

## DID YOU HEAR THE LATEST?

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

ISSUE #221 - JANUARY 30, 2026



2025 ASD leading trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. (right) in the winner's circle after his victory in the Chantilly Stakes with Gina's Serenade for owner Arnason Farms. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia photo)

### Leading Trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. Eager to Return to ASD for 2026 season

2025 Assiniboia Downs leading trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. is chomping at the bit to get back to the Downs for 2026, and his stable will have a slightly different makeup this year, but some of his 2025 stars are already in training.

The 32-year-old Turtle Mountain Chippewa from Belcourt, N.D., who won numerous stakes races last season, is taking a quality-over-quantity approach this year, shooting for a stable of around a dozen horses rather than the 25-30 he cycled through in 2025.

Triple stakes winner and fan favourite Judo will be back, and Keplin and his team are also on the lookout for a Manitoba Derby prospect.

[Full story here](#)



Groom School graduate and former Groom of the Year Skyla Blanchard loves her job. (George Williams)

### Explore a Career as a Racehorse Groom!

Looking for a hands-on way to get involved in the horse racing industry?

The HBPA of Manitoba Inc. is offering a 4-week paid Racehorse Groom Training Program, a chance to learn the ropes of daily barn life while working directly with racehorses.

Applications are open now! For details and to apply, visit [hbpamanitoba.ca](http://hbpamanitoba.ca) or email [hbpamanitoba@mymts.net](mailto:hbpamanitoba@mymts.net).

[Full story here.](#)



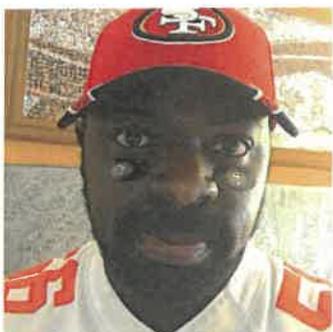
### **The fun never stops at Assiniboia Downs Winnipeg's place to play and win!**

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.

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



Travers Cummings

### **NFL Picks by TravyFootball Conference Recap**

I went 1–1 last week, and both games went about as expected. Denver couldn't move the ball without Bo Nix, and once the snow hit, the Patriots did just enough to punch another Super Bowl ticket. Drake Maye wasn't flashy, but he was effective. Sunday night was a brutal watch, but Sam Darnold's comeback story continues as Seattle heads to the Super Bowl behind him. See my full recap [here](#).



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

- Jan. 31 - Withers (Aqu) - 20 points
- Jan. 31 - Holy Bull (GP) - 20 points
- Feb. 6 - Southwest (OP) - 20 points
- Feb. 7 - Sam F. Davis (Tam) - 20 points
- Feb. 7 - Robert B. Lewis (SA) - 20 points



Trainer Michael Nault (right) and co-owners Nolan Allard (left) and Phil Allard celebrate after Betterlucknexttime's

### **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).

victory in the 56th running of the J.W. Sifton Stakes on Sept. 10. Click image for full size. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 😊



### A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

The Phil Kives (formerly run as the Agassiz Stakes) celebrated its 50-year history in 2025. Manitoba wonder horse, Langara won the Kives a record five times. Here Langara is seen winning the inaugural running of the race on August 19, 2016. Langara, we salute you! (Gerry Hart Photo).

Click photo to enlarge



- \$13.95 Daily Lunch Special
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- Daily Evening Specials
- Details at ASDowns.com



### 2026 Holy Bull Stakes Cheat Sheet

Gulfstream Park kicks off its always influential prep series for the Kentucky Derby this Saturday with the 37th running of the Holy Bull Stakes.

The Holy Bull offers a total of 42 qualifying points for the May 2 Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, and this year's field includes graded stakes winner Incredibolt, as well as Cannoneer and Nearly, two "buzz" horses from the barns of Brad Cox and Todd Pletcher, respectively.

Last year's Street Sense Stakes winner Incredibolt has been flying under the radar, but is expected to be a major factor in this Saturday's Holy Bull Stakes at Gulfstream Park. (Coady Media)

-- *America's Best Racing*

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### 'Skippy' Overhauls White Abarrio, Joseph Dominates Pegasus



Skippylongstocking has raced at 15 tracks and won numerous graded stakes, but his win in last Saturday's Pegasus World Cup Invitational was his first Grade 1 victory. (Gulfstream Park)

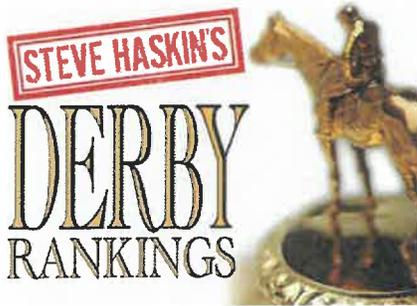
You could call Skippylongstocking the everyday person's racehorse, a blue collar guy who has traveled to all parts of the United States, testing his talent against the best horses in the world.

He tried Triple Crown races as a 3-year-old, and his first big win came in the rich West Virginia Derby. In 2023, he scooped up over \$500,000 in the Charles Town Classic, a race he won again in 2024, and he also bagged \$600,000 for his win in the Oaklawn Handicap. Last year, he won the Hollywood Gold Cup at Santa Anita.

And now, the \$37,000 purchase is a Grade 1 winner, after his victory in last Saturday's Pegasus World Cup Invitational.

-- [Canadian Thoroughbred](#)

**CLICK FOR FULL STORY**



Kentucky Derby Rankings by Steve Haskin are a regular feature at Secretariat.com

### 2026 Kentucky Derby Rankings - Week 2

Hall of Fame scribe Steve Haskin is back to his Derby Dozen this week, with two horses in particular to watch closely in the Holy Bull Stakes.

Haskin has kept Nearly and Cannoneer in spots 11 and 12 this week, but they could move up quickly with strong performances in the Holy Bull.

He also notes that the Southwest Stakes, which would have showcased a few more Derby hopefuls, has been postponed for a week due to weather.

-- [Secretariat.com](#)

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### The Best of Bob



Track Historian Bob Gates

How about a game of Who Am I? This history blog celebrates the life of a man who played eight seasons in the NHL and all of them for one team. He won the Stanley Cup, an AVCO Cup, the Little Brown Jug and he's in the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame.

Oops, almost forgot, he was also a member of the exalted 1972 Team Canada and he still found time to leave his footprints at Assiniboia Downs. Who's your best guess? Click [here](#) for the reveal. (From June 9, 2021)

### 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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# Leading Trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. Eager to Return to ASD for 2026 season

Jan 29, 2026 | The Inside Track



*2025 ASD leading trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. (right) in the winner's circle after his victory in the Chantilly Stakes with Gina's Serenade for owner Arnason Farms. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia photo)*

**by G. S. Thompson**

2025 Assiniboia Downs leading trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. is chomping at the bit to get back to the Downs for 2026, and his stable will have a slightly different makeup this year, but some of his 2025 stars are already in training.

The 32-year-old Turtle Mountain Chippewa from Belcourt, N.D., who won numerous stakes races last season, is taking a quality-

over-quantity approach this year, shooting for a stable of around a dozen horses rather than the 25-30 he cycled through in 2025.

“I’m trying to have around the dozen mark, with a little bit more quality,” said Keplin, who plans to ship back to the Downs in mid-April, three to four weeks before the meet opens. Three of his 2025 stars, triple-stakes winner Judo, and stakes-placed Marvelous Lady and Up Striker, are already in training at Fonner Park in Nebraska after 90 days off.

Keplin claimed Judo for \$12,500 at Turfway Park in December 2024 and guided him to a stellar season at Assiniboia Downs in 2025 with three straight stakes wins including the Free Press, the R. J. Speers Memorial, and the Harvey Warner Manitoba Mile. Judo also finished second in the Already Dia Overnight Stakes and the Gold Cup, and led all earners at Assiniboia Downs with US\$81,749 from a record of 4-1-1 in seven starts.

“I think he got the rest he needed after the meet,” said Keplin. “He hadn’t had any time off before. He should be back to his old self now.”

Keplin also won stakes in 2025 with Gina’s Serenade and Sophia’s Storm. The former won the Honorable Lady Overnight Stakes and the Chantilly, and the latter won the Red Berry Overnight Stakes and the La Verendrye.

Keplin’s success comes naturally as a result of lessons from his father, Steve Keplin, Sr., who taught him, “a lot of the old horseman stuff.”

Growing up, money was tight. Keplin remembers trips with his dad to buy horses where they had to sleep in the trailer or truck overnight because they were “a little bit short on cash.” The horses they could afford rarely cost more than \$1,000 or \$1,500.

“I remember the tough times,” said Keplin. “But my dad did well with what he had. I feel very blessed that something I dreamed about growing up actually became a reality.”

That dream took hold when he was about 12 or 13 years old during a trip to Winnipeg with his father. They were stabled next to longtime friend and Downs all-time leading trainer Gary Danelson, and young Steve walked in to see Danelson’s assistant trainer Walter at work.

“There were horses hand walking, and there were big deep beds, and Walter was patting down a stall with a lot of straw,” said

Keplin. "I just thought right then, this is what I want to do. That was my first real memory of wanting to be a trainer."

Now, with top owners like Barry Arnason and others putting up the money, Keplin is living the dream. "We have a little bit more money behind us now, and I've got a couple guys coming forward and trying to be a part of the team. I never had these opportunities growing up with my dad, so this is kind of a dream come true."



*Judo (outside) and jockey Prayven Badrie win the Free Press Stakes, for trainer Steve Keplin, Jr. and owner James Parisien.*

The partnership with Arnason, which worked so well in 2025, continues. Arnason has a 3-year-old filly at Turfway Park and Keplin also has horses with his brother James and their father, along with three babies purchased at a Fasig-Tipton sale, now being developed in Winnipeg. "Barry and us also have a group that's trying to claim a horse, hopefully we get a Derby prospect," said Keplin.

The better horses will help Keplin get to where he eventually wants to go. "If we ever do plan on going south for the winter, we're going to need better horses," he said.

Despite his success and bigger plans, Keplin hasn't changed. "I never try to act better than anyone, no matter what," he said. "I remember growing up, we had nothing. I know what it's like. And now that we have a little bit more, it feels better."

With his 8-year-old son beginning to pick horses' feet and help in the barn, Keplin is passing on the family tradition. "You've got to

start somewhere, right?" he said.

His father Steve Sr., now 63, still makes the trip up from Belcourt during stakes weeks, walking hots, helping in the barn, and visiting with old friends like Danelson in the kitchen.

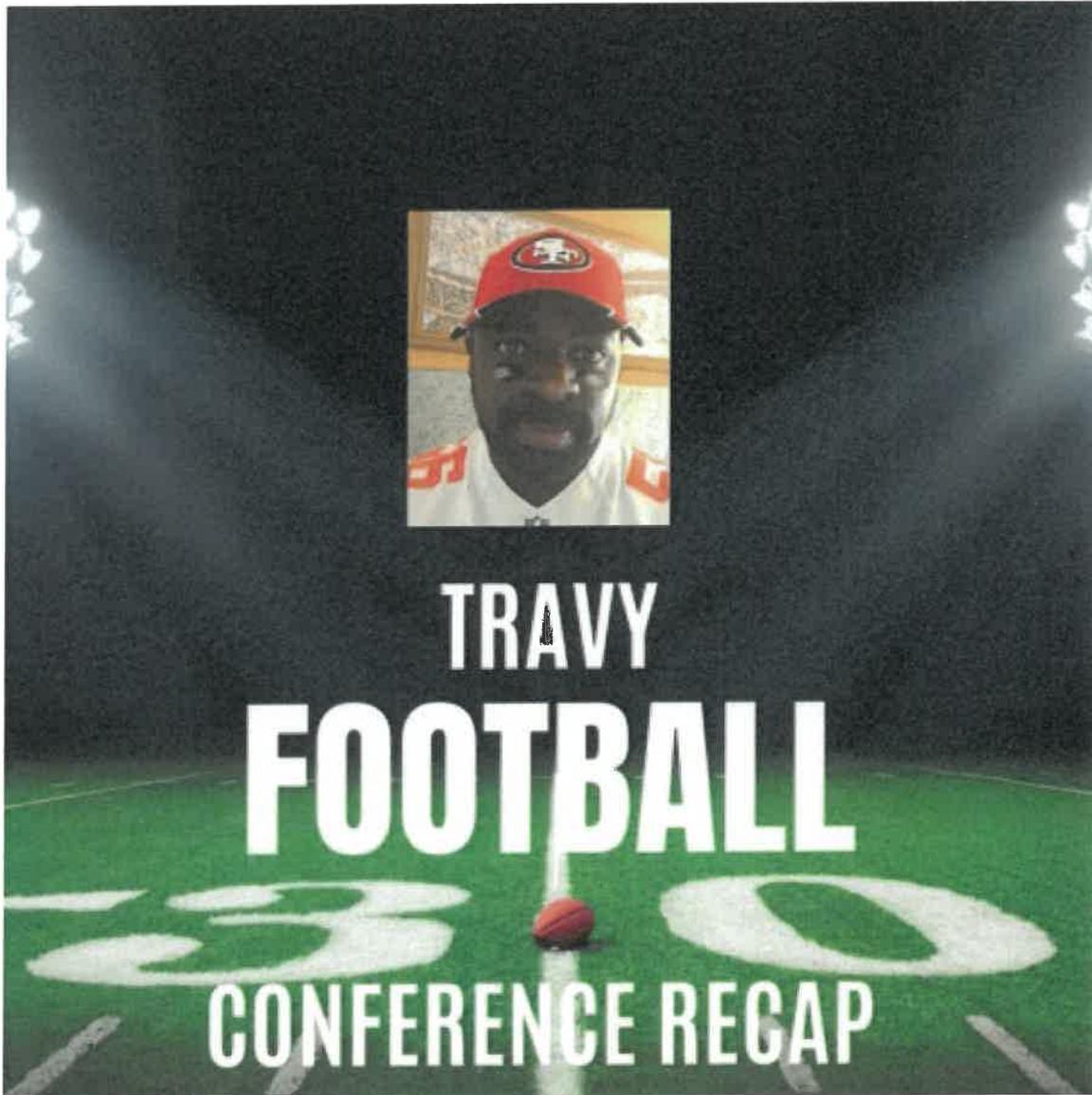
"I'm just looking forward to being back," said Keplin.

From sleeping in horse trailers to winning stakes races, from \$1,500 claimers to Derby prospects, Steve Keplin, Jr. has come a long way. He compiled a record of 40-27-19 from 130 starts in 2025 for purse earnings of US\$440,686, winning at a 31% clip. But he hasn't forgotten where he came from. And in the horse business, maybe more so than most....

That matters.

# TravyFootball Conference Recap

Jan 28, 2026 | The Inside Track



**By Travers Cummings**

**Patriots defeat Broncos (Sunday afternoon):** I said last week the Broncos would struggle on offense without starting QB Bo Nix, and sure enough, that's exactly what happened. After an impressive first drive by Jarrett Stidham that actually led to the first touchdown, he basically disappeared for the rest of the

game. A lot of people don't realize how different the talent level is between a starting quarterback and a backup quarterback. The Broncos said and did all the right things leading up to the game, talking about how much they believed in Stidham and how the offense would be fine, but at the end of the day, the guy is a backup for a reason. Once the snow started falling, Denver had no chance, and that's why they're going home instead of going to the Super Bowl.

It took four years of misery, but the Patriots are once again headed back to the Super Bowl. Fans thought the era of New England dominance was over once Tom Brady left, but here we are again, this time led by Drake Maye. He didn't have the prettiest stat line (10 of 21 for 86 yards passing), but he had 65 yards on the ground and a rushing touchdown. The Pats added a field goal late in the third quarter, and that's all they needed. A snow blizzard descended on Mile High Stadium, and you could barely see a thing by the fourth quarter. Would Bo Nix have made a difference in this game? Probably, but we will never know now.

**Seahawks defeat Rams (Sunday night):** I hate-watched this game, hoping both teams would lose somehow. Nonetheless, the Seahawks and Sam Darnold came out victorious in this contest over the Rams. It's been quite the career turnaround for him. After three terrible years with the New York Jets, where he was "seeing ghosts," he was shipped off to the Carolina Panthers, only to be slightly above average there as well. He then found himself as the backup to Brock Purdy in San Francisco for a year before landing a deal with the Vikings. He found instant success in Minnesota, and he credited Niners coach Kyle Shanahan, along with Brock Purdy, for giving him a different perspective on how to play and be more successful in the league. A failed playoff run with the Vikings led to Darnold leaving for Seattle, and in his first season with them, he's headed to his second Super Bowl (first as a starter) in what would be the ultimate feel-good success story.

**Last week:** 1–1

**Playoffs overall:** 4–4