finish in the Top 10 among more than 50 DRC jockeys in 1989.

**HORSE RACING** may be a man's world, but Powers, who has been riding at DRC since 1980, said that doesn't matter. About 10 percent of the regular DRC jockeys are female.

"Everyone knows me around here and I'm established," she said, surveying the crowded race track kitchen.

Larger racing fields are hoped for, with DRC's tote board being expanded from 12- to 14 slots over the winter. More horses mean handicapping will be tougher and carryover purses likely will be larger on DRC's popular Super Trifecta races, which commonly draw 12 or more horses.

"Makes it a little tougher to bet," said DRC President Bill Bork.

To win the Super Tri, bettors have to pick the top three finishers in the fifth race and top four in the sixth, in order of finish.

Last year's Super-Tri pot reached \$484,000, said track publicist Bob Raymond.

"WHEN WE generate a pool over \$100,000... it helps our attendance and handle (money wagered). It's our answer to the lottery," Raymond said.

Many trainers, horses and jockeys arrived recently in Livonia from warm weather tracks in the south or west. They have spent the last few weeks preparing for the DRC season, which runs through November.

Trainer James Jackson, who spent the winter at Tampa Bay Downs in Florida, was watching his horses work out one morning this week at DRC.

Jackson's horses claimed 97 races last year, making the 42-year-old Lexington,

Ky., native the second-leading winner among trainers. He brought 35 horses to DRC this year, including "some nice two-year-olds," he said.

"They all are fit and ready to run. And I run 'em. I got owners that want to see 'em run," Jackson said.

Jockey Ronnie Hirdes, beginning his fourth season at DRC, exercised nine horses Monday morning. Like most jockeys, Hirdes has an agent, Marty Combs, who lines up rides for him by negotiating with trainers.

**HIRDES**, A 110-pound "natural lightweight," said he had no trouble keeping his weight down. He tallied more than 90 wins last year at DRC, and wants to double that this year.

"I'd like to be a leading rider," Hirdes said. "I'd like to win 200 races if possible. That's what I'm shooting for."

Hirdes, 27, began riding at age 11 and turned pro in 1978.

"I think everyone would like ride to be in New York or California, but you gotta go where you can make a decent living," he said. "I can make a decent living here."

But other states can offer off-track and inter-track betting, neither of which is legal in Michigan. OTB allows bettors to wager at places other than race tracks — grocery stores, for instance. ITB allows bettors to wager only at race tracks on a second track's program.

Ladbroke officials believe OTB is needed to make the sport more profitable and to bring it to a wider audience.

The issue is tied up in the Michigan Legislature, partly because of opposition from harness horsemen. ITB is given better odds of passage than OTB.



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