

Billings Series to open March 30 at Yonkers

by John Manzi, for the Billings Series

Monticello, NY --- The C.K.G. Billings Harness Driving Series kicks off its 36th season on Thursday (March 30) at Yonkers Raceway followed by a Pompano Park leg on Monday (April 3). And five days after that, the first of two legs at Freehold Raceway will be presented on Saturday (April 8).

Then, almost weekly, there will be races for amateur drivers at various racetracks in the United States and Canada through late November.

Again the Billings will be conducted by the Delvin Miller Harness Drivers Association. The series, which began in the early 1980s, is considered the Grand Circuit of Amateur Racing. Known for its constant traveling sideshow over the years, some of the best amateur drivers in North America compete, or have competed, in it. And because of the success of the Billings a multitude of amateur clubs have now become part of the harness racing landscape.

"Amateur racing has never been more popular than it is now," noted Tony Verruso, the C.K.G. Billings Series president. "Just look at the handle at the amateur races and you can see we are a good bet. And not only that, amateur races are needed to help fill overnight cards at many racetracks.

"Last year amateur racing action had weekly record breaking handles in races at the Meadowlands and at Pompano Park. Wagering was also strong in the NAADA Trotting Series at Yonkers, Freehold, and Monticello."

Various amateur clubs are now organized to help maximize the number of races and add benefits to the tracks that host them as well as aiding the various charities that each club represents.

"Tens of thousands of dollars are raised each year through amateur driving for the benefit of each club's charity. The C.K.G. Billings is proud to contribute its drivers' earnings to the Harness Racing Museum and Hall of Fame," Verruso added.

This season being no exception, Billings president Verruso has once again worked diligently and as a result has put together another outstanding series of races at venues both in the United States and Canada.

"You'll find that the current schedule has limited Canada dates as Dave Drew is still working tirelessly at getting us squared away up North," Verruso acknowledged. "So hopefully there will be some dates to add to our seasonal schedule."

According to Verruso most rules remain the same except for the following:

- The yearly earnings per start average has been lowered to \$1,500 per start
- Because of the number of amateur clubs in the East, it is getting harder to fill two fields at any one venue and we never get two in the Midwest. So this year we are going to let any horse entered for the \$10,000 claiming price draw inside any horse entered for \$15,000

"It does not mean the \$10,000 claimer will draw the inside post, just that said horse will draw inside of any \$15,000 claimers," Verruso explained. "If need be, the race may be seeded and drawn in lots as is done in some of our races already."

At season's end the Gold & Silver Cup finals will be held at Yonkers Raceway on Nov. 26, the Sunday following Thanksgiving.

"Yonkers has graciously offered to host the races at our normal purse level. They will feature the Gold Cup on their France simulcast program which should be a great showcase for amateur racing here in the States," said Verruso.

"There is a very big amateur colony in Europe, so it will be very nice to put on a good show for them. We will have to go with 10 horses at 1-1/4 miles as all the French races do."

To become a member of the Delvin Miller Harness Drivers Association, or for a complete listing of conditions and nominating costs, please contact Verruso at sulkyracer@hotmail.com or Billings Series VP, Steve Oldford, at steveoldford@oldford.biz.

One can also get pertinent information on the Delvin Miller Harness Driving Series on the USTA [website under amateur racing](#).