

DID YOU HEAR THE LATEST?

Stay up-to-date with the latest news from Assiniboia Downs.

ISSUE #177 - MARCH 28, 2025



Brian "Ivan Bigg" Gory

Remembering Brian "Ivan Bigg" Gory

Brian Gory, known to many in the racing world as "Ivan Bigg," passed away on March 20. He was just eight days shy of his 82nd birthday.

There's now an empty carrel in the south end of the clubhouse at Assiniboia Downs that speaks volumes. For two decades, that space belonged to Brian, whose presence at the track was as reliable as the racing season itself.

CLICK HERE to learn more.



Trainer Mike Taphorn with star Manitoba-bred No Show No Call. (George Williams)

Taphorn Making His Mark at ASD

Assistant Director of Racing Derek Corbel reports there are now 200 horses on the grounds as opening day Tuesday, May 13 fast approaches, with four more trainers shipping in this week including Will Tourangeau, Jamie Hartmann, Terry Cole and Larry Cizik. Trainer Mike Taphorn is already here with his star Manitoba-bred No Show No Call, and he will have over 20 horses in his stable this year.

CLICK HERE for more information.

2025 Live Racing Season

- 2025 Live Race Dates - click [here](#)
- **NEW ENHANCED** Shipping Incentives - click [here](#)



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- Stakes Schedule - click [here](#)
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Tickets on Sale for Easter Brunch & Mother's Day Brunch

Tickets are on sale now for Easter Brunch & Mother's Day Brunch. **Tickets are selling quickly for both so call to order your tickets today! 204-885-3330.**

- [Easter Brunch](#) - Sunday, April 20
- [Mother's Day Brunch](#) - Sunday, May 11

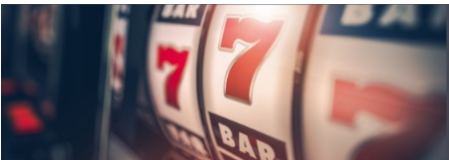
Click the above links for menu details and ticket prices.



Live Racing Prime Rib Buffet

Reservations are now open for our live racing Certified Angus Prime Rib Buffet featuring succulent, melt-in-your-mouth prime rib prepared to perfection, seafood table, rotating entree selections and much more! Buffet prices: Adults \$59.95, Seniors (65+) \$54.95, Kids 12 & under \$34.95, Kids 5 & under \$22.95.

SPECIAL LIMITED OFFER: \$10 off per person for any race night in May. **Promotional reservations are limited and must be made before April 30th.**



- #1 Spot in Winnipeg for VLT Jackpots!
- Free Draw for \$200 Cash every Friday, Saturday & Sunday plus draws to Spin the Lucky Cash Wheel



[A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates](#)

A legendary farewell to a racing icon—relive the final chapter in our Ken Hendricks Snapshot in Time, honouring Hank's unforgettable ride into the record books and beyond. Click [here](#) to read more.



- \$11.95 Daily Lunch Special
- Happy Hour (3 to 5pm & 9pm to close)
- \$4 Spirit Hour (11 pm to midnight)
- Daily Evening Specials



2025 Arkansas Derby Cheat Sheet

The Arkansas Derby (G1) this Saturday at Oaklawn Park features a great matchup between multiple stakes winner Coal Battle and fast maiden breaker Cornucopian. Coal Battle has won four stakes in a row, the last two at Oaklawn Park. Will he be able to catch his talented new rival?

Cornucopian has been listed as the 7/5 favourite in Saturday's Arkansas Derby. (Coady Media)

One of the premier prep races for the [Kentucky Derby](#), the Arkansas Derby has sent several horses on to shine in the American classic races, led by 2015 Triple Crown winner American Pharoah, and last year's Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan. ~

[AmericasBestRacing.net](#)

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- Wager on Top Tracks
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- Off-Track Betting Locations



Mandatory Payout Alerts:

- **Woodbine Harness:** Mandatory payout of the Jackpot Hi-5 on Saturday, March 29. The current carryover is \$131,002.
- **Gulfstream Park:** Mandatory payout of the Jackpot Pick 6 on Sunday, March 30. The current carryover is \$89,926.
- **Laurel Park:** Mandatory payout of all carryover pools on Sunday, March 30.



Steve Haskin's Kentucky Derby Rankings Week 9

There are two Kentucky Derby preps this Saturday, the Arkansas Derby (G1) at Oaklawn Park and the Florida Derby (G1) at Gulfstream Park. These races often attract larger fields than normal, with horses trying to squeeze into the Kentucky Derby field.

Secretariat.com has been running Steve Haskin's horse racing columns for years, and for good reason! Haskin spent decades in the backstretch learning his craft, and it shows!

Florida Derby favourite Sovereignty faces nine rivals and breaks from post 10. Coal Battle faces eight rivals including the Bob Baffert-trained favourite Cornucopian. Read Haskin's notes closely. ~

[Secretariat.com](#)

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151st Kentucky Derby: Point Leaders, But



Still Early

Here are the Kentucky Derby (G1) points leaders as of March 25. Each horse is listed along with his sire, points, owners and trainer. Earnings follow along with the last three Beyer Speed Figures.

The top 20 horses on the list are currently in the field, although there are still the Arkansas Derby, Florida Derby, Wood Memorial, Santa Anita Derby and Blue Grass Stakes to be run.~ CanadianThoroughbred.com

Final Gambit improved his Beyer Speed Figure from 64 to 90 winning the Jeff Ruby Steaks. (Coady Media / Turfway Park)

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The Best of Bob by Bob Gates

From September 1, 2023: The Room

Our history guy recently ventured into one of the most restricted areas at the track—and lived to tell the tale. This week's blog looks back at the people from the 1950s, '60s, '70s, and beyond who were directly connected to this mysterious spot. Click [here](#) to uncover the story behind one of the coolest places at Assiniboia Downs—not quite Area 51, but close.

Feedback & Inside Track Archives

We would love to hear from you! Email your comments and/or suggestions to theinsidetrack@ASDowns.com.

Did you know that past issues of The Inside Track are available on our website? Click [here](#) to read them now.



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Down the Homestretch: Remembering Brian “Ivan Bigg” Gory

Mar 27, 2025 | The Inside Track



Brian “Ivan Bigg” Gory

By G. S. Thompson

Brian Gory, known to many in the racing world as “Ivan Bigg,” passed away on March 20, 2025, at 4:55 a.m. – symbolically on the first day of spring – after a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 81, just eight days shy of his 82nd birthday.

There’s now an empty carrel in the south end of the clubhouse at Assiniboia Downs that speaks volumes. For two decades, that space belonged to Brian, whose presence at the track was as reliable as the racing season itself.

Born on March 28, 1943, Brian grew up in Winnipeg’s North End on Cathedral Avenue. Even as a child, his exceptional abilities shone through. At Robertson Elementary School, he earned the trophy as the best student, an achievement his sister Pat noted was still recorded at the school decades later.

His entrepreneurial spirit emerged early when, as a youngster, he collected returnable bottles for pocket money and organized comic book trading sessions with neighborhood children. This creativity would become his hallmark throughout life.

Brian’s career path was as diverse as his interests. He began his writing career with a “Youth Beat” column in the Winnipeg Tribune, before moving on to positions with the Globe and Mail and the Ottawa Citizen. His journey eventually led him to Assiniboia Downs, where he served as a marketing consultant beginning in the early 2000s.

At the Downs, Brian created “The Insider,” the predecessor to the track’s current newsletter, which he wrote for 16 years, while also writing a horse racing column for the Winnipeg Free Press Canstar Community News. He then became a freelancer for the Canadian Thoroughbred Magazine.

His "Bettor's Edge" column in the Canadian Thoroughbred was highly regarded, but perhaps his proudest moments came in 2023, when he was nominated for a Sovereign Award, and also became the sole public handicapper to predict the top three finishers in the Queen's Plate – including a 16-1 second-place finisher. This feat earned him an invitation from Woodbine to write a column predicting the outcome of the Woodbine Mile.



"I WON BIG" Workshop Every Saturday - Hosted By Ivan Bigg

Beyond his handicapping prowess, Brian connected with fans through his popular "I Won Big" Saturday morning workshops. "For years I attended the Saturday morning workshops," said former Handicapper of the Year Ron Phelps. "It was something I looked forward to every Saturday. Nowhere else could you have two hours of entertainment and a chance at winning a good payoff for \$20. There were always a lot of laughs and also a lot of heated arguments. Through the laughs and arguments Brian always held his own."

Brian was known as a "rules guy" in his handicapping approach, sticking firmly to his proven methods. "He never swayed on those beliefs over the years I knew him," said Phelps. "And I respected that. Many times it worked, so good on him."

Racing was just one facet of Brian's multidimensional life. In the gardening world, he was affectionately known as "Mr. Tomato" and gained recognition for his "Kozy-Coats" plant protection product. He collaborated with Kevin Toomey of TNT Seeds, appeared on "The Manitoba Gardener" radio show on CJOB, and wrote articles for editor Dorothy Dobbie for a magazine of the same name. His landscaping talents turned his modest Kilbride Avenue yard into such a showpiece that it attracted bus tours of garden enthusiasts.

Remarkably, even in his final summer, Brian completed a full landscaping job single-handedly, working with 30-pound rolls of sod despite his advancing age.

The arts also claimed a portion of Brian's creative energy. From elementary school performances to high school productions, his acting talent caught the attention of directors. His sister recalled that he was so impressive that he was invited to perform at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in "A Streetcar Named Desire."

One of Brian's favourite stories was about attending Secretariat's final race at Woodbine. As friend Louise Townsend recounted, "At the last minute he was able to get a cheap sale seat from Winnipeg, and with little time to prepare he wore shorts aboard the plane and out to the racetrack. It had been warm in Winnipeg, but that day Toronto experienced some unseasonably cold and wet weather. Not one to worry, Brian bragged that he was THERE to see the 'Greatest Race Horse' run his final race before the trip to the breeding shed."

Bill Drew, another friend, remembered encountering Brian about a month before his passing: "I think a lot of people were always appreciative of the effort Brian put in to bring fans and people together. I bumped into Brian about a month ago and he told me about his situation. I was taken aback by how calm and incredibly brave he was. The racetrack is full of interesting people who walk to their own beat. Brian was certainly one of them, and he was a really good guy."

Larry Liebrecht, who co-hosted the I Won Big workshops with Brian in his final year, fondly remembers their partnership and Brian's distinctive approach to handicapping, which was rules-based. The pair shared some notable success at

the betting windows, with Liebrecht recalling, "Brian and I won a couple of big, decent pots ourselves. Our biggest hit together was \$12,000 with a Pick 4."

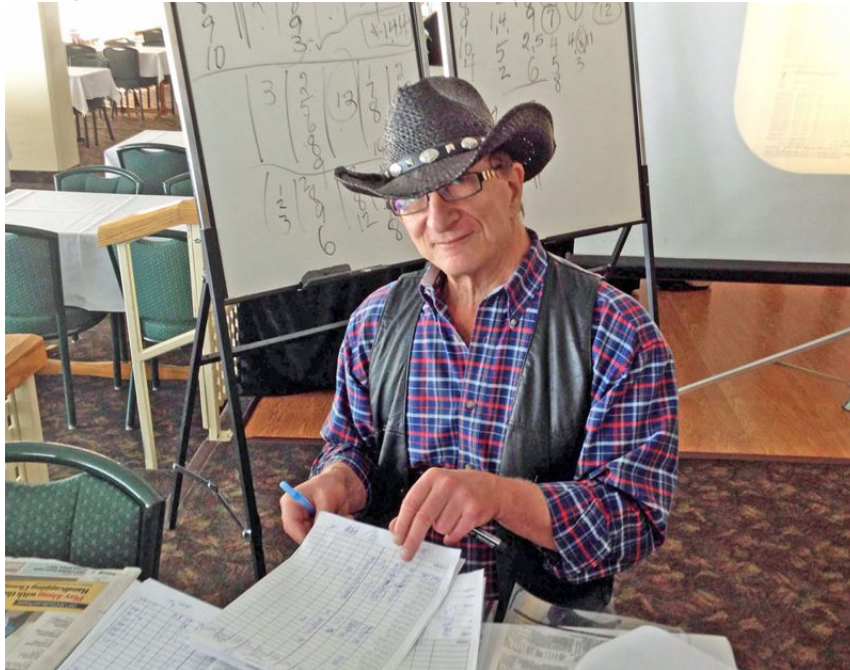
The I Won Bigg group also had impressive collective victories, including a few large Pick 6 wins. Liebrecht confirms the popular Saturday morning I Won Bigg workshops will continue, saying, "We've got our core of 20 to 30 people for the most part, and for now, we're going to continue on," preserving Brian's legacy of shared handicapping wisdom.

"I'm sure he'll be watching us from above and helping us," said Liebrecht.

Phelps echoed this sentiment of lasting impact: "As we are all aging, ASD is starting to lose a lot of good people who have meant a lot to me. Brian was one of them. Thanks Brian for being you, and I will always remember the fun times. I might even use a couple of rule horses in my next handicapping session."

A celebration of Brian's life will be held on Wednesday, April 23, at 2 p.m. at Assiniboia Downs, where friends and colleagues will gather to share memories .

A fitting final post for a man who lived life at full gallop.



Trainer Mike Taphorn Making His Mark at Assiniboia Downs

Mar 27, 2025 | The Inside Track



Trainer Mike Taphorn with Manitoba-bred star No Show No Call. (George Williams)

By G. S. Thompson

Assistant Director of Racing Derek Corbel reports there are now 200 horses on the grounds as opening day Tuesday, May 13 fast approaches, with four more trainers shipping in this week including Will Tourangeau, Jamie Hartmann, Terry Cole and Larry Cizik. Trainer Mike Taphorn is already here with his star Manitoba-bred No Show No Call, and he will have over 20 horses in his stable this year.

Taphorn, who is also a farrier, quickly caught the eye of handicappers and owners alike with his winning ways at Assiniboia Downs when he arrived here from Saskatchewan in 2020, and he has now compiled a career record of 138-117-84 from 670 starts, a 21 percent career win clip that was even better in 2023 and 2024 at 32% and 24%, respectively.

Growing up around horses in Lake Tisdale, Saskatchewan, Taphorn was destined for a life in the equine world. The 45-year-old trainer spent his childhood on a farm where both parents rode and his mother showed horses competitively. "We used to show horses as kids all the time, and then kind of graduated from there," said Taphorn.



Trainer Mike Taphorn talking to No Show No Call.

Taphorn's transition to the racing world began almost by accident. After owning a few racehorses with his parents, Taphorn decided he could do better himself. "I was at the track with horses. And I'm like, you know what? I can do this. I've been around horses my whole life." That confidence led to his first win as a trainer in 2005, starting with just a single horse.

His stable has grown significantly from 14 horses last year to over 20 this year, with more possibly on the way. The barn includes promising 3-year-olds with diverse breeding – Saskatchewan-breds, Manitoba-breds, California-breds, and even a Kentucky-bred.

No Show No Call, owned by the partnership of Staffmax Stable and Club 3D Stable, remains Taphorn's stable star after winning six races last year including the Frank Arnason Memorial Sire Stakes and the J. W. Sifton Stakes. The Manitoba-bred son of Kentucky Bear was the leading earner at Assiniboia Downs in 2024 with US\$77,137. He'll face older horses this season, a challenging transition for any young horse, but Taphorn is hopeful.

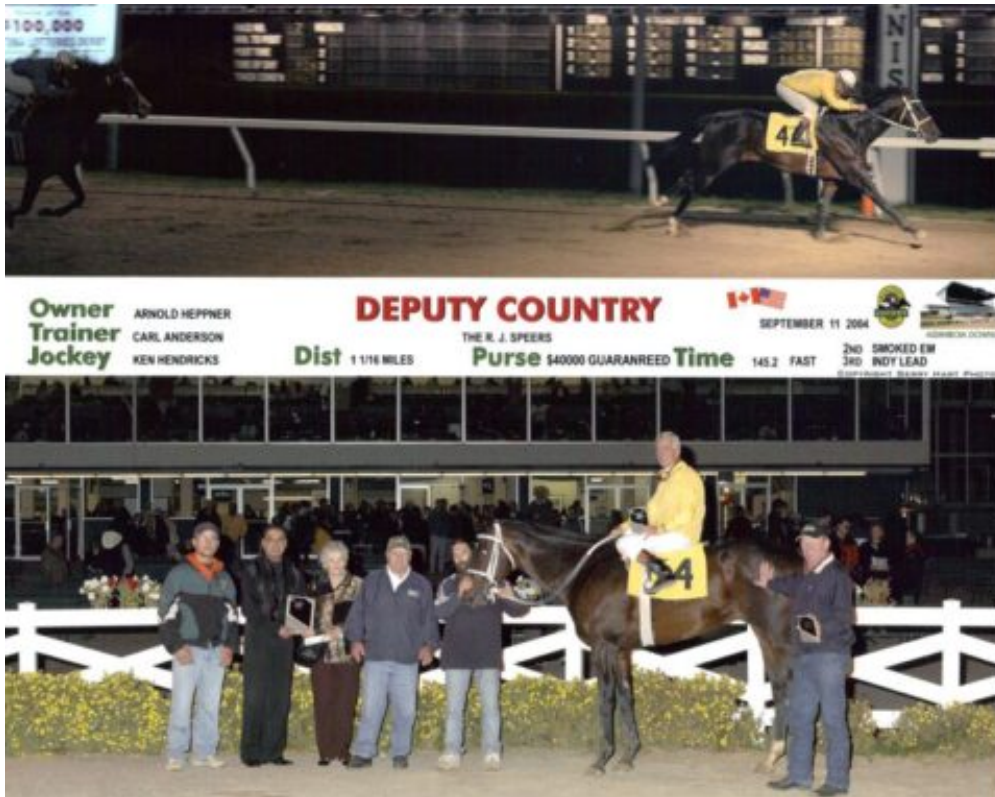
Taphorn is also excited about an unnamed 3-year-old Manitoba-bred with impressive bloodlines. "All his full siblings are runners," said Taphorn, pointing to a pedigree page featuring siblings with earnings of \$215,000, \$123,000, and \$74,000.

With his expanding stable and growing reputation, the Saskatchewan horseman is making his mark at Western Canada's premier racetrack, bringing solid horsemanship and a winning touch to Manitoba.

Well done Mike!

A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

Mar 24, 2025 | The Inside Track



This is the last installment of our *Ken Hendricks Snapshot in Time* feature. In 2004, Hank piloted the favoured Deputy Country to victory in the 45th running of the R. J. Speers Stakes. It marked the last time Hank won the Speers—a race he captured a record-setting six times, a record he co-holds with Jimmy Anderson.

They say records are made to be broken, but Hank's 1,685 career wins at Assiniboia Downs will never be touched. Hank was so much more than a great rider—just ask his family and friends. Rest in peace, my friend. (Gerry Hart photo)