

Wolverine Plans Mile Track For Harness Racing

Patrons want it. Drivers, trainers and owners have petitioned for it. Experts in other sections of the nation has shown that it makes for better racing and faster times for trotters and pacers.

The Wolverine Harness Raceway, which operates at the Detroit Race Course, has decided to present racing over a mile track beginning with the 1970 season.

This was the announcement Wednesday by Vice President and General Manager Richard S. Nelson after more than six months of study during which the Detroit Racing Association, owners of the huge plant at the intersection of Middle Belt and Schooner Roads in Livonia, installed an ultra modern lighting system around the mile racing strip.

THE SYSTEM WAS installed to light the track for the late races during the thoroughbred campaign when it became too dark to race without lights.

The runners took to the lights like a duck to water and Wolverine officials hope harness racing fans, owners, drivers and trainers have the same reaction to the mile oval.

Wolverine's top echelon has received petitions from the owners, drivers etc asking for the change, explaining that they feel it would make for better racing, faster times and better performances of horses who would have only two curves to circle instead of four in a half mile strip.

A poll was made of patrons during the Wolverine meeting last spring, asking fans whether they preferred a half mile track or thought a mile strip would be better.

A total of 61% favored the mile with the remaining 39% about equally divided between a half mile as at Wolverine and Northville Downs and the 5/8 mile used at Hazel Park.

That was one of the principal factors in the decision of Wolverine to change to the mile track.

OTHER REASONS behind the change included:

1. Mile tracks have proven very successful at Washington Park in Chicago, Hollywood and Santa Anita in the Los Angeles area of California. The latter two recently received permission to operate at night and business has improved considerably.
2. Wolverine officials were swamped with petitions from members of the horsemen's fraternity asking for the change. The petitions included



D. W. YATES, owned by Charles Pontius of Ceresco, Mich., became the first four-time winner of the Jackson at Northville Downs winter meeting and is seen here scoring a neck verdict over Pride's Rusty (No. 2). Driver Bill Champion took the seven-year old gelding over a mile in 2:11 for his fifth win of the year. Frisky (No. 5 on the outside) closed strongly to finish two necks off the winner.

track and have considerable trouble making the sharper turns at a half mile and also going around four times instead of two.

"EVERYTHING CONSIDERED," said Wilson, "We felt it would be to the advantage of all to make the change. Our track superintendent had a role in the decision when he told us he could change a mile track from the soft footing of the runners to the hard surface for trotters and pacers in less than 18 hours. It has taken as many as four days in the past.

"We realize it will take a bit of educating to get all accustomed to the mile but we feel that once they are adjusted, they'll all welcome the better, faster and more exciting racing."

Now compare those times to the best on a half-mile: Matastar, 1:58.3; Speedy Roddy, 1:58.3; Noble Victory, 1:59; Armbo Flight, 1:59.1.

Best time for pacers on a mile oval are: Bret Hanover, 1:53.3; Adios Butler, 1:54.3; Billy Direct, 1:55; and Adios Harry, 1:55.

On a half-mile strip: Adios Butler, 1:53.3; Bret Hanover, 1:57.1; and Bye Bye Byrd, 1:57.4.

And therein are the reasons why Wolverine is making the change - faster times, better horses and stiffer competition by drivers for the entire mile and not for the final quarter as is the custom at the half mile ovals.

By George Maskin
observing sports

I HAVE TO CONSIDER myself a lucky guy...for one thing I work for some pretty swell guys who permit me to drift around this wonderful country of ours. Secondly, there's a pretty understanding of me here. I'm always for a week or so.

From the time I was a youngster, there's always been a wanderlust in me. But I didn't realize it until the other day when I watched a spectacular film on "Our America" at one of the exhibits at the famed Disneyland out in California, that I have really been around in recent years.

Under an unusual "around the room setting" where the film showed in front and behind and along the side of you...it told the story of our country...these United States which all of us cherish so much.

Business Shows Big Gain In Winter Trot Meeting

With three more weeks of racing on the agenda, Jackson's action at Northville Downs is giving every sign of swinging ever upward in both attendance and mutual handle before the Dec. 30 finale.

The real breakthrough arrived over the weekend. On Friday a turnout of 3,140 pushed \$250,021 through the mutual machines and Saturday's top crowd of 4,253 wagered \$308,753 on an excellent 10-race program.

"Our average is \$195,611 and barring the worst possible weather, we should finish strong. It is obvious the weekends will be our best action but if the mutual handle maintains a respectable level during the week, we might hit a \$250,000 average," said Leon A. Slavin, president of Jackson Harness Raceway who is conducting the current winter session at Northville.

SLAVIN ADMITTED that the attendance has been hurt because the triple-decked clubhouse isn't completed in its entirety.

"Our switchboard has been hopping with requests for dinner reservations nightly. Regrettably, we cannot take them since only the lower level of the clubhouse is being used right now. However, it will be ready to 1970 and you certainly will notice the difference."

The affable racing executive, who enjoyed an all-time record season in the recent Jackson Harness Raceway meeting, also reminded the adoption of Tuesday as Ladies Night should give the gate an early week lift.

"Women are becoming as knowledgeable as men in the sport. And when they see our new heating and air conditioning system throughout the plant, they are certain to keep coming back. We maintain a constant temperature of 70 degrees."

Director of racing Gary Buxton, who has been doing an excellent job of bringing good fields together in balance, is now working on a marathon series and will make the first presentation next Saturday with a one and one-half mile assignment.

The track record for this distance among pacers goes back to 1945 when Little Jack came the trip in 3:15. It has not been contested at Northville for trotters.

PERFORMANCE-WISE, it was another outstanding week at Northville Downs. Buxton presented a mile and one-quarter for trotters Tuesday and Howard Watkins' Prince Manuul out of Livonia established a record of 2:46 3/5. The 11-year-old gelding scored his ninth win, beating Super Mattie by three-quarters of a length.

D.W. Yates, racing for Charles Pontius of Ceresco, Mich., became the first triple winner of the meeting, beating Pride's Rusty and Frisky by a neck. Orvis M. Ramonayer's Orphan horse posted his 18th win of the year, capturing the Macomb County Invitational Friday in 2:08 1/5.

There were graphic scenes of Washington, D. C., and it made you feel that there you were again, standing in front of the White House, ordering down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol.

There were "shots" of Miami Beach...and how it's so nice to drift there during the winter!

There was Chinatown and the Fisherman's Wharf in film before your eyes and just the day before you were walking on the Wharf and trying to drive down what they call the most crooked street in the U. S.

There was Los Angeles...and looking down from up Sunset Blvd. into the lighted area...and you had beheld the same sight the night before as you drove along to visit old friend Bill Bond (remember him on Channel 7 News? He's now on Channel 7 in L.A.).

The panoramic view of the mountains in the movie was so fresh in your memory book, too. A couple days before you'd sailed along 28,000 feet up in one of those American Airline jet birds.

There you were in the film driving up Michigan Avenue, across

There you were in the film driving up Michigan Avenue in Chicago, across the River bridge and past the Sheraton-Cadillac where you've stopped so many times as a member of the Piston's party.

There was the Statue of Liberty standing in the harbor in New York...and while you've never sailed into New York, you always take a peep at Miss Liberty from an airplane window when your plane makes its approach into Manhattan.

This has to be a great country...and the more I travel around it, the more I appreciate it.

The jet plane, of course, has shrunk us together. The jets make it from Metro to the west coast in just over four hours, sometimes less. They make it back in 3 1/2 hours.

It's only an hour to New York or Washington and 2 1/2 hours to Miami.

But wherever you go in this land, you can use the same money...you can talk the same language...you can rent a car and drive on the same side of the road...you can behold the beautiful gals that make up our population.

BOUNCING LAST WEEK as we did out to San Francisco, down to Los Angeles, over to Phoenix and then back to San Diego...you have to say that there was something "unrealistic" about it for the Michiganander.

Your daily calls back to Detroit with reports about the Pistons brought reports on how it was 20 or 25 degrees and some snow in the air.

But out on the coast, you needed no overcoat, no even a top coat.

You drove along the Pacific, south of Los Angeles and your eyes glittered...a visit to Marineland was worth the price of admission.

But give me Disneyland anytime, not for just three or four hours, but for a couple of days. It has to be one of the most exciting spots around and believe me it's just as thrilling for a grandfather-to-be as it is for youngsters.

Well, that's behind us...and we'd better settle down to the reality of home life. The overcoat is ready...so are the boots...and the memories of looking out over the beautiful Pacific...well, like all our trips one makes...they're now just memories.

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