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THE NYRA 2004 SARATOGA NUMBERS

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The NYRA 2004 Saratoga Numbers

Is Saratoga weather-proof? Maybe not if you were at the Travers this year, but if you look at the handle numbers at Saratoga over the past six summers, (Numbers are courtesy of the staff of the Racing and Wagering Board.) you see remarkably little difference in the handle numbers per each week. With Saratoga racing until Labor Day, it may be that major variant of Saratoga handle has involved how late Labor Day falls. The placement of Labor Day in the calendar may have a greater effect on NYRA on-track handle than most any other factor.

First of all, NYRA overall handle at Saratoga has basically been flat over the past six years. Total handle in 1999 was \$531.56 million. In 2004, it was \$545.17 million. When adjusted for inflation, this means that handle in 1999 at Saratoga was actually 10.8% higher than in 2003. Even when utilizing the somewhat higher 2003 figures, Saratoga's real handle in 1999 was 4.5% higher than for 2003.

NYRA's on-track handle numbers have been declining slowly but surely over the past six summers. In 1999, the on-track handle reached \$136.76 million. It is now \$116.73 million. The 2004 number is down slightly from the 2003 on-track number but is actually up slightly from 2002.

The later Labor Day falls in the year, the worse NYRA's last week is on track. Conversely, the later Labor Day falls, the better the first week is for on-track handle. In 2004 (with Labor Day falling late on September 6), handle on-track for the last week was \$15.77 million (13.8% of handle), the lowest weekly handle number on-track for the last six years. In 1999, the last time Labor Day fell on September 6th, on-track handle for the last week was similarly the weakest (amounting to 14.5% of total handle) of the meet. In both 2003 (with Labor Day falling on September 1st) and 2002 (with Labor Day falling on September 2nd) when the meet started early, the first week of the meeting was the weakest in terms of on-track handle.

To contrast 2003 and 2004, on-track handle for the first week of 2004 was 19.2% higher than handle in 2003. In the last week, on-track handle in 2004 was 14.9% lower than for 2003.

Even though the on-track numbers for the last week of 2004 were not good, the fact is that the total on-track and off-track handle for the last week at Saratoga have been good in most every year. In 2004, the off-track handle (\$78.92 million) for the final week was the best of the meet. Off-track handle from inside New York State in the final week of 2004 was considerably higher than during any other week of the meeting.

In fact, for the past six years, the off-track numbers for the sixth week were the highest of the meeting or the second highest of the meeting. For four years, the off-track numbers for the last week were the best of the meeting (1999, 2000, 2002, and 2004), and for two years, (2001 and 2003) they were the second best. Similarly, the total handle

for the last week has generally been well above average. In 1999, 2000, and 2002, the final week was the top week for overall handle. In 2001 and 2003, the last week finished second, and in 2004, it was the third best week. So while the last week of the meeting may have been weak on-track, it has regularly been excellent off-track.

Overall, the fifth week has generally the best for on-track handle at Saratoga. In five of the past six years, the fifth week has been the winner on-track. The only year it finished second was 2002 when Travers Day features an almost endless cold rain. The fifth week has been the overall handle leader in three of the past six years (2001, 2003, and 2004). It finished second in total handle in 1999 and 2000 and third in 2002.

The worst overall weeks have generally been the third and fourth weeks of the meet. The third week was the weakest overall in four years, (1999, 2000, 2003 and 2004), and the fourth week was the weakest in two years (2001 and 2002.) Viewing just the off-track handle, the fourth week was the weakest for the past our years. In 2000, week one was the weakest off-track, and in 1999, week three was the weakest link.

NYRA attendance may have dropped by 8.2% in 2004, but considering the absence of free passes in 2004, some lousy weather in August, and competition from the Saratoga Harness racino, this number is still respectable. The one major down event was the attendance and handle for the last week of the meeting. The weather could not have been better, and the on-track handle could hardly have been lower. Saratoga may not be the best locale for September racing, but how can you abandon the sixth week when the sixth week does better off-track than any other week of the meeting?