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Trotters Open Tonight At Wolverine

Horse racing fans bid adieu to the King of sports Saturday in the western section of Metropolitan Detroit and harness racing enthusiasts will welcome the Queen of sports Wednesday when Wolverine Raceway opens a 76-night meeting at the Detroit Race Course.

The thoroughbreds wound up the 120-day campaign at the DRC Saturday with attendance and purse figures on the sad side...both showing declines from the records of a year ago.

With that kind of a showing hanging over its head, Wolverine is looking forward to an even better meeting than in 1970 when it shattered all records for attendance, handle and what you have.

The reason Wolverine under the direction of Vice President and General Manager Richard Wilson has arranged what appears to be the greatest harness racing program ever offered in the area.

That, along with the numerous promotions planned by Wilson and his aides, is expected to have the track humming throughout the 76 nights with things that are geared to bring more and more persons into the plant.

THE DRC concluded its 90-day summer meeting with a total attendance of 881,726, a dip of 14.5 per cent from 1970, and total wagering of \$80,999,905, down 10 per cent from a year ago.

The daily average handle was \$688,399 compared to \$888,020 and the average daily attendance was 9,797 contrasted to 11,452 in 1970.

For the 30-day spring meeting, the DRC averaged 9,195 and \$748,889 at the open & 76-night meeting at the Detroit Race Course.

Wolverine faces the same problems as the DRC in getting fans through the maze of temporary roads and the huge piles of mud and debris created by work on the Jeffries highway. The conditions will probably exist for another year and a half.

In addition, the DRC lost 1,200 parking spaces when the new highway took 127 feet along the Schoolcraft side of the plant. There isn't any way to make up for that loss and it hurt the thoroughbred meeting on every big day when cars jammed all of the entrances and oftentimes fans couldn't get into the stands until the second or third race.

During the past three years he has been on assignment by the New York Harness Racing Commission and has had several turns at Yonkers and Roosevelt Raceways, considered the top assignments in the east.

He accepted a contract from Wolverine last spring and there are indications that he may take over at some of the other area plants in another year.

AS ANOTHER feature, one that fans are certain to follow, Wolverine will present a series of eight early closing stakes in a 10-night period in early September.

The stakes will highlight the two weeks of Grand Circuit events and will bring all of the nation's two and three-year-olds of the Roaring Grand to the area.

As an added attraction, Wolverine will present renewals of the Matron four miles in better than 2:00.

There is only one change in the official family where Chuck Conn, Jr., son of the late Charley Conn, Sr., who served more than 30 years as executive secretary of the Michigan Horsemen's Association, will take over as starter.

Chuck, who was taught all of the fine points of keeping a racing strip in top condition by his father, served as track man at plants in the Buffalo, N.Y. area for several years before shifting to the role of starter.

The big award comes on the final Tuesday when the contest winner will receive a week's vacation to Florida. It will be eight days and seven nights at Pompano Beach with travel via Delta Airlines.

Wolverine is also making plans for a repeat of the popular "Good Ol' Days" program on Sept. 9. It attracted more than 19,000 a year ago for the largest harness racing crowd in Michigan history.

It also will be the opening night of the stakes and will have the Motor City Pace as the principal attraction.

Post time for the first race is 8:30 p.m. and Wilson emphasizes that this means 8:30 p.m. sharp.

THE INAUGURAL Pace, which tops the opening card with a purse of \$2,400, attracted a field of seven headed by John Lighthill's Star John and speedy H.T. Nick, from the powerful Ray Forsythe stable.

The pace will give area fans their first chance to see Sandra Fisher, who formerly trained with Harold Fisher, in the sulky for the first time in Michigan.

Sandra, who has her own stable now, shipped in from Maryland where she received a driver's license last spring. More than that she won her second start at a parimutuel track. Sandra will have the reins on Jerebo this time.

Others in the inaugural are: Joe Marsh's Diller Volo, Bob Ackerman's Trenton Lady, Doug Ackerman's sensational Broad Shaw and Jim Merriman driving Springs Pride, a Bret Hanover filly. Wolverine will have the daily double, Big Perfecta and a Tri-Fecta on the 10th race.

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Turf Tips, Quips

By Doc Minard

Strange as it may sound, Michigan's two smallest harness racing operations will have the enviable record of ending the 1971 season with plus figures for attendance and handle.

The Detroit Racing Association rang down the curtain on its thoroughbred meeting at the Detroit Race Course with both figures on the minus side.

The Hazel Park harness meeting was a big one but fell short of the records set a year ago even though it went over \$900,000 for a single night's wagering. It was down in both turnstile and mutuel figures.

The Jackson Raceway campaign at Jackson in late spring was the most successful ever staged by the President and General Manager Leon Slavin with a tremendous increase in betting and attendance.

But it remains for Northville Downs, the smallest of the tracks in the Detroit area, to make the best showing to date.

Officials of the other racing plants have always taken a dim view of the tight operation of Northville's Executive Manager John Carlo. That is up to this year when Carlo, who always takes a dim view of promotions, is conducting one of the most successful harness racing meets in the United States.

For the first time the half-mile plant has really taken hold. Better horses, excellent weather, the ultra-modern clubhouse and the racing strip that is only a few yards away from the stands caught the fancy of the betting public with the result that business is booming.

The Downs figured to end the 35-night season with a nightly average of \$420,000 for a hike of 12.7 per cent over the \$372,931 for the same number of nights a year ago. It had handled \$18,866,599 for 33 nights.

The turnstile count was up 14.2 per cent with a nightly average count of 5,667 compared to 4,984 in 1970. A total of 187,011 stormed through the gates.

And that should go far in convincing Racing Commissioner Leo Shirley that Northville should retain its summer dates. It's rather hard to order a change in the face of such success.

It will be interesting to see what happens come next December when the Commissioner has to announce the dates.

Northville had a rough go during the winter when it had to start midway through the Windsor meeting. But even under those conditions the

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