

Batavia Downs 2017 live meet kicks off on Wednesday

By Tim Bojarski, for Batavia Downs

Batavia, NY---The 71st season of live harness racing at America's oldest lighted track opens on Wednesday (July 26) and runs through Saturday (Dec. 16). This year's schedule features 71 race dates including seven matinee cards.

The live schedule this year has new post times. Racing will be presented on Sunday afternoons at 1:15 p.m., opening Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. (then switches to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays for the remainder of the meet) and Friday and Saturday evenings at 6:00 p.m. to begin the season. Monday will replace Sunday in September and go at 5:00 p.m.

The finest Standardbreds in the Empire State will be on hand as the New York Sire Stakes will be making eight stops at the Downs this year, each worth an estimated \$100,000 for the contestants. Mark your calendars for Wednesday (July 26), Sunday (July 30), Sunday (Aug. 6), Sunday (Aug. 27), Friday (Sept. 1), Wednesday (Sept. 6), Friday (Sept. 8) and Wednesday (Sept. 13) to see some of the best racing all year.

Once again the local action will be highlighted by the very popular claiming series that the track introduced last year. Mid-level claimers who accumulate points throughout the year will vie for championship final purses of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 for each respective division in November.

Many familiar faces will be returning to drive this year including last year's dash title winner Drew Monti, runner-up Jim Morrill Jr., Ray Fisher Jr. and Larry Stalbaum.

Monti accumulated 117 wins at the Downs last year before moving to the Meadowlands to drive when this meet concluded. Morrill was right behind him in second with 112 tallies and Fisher was third with 98. Stalbaum never showed up at the Downs until Saturday (Nov. 5) but made the most of his cameo appearance by winning 32 races in only 18 nights.

This year all four are sporting equally impressive numbers and the competition on the track looks to be fierce from start to finish. To date, Stalbaum has won 206 races, earned \$1.08 million and has a UDR of .372, Monti has won 155 races, earned \$964,900 and has a UDR of .304, Morrill has won 132 races, earned \$1.01 million and has a UDR of .333 and Fisher has won 109 races, earned \$705,458 and has a UDR of .319.

"The start of a new meet is always busy and exciting and I am really looking forward to getting the horses back on the track" said Todd Haight, Director/GM of Live Racing. "We have some great stake action on tap, a good overnight program in place and a very tough driver colony that competes very hard every race. This is definitely a meet that will offer value for our bettors."

For the fans, another lengthy slate of 20 promotions dots the live schedule and offers something for everyone that comes to Batavia Downs all year long.

Starting at 4:30 p.m. on opening night, fans will receive a free racing programs and magnetic racing schedules while supplies last. Programs will be available at the program stands and the magnets can be obtained by swiping your Player's Club card at member services.

Sunday (July 30) is Old Fashion Day when hot dogs and soft drinks are only 50 cents and draft beer is \$1. Items are available from noon to 4 p.m. on the track apron and at the Homestretch Grill. Batavia Downs is the only harness track that still offers concession items at this price during the Old Fashion Day promotion.

Every Sunday in August is Dollar Sunday. Draft beer, hot dogs and soft drinks will all be \$1 from noon until the final race of the afternoon.

On Saturday (Aug. 12) there is a great promotion to highlight the newest addition to the track, The Hotel at Batavia Downs. Starting after the fifth race and for four consecutive races after that, 12 names will be randomly drawn to win a free night's stay at the beautiful new facility. Any Player's Club member who swipes their card before 7 p.m. will be automatically entered to win. Patron's do not have to be present to win and can only win once.

There will be a gold rush at the Downs on Saturday (Aug. 19) when five sealed boxes will be given away to randomly drawn contestants. Four will contain a one ounce silver bar but one will contain a one ounce pure gold bar valued at \$1,500. The promotion is sponsored by TAG Jewelers of Cheektowaga, New York (www.tagjewelers.com). Any Player's Club member who swipes their card before 7 p.m. will be automatically entered to win.

Sunday (Aug. 27) is the very popular Family Fun Day and Wiener Dog races. There is a full slate of free fun for kids of all ages including pony rides sponsored by Castilone Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram (www.castilonechryslerdodgejeep.net), Pringles the Clown, Jason the Juggler, Mr. Scribbles and booths set up on the apron including face painting, sand art and snow cones.

Then following the live harness racing action, the Wiener dogs hit the track for the "Dachshund Dash" sponsored by Genesee Feeds of Batavia. Up to 10 heats with eight dogs per heat will line up before the championship field is decided. There, the top three dogs will earn their owners Clubhouse buffets and gaming Free Play packages valued up to \$200. And all dogs entered will be rewarded with a "doggy bag" full of gifts.

Labor Day (Sept. 4) brings back the annual driver's bike race and chicken bar-b-que. A tradition since 1975 the driver's bike race pits eight of the Down's top reinsmen against each other on a different kind of bike; a 10-speed. The contest is held after the seventh live harness race and the bikes are randomly given away after the race to eight lucky patrons who correctly put their name in the box of the winning driver. Entry slips will be distributed between noon and 2:30 p.m. and must be deposited before the seventh race. Winners must be present to win.

The bike race is sponsored by Crazy Cheap Cars of Oakfield, New York (www.crazycheapcars.com) and the chicken bar-b-que is sponsored by the Center Street Smoke House of Batavia (www.centerstreetsmokehouse.com).

“With the new hotel added to the property last year, many groups have been here for different functions. We have aggressively promoted live racing to them and are looking forward to many new fans attending starting this Wednesday night” said Haight. “Our concert series has brought in tens of thousands of people this summer, many of which were new to the track. We hope our promotions keep them coming back to watch the races all season long.”

For more information and updates as they happen, log onto the track's website at www.bataviadownsgaming.com and click on “Live Racing”. Follow us on Facebook as well (www.facebook.com/bataviadownsracetrack)!