

Turf Tips, Quips

By Doc Minard

With schools closed for the annual Easter vacation, the Detroit Race Course will give the youngsters a big climax to the week when it stages its annual Old Time Day program Saturday. It will be a day in which all children under 12, accompanied by a parent, will be admitted free.

Just to make it even more inviting, there'll be dime hot dogs, nickel pop, ice cream and pop corn and a chance for the kids to lead up all afternoon while Mom and Dad watch the thoroughbreds.

The annual celebration has always been a big day for the track since it is the one time of the entire meeting that youngsters under 12 are admitted to the grounds. Other than that, you have to be 12 and over to get inside the premises.

Racing Commissioner Leo Shirley decided to crack down on the kids a couple of years back and allowed each track one or two programs to which children under 12 are admitted and that's all.

Inasmuch as the Saturday post time for the first race is 1:30 p.m., it behooves fans to arrive a bit earlier than usual for we know well that there'll be kids coming out of every corner to take advantage of the dime hot dogs...imagine a dime in these days of inflation and especially in meat prices.

Incidentally, a recent communication from Harness Tracks of America Inc., information service of the harness tracks, has some interesting news that is well known to track management but not to race goers.

It may come as a surprise to bettors, and it certainly will to non racegoers, but it is the hot dog, the admission ticket and the parking charge, not the money bet on horses, that enables race tracks to meet their expenses and turn a profit in these days of rising costs.

A survey conducted by HTA among its 50 member tracks in the United States and Canada shows that total raceway operating expenses now average 118.1 per cent of income from pari-mutuel retention, the amount of money tracks get to keep from the total bet. A similar survey 10 years ago showed expenses ran 110.6 per cent of income from the wagering handle.

Thus it's rather easy to see that tracks must get income from other sources to meet expenses and the only other places are from the concession, programs, parking and admissions.

That's why so many racing plants now have a very tight policy in regard to passes. Management has discovered you can't give away the gate and still show a profit. So the answer to that is, provide folks with an afternoon or night of entertainment and make them pay for it just as they would if they attended a movie or a night club.

After the relatively slow start during the late winter dates at the Detroit Race Course, the runners and trotters have settled down and it now appears both the DRC and Hazel Park are in for banner years, especially the latter.

Hazel Park shattered several waning records Saturday when a season high crowd of 12,739 wagered an all-time Michigan high of \$1,211,159. The attendance was more than the 11,544 at the afternoon races at the DRC where the handle was a season high of \$1,226,696.

During the course of the evening, Hazel Park saw records for wagering on a singlerace bettered twice with new standards for betting on the nightly double the perfecta and the superfecta.

Just to make the evening a complete success, Chris Boring, the veteran Adrian driver-trainer who checked in only on Thursday with his large public stable from Chicago, recorded the first four-bagger of the year, including a victory in the \$10,000 invitational pace.

The pace went to Blu Fireball, a Michigan owned, who was clocked in the fastest mile of the year a quick 1:59.3, the first sub-2:00 win.

Fran Smith, the capable public relations and publicity director at Windsor Raceway, has taken some new duties during the period between meetings. He was recently named administrative assistant for public relations and advertising during the 1974 meeting at Chicago's Maywood Park.

The appointment was announced by General Manager and Vice President Sid Anton, former Windsor general manager who hired Smith for the PR job there.

Although limited to 24 nights for its summer meeting, Northville Downs will host one leg of the rich Canadian-American pacing series for three and four-year-olds. A total of 105 have been nominated for the series which will offer more than \$200,000 in purses.

Northville has been awarded the June 28 leg with a value of \$12,500. The series winds up with a \$49,450 championship on Aug. 15 at Batavia Downs near Buffalo, N.Y.

Rule of the competition provide that pacer must compete in at least half of the 10 events and be among the top eight in points to be eligible for the finale.

The stake brought many of the North America's top stars to the Downs a year ago and Executive Manager John Carlo is looking for even better entrants this year.

After a miserable showing in the Provincial Cup stake at Windsor Raceway a month ago, Sir Dairae, harness racing's horse of the year in 1973, struck with power and speed recently in Chicago to win the \$25,000 qualifier of the \$150,000 Metropolitan Pacing Series in 1:58.2.

The west coast speedster had more than two lengths on Black Gamecock and Armbror Nesbit was fourth.

Trainer-driver Jim Dennis reports

his great star had a high fever at Windsor which didn't show prior to the race but did after it suddenly stopped and finished a dismal last.

Fabulous Joe O'Brien, a member of harness racing's Hall of Fame, will have part of his large public stable at Hazel Park. He will send 50 head to the Detroit area and 50 to Brandywine Raceway and divide his time between both tracks.

This isn't the first time the diminutive O'Brien has had a large stable in this area. Years ago he checked into Wolverine Raceway with all of his horses, a second and third trainer, a number of grooms, his head bookkeeper and all other personnel necessary for an operation that size and stayed for the entire meeting.

O'Brien adds quite a bit of class to any meeting he has horses since he has had so many top stars he has to move them around to get races. At Hazel Park he'll find plenty of opportunity for most of his stock so fans can be assured they'll see a lot of O'Brien this spring.

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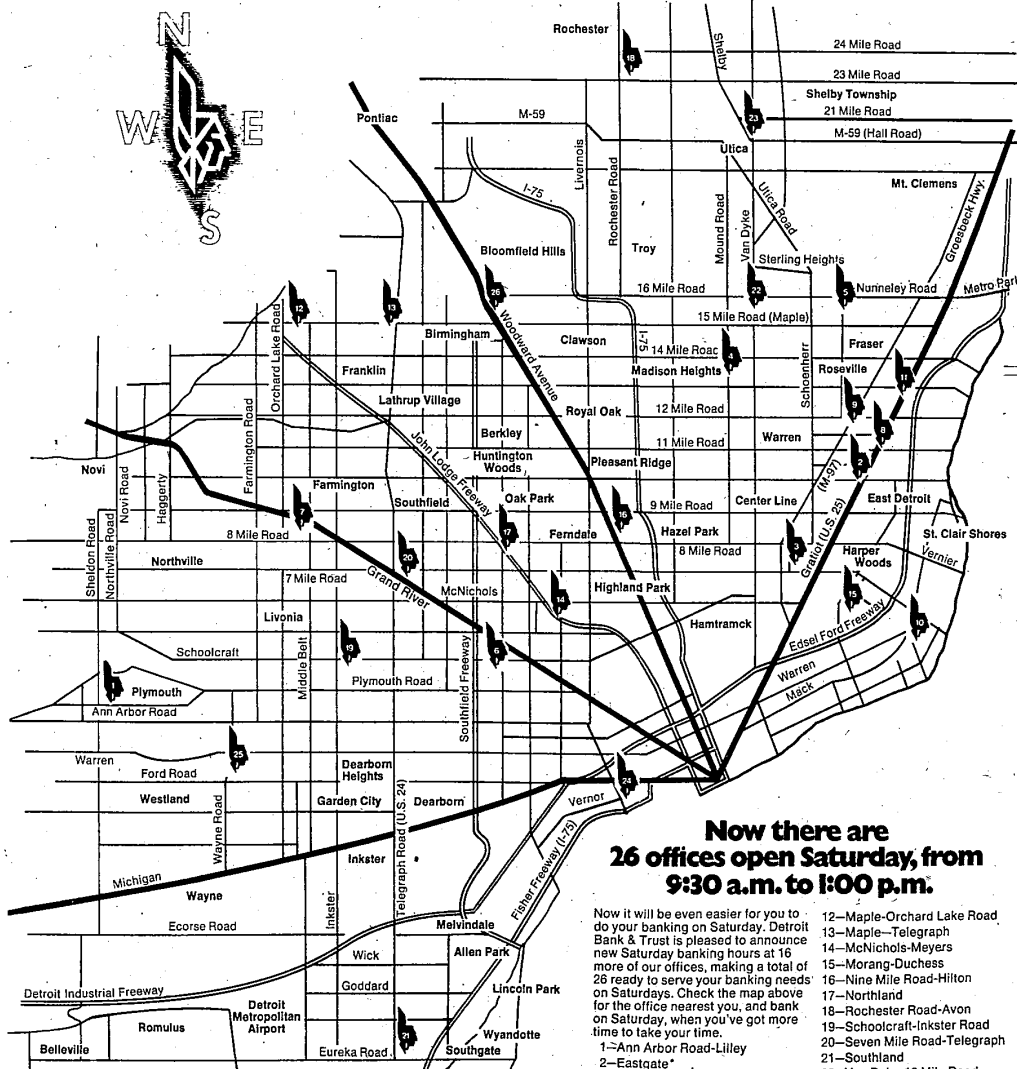
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