

"Venus" seated all four of his foes early, forcing Yagonnakissmeornot (Dan Dube) into a two-hole. After cheapy opening intervals of :27.4 and :57.1, onkey On My Wheel took out of third. That one threw down the gauntlet in and out of a 1:25.3 three-quarters, while "Yagonnakissme" was losing ground in behind.

Venue Delight maintained a short, half-length advantage entering the lane, then whipped a charging Camille by that same margin. Yagonnakissmeornot and a non-factor Coffee Addict (Matt Kakaley) completed the order.

For Venus Delight, a 5-year-old daughter of Bettor's Delight owned by Bamond Racing and trained by Jeffrey Bamond Jr., it was her second win in four seasonal starts (2-for-3 in series). The exacta paid \$22.20, with the triple not offered to the abbreviated assemblage.

The second Matchmaker event was more of the same for series leader, odds-on choice Carolsideal (Dube, \$2.80).

The only perfect participant made it four wins in series succession, defeating Krispy Apple (Tim Tetrick) by a half-length in 1:53.2...same time as the opening division.

Unhurried early from post position No. 2, "Carol" watched both Charisma Hanover (Brennan) and Fancy Desire (Kakaley) slug it out approaching a :27.1 opening quarter-mile. Carolsideal then moved from third, securing the lead in Turn 2 and getting a 56-second intermission.

Fancy Desire made her second move going toward the 1:24.4 three-quarters, with Krispy Apple in behind. However, Carolsideal widened to 3½ lengths turning for home, holding sway to keep the roll going. Strings (Eric Carlson) was a best-of-the-rest third, with Fancy Desire and Charisma Hanover completing the order.

For Carolsideal a 6-year-old daughter of Western Ideal trained by Rene Allard for co-owners himself (as Allard Racing), Yves Sarazin and Kapildeo Singh, she's now 9 for 10 this season. The exacta paid \$8.20, with again



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The View of Jeff Gural; Outside the Harness Racing Bubble

Earlier this year I popped over to the Paulick Report for my daily dose of Thoroughbred racing news and saw a headline screaming at me that was all too familiar: "You're Out! Meadowlands Bans Owner After High Cobalt Tests"

Having previously read the story on harness websites and chat boards, I navigated down to the comments section, wondering what the high traffic Paulick Report Thoroughbred crowd had to say about this affair. I expected a smattering of "go get 'em Jeff" comments mixed in with those criticisms we see of him in harness racing - dictator, killer of due process, that he won't get along with people, etc.



"Bravo, Jeff Gural", wrote Charles Smith.

"If only the flat racing would follow suit", said Gaye Goodwin.

"Now that's taking care of your customers", said Rick.

Jeff Gural has many supporters in the thoroughbred industry

"I'd like to see all racing have the intestinal fortitude to do the same!" wrote Sandi.

There were many more, and they were all the same. If I didn't know better, I'd think Jeff Gural had a lot of relatives in Thoroughbred racing.

Just this week, Dave Briggs had a very extensive interview with Gural on the website [Thoroughbred Racing Commentary](#) It was eye-opening, and interesting (Jeff is clearly never boring) and it too seemed well-received on social media and elsewhere with that audience. That got me thinking: What truly is the view of Jeff from the people who we don't often hear from? What do people outside harness racing feel about him, and his tactics?

Off I went to find out.

"Personally, I find Jeff's commitment to integrity highly inspirational and I applaud him for the practices he has instituted to ensure a level playing field for his horsemen and his customers," Jockey Club President and CEO Jim Gagliano wrote when contacted by email. "It is also reassuring to know that his business has improved as a

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result of the integrity measures he has put in place."

Barry Irwin, founder and CEO of Team Valor International and someone known for his outspokenness on integrity, seemed to echo, at least some of Jim's view.

"He is a singularly impressive individual, because he has taken a no-nonsense approach to operating a racetrack in a sport renowned for being on the cutting edge when it comes to the illegal use of performance enhancing drugs. Whereas other racetracks and racing jurisdictions seem to have been stymied by local laws or a lack of will to change the contaminated environment, Jeff has used his noggin to foil the cheaters by staying one step ahead of them and denying them the opportunity to cheat at his racetrack. If racing of all breeds took a page or two from Jeff's playbook, we would all be better off."

Wondering what Thoroughbred track operators thought about Jeff's positions, I turned to Charles Hayward. Hayward was CEO of the New York Racing Association, which operates Aqueduct, Belmont and Saratoga Racetracks, and has had to navigate similar minefields for years.

"As a former track operator, I think that Jeff Gural is doing more for racing than all of the regulators combined. Gural is the only track operator aggressively pursuing out of competition testing which is the only way to catch the cheaters. He deserves our full support."

Interestingly enough, the manner in which I received his comments may say as much or more about Hayward's view than his words themselves. We played an extended game of email tag, as he was busy all day in meetings. When I informed him via email I was going ahead without his comments, and thanked him for taking my original email, he relayed his thoughts while out for a business dinner from his cell phone. It appeared he was going out of his way to share his respect for Jeff's efforts.

Those views on Jeff Gural - the admiration for taking a stand - are not uncommon, even in harness racing. Where Jeff seems to get in trouble in this sport is with some horsemen and their representatives, so I looked to Steve Zorn. Steve is a lawyer, the Racing Manager of Castle Village Farm and, for the past 12 years, a member of the Board of Directors of the New York Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association.

"In a perfect world, one would have uniform enforcement, in a timely manner, by the regulators. But that doesn't happen. When a trainer fights a charge, the average time to a final decision, in New York at least, is between 2-3 years. By the time a suspension is confirmed, it has no deterrent effect," Steve wrote to me via email.

"So the fallback position is for the track owner to act. The court cases are clear that track ownership has the ability to do this, subject only to providing due process, i.e., an opportunity for the trainer to confront the accuser and have his/her say. Why don't more tracks follow this model? Fear of being sued? Fear of small fields?" he added.

Steve's comments were certainly not effusive, but his tone resonated with me. I sensed there was a frustration - a similar frustration Jeff Gural talks about - even from a man in his position.

As I moved ahead in my quest, I shifted to some in the media to see if I could get a birds-eye view from the Thoroughbred perspective. For that, I turned to a couple of veterans for their take.

Tom LaMarra has worked for many years in Thoroughbred racing at the Blood-Horse magazine, and he shared his broad view. He believes, overall, Jeff is looked at as a positive force for racing, and his willingness to speak his mind appears to be an asset with many.

"It seems Jeff is viewed in a positive light because the issues he continues to hammer upon-integrity, equine welfare, keeping horses racing after their 3-year-old seasons, a need for more marketing and promotion-are all very important to Thoroughbred racing as well. Jeff, and his viewpoints, would probably be better known-and in turn perhaps more controversial-in Thoroughbred racing if there was a more productive working relationship between the Thoroughbred industry and the Standardbred industry," he wrote via email.

Tom continued: "He appears to have a good relationship with the Thoroughbred horsemen in New Jersey as far as being willing to allow for Thoroughbred meets at Meadowlands, and I believe Thoroughbred interests in the state realize the value of Meadowlands and its off-track wagering facility as a major outlet for wagering on Thoroughbred races. Speaking as a journalist, I will say the guy returns phone calls and emails and is refreshing in that he speaks his mind about things in which he believes. That's becoming more rare."

(continued on next page)



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Ray Paulick, owner and operator of the Paulick Report, has been around the block one or a thousand times. He shared a slightly different view that addressed the fact that people use confirmation bias in life, and in racing it's the same. He also believes that too few people even know about Gural to form an opinion.

"Thoroughbred people who do know what he has tried to do at Meadowlands likely fall into one of two camps: those who support stricter medication rules and tougher enforcement admire him; those who are satisfied with the status quo probably think he's misguided, naive or a bully."

Perhaps Ray's point helps explain the vitriol in some harness camps towards Jeff Gural. Once you get down to making sausage and the way things are begin to become the way things were, the whole paradigm changes. Ronald Reagan once said: "The status quo, you know, that's Latin for 'the mess we're in'." In almost all of the above views, it seems there's a realization that what has been done in the past is not working; that yes, the status quo is quite the mess.

To many in this sport, and in Thoroughbred racing, I feel Gural represents an infantryman. He's the one willing to get his hands dirty to lead an assault against that status quo. With few in charge bringing in real change, or taking the helm, when someone finally stands up and leads - especially when that person makes progress - it is inevitable he or she will have staunch advocates. I think that's true whether the sport is harness racing, or Thoroughbred racing, because the two sports might feel different, but the issues are the same.



Race 7, N/W \$15,000 L5 Pace

This race to begin tonight's late Pick 4 is a total puzzle and I think it all centers around Campbell. He's driven the raging WINDSONG GORGEOUS in all of his last three consecutive wins but interestingly wasn't listed tonight as the horse makes his start as a Virgil Morgan reclaim. JC was listed on both DAPPER DUDE who's dropping out of the Levy series and ONTARIO SUCCESS; he opted for the latter and perhaps that's telling. Back to Windsong, Brett Miller was listed here and on BLATANTLY BEST and in a tough call went to the Remmen trainee who nearly won the Open here back in March. So what we're left with is Ginsburg inheriting the drive on WINDSONG GORGEOUS as a suspect morning line favorite. Onto others, ODDS ON EQUULEUES qualified to run away from Dovuto Hanover by 7 lengths when he closed in :26:2; this is a pretty low level for him. MISTER VIRGIN raced big last week but this field is considerably tougher; at least lands the rail to compensate.

Race 8, G-Note Final Pace

ROCK STAR had been racing deceptively well of late and paid off last week at 5/1 when he was finally given the chance to flaunt his form in a clean trip and McCarthy seems to fit him well; any good cover flow and his repeat chances go way up. NF DRUM ROLL has looked like a new horse since going to trainer Tara Hynes; picks up a new driver tonight in Zeron. JJ SHARK was able to get the job done last week at 3/5 but the move to the outside will complicate things a lot; on the other hand Dave Miller does show confidence by opting here over #8. DULL ROAR has some class to him and that was a useful return to the Meadowlands last week; should offer another double digit price. MAMBO ITALIANO was claimed last out for McDermott and put up a noticeably fast mile three back; the Chiodo entry of MIGHTY YOUNG JOE and LETS FOAL AROUND can land a minor share.

Race 9, Claiming \$10,000 Pace

CAJON HOT SHOT enters here from Freehold and some of those recent rivals on view such as Code Word are relatively decent; Andy Miller opts here too over STORMIN RUSTLER. I'd keep an eye on VISA VIPER who shows a barn change from Altman to Magie; Zeron landed here and vast improvement could be coming. FOX VALLEY TYRESE has been close a number of times but hasn't been able to deliver; this is about as soft as a group he's faced. GETONTHEWAY appreciated the move to the big track last week when he nailed the place spot as a big longshot; will take much more action this time around.

Race 10, G-Note Consolation Pace

SASSY HANOVER was caught three wide at the half mile marker last week and probably shouldn't have been favored in that ultra-competitive field anyway. This one was a strong 1:51:2 winner two back and overall seems to lay over these even from PP 10; goes right down the road. MAGNUS DEO clearly outraced expectations last week with a tough trip and now lands the rail; he should warrant a long look now. GALLANT SEELSTER had been moving in the right direction with that third place finish at Pocono a couple back but then wasn't fast enough to close with the resurgent NF Drum Roll last week; he's one of the fringe players in here. SPORTS SINNER looked like a sneaky play last week but he was empty off acceptable cover; maybe he'll be stronger now in his second start over the track. Stone closer RELENTLESS DREAMER may be able to pick up some pieces if the early pace is fast.

The Plays:

\$8 ticket (\$0.50 base): 1-3-4-8 / 6-8 / 4-6 / 10

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