

## DID YOU HEAR THE LATEST?

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

ISSUE #216 - DECEMBER 24, 2025



### ASD Holiday Hours

- Christmas Eve - Wednesday, December 24 - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Christmas Day - Thursday, December 25 - Closed
- Boxing Day - Friday, December 26 - 10 a.m. to 1 a.m.
- New Year's Eve - Wednesday, December 31 - 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.
- New Year's Day - Thursday, January 1 - 10 a.m. to 1 a.m.



John Smith with his horse Valor on Christmas Eve. Good news was on the horizon.

### **We Sure Could Use a Little Good News Today**

The barn area fell silent on Christmas Eve, save for the scratchy backstretch speakers playing the local country music station. John Smith sat on a five-gallon pail outside stall forty-seven with his horse Valor, nursing a lukewarm coffee while light snow drifted through an opening in the barn and collected on his jacket.

Anne Murray's voice floated through the cold December air... *We sure could use a little good news today...*

Unbeknownst to them, it was coming.

[Full story here.](#)



Open daily from 10 a.m. to 1 a.m.

### **The fun never stops at Assiniboia Downs Winnipeg's place to play and win!**

Did you know that Assiniboia Downs is Winnipeg's #1 Spot for VLT Jackpots? Play any of our 140 VLTs in the Club West Gaming Lounge for your chance to win!

🎄 Join us for the 12 Days of Christmas daily through Wednesday, Dec. 24. Complimentary snacks and free draws to pick an ornament off the Christmas Tree for a chance to win \$100 cash!

🎁 Free Spin to Win draws — Friday, Saturday and Sunday starting at 6 p.m.

💰 Free \$200 cash draws — Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 9 p.m.

Click [here](#) to see our recent jackpots.



Travers Cummings

### **NFL Picks by TravyFootball Week 17**

31-17 on the season. 2-1 last week. This week? I'm locked in on three games where playoff dreams are on the line. One team just pulled off the comeback of the year and needs to protect first place. Another's chasing a division crown with two games left. And that QB who wasn't having fun? He just dropped four TDs and looks dialed in. Read the full [breakdown](#).





Groom Julianna LeRoux leaves the winner's circle with Baby Gundin after their victory in the Miss Imperial Overnight Stakes on Aug. 26 for trainer Jerry Gourneau and owner Henry S. Witt, Jr. Click image for full size.  
(Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

### Looking for a Special Photo?

Track Photographer Jason Halstead may have just what you're looking for

Looking for that extra-special photo of your big horse, one you might not find in your win pictures?

Track photographer Jason Halstead takes numerous photos during the races, and not all of them can make it into the win photos. If you're looking for something frameable from your big race, or of your special horse, email Jason at [jjhphoto@gmail.com](mailto:jjhphoto@gmail.com).

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 😊



Click photo to enlarge

### A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

As we celebrate the Christmas season, may the peace and joy of this special time stay with us throughout 2026. Pictured here is Ivan Dowler and sons' *Peace Night* from October 3, 1977. The dark bay gelding was a solid competitor during his time (1975 to 1979) at the Downs. (Gerry Hart Photo)

Merry Christmas to all, from your born-on-Christmas Day history guy, and may you never be too grown-up to search the skies on Christmas Eve.



- \$13.95 Daily Lunch Special
- Happy Hour (3 to 5pm & 9pm to close)
- Daily Evening Specials
- Details at [ASDowns.com](http://ASDowns.com)



### Doc Sullivan, Bank Frenzy Clash Again In Alex M. Robb

Multiple stakes-winners Doc Sullivan and Bank Frenzy will renew their rivalry in the \$125,000 Alex M. Robb, a one-turn mile for New York-bred 3-year-olds and up, on Friday, Dec. 26, at Aqueduct Racetrack.

Doc Sullivan and Bank Frenzy will be facing each other for the fifth time, with the score currently tied at 2-2.

A great race for Boxing Day!

-- [Paulick Report](#)

Bank Frenzy (outside) gets the best of Doc Sullivan in the Empire Classic Stakes on Oct. 25 at Aqueduct. (NYRA Photo)

[CLICK FOR FULL STORY](#)

- Wager on Top Tracks
- Simulcast Schedule
- Off-Track Betting Locations



**Mandatory Payout Alert:** Mohawk Harness will have a mandatory payout of the Jackpot Super Hi-5 on Friday, December 26. The current carryover is \$189,705.



Best of Greeley won five races at Assiniboia Downs in 2025 at the age of 10. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

### Unsung Heroes: Canada's Winningest Horses of 2025

There were dozens of thoroughbreds across Canada who were stars on their own circuit, whether they were winning stakes races or claiming races. Fans loved to bet on them, and grooms, owners, trainers, and breeders celebrated them when they raced.

Here are a few of the winningest horses at Canadian tracks in 2025, including one from Manitoba!

-- [Canadian Thoroughbred](#)[CLICK FOR FULL STORY](#)

### Santa Anita Postpones Opening Day Until Dec. 28

The opening day of Santa Anita Park's Classic Meet, traditionally held Dec. 26, will be postponed for two days until Dec. 28 ahead of this week's declining weather forecast.

While it is difficult to predict weather forecasts with certainty, the current models have an atmospheric river set to dump significant rain on the Southern California area beginning the afternoon of Dec. 23 through late Dec. 26.

-- [BloodHorse](#)[CLICK FOR FULL STORY](#)

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Track Historian Bob Gates

## The Best of Bob

Well, it's time for our annual holiday treat from your "born-on-Christmas-Day" track historian—my take on Clement Clarke Moore's poem 'A Visit from Saint Nicholas.'

The result is a Christmas classic with a local horse racing flavour that we can enjoy every holiday season. Click [here](#) for my version of A Racetracker's Night Before Christmas—and Merry Christmas! (From December 17, 2020)

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## Feedback & Inside Track Archives

We would love to hear from you! Email your comments and/or suggestions to [theinsidetrack@ASDowns.com](mailto: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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# We Sure Could Use a Little Good News Today

Dec 22, 2025 | The Inside Track



By G.S. Thompson

The barn area fell silent on Christmas Eve, save for the scratchy backstretch speakers playing the local country music station. John Smith sat on a five-gallon pail outside stall forty-seven, nursing a lukewarm coffee while light snow drifted through an opening in the barn and collected on his jacket. Anne Murray's voice floated through the cold December air.

*We sure could use a little good news today...*

He unwrapped a Twinkie, his second of three, and figured this was as close to Christmas dinner as he'd get this year. Earlier, he'd walked across the street to Murphy's Tavern and shared a few drinks with the old-timers, guys who'd been working horses since the Fitzsimmons days. They'd toasted absent friends and

better times, then John had slipped back to the barn before the sentiment got too heavy.

The divorce papers had come through in October. His daughter hadn't returned his calls since Thanksgiving. And here he sat, fifty-three years old, on Christmas Eve, rubbing \$1,500 claimers, while the world seemed to be moving on without him.

Inside the stall, his favourite horse and longtime companion Valor shifted his weight and let out a long sigh. The big bay gelding had seen better days. They both had. Nine years old, forty-three starts, carrying all the aches and pains that come with a lengthy career on the track, just like his groom. But when he was right, when the stars aligned and the track came up just sloppy enough, Valor could still find another gear that defied everything the condition book said about him.

John stood up and slipped into the stall, brushing the snow from his shoulders. He ran his hand along Valor's neck, scratching softly behind his ears. The smell of hay and horse mixed with the cold bite of winter air. Valor turned his head and nuzzled his groom. "Merry Christmas, old man," John whispered. "Sorry I didn't get you anything fancy."

He'd spent the last of his Christmas money on a jar of his special warm-up liniment, the one that cost forty bucks and smelled like heaven and eucalyptus mixed together. Valor was in the day-after-tomorrow's Boxing Day feature, a mid-level allowance race that he had no business winning. But snow was in the forecast, and after that, freezing rain. The result would be a track surface where class didn't matter as much as heart.

Anne Murray gave way to Toby Keith's "I ain't as good as I once was, but I'm as good once as I ever was..." and it seemed only fitting. John finished his makeshift dinner while Valor worked his hay net with the methodical patience of an old campaigner who'd learned to savour the little things. He cherished the companionship of his groom. The snow fell steadier now, quiet and peaceful, the kind of Christmas Eve you see on greeting cards.

Around eight o'clock, John heard boots crunching through the fresh snow. Danny O'Brien, the trainer, appeared carrying a paper bag and two coffees, his hat and shoulders dusted white.

"Figured I'd find you here," O'Brien said, handing over the coffee. "Wife sent turkey sandwiches. Said nobody should eat Twinkies on Christmas Eve."

John felt something catch in his throat. "Thanks, Danny."

They stood in comfortable silence, watching Valor pick through his hay. O'Brien finally spoke.

"The Hendersons are flying in the day after tomorrow. Haven't seen this horse run in two years, but their daughter convinced them to come up from Phoenix for the Boxing Day card."

He paused. "They're talking about retiring him after this race. Win or lose. Sending him to their farm in Kentucky."

John felt his chest tighten. "He's still got plenty left, Danny."

"I know he does. And you know he does. But John..." O'Brien's voice softened. "Maybe it's time we both let him go out while he's still sound enough to enjoy it."

After O'Brien left, John stood in the stall with Valor for a long time. He thought about all he and Valor had been through, the tight winning photo finishes and the heartbreaking losses, the way this horse had never quit on him. Not once in six years together.

"We sure could use a little good news," John said quietly, looking up at the falling snow. "What do you say, Valor? One more time?" From inside the stall, the gelding lifted his head and nickered softly, the same answer he'd given a hundred times before.

Christmas Day came and went in the quiet way of racetracks on holidays, skeleton crews, almost all horses just walking for the day, the fans holding their breath before the Boxing Day card.

Boxing Day dawned grey and bitter, the track a freezing sheet of slop that sent half the card's entries to the scratch list. But Valor was ready. That morning, he stood in the turbulator for his usual hour, the warm water and Epsom salts working wonders for his knees. John rubbed his back and upper leg muscles with the special liniment, working it deep into the tissue. The old gelding stood quietly, eyes half-closed, understanding this ritual meant something important was coming.

The race unfolded exactly as John had dreamed it. The speed horses splashed through the slop and came back to Valor like he was calling them. Young Ramirez, the bug boy who'd caught the mount, sat quiet and confident in the irons. At the top of the stretch, with freezing rain mixing with snow, Valor's stride lengthened. He began to accelerate. John watched from the



apron, his hands balled into fists, as the big bay gelding found that gear, the one nobody thought existed anymore.

He won by a length and a half, galloping out strong, ears pricked, like he'd just discovered racing for the first time. In the winner's circle, Valor stood quietly while John held on to him for the win photo, his warm breath flowing across his groom's face. And John felt the tears come.

Mrs. Henderson touched his shoulder. "Our daughter wants to know if you'd consider coming to Kentucky. To work at our farm and take care of Valor. Salary, benefits, a cottage on the property."

John looked at the old gelding, at those kind eyes that had carried him through some of the worst years of his life. "Ma'am," he said, "I'd walk there barefoot to look after this horse."

Three weeks later, John stood in Murphy's one last time. The old-timers raised their glasses.

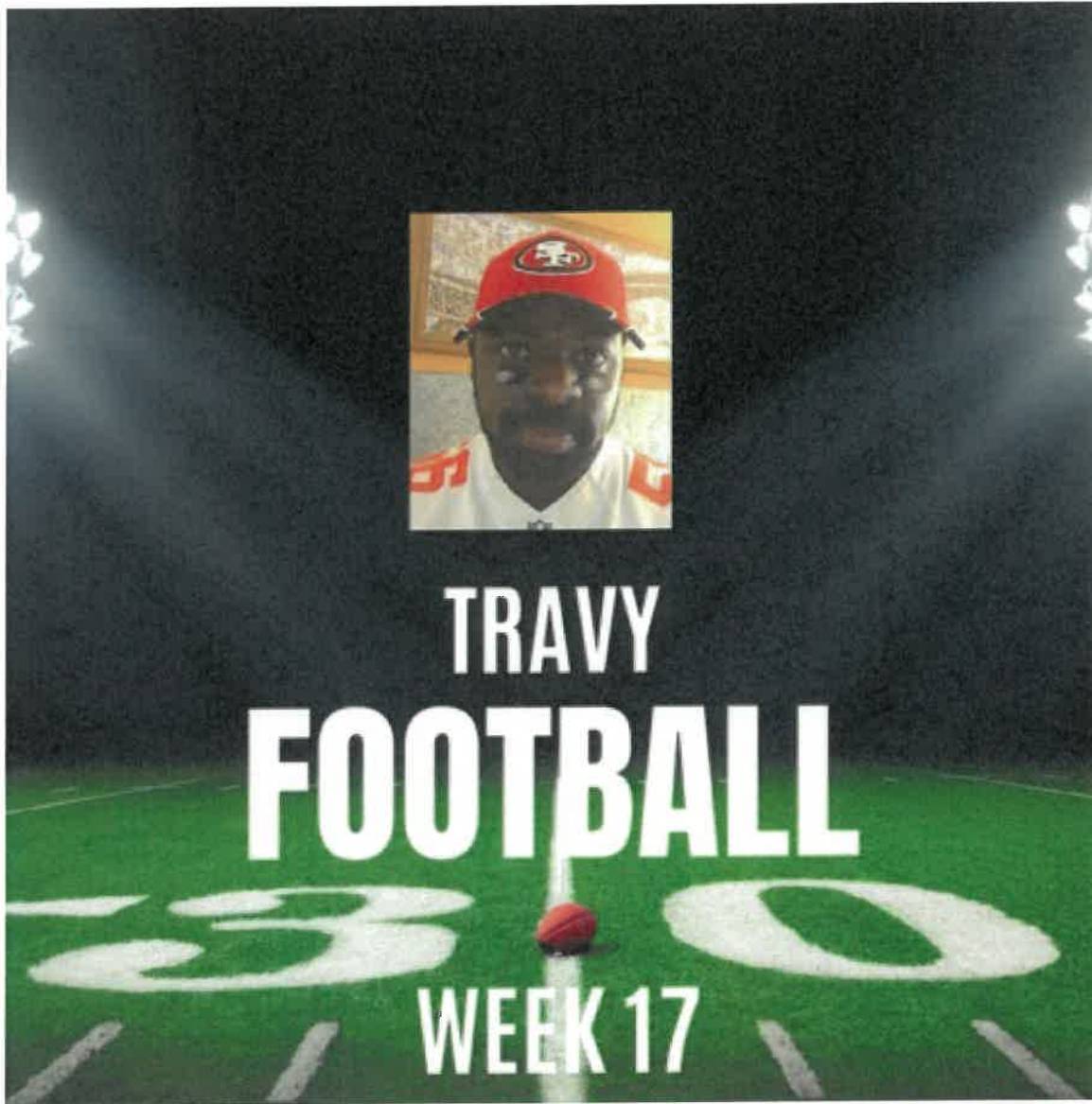
"To Valor," one said. "To the good ones," said another.

To welcome good news, thought John, as he walked out into the January cold. Across the street, Valor was waiting for him, and the trailer ride south. Ready for greener pastures and whatever came next.

Together.

# TravyFootball Week 17

Dec 22, 2025 | The Inside Track



**Seahawks over Panthers** (Sunday noon): Seattle had quite the comeback last week against the Rams in what was one of the best games of the year. After being down 30-14 in the 4th quarter, a punt return touchdown by Rashid Shaheed cut the deficit to eight points. After a three and out by the Rams, AJ Barner hauled in a pass from Sam Darnold to make it 30-28. After the wackiest two-point conversion I've ever seen (watch it on [YouTube](#)), the game was tied. Seattle ended up getting the win in overtime and with that, owns first place in the NFC. Now they'll hope to extend

that first place lead by defeating the Panthers. Carolina beat their division rivals, Tampa Bay, last week to take a one game lead in the race for the NFC South. The Panthers might be the most inconsistent team in the league. Games you think they'll lose, they win, and games you think they'll win, they lose. I do think Seattle is just the better team, so they should get the victory.

**Bills over Eagles** (Sunday afternoon): After handling their business in Cleveland last week, even though it was closer than it should have been, Buffalo heads back home to welcome the Eagles to Highmark Stadium. Josh Allen didn't have his typical game against the Browns, only throwing for 130 yards and no touchdowns. It was actually the legs of James Cook, who rumbled for 117 yards and two touchdowns, that led them to victory (and my fantasy football team to the final!). The Eagles, who have the NFC East division wrapped up already, made short work of the Washington Commanders, who were forced to play their 3rd string quarterback, Josh Johnson, after backup Marcus Mariota left with a hand injury. With only two regular season games left, Buffalo is still chasing New England for the AFC East crown and a win here would help that.

**Bengals over Cardinals** (Sunday noon): I don't know what's going on with Joe Burrow. Two weeks ago, he stated in an interview that he wasn't having fun playing football, and it kind of looked like it against the Ravens, but last week he looked pretty darn happy dismantling the Miami Dolphins, throwing for over 300 yards and four touchdowns. Whether it's happy Joe or sad Joe that shows up, it really won't matter since they're up against the Cardinals. Losers of seven games in a row, Arizona is just looking for some sort of positive spark that can maybe help them end this losing streak. I wouldn't get my hopes up on that because they are lacking in talent on both sides of the ball. More importantly, they don't currently have a capable quarterback. Jacoby Brissett is a fine backup, but he's not going to lead a team to many victories with his limited skillset.

Last week 2-1 Season overall 31-17