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ISSUE #217 - JANUARY 2, 2026



### December Dreams Come True for Brandon Barter and Roger Jones

Brandon Barter won last Saturday's Player's Choice Tournament for the second time, but this time he won it by himself, and Roger Jones finally got what he always wanted for Christmas, the Handicapper of the Year title.

For Barter, it's a trophy he can finally call his own. For Jones, the Handicapper of the Year title is also...

The birthday present he always wanted.

[Full story here.](#)

December Player's Choice tourney winner Brandon Barter with his handicapping assistant.



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Travers Cummings

### **NFL Picks by TravyFootball** **Week 18**

Week 18 is here and the stakes couldn't be higher — division titles, playoff seeding, and postseason lives on the line. I've got three games that caught my eye this weekend, including a Saturday night NFC West thriller and a Sunday night AFC North battle that's going to be a war. After going 2-1 last week, I'm sitting at 33-18 on the season. Let's finish strong. Check out the full breakdown [here](#).



Racing under the Harvest Moon at ASD.  
Click image for full size. (Jason Halstead /

### **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 📸



Assiniboia Photo)



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### A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

While the season of Burl Ives, Gene Autry and Nat King Cole is behind us, over the next four weeks, we here at the *Snapshot in Time* want to acknowledge some holiday greetings we received from members of our racetrack family.

We heard from Bobbie Clarke who sent her best wishes. Pictured above is Will Scoot Away who won the Manitoba Stakes in 1981. Bobbie lost her husband Ted a few years back, but Mrs. C fondly remembers "Scoot" and his big stakes win on June 14, 1981. Nice hearing from you Mrs. C! (Gerry Hart Photo)



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### Who Is the 2025 Canadian Horse of the Year?

While the memories and reviews of 2025 roll in from all parts of the world, Canadian Thoroughbred racing had some stellar performers during the year, coast to coast.

A select group of horsepeople and media will be filling out the ballots of the champions of 2025 for the 51st Sovereign Awards on January 12 through January 25.

Who will be Horse of the Year?

-- [Canadian Thoroughbred](#)

**CLICK FOR FULL STORY**

Grade 3 BC Derby winner Rondelito dominated sophomores out west in 2025. Does he have enough accomplishments to win a Sovereign Award? (Michael Bye Photo)



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The undefeated Rancho Santa Fe will be favoured in the Smarty Jones this Saturday at Oaklawn Park. (Coady Media)

### Sizing Up the 2026 Smarty Jones Stakes at Oaklawn Park

The spring classics will soon be taking shape. Horses that were 2 at the start of the week will turn 3 on Thursday, and talk of the 2026 Kentucky Derby (G1) will begin to intensify.

On Saturday, the Smarty Jones Stakes from Oaklawn Park will serve as one of the day's two 3-year-old stakes with Kentucky Derby points, along with the Jerome Stakes at Aqueduct. Here's the rundown on the Smarty Jones field.

-- [BloodHorse](#)

**CLICK FOR FULL STORY**



Fans at Gulfstream Park hang out at the paddock to watch horses prepare for the next race. (Eclipse Sportswire)

### Noel's Weekend Winners: Profitable Gulfstream Stakes Picks for the New Year

Happy New Year everyone! Let's kickoff 2026 with a new set of Weekend Winners from Noel Michaels at America's Best Racing. This weekend's focus is on Saturday's two stakes at Gulfstream Park, the Mucho Macho Man Stakes for newly turned 3-year-olds and the Ginger Brew Stakes for 3-year-old fillies on the grass. If he can pick the winners of these two early January features, we will be well on our way to good start to the new year.

-- [America's Best Racing](#)

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Track Historian Bob Gates

### **The Best of Bob**

Recently our history guy sat down with Dr. Norm Elder and chatted about his career at the Downs, which dates back to the mid-1960s. At one time Elder owned and trained racehorses, then he got into the breeding end of the sport. Three and a half hours later, Bob realized they had but scratched the surface of his amazing career.

Click [here](#) to learn everything you ever wanted to know about "Doc" Elder, but were afraid to ask. (From Sept. 16/22)



## 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?  
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# December Dreams Come True for Brandon Barter and Roger Jones

Dec 31, 2025 | The Inside Track



*December Player's Choice Tourney winner Brandon Barter with his handicapping assistant.*

**By G.S. Thompson**

Brandon Barter won last Saturday's Player's Choice Tournament for the second time, but this time he won it by himself, and Roger Jones finally got what he always wanted for Christmas, the Handicapper of the Year title.

Roger was hoping he could take the Handicapper of the Year title after winning the September ASD Handicapping Challenge, and his seven best tourney scores, including another 2025 Player's Choice win in February, were enough to get him home on top with 286 points and \$3,500 in prize money. Dwayne McIvor finished second in the standings with 258 points and \$500, while David Smook took third with 253 points and \$250.

The \$3,500 prize money for the Handicapper of the Year title will be put to good use, said Roger, who plans to spend his winnings in Vegas with fellow handicapper and partner Nicole Baker, but you get the feeling he's really going to cherish his trophy.

As will Brandon Barter, who won the December Player's Choice tourney by himself this time. He had tied for the win spot once before and split the \$1,000 prize money, but hadn't gotten the trophy. He has one now.

Brandon built his bankroll to \$93.40 to defeat George Williams (\$75.80) by \$17.60, which was a large winning margin compared to the usual for the off-season monthly tournament. Donny Allard (\$73.40) finished third, followed by Glen Gray (\$72.30) and Steve Holborn (\$72.30).

**Barter's Breakthrough Victory**

For Brandon, a 48-year-old retired military veteran and former RCMP officer now living in Headingley, Saturday's win represented the culmination of roughly 15 years of handicapping experience.

Originally from Newfoundland, Brandon was posted to Manitoba during his military service and decided to stay permanently, for good reasons. "The track is just down the road from me," he said.

While he dabbled with harness racing during his days on the East coast, Brandon didn't seriously pursue handicapping until discovering thoroughbred racing after moving to Manitoba in 2002. And it was only in the last five years that he truly committed himself to understanding the sport at a deeper level. "Trial and error," he said, when asked how he learned to handicap.

His handicapping methodology focuses on fundamentals. "My main angles are class and pace," said Brandon. And understanding how a race will unfold became critical to his development. "The first thing you have to do when you open the form is figure out what each horse is going to do. You have to know their running styles. How the race is going to set up. If you don't know that right off the bat, you're going to be in trouble."

While many tournament players chase longshots, Brandon often looks for overlays. "I look for value," he said, and that philosophy served him well on a day when favourites dominated. He had two winners and a number of places among his selections, with his biggest winner being Run Mama Run in the 4th race at Turfway Park, who paid \$16.00, \$8.80, \$5.70 across the board.

"I just made the right plays this time," said Brandon with characteristic modesty. He typically plays the tournaments from home online. "I really like the Player's Choice," he said. "I've never seen anything like it. The contest runs flawlessly. Sheri (tournament organizer Sheri Glendinning) is a gem."

Regarding the prize money? "It'll go towards some of this Christmas budget that was blown, said Brandon. "I guess it was a great time to win, right!"

### **Jones Achieves Year-Long Goal**



*2025 Handicapper of the Year Roger Jones in the ASD Fan Education Booth this fall with one of his many trophies.*



While Brandon savoured his December victory, Roger Jones was celebrating an even bigger achievement, the 2025 Handicapper of the Year title that had eluded him. At 54 years old, soon to turn 55 on January 16th, the full-time Winnipeg bus driver with four decades of handicapping experience scored the perfect present.

“My goal has been Handicapper of the Year for a while,” said Roger. “I’ve had the lead a few times over the years. The problem for me is that I’m not that good on the live races at Assiniboia Downs. So I tend to get the lead earlier in the year when Remington is on and then fade out.”

This year was different. The February Player’s Choice win got him started, and the September ASD Handicapping Challenge victory positioned him perfectly for the final stretch. His seven best tournament scores were good enough this time.

“I felt this was my year, so I was determined to try to put it all together,” said Roger. “Every contest I entered, I tried my best to maximize my potential.”

Roger’s favourite races to handicap are quarter horses, and his handicapping methodology emphasizes watching replays and studying pedigrees. “And I like to play horses that are longer odds, maybe providing a little more value. If I like three or four of them, and I can get two of them to come in, that’s better. A lot of my horses run second is what I’m getting at.”

The \$3,500 windfall comes with plans already in place.

“Same thing we did last time,” said Roger. “We already made reservations to go to Vegas again.” But you sense the trophy means more than the trip, it’s tangible proof of excellence sustained over an entire year.

Roger made special mention of how Assiniboia Downs honoured one of his horse racing mentors, Brian Gory, and others who passed away this year. “I was really impressed that Assiniboia Downs stood up and did special celebrations for these people, especially Brian Gory, who was a longtime handicapper,” he said.

His praise for Sheri Glendinning’s tournament administration echoed Brandon’s sentiments. “I think Sheri has done an outstanding job with these tournaments,” he said. “And they’re affordable. They offer great value with good prize money. I don’t know why everyone doesn’t enter them.”

## **A Season of Satisfaction**

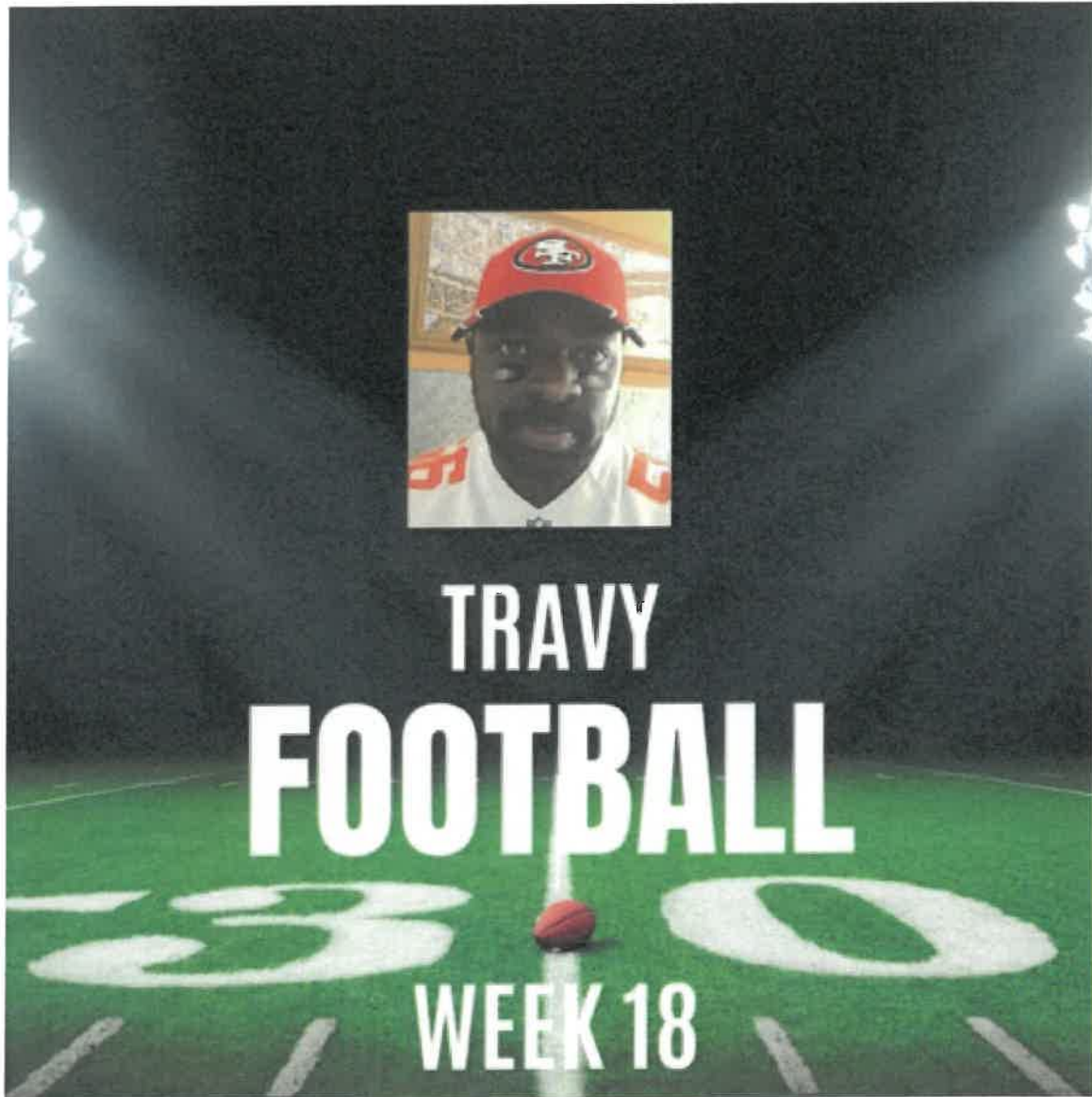
As Brandon hoists his December trophy and Roger adds his Handicapper of the Year hardware to his collection, both men exemplify what makes tournament handicapping so compelling. Brandon's focused approach and patient pursuit of value, combined with Jones's year-long consistency, demonstrate that success in tournament play requires discipline, experience, and the ability to execute when it matters most.

For Barter, it's a trophy he can finally call his own. For Jones, the Handicapper of the Year title is, well...

The birthday present he always wanted.

# TravyFootball Week 18

Dec 31, 2025 | The Inside Track



By Travers Cummings

**49ers over Seahawks (Saturday night):** I didn't think I would be writing about the 49ers playing for the number one seed in the NFC considering how the season started off. Losing Nick Bosa, losing Brock Purdy for a long stretch, losing Fred Warner, questions about the offensive line, and just nothing seeming to go their way, yet here we are in Week 18 and San Fran has a chance to do something special. Brock Purdy played out of his



mind last Sunday and silenced a lot of the naysayers out there about whether he belongs in the upper echelon of NFL quarterbacks. He'll need to do it one more time against the Seahawks (who San Fran beat way back in Week 1) if they want to capture the NFC West crown and get a bye in the first round of the playoffs. That would also enable the Niners to play all their playoff games at home, and that would include the Super Bowl since it's being played in their stadium. Beating Seattle won't be an easy task, but I think San Fran has the momentum on their side.

**Ravens over Steelers (Sunday night):** Because the Steelers couldn't handle business against the Browns last week, they now find themselves in a do-or-die matchup against the Ravens for the AFC North title. Even though they didn't have Lamar Jackson, backup quarterback Tyler "Snoop" Huntley was efficient enough moving the offense down the field. It also helped that Derrick Henry had one of the best games of his career, rushing for 216 yards and 4 touchdowns as he steamrolled the Packers defense. I'm not sure if Lamar will be back for this game, but if Huntley and Henry can do what they did last week, they might be calling themselves AFC North champs at the end of the night.

**Panthers over Bucs (Saturday afternoon):** Unfortunately, one of these teams has to get into the playoffs. Neither of them are good, and both lost last week. Carolina quarterback Bryce Young threw for an abysmal 54 yards against the Seahawks, and Bucs quarterback Baker Mayfield lost to a Dolphins team who had nothing to play for. Even though I picked the Panthers, it wouldn't shock me if the Bucs won. I've said it before, when two bad teams play each other, nothing good happens and it makes for a terrible game. The even more disgusting thing is the winner of this actually gets to host a playoff game, but I'm expecting a first-round exit no matter what.

**Last week: 2-1**

**Season overall: 33-18**