



Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association

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Oh What a Night

by Thom Pye

A large and enthusiastic crowd was on hand for the Ohio Harness Horsemen's Association's annual Charity Night at the Races held Saturday (June 23rd) at Eldorado Scioto located on the south side of Columbus in the former Hamilton Township.

The warm weather and a great cause brought out a throng of people as the first official weekend of summer welcomed the fans just like it used to be.

Twenty area charities benefited from the two signature races (the 6th and the 8th) as the clubhouse and tarmac was packed with attendees showing their support.

Many of the racing fans that arrived were longtime devotees such as Richard who had been coming to the Columbus area's harness racing mecca ever since founder Charlie Hill had opened it in 1959.

"I used to come here with my dad," he remembered, "from Xenia. And it became a weekly pilgrimage. We got to know all the ushers by name and they'd always save us a good seat in the grandstand. The place would be packed. Then after I got married my wife and I would travel up to watch the races... not quite as often what with work and the kids but we'd get here when we could. We'd sit right there," he added as he pointed up to a row of seats in the grandstand. "I'd be doing my handicapping while my wife would knit and nod in agreement if she liked my pick."

He stopped and eyed the cavernous structure now blocked off due to age-related safety issues. "This place is historic," he said mistily, "they should do the repairs and save it."

We met first-time patrons that hailed from Cleveland who "have always enjoyed the racing at Northfield and wanted to see what Scioto was like..." it's very, very nice."

One father from Indiana stood watching the races and said that he "had promised his kids

every time that they went through Columbus on 70 East to visit the grandparents in West Virginia that he was going to take them to the races at Scioto."

He had been a regular back in the days before they "were even thought of" and "tonight I got all three of my kids with me," he said proudly.

I turned expecting to see a group of youngsters ranging in age from seven to 15 but instead was greeted by three twenty-somethings who were closer to thirty-somethings. So I put back the pony bag with a coloring book and handed them all a can koozie for their mixed drinks. "Compliments of the OHHA," I smiled. "Enjoy."

A native Buckeye proudly introduced his wife and sister-in-law who he had brought to Ohio from "back east." "Salem, New Hampshire," he said. "Ever hear of it? Rockingham Park?" "Not on Route 28, just south of Canobie Lake Park?" I answered. "That's where I first really dug into the business," I laughed. "Literally... with a pitchfork and muck basket. How about Bucky Day, Al Langille, the Round Man... the Rockingham Hotel?"

There were many new faces in the crowd coming to the races for the very first time. And tonight was a fine example of how enjoyable a night at the races can be. It was an excellent model of how harness racing is so very connected to the community.

A great night for a great cause and a great job done by all.