

Trotters Off to Big Start

After an opening that was second to none in Michigan, Wolverine Harness Raceway is looking forward to a record season, comparable to that in 1965 when it set 22 records.

Despite the fact that Saturday's opening was the earliest ever in the state, Wolverine, which operates over the facilities of the Detroit Race Course at the intersection of Middlebelt and Schoolcraft Roads in Livonia, had a record opening night handle and a near record crowd.

The combination of perfect spring weather, the end of the Lenten season and the return of the pacers and trotters to Michigan after a lapse

of four months appeared to be just what was ordered. The crowd of 11,388 was the second largest for Wolverine and the \$608,349 handle was the most for an opening night in the state since a Michigan harness racing track had exceeded \$600,000. Wolverine did that two years ago with an all-time high of \$609,380. The track also holds the all-time high attendance figure of 13,186 on opening night in 1953.

There wasn't any question but that this would be a banner opening — the track delayed the start of the first race 17 minutes and still saw Schoolcraft Road jammed with racegoers as far back as Beech Road in Redford Township. The traffic was still jammed when the field left the post for the second race.

And there was evidence that the handle would reach record proportions as early as the first event when eager bettors stood in long lines before the daily double windows. When the mutual department totaled the pool, it was a record high of \$34,276, erasing the previous standard of \$50,048 of April 10, 1964.

The fact that the featured Inaugural pace attracted only six starters killed chances of bettering the mutual handle for a single night. The mutual machines racked up a total of \$69,592 on the seventh race, a conditioned pace with a field of eight, and then dropped back to \$60,232 for the Inaugural. That dip of \$9,000 meant the difference between an all-time high and a record handle for the opening.

As it was, Wolverine just missed by \$3,000 and Vice President and General Manager Orlov Owen, who had

nothing but smiles at the successful opener, predicted the track would shatter the mutual record before the end of the 58-night meeting on May 31.

Honor of becoming the first winner of 1967 in Michigan went to driver Terry Bu-

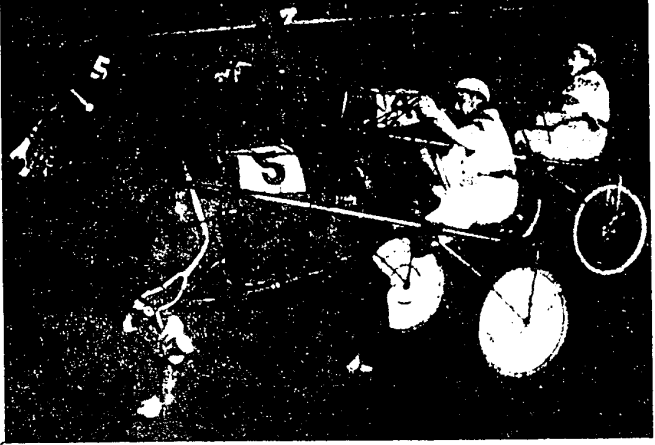
ter, who guided Red Queen to an easy triumph over the heavy track in the season opener in the slow time of 2:26. Red Queen went off at better than 81 and paid \$19. Then Gold Jet, a six-year-

old, making his first start, romped home in the second at 1-11 odds to complete a daily double worth \$263.50.

Joe Marsh Jr., the defending driving champion, showed he'll have to be considered as a threat

again this year by recording a driving triple. That was the best performance for the initial card.

Joe guided Careless Kate under the wire in the third for a \$5 mutual, had Chey-



HITTING WIRE with a half-length margin is Royal Robert, a seven-year-old son of Sky Rider, owned by Robert Kalish of Detroit and driven by Tom Merriman, to win the Inaugural Pace at Wolverine Harness Raceway's record opening. Royal Robert just did have enough

to hold off Trovhold Bob (4), handled by Joe Marsh Jr. A crowd of 11,388, second largest in Wolverine history, viewed the opener and wagered a record high opening total of \$608,349.

Observer Sports News

Page ★ 2B Wednesday, March 29, 1967



NO QUESTION about the interest of Michigan harness racing fans in the return of the pacers and trotters. This shows a section of the crowd lining up for daily double tickets—the pool was a record high of \$54,276.

Finishes Course at Fort Leonard Wood
Army Pvt. Philip V. Messina, 23, son of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent C. Messina, 20032 Weyher, Livonia, has completed an eight-week construction machine operator course at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo. The private's wife, Barbara, lives at 8085 Bristol Drive in Garden City.

Observing SPORTS

By George Maskin

A baseball resolution? What better description fits the announcement that Detroit area Catholic High School League baseball teams — and this includes Our Lady of Sorrows and St. Agatha — have adopted a three-ball walk and two-strike-and-out rule for the coming season.

Bold, you say? Agreed, but it's a step forward for baseball, as far as youngsters are concerned, and it's a move that rates considerable attention from those who govern Little League, Babe Ruth and other types of baseball for the kids.

Ralph Owen, the director of the Catholic League, never has been one who stood still. As a prep coach in Detroit, he always was one of the best.

Since taking command of the Catholic League, the highest schoolboy circuit of its kind, Owen has worked to promote all sports, to match those of equal strength, to give the league one of the most rounded programs you'll find anywhere.

Giving a batter a walk on three balls or having him ruled out on two strikes is an idea Owen has nurtured for some time.

"I know it's an experiment. It might get us into some difficulties," Owen told this writer the other day.

"But we have felt that something had to be done for high school baseball. It's the toughest sport we have to promote. Interest is the lowest, too.

The old guard among baseball fans, supporters and executives, no doubt can't buy Owen's new idea. Baseball never has been known as the sport with "modernistic ideas."

Consider the number of discussions, which have arisen, that baseball could help itself by permitting inter-league play among the majors each season . . . thereby giving fans in Detroit a chance to see the Los Angeles Dodgers, the San Francisco Giants, the New York Mets, etc.

Everybody agrees that such a step would stimulate interest many fold. It would up attendance tremendously.

But baseball stands pat. It won't budge. Breaking precedent is something the moguls don't like.

This same feeling is prevalent on the lower levels . . . among the colleges and the amateurs, which includes the schoolboys.

We're all for what the Catholic League is doing. We should think that the State High School Association makes the rule Michigan-wide next season . . . and perhaps, that the rule becomes nationwide within a year or two.

So should the Little Leagues . . . and also the rest of the kids' leagues.

"We have been concerned that some—even many—of our schools might drop baseball. And what a tragedy that would be—our schools without the sport known as our national pastime."

Many considerations figured in Owen's proposal to change the rule.

He thought about the pitchers, the batters . . . and mostly about the game itself, when it is played by the schoolboys in Michigan.

"Most of our teams bank pretty much on one pitcher," explained Owen. "And since we start the season by mid-April, it's pretty difficult to get one pitcher or ten in shape to work two full games in a week.

"So, we think that our new rule will help pitchers' arms and perhaps save a few of them from bad aches and pains.

"On the other side of the fence, there's the Continued on Page 3B

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Livonian Completes Course in Cooking

Army Pvt. Gerald M. Peterson, 24, son of Mr. and Mrs. Maynard W. Peterson, 35564 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, has completed a cooking course at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo.

During the eight-week course, he was trained in cake and pastry baking, meat cutting, and learned to prepare and serve food in Army mess halls and in the field.

Pvt. Peterson's wife, Carol, lives at 35142 Birchwood, Wayne, Mich.

A Trained Mechanic

Airman Apprentice Michael J. Sielaff, USN, son of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Sielaff, 15676 Park Lane, Livonia, was graduated from the Aviation Structural Mechanics School in Structures at the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Memphis, Tenn.

Ends Technical Study

Harry B. Johnson, claim representative for State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Company, 28414 Joy Road in Livonia, has returned after completing three weeks of technical study at his firm's home office in Bloomington, Ill.

Cash on Beam

Norm Cash's 32 home runs in 1966 were the biggest total for the Tiger slugger since 1962 and included the 200th of his career.