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ISSUE #218 - JANUARY 9, 2026



Throughout his life after racing, Seattle Slew was tended to by his attentive groom Tom Wade. (Barbara D. Livingston)

### The Best Horses I Ever Met

Looking back over my 50-year career in horse racing from water-bucket carrier to groom to trainer to writer, I've met some pretty darn good horses, some of which were the best in the world, but every one of them had something special about them.

I missed seeing the mighty [Secretariat](#) in person, but I did get to meet [Seattle Slew](#) and [Cigar](#), among other greats, a few of whom graced us at Assiniboia Downs.

But one stood out.

[Full story here.](#)



### 2026 ASD Live Race Dates Announced!

The 2026 50-day live racing meet at Assiniboia Downs kicks off on Tuesday, May 12, and runs through Wednesday, October 7. Racing will take place primarily on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, with select Monday night cards on June 22, July 13, August 3 and 24, and September 14. Post time will be 7:30 p.m., and the very popular Family Fun Nights and Girls Night Out will be back in full force! See full schedule [here](#).

Are you ready!?!





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!

🎰 **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** **Wild Card Weekend**

It's win-or-go-home time, and I'm back with my Wildcard Weekend picks. From a surprising division champ trying to pull off another upset, to one of the NFL's oldest rivalries under the Saturday night lights, and a matchup that hurts me to make against my own team, this weekend has no shortage of drama. After a rough outing last week, I'm looking to bounce back when it matters most — check out my Wildcard Weekend breakdowns [here](#) and see where I'm putting my faith.



### **Road to the Kentucky Derby**

- Jan. 16, 17, 18 - Kentucky Derby Future Wager
- Jan. 17 - Lecomte (FG) - 20 points
- Jan. 31 - Withers (Aqu) - 20 points
- Jan. 31 - Holy Bull (GP) - 20 points
- Jan. 31 - Southwest (OP) - 20 points



Downs all-time leading trainer Gary Danelson and Bonnie McCrory celebrate as owners with jockey Antonio Whitehall after their victory in the Winnipeg Futurity with Omaha Warrior, conditioned by Jared Brown. 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 😊





### A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

Lorne Spearman (jockey agent for the late Irwin Driedger) called on Christmas Day to send holiday greetings. Lorne is pictured here with Irwin, who was one of the most successful riders to ply his trade here at the Downs. Thanks for thinking about us Lorne! (Assiniboia Downs Archive Photo)

[Click photo to enlarge](#)



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



### Trailblazing Jockey Crump Dies at Age 77

Diane Crump, the pioneering Thoroughbred jockey whose riding breakthroughs set the stage for generations of female riders, died Jan. 1 at an inpatient hospice facility in Winchester, Va. She was 77.

Crump, involved with horses from her youth until the final months of her life, was best known for becoming the first woman to compete as a licensed jockey at a United States racetrack when she rode Bridle 'n Bit in a race Feb. 7, 1969, at Hialeah Park in South Florida.

"It always impacted me, being the first female jockey," Crump said during a 2017 interview with *America's Best Racing*. "I have one little footprint in history that turned a corner not just for women's rights, but equal rights."

-- [BloodHorse](#)

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







Fans enjoy sunshine and great racing at Gulfstream Park. (Eclipse Sportswire)

### **Noel's Weekend Winners: Lure of Sunshine Beckons for Gulfstream Park Stakes**

This Saturday's featured races at Gulfstream Park are a pair of remnants from the track's old Sunshine Millions program that showcased Florida-and California-breds. Now with purses of \$75,000 apiece and restricted to Florida-bred racehorses, the Sunshine Classic Stakes and the Sunshine Filly and Mare Turf Stakes headline Saturday's 11-race card at Gulfstream as the final two races on the card.

Handicapper Noel Michaels has the plays.

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

**CLICK FOR FULL STORY**

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Sovereignty, the front-runner for 2025 Horse of the Year, is also a finalist for the Eclipse Award as champion 3-year-old male. (Barbara D. Livingston)

### **2025 Eclipse Awards: Sovereignty headlines list of finalists**

Sovereignty, the dual-classic winner, Thorpedo Anna, the 2024 Horse of the Year, and 12 of the 14 winners of Breeders' Cup races were among those announced Sunday as finalists for Eclipse Awards, which honour the 2025 champions of Thoroughbred racing.

Three finalists for Eclipse Awards in 11 equine and five human categories were announced Sunday. The award winners will be announced and honoured Jan. 22 at a black-tie ceremony held at The Breakers Palm Beach, a luxury resort in Palm Beach, Fla.

-- [Daily Racing Form](#)

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Track Historian Bob Gates

### **The Best of Bob**

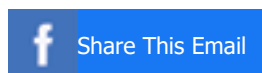
What possible link could there be between the 1962 Grey Cup game and the Winnipeg born and raised horse racing Hall of Famer who was a part of Manitoba Horse Racing Commission in the 60s, 70s and 80s?

Hint: What was the longest football game in the history of the CFL. Bob has the details [here](#). (From June 20, 2018)

## 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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# The Best Horses I Ever Met

Jan 8, 2026 | The Inside Track



*Throughout his life after racing, Seattle Slew was tended to by his attentive groom Tom Wade. (Barbara D. Livingston)*

By G.S. Thompson

Looking back over my 50-year career in horse racing from water-bucket carrier to groom to trainer to writer, I've met some pretty darn good horses, some of which were the best in the world, but every one of them had something special about them.

I missed seeing the mighty [Secretariat](#) in person, but I did get to meet [Seattle Slew](#) and [Cigar](#), among other greats, a few of whom graced us at Assiniboia Downs.

Canadian champion Escape Clause was the best female I ever met at the Downs, and her coming-back-at-the-wire nose defeat to the best mare in the world, Midnight Bisou, in the [2019 Apple Blossom](#)

[Handicap \(G1\)](#) at Oaklawn Park, makes her the best Manitoba-bred of all time.

Congratulations to breeders Cam Ziprick and Arnason Farms, owners Barry Arnason and True North, and trainer Don Schnell, for an amazing accomplishment.



*Escape Clause (inside) and Midnight Bisou at the wire in the 2019 Apple Blossom Handicap. (Coady Photography)*

Interestingly, Escape Clause wasn't the quickest horse I ever met at the Downs. That honour belongs to One More Lady, who won eight stakes here from 1984-1989. But that's not where I caught her tailwind.

I was at the rail near the three-eighths pole one morning when she was working a half-mile for trainer Tommy Elias. When she got to the turn, I thought the jockey might jump off. She was moving heavy and extremely fast. I didn't think she would make the turn, but she did, and her supposed 48-second work was more like 44 seconds, or less. I'm pretty sure she went half a mile in 43  $\frac{2}{5}$  in a race one day at the Downs, but those charts aren't readily available anymore. And she probably had faster in her.

The best horse I ever met at the Downs was Overskate, who won the 1978 Manitoba Derby by a zillion lengths while bent in half and set a new track record for 1  $\frac{1}{8}$ -miles. Peggy's Choice finished second in the race for trainer Don Gray, and I was in the test barn

with that horse and Overskate. He wasn't a big horse, and some said he weighed in at only 850 pounds. Most of it was heart.

The 7-time Canadian champion also won numerous graded stakes in the United States and set a new track record going 1 3/8-miles on the turf at Belmont Park in the Bowling Green Handicap.



*Cigar in the midst of his 16-race winning streak at Belmont Park in 1995. (Barbara D. Livingston)*

Cigar holds a special place in my heart, as I was able to cover him for a full week at the [Breeders' Cup in 1995](#), in the midst of his perfect season and his [16-race win streak](#). Trainer Bill Mott and his crew were especially kind to me, and on many mornings, I was the only reporter at the barn, so I got to know Cigar better than most outsiders.

I was standing by the walking ring outside Mott's barn one morning with Cigar's jockey Jerry Bailey and I asked him what it was like to ride such an incredible horse. Cigar was on the other side of the walking ring, about 50 yards away, when Bailey said, "Watch this." "Hey buddy," he called out to Cigar. Cigar stopped and looked right at him. They were brothers.

While Secretariat may have been the Bobby Orr of the breed and the most talented thoroughbred ever to look through a bridle, and Cigar might be considered a thoroughbred version of Sydney Crosby, Seattle Slew was probably the best horse I ever saw up close.

He was like a combination of 7-time Super Bowl champion Tom



Brady and Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor.

Taylor was described as one of the most feared and intimidating players in NFL history. His explosive speed and power is credited with changing the outside linebacker position from one of read-and-react to aggression and attack. (Wikipedia). Intimidating and explosive was Seattle Slew.

I was at the paddock on November 11, 1978, when Seattle Slew took on four rivals in the final start of his career, the Stuyvesant Handicap (G3) at Aqueduct. The only undefeated Triple Crown winner in history was heavily favoured to win, but he was sopping wet in the paddock, and he was acting like a crazy, fire-breathing dragon.

I thought, 'how could he possibly win in that condition after expending so much of his physical and mental energy in the paddock.' I bet against him. Mistake.

Slew took the lead out of the gate and never looked back. They were NEVER going to beat him. Seattle Slew won the first nine starts of his career including the Kentucky Derby (G1), Preakness (G1), and Belmont Stakes (G1), and finished his career with a record of 14-2-0 from 17 starts. When he lost, he had major excuses.



*Seattle Slew winning the 1977 Kentucky Derby. (Tony Leonard)*

In the [Life and Death of Seattle Slew](#), Hall of Fame scribe Steve Haskin described Slew as “something wild and beautiful. On the track, he could be as swift and lethal as a falcon in a dive or soar as

gracefully as an egret on gossamer wings. He was, in every sense of the word, a Thoroughbred.”

Many hardcore horse people, from breeders and bettors to jockeys and trainers, thought the performance that summed Seattle Slew up best was his neck loss to Exceller in the [1978 Jockey Club Gold Cup \(G1\)](#), when he dueled fellow Triple Crown winner Affirmed into submission after a half mile in 45 1/5 and six furlongs in 1:09 2/5, opened up, was caught by Exceller late on the sweeping Belmont turn, dueled with that one to the sixteenth pole, appeared to be put away, and then came back gamely in the last 100 yards to lose by a neck. Read more here: [Exceller, Seattle Slew Gold Cup Battle Among the Best Ever](#).

There were other special horses I was privileged to groom or spend time with while working for trainers like Woody Stephens, Charlie Whittingham, Allen Jerkens, and Roger Attfield, or writing about them. Champions, superstars, and graded stakes winners that included White Star Line, Terpsichorist, Sensational, Sir Lad, Inkerman, Balzac, Amazer, Devil His Due, Sky Beauty, and Peteski, but one stood out as the best of the best, for me.

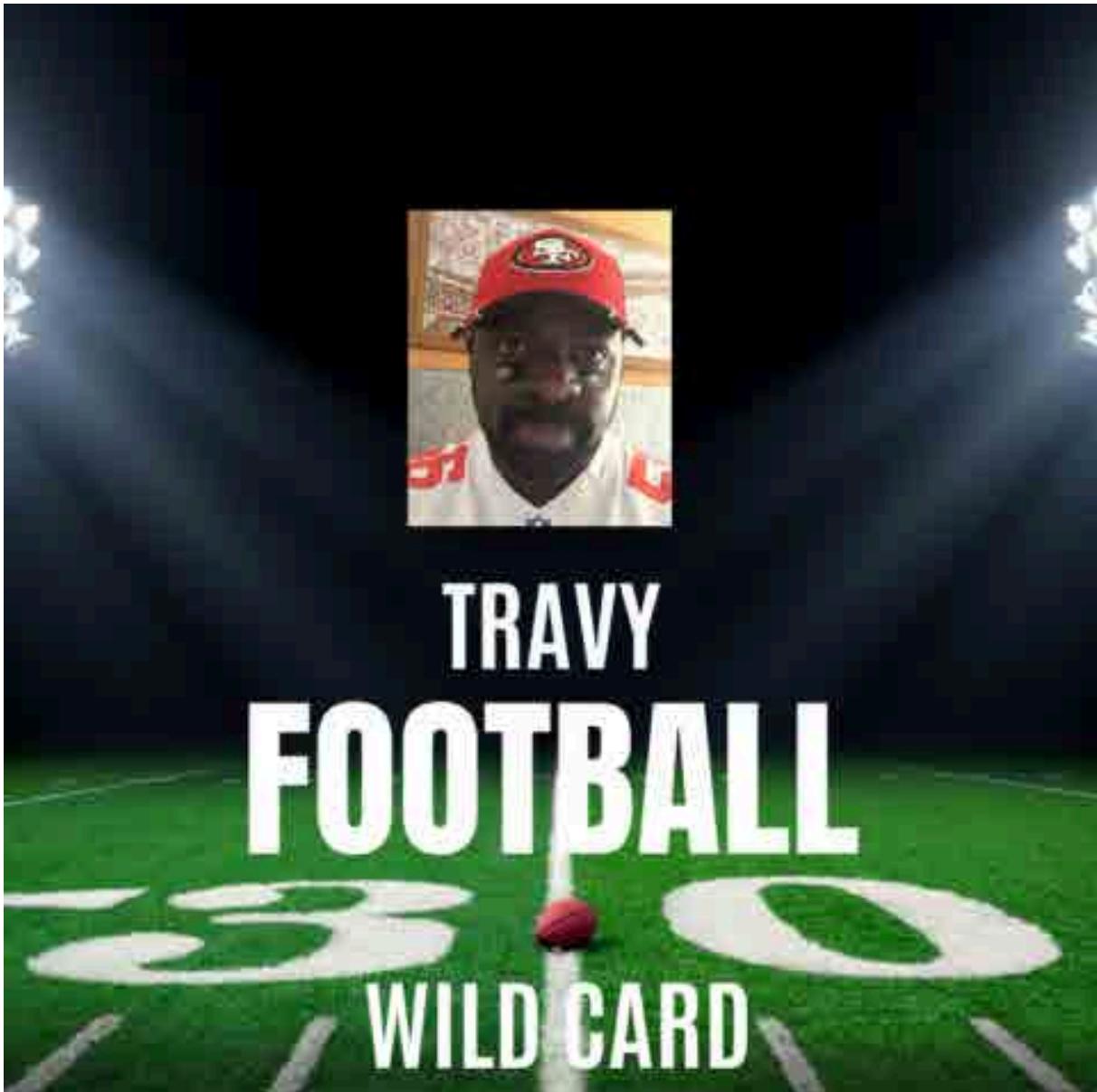
Seattle Slew.

He could be your horse, too.



# TravyFootball Wildcard Weekend

Jan 7, 2026 | The Inside Track



By Travers Cummings

**Rams over Panthers (Saturday afternoon):** Well, even though they lost last week to the Bucs, the Panthers still find themselves in the playoff tournament thanks to the Atlanta Falcons' victory over the New Orleans Saints. The Panthers, Bucs, and Saints all had the same 8–9 record, but the Panthers had the better record within the

division, so they took the NFC South crown. Now they will host the Los Angeles Rams, a team they surprisingly beat during the regular season. I don't see a repeat of that happening. Even though the Rams aren't quite the juggernaut they were during the middle part of the year, offensively they should be able to outplay the Panthers' defence.

**Packers over Bears (Saturday night):** One of the NFL's longest-standing rivalries will write another chapter on Saturday night when the #2-seeded Chicago Bears host the Green Bay Packers. Both teams are coming off losses last week (although the Packers didn't play any of their starters against the Vikings), so I'm sure nothing will give either team more pleasure than eliminating their foe from the playoffs. Packers quarterback Jordan Love is good to go after missing the last few games with a concussion. It took some very late-game heroics from Caleb Williams in their Week 16 matchup to get the victory for the Bears. Since then, they've actually lost back-to-back games in the final minute of play. Green Bay should learn from their past mistakes and put the hammer down if they gain a lead, and not let the Bears creep back into it.

**Eagles over 49ers (Sunday afternoon):** It pains my soul to do this, but I have to pick against my team this weekend, sadly. Seattle manhandled the 49ers last week. Their defence shut down Christian McCaffrey, holding him to only 23 rushing yards, and Brock Purdy was under siege the entire time. With that loss, San Fran fell to the 6th seed in the NFC and now has probably the worst matchup they could have hoped for. The Eagles' defence is always a fierce bunch to deal with, especially up front, so the Niners' already shaky offensive line will once again have its work cut out. If, by some measure, San Fran manages to get their offence going, I don't know how they will slow down the Eagles' offence. The Niners are so injured on defence right now that the backups to the backups are hurt, and they have signed guys off the street and inserted them into the starting lineup just to have enough capable bodies to play. It makes me very sad, because they dealt with a lot of adversity all year and, despite all of it, managed to overachieve and get to the playoffs.

**Last week:** 0–3

**Season overall:** 33–21