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Henry S. Witt, Jr. Returning to ASD in Quest for 8th Consecutive Owner Title

Henry S. Witt, Jr. has won the leading owner title at Assiniboia Downs seven years in a row, and the former champion race car driver will be coming after it again in 2026 with an even bigger and better stable.

"We'll be there early this year," said Witt, who won the 2025 owner title at the Downs with a record of 33-26-20 from 132 starts for purse earnings of \$350,137. And that was after getting off to a late start.

Henry S. Witt, Jr. (right) with trainer Jerry Gourneau and jockey Antonio Whitehall after winning the Manitoba Derby with longshot Mano Dura in 2023. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia photo)

Five-time leading trainer Jerry Gourneau is expected to be back at the helm again in 2026 for Witt, who could have as many as 50 horses in training at the Downs this year, including a Derby horse.

[Full story here](#)



Rob Solmundson proved once again that you can win the Player's Choice tourney, without longshots.

Rob Solmundson wins January Player's Choice Tourney, Without Longshots

Rob Solmundson won last Saturday's Player's Choice Handicapping Tournament, and for the second time in as many months, the winning total was less than \$100.

Longshots continue to be hard to come by, even for our core group of talented handicappers, and while the average winning score in the Player's Choice is likely around \$120, Solmundson built his bankroll to \$90.40 to take home the trophy.

For the second consecutive month, the winning total for the Player's Choice hovered around the \$90 mark.

Is a trend developing?

[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 or email hbpamanitoba@mymts.net.

[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!

- 🎰 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 Super Bowl

The Patriots are being written off by just about everyone — weak schedule, lucky wins, no star power. But the Super Bowl isn't a series, it's one game, and strange things happen when pressure hits early.

See my full breakdown [here](#).



Super Bowl LX at Assiniboia Downs

Enjoy Happy Hour pricing all day long while you settle in for the biggest game of the year. Kickoff is at 5:30 p.m., so grab a seat, load up on great food and drinks, and cheer on your favourite team with us.



Road to the Kentucky Derby

- Feb. 6 - Southwest (OP) - 20 points
- Feb. 6 - Withers (Aqu) - 20 points
- Feb. 7 - Sam F. Davis (Tam) - 20 points
- Feb. 7 - Robert B. Lewis (SA) - 20 points
- Feb. 14 - Risen Star (FG) - 50 points
- Feb. 14 - Saudi Cup - 30 points



Jockey Shavon Belle flexes his muscles as Rheco Gittens prepares future stakes winner Mighty Mikee for the winner's circle after breaking his maiden for trainer Devon Gittens on July 30. 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.

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 🤔

A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates



Well friends, we've made it to February — the “longest” shortest month of the year. That means it won't be long before the horses start moving in. You can feel it in the air: racing season is on its way, and I can't wait! Over the next four weeks, let's take a look back at the Jockeys of the Past. First up is this fantastic photo from the Downs' archives, “Whittier Park Jockeys – 1932” (Assiniboia Downs Archives 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



2026 Robert B. Lewis Stakes at a Glance



The Robert. B. Lewis Stakes (G3) has been dominated in recent years by Hall of Fame trainer Bob Baffert, who has won the last seven editions with odds-on favourites.

Baffert trains three of the seven 3-year-olds entered in this year's edition, but there are a few in here that could upset the apple cart, including Intrepido.

Potential upsetter Intrepido has been listed at 7/2 for Saturday's Robert B. Lewis Stakes at Santa Anita. (BENOIT photo)

— *America's Best Racing*

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Focus could be on closers in loaded Southwest



Send in the closers. The \$1 million Southwest Stakes (G3) on Friday at Oaklawn Park could have a completely different pace scenario than the track's first Kentucky Derby points race of the season, the Smarty Jones.

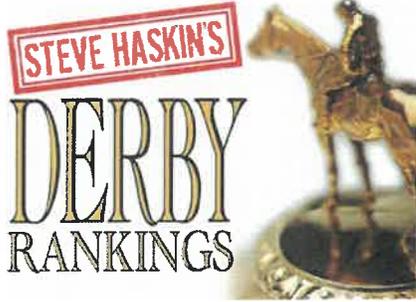
“There's a lot of pace in this race,” said trainer Mark Casse, who won the Smarty Jones with Strategic Risk. Casse expects Strategic Risk to be coming from just

Smarty Jones winner Strategic Risk has been listed at 9/2 for Friday's Southwest stakes at Oaklawn Park. (Coady Media)

off the pace in the packed Southwest field, and he will be a solid price with morning-lined odds of 9/2.

-- [Daily Racing Form](#)

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2026 Kentucky Derby Rankings - Week 3

Early Kentucky Derby favourite Ted Noffey is off the Derby trail, so who will take his place at the top? Did we see a future star in last weekend's Holy Bull winner Nearly? Maybe, but you can be sure there will be more.

We could see them on Friday in the Southwest and Withers Stakes, or on Saturday in the Robert B. Lewis and Sam F. Davis. Steve Haskin has the update on his top Derby contenders and where they're headed.

Watch closely!

-- [Secretariat.com](#)

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The Best of Bob

Did you know that Dick Armstrong rode his one and only Manitoba Derby winner on July 19, 1969? Just one day later, another Armstrong — Neil — stepped off the lunar module Eagle and onto the moon for his famous walk.

Read Bob's story about two Armstrongs making history worlds apart [here](#). (From July 2019)

Track Historian Bob Gates

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.

Henry S. Witt Jr. Returning to ASD in Quest for 8th Consecutive Owner Title

Feb 5, 2026 | The Inside Track



Henry S. Witt, Jr. (right) with trainer Jerry Gourneau and jockey Antonio Whitehall after winning the Manitoba Derby with longshot Mano Dura in 2023. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

By G.S. Thompson

Henry S. Witt, Jr. has won the leading owner title at Assiniboia Downs seven years in a row, and the former champion race car

driver will be coming after it again in 2026 with an even bigger and better stable.

“We’ll be there early this year,” said Witt, who won the 2025 owner title at the Downs with a record of 33-26-20 from 132 starts for purse earnings of \$350,137. And that was after getting off to a late start. Five-time leading trainer Jerry Gourneau is expected to be back at the helm again in 2026 for Witt, who could have as many as 50 horses in training at the Downs this year.

The 66-year-old Texan operates out of his 1,200-acre ranch east of Waco, where he has two barns capable of housing 40 horses and a half-mile training track. Witt figures he’s got around 60 horses right now, and he’s always looking for more.

“I should gather up about 25 more pretty quick,” he said. “We’re gonna go up there and fire with them. Everything should be good up there this year.”

And Witt has some live ones.

The owner of Affiliated Auto Glass in Waco is particularly excited about a filly named Witt’s Lil Ringer, who is two-for-two in Texas and looks like she could be something special. The daughter of Bell Ringer won her debut at Sam Houston by daylight on January 18th, and came back six days later to win the \$75,000 Bara Lass Stakes in the mud, looking every bit as impressive as she did in her maiden win.

“She left them at the latches, and I’m telling you, it looked like her gate was the only one that opened,” said Witt. “She left there running and she won that sucker. She won it as easy as she won the maiden race because she got a little better.”



Three-year-old filly Witt's Lil Ringer wins the \$75,000 Bara Lass Stakes on January 24 at Sam Houston Racepark for Henry S. Witt, Jr. (Jack Coady Photography)

Witt, who grew up riding horses bareback on the family dairy farm in Axtell, Texas, wasn't worried about a little mud in the stakes race.

"I called my trainer saying, 'Oh, you don't want to run?'" said Witt. "I said, man, you know, I used to go out in the mud to get dairy cows on 545 acres with horses. I rode those horses every day. No saddle, nothing but a bridle."

But the horse Witt thinks could be his next Manitoba Derby contender is a colt named American Witt, a three-year-old son of American Dubai. The colt has been knocking on the door in stakes company, and Witt believes distance will be his friend.

"He's gonna be my big horse," said Witt. "Believe me, he's bad news."

Witt knows a thing or two about being bad news for the competition. Before he turned his attention to horses, he was one of the most successful dirt track racers in the history of IMCA Modified racing. He won 258 features, eight consecutive regional championships, six consecutive state championships, and one national championship. He retired in 2007 the same way he did everything else. By winning.

“I quit racing cars on July 21, on my birthday,” said Witt. “I was in a race and I got a lap down. I came back and I got back on the lead, and they tried to put me in first place, but I just said no. I knew I was a lap down. It would have been cheating.”

Witt dropped back to twenty-first place and made them all pay. With two laps to go he took the lead and won going away with half his car torn off and sparks flying off the wall.

“My crew said, ‘God dang man, we’ve never seen anybody drive like that,’” said Witt. “That was the last race of my career. I told him, ‘I think we did all we needed to.’”

These days, Witt does his winning at the racetrack instead of the speedway, and nobody does it better at Assiniboia Downs. From 2019-2025, he has compiled a record of unprecedented dominance at the Downs with trainer Jerry Gourneau at the helm for all but one of those years, culminating with their victory in the 2023 Manitoba Derby with longshot Mano Dura.

The best horse Witt owned before Mano Dura was Witt Six, who finished second in the 2015 Manitoba Derby and 2015 Canadian Derby before going on to win the Manitoba Mile, the R.J. Speers and the Gold Cup at Assiniboia Downs in 2016.

Witt’s success on the track mirrors his success in business. He built Affiliated Auto Glass from scratch, starting in 1983 while he was still racing cars and sleeping on a pallet on the office floor between races.

“It’s pretty lucrative now,” said Witt. “I have depots in Waco, Temple, Copperas Cove and Gatesville, 14 trucks and 24 or 25 guys. We do 400 windshields a week. But it wasn’t always like that.”

Witt knows the highs and the lows that come with horse racing, but through it all, he keeps coming back for more. He’s won seven consecutive owner titles at the Downs, and with the firepower he’s bringing north in 2026, number eight seems almost inevitable. You have to win a lot of races to pay for all those horses?

“You damn sure do!” laughed Witt from the gym.

And then he went back to his workout.

Rob Solmundson wins January Player's Choice Tourney, Without Longshots

Feb 5, 2026 | The Inside Track



Rob Solmundson won last Saturday's Player's Choice Handicapping Tournament, and for the second time in as many months, the winning total was less than \$100.

By G.S. Thompson

Longshots continue to be hard to come by, even for our core group of talented handicappers, and while the average winning score in the Player's Choice is likely around \$120, Solmundson built his bankroll to \$90.40 (**\$1,000 prize**) to defeat runner-up Trevor Phelps (\$85.10, **\$400 prize**) by \$5.40, followed by Brad Kinnear (\$83.00, **\$200 prize**), James McMullin (\$79.20, **\$150 prize**) and Mel Peddle (\$75.20, **\$100 prize**).

Last month, Brandon Barter won the tourney with a total of \$93.40. Is this the beginning of a trend? Probably not, as averaged out over time, these types of contests are usually won by doubling your money. And Rob's selections certainly included a few nicely priced winners.

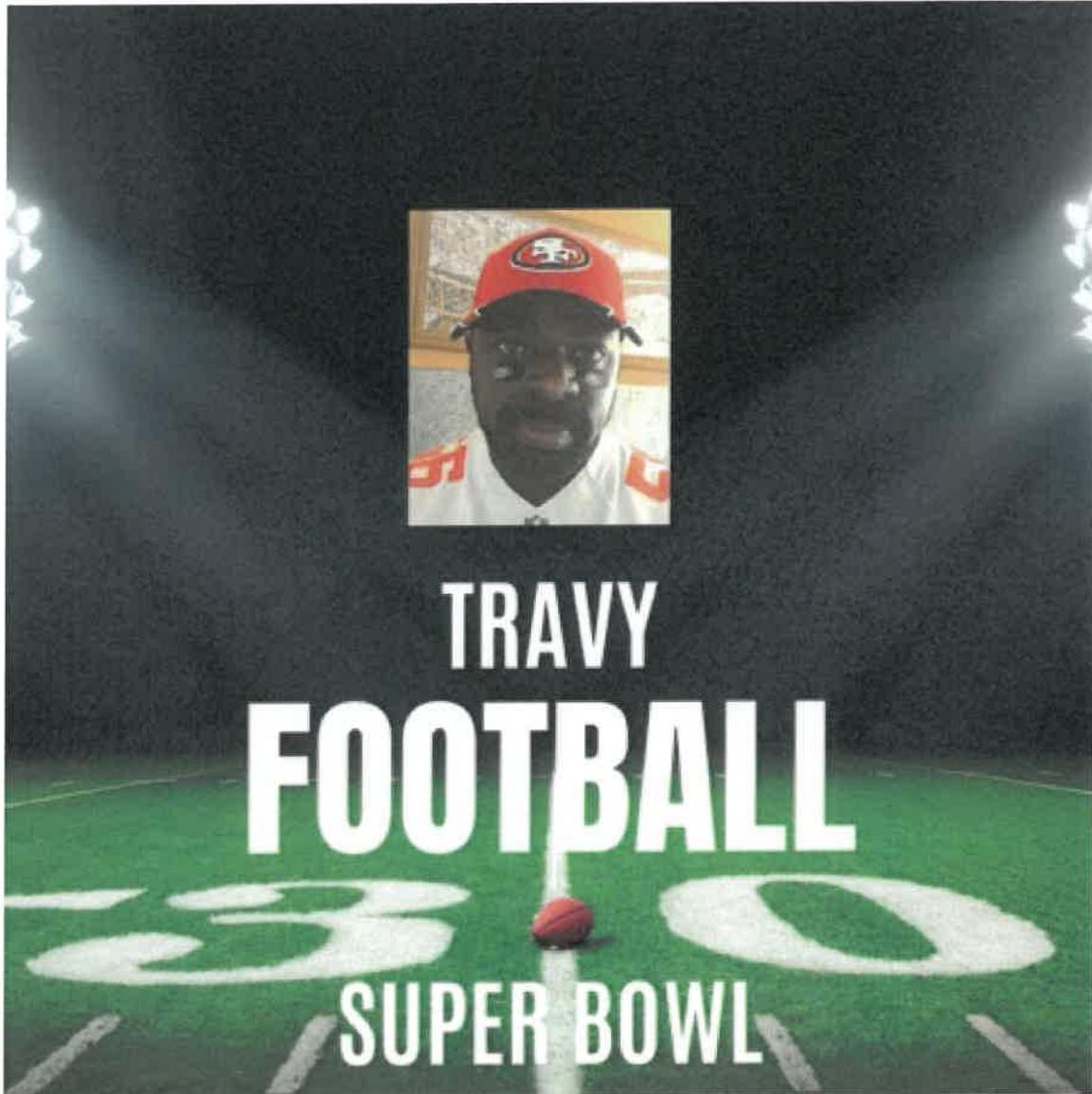
Rob's winning selections featured a mix of Standardbred and Thoroughbreds, with his biggest winners being Native Star (\$13.60, \$7.80, \$3.90), who wired her field in the fourth race at Delta Downs, and Myultimate Snowy A (\$9.90, \$6.10, \$3.10), who dueled the length of the stretch and edged away late in the fourth race at Woodbine Mohawk Standardbred.

There are all kinds of ways to win the Player's Choice tourney, but Rob proved once again that you can get the job done...

Without longshots.

TravyFootball Super Bowl

Feb 4, 2026 | The Inside Track



Patriots over Seahawks (Sunday at 5:30 p.m.): Not many people are giving the Patriots a chance in this game for a multitude of reasons. “They had the easiest schedule,” “they only played one good team all year,” “they should have lost to the Broncos,” etc. I don’t care how easy their schedule is — it’s the NFL, and it’s really hard to win games no matter what. On top of that, this Patriots team isn’t some loaded squad full of elite superstars. Prior to this year, the two previous seasons they had

a combined record of 8–26, so to turn that around in such a short period of time is pretty remarkable.

Drake Maye will be the second-youngest quarterback in history to play in the Super Bowl (only Dan Marino was younger). Players like Lamar Jackson and Josh Allen haven't even been to one yet, so that is an accomplishment he can hold over them. If they played this game 10 times, Seattle would probably win nine of them, but unlike other playoff sports where you play a series and dropping the first, or even the second game, doesn't matter because you have a chance to come back, the Super Bowl is just ONE game. If you're the underdog, you only have to be better than the other team once.

All it takes is a rough start for the Seahawks, a couple of turnovers, and all of a sudden a game that was supposed to be a blowout becomes interesting. It still will be a tough outing for New England, especially against the Seattle defence, but I've seen stranger things happen, and I'm not ready to just declare victory for the Seahawks despite what all the "experts" say.

Playoffs overall: 4–4