

The love for horses is strong in the Cowboy State and that culture is also embracing Thoroughbred racing

STEVEN GIRT

Riding High

BOLSTERED BY HHR, WYOMING RACING, BREEDING REACH NEW HEIGHTS

By **FRANK ANGST**

AFTER 10 COMPETITIVE Thoroughbred races at Wyoming Downs in Evanston, there are days that no one in the crowd heads for the exits. Instead, those 2,000-3,000 fans of horse racing—and fans of the horse—stay to watch the Indian Relay races that follow.

Welcome to Wyoming, where the state quarter released in 2007 celebrating the 44th state featured a bucking horse and rider. It's a state where hundreds of thousands of people flock to the Cheyenne Frontier Days rodeo. These days horse racing, thanks to that strong-rooted love of the horse, a family commitment to the sport in the state spanning generations, and a new funding approach in

ALL SIRES LISTS ARE THROUGH NOV. 8



TOBA

THOROUGHBRED OWNERS AND BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

We support TOBA for numerous reasons but one of the biggest for me is the work the organization does towards new owner education and development. In fact, many years ago, it was at a TOBA seminar that my father was introduced to Bob and Beverly Lewis and what an amazing friendship and relationship that blossomed into.

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2026 LEADING SIRES IN CALIFORNIA

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2026 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2026 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative BT SWs	Cumulative A-E Index	Cumulative Comp Index
1	Collected (13, City Zip), Rancho San Miguel	$7,500	159/81	7/10	0/7	(Thought Process, $470,000)	$5,438,621	361	23	1.15	1.36
2	Stay Thirsty (08, Bernardini), Lovacres Ranch	$8,000	187/73	4/5	2/4	(Vodka Vodka, $307,750)	$3,408,467	*954	26	1.01	1.21
3	Grazen (06, Benchmark), Eclipse Thoroughbred Farm	$6,000	104/48	1/1	0/1	(Hey Jessie, $174,750)	$3,174,828	470	29	1.30	0.98
4	Clubhouse Ride (08, Candy Ride), Legacy Ranch	$5,000	105/57	1/1	1/1	(Fibonaccis Ride, $193,852)	$3,023,628	302	8	1.06	0.90
5	Smiling Tiger (07, Hold That Tiger)	Died, 2024	123/62	5/9	3/5	(Grand Slam Smile, $361,000)	$2,703,708	566	16	0.84	0.93
6	Sir Prancealot (IRE) (10, Tamayuz), Eclipse Thoroughbred Farm	Private	122/52	0/0	0/0	(Prince Dolce, $199,260)	$2,624,732	*765	17	0.98	0.91
7	Pavel (14, Creative Cause), Ocean Breeze Ranch	$4,000	42/22	4/4	3/4	(Pavlovian, $526,850)	$2,292,514	65	5	1.15	1.19
8	Om (12, Munnings), Legacy Ranch	$5,000	73/38	2/3	1/2	(Om N Joy, $342,000)	$2,182,906	179	3	0.82	0.99
9	Catholic Boy (15, More Than Ready), Hanson's River Ranch	$5,000	113/44	2/2	0/2	(Professor Grace, $125,118)	$2,180,458	206	4	0.71	1.52
10	Stanford (12, Malibu Moon), Eclipse Thoroughbred Farm	$4,000	93/60	2/4	1/2	(Man O Rose, $193,500)	$2,171,126	276	3	0.71	0.82
11	Midnight Storm (11, Pioneerof the Nile), Milky Way Farm	$4,000	88/46	2/6	1/2	(Specialsortastorm, $123,293)	$1,730,410	261	6	0.87	1.01
12	Mo Forza (16, Uncle Mo), Rancho San Miguel	$5,000	47/23	0/0	0/0	(Bull Shoals, $144,521)	$1,257,155	108	0	0.69	0.87
13	I'll Have Another (09, Flower Alley)	Pnsd	64/30	0/0	0/0	(Take Another Card, $147,420)	$1,251,073	493	7	1.02	1.04
14	Dads Caps (10, Discreet Cat), Barton Thoroughbreds	$2,500	56/32	1/1	0/1	(Caps and Carnage, $113,385)	$1,081,287	157	3	0.63	0.76
15	Mr. Big (03, Dynaformer)	Died, 2024	48/23	1/1	1/1	(Big City Lights, $151,040)	$1,065,874	254	12	1.08	0.90
16	Majestic Harbor (08, Rockport Harbor)	Died, 2022	11/7	1/2	0/1	(Majestic Oops, $536,750)	$738,179	64	3	1.17	0.93
17	Halladay (16, War Front), Kingfisher Farms	$5,000	46/14	0/0	0/0	(Dr. Filkins, $58,600)	$715,445	77	0	0.46	0.90
18	Acclamation (06, Unusual Heat), Hanson's River Ranch	$4,000	32/13	1/1	1/1	(On the Whim, $165,222)	$690,028	255	7	0.91	1.06
19	Cat Burglar (10, Unbridled's Song), Barton Thoroughbreds	$2,500	41/15	0/0	0/0	(Still Unwritten, $95,920)	$684,970	111	1	0.60	0.75
20	Jack Milton (10, War Front), Gray Farms	Private	37/14	0/0	0/0	(Heartbeat, $104,453)	$653,685	194	6	0.93	1.03
21	Curlin to Mischief (11, Curlin)	Pnsd	28/13	0/0	0/0	(See Through It, $104,127)	$573,267	158	5	0.76	0.78
22	Tamarando (11, Bertrando), Eclipse Thoroughbred Farm	$2,500	17/8	0/0	0/0	(Matt At Five, $238,236)	$469,110	75	4	0.78	1.15
23	Richard's Kid (05, Lemon Drop Kid), Rancho San Miguel	Pnsd	26/13	0/0	0/0	(Jennys Wine Girl, $80,620)	$468,871	156	0	0.74	0.81
24	Gato Del Oro (14, Medaglia d'Oro), BG Thoroughbred Facility	$2,500	21/11	0/0	0/0	(Donttellmewhattodo, $107,140)	$464,855	50	0	0.65	0.49
25	Smokem (15, Union Rags), Lovacres Ranch	$2,500	26/13	0/0	0/0	(Southern Melodee, $59,820)	$448,391	72	1	0.65	0.71
26	Tough Sunday (12, Grazen), Eclipse Thoroughbred Farm	$4,000	12/5	1/1	1/1	(Shea Brennan, $120,000)	$436,460	17	2	1.59	1.11
27	Idiot Proof (04, Benchmark), Victory Rose Thoroughbreds	$3,000	23/12	0/0	0/0	(Proof He Goes, $110,020)	$373,339	193	2	0.87	0.86
28	Empire Way (09, Empire Maker)	N/A	11/7	0/0	0/0	(Trotsky, $115,560)	$354,631	170	3	0.67	0.87
29	Graydar (09, Unbridled's Song), Milky Way Farm	$3,000	30/8	0/0	0/0	(High King, $63,400)	$305,414	*405	7	0.83	1.17
30	Tap Back (17, Einstein), Barton Thoroughbreds	$2,500	19/6	0/0	0/0	(Midnight Cowgirl, $80,540)	$286,630	39	0	0.39	0.83
31	Tom's Tribute (10, Lion Heart), Kingfisher Farms	$1,500	14/8	0/0	0/0	(O K Rose, $55,126)	$273,260	102	1	0.59	0.76
32	Northern Causeway (08, Giant's Causeway), Rancho San Miguel	$2,500	31/9	0/0	0/0	(Clarina, $76,904)	$262,512	156	0	0.35	0.80
33	Listing (16, Square Eddie), Ocean Breeze Ranch	$2,000	11/8	0/0	0/0	(First Time Listing, $52,800)	$246,995	19	1	0.92	1.23
34	Conquest Farenheit (14, Scat Daddy)	N/A	23/8	0/0	0/0	(Mr. Machupicchu, $41,640)	$233,643	68	0	0.47	0.96
35	Desert Code (04, E Dubai), Harris Farms	$2,000	17/7	0/0	0/0	(Sawasdee, $52,277)	$213,408	193	4	0.77	0.97
36	Point Piper (10, Giant's Causeway)	N/A	8/6	0/0	0/0	(Coach Cronin, $152,460)	$213,350	22	0	0.64	0.68
37	Passion for Gold (07, Medaglia d'Oro), Milky Way Farm	$2,500	22/9	0/0	0/0	(Lyndee's Dream, $66,260)	$212,224	*282	0	0.78	0.83
38	Win the Space (12, Pulpit), Milky Way Farm	$2,000	5/3	0/0	0/0	(Ryan's Girl, $142,940)	$211,952	12	0	0.92	0.99
39	Cistron (14, The Factor)	Died, 2024	12/4	1/1	1/1	(Cee Drew, $99,250)	$209,091	23	1	0.62	0.70
40	Gig Harbor (08, City Zip)	N/A	17/9	0/0	0/0	(Ballyvaughan Gig, $42,580)	$185,676	102	0	0.56	0.74

** includes Southern Hemisphere foals; ¶ Indicates a first-crop sire*



Eugene Joyce (right) at the 2025 ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of Sweetwater Downs alongside Rock Springs Chamber of Commerce CEO Rick Lee

historical horse racing—have brought Thoroughbred racing back to life in the Cowboy State.

Taking a page from Kentucky's book, Wyoming has turned to the sport's traditional means of funding, pari-mutuel wagering, but in a new package: historical horse racing. Since being approved in 2013, HHR has sparked an incredible increase in purses and breed funds in Wyoming.

In the initial years the growth was slow. Ten years ago, total purses awarded in the state were just $221,250. But when Thoroughbred racing concluded for the 2026 season in Wyoming, total purses awarded for the season had reached $3,656,825—more than 13 times the purses awarded just 10 years earlier.

From 2022-25, HHR handle in the state nearly doubled to $2.49 billion to make this growth possible.

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2026 LEADING SIRES IN OREGON

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2026 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2026 Earnings	Cumulative Foals	BT SWs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	Dynamic Impact (11, Tiznow), Bar C Racing Stables	$1,500	12/4	0/0	0/0	(Miss Dynamic, $31,157)	$105,071	37	2	0.44	0.87
2	Rise Up (11, Rockport Harbor), Ruah Ranch	$2,000	12/5	0/0	0/0	(Designated Runner, $15,925)	$97,525	31	1	0.32	0.32
3	Jess Mo (17, Uncle Mo), Bar C Racing Stables	$1,500	7/2	0/0	0/0	(Jess in Time, $16,957)	$50,830	17	0	0.22	0.73
4	Giacomo (02, Holy Bull), Oakhurst Thoroughbreds	$2,500	6/3	0/0	0/0	(Rocky Bay Rae, $27,559)	$45,322	*402	10	0.90	0.99
5	Sixthirteen (04, Dixie Union)	N/A	6/2	0/0	0/0	(It's Later Burt, $12,419)	$33,776	78	0	0.31	0.55
6	Al Faatik (09, Invasor)	N/A	4/2	0/0	0/0	(Al's Big Boy, $13,970)	$29,750	12	0	0.10	0.08
7	Outlash (12, Unbridled's Song)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Somekindaoutlaw, $15,195)	$17,545	14	0	0.11	0.79
8	Why Not Be Perfect (07, Whywhywhy), Keizer Equestrian Center	$750	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Why Not Mayzee, $11,122)	$12,002	39	0	0.08	0.38
9	Slew's Saga (02, Seattle Slew)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Saxon Saga, $5,106)	$5,106	38	1	0.36	0.66
10	Raging Tiger (15, Giant's Causeway), Oakhurst Thoroughbreds	$1,000	3/0	0/0	0/0	(Malibu Tiger, $3,930)	$4,740	16	0	0.17	0.64

** includes Southern Hemisphere foals; ¶ Indicates a first-crop sire*

Pari-mutuel success is not limited to HHR. From 2022-25, on-track handle improved 35% to $3.5 million (for Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse racing). While Wyoming track signals do not go out for interstate wagering, HHR satellite locations in the state offer pari-mutuel wagering on live signals. That in-state simulcast handle has nearly tripled in that same timespan, going from under $1.8 million in 2022 to $5.24 million in 2025.

Those strides in HHR and pari-mutuel wagering on Wyoming races have helped fund a ballooning breeder fund (Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses) that this year surpassed $10 million. It has all added up to a fast-improving racing circuit as well as quickly improving numbers for Thoroughbred breeding in the state, bucking the downward trend seen in most states.

Wyoming Downs general manager and director of government affairs Frank Lamb still can't believe the amount of money now available for state breeders.

"When we were first meeting to talk about the legislation for historic racing, there was a state senator, Sen. John Schiffer, who was going to lead the way on the Senate side," said Lamb, who has been part of the state's racing scene for decades as a track executive or regulator. "We were talking about the breed program, and at that time, I mean, the largest amount of money that had been distributed to the breed program was like $20,000 or $30,000.

"I remember he and I talking because he was a horseman too. ... I told him I could see a day when there'll be over a million dollars in the breeders' program. Well, now it's $10 million.

"So it's just beyond even what we'd dreamed."

FAMILY COMMITMENT

Wyoming's dream ride has coincided with the hopes of Eugene Joyce, the current president of Sweetwater



Corey Johnsen shared his thoughts with Joyce on the positives that historical horse racing had on Kentucky Downs

Downs who returned to the state in 2011 and found a way to keep racing going. Credited by many as the driving force of this version of Wyoming racing, its success has surpassed even his considerable vision.

"It's been a labor of love; a lot of blood, sweat, and tears for 15 years," Joyce said. "If and when I step down or step aside, I think I've left the industry in pretty good shape going forward."

Few would argue that the Joyce family has twice saved Wyoming racing. While Eugene Joyce began to turn things around in 2011, the seeds of his cowboy dreams were planted by his father and great-grandfather. Joyce's father, Joe, as president and CEO of Arlington Park conceived of and implemented the world's first million-dollar race for Thoroughbreds: the Arlington Million Stakes (G1T). Four years after the race's launch, Joyce and his colleagues would earn a special Eclipse Award for pulling off the Miracle Million version of the Arlington Million Stakes in 1985 just three weeks after a fire had destroyed the Chicago-area track's grandstand.

When Richard Duchossois bought out the other ownership partners of Arlington in 1986, Joe Joyce began to think about his next career move. During those thoughts, he recalled tales he had heard from his grandfather about riding horses in Wyoming, who lived that experience as a member of the United States Cavalry.

Joe Joyce would purchase Wyoming Downs in 1989 and get racing going in the state. That purchase also included some 100 acres tied to the track that provided the opportunity to ride horses, "run cows, and play cowboy," for Eugene Joyce—connecting him to horses and the vast land. The younger Joyce would soon move into track operations at his father's track.

"I fell in love with horse racing, fell in love with Wyoming, and then I just fell in love," Eugene Joyce said. "I met my wife (Tina) out here."

That magical young adulthood would face a crossroads when Joe Joyce sold Wyoming Downs in 1998.

2026 LEADING SIRES IN UTAH

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2026 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2026 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative BT SWs	Cumulative A-E Index	Cumulative Comp Index
1	Proud Zoning (13, Proud Tower Too)	N/A	3/0	0/0	0/0	(Boogie Boy, $4,353)	$7,156	6	0	0.08	0.02
2	Dr. Skimming (04, Skimming)	N/A	1/1	0/0	0/0	(Mr. Mount Dutton, $6,620)	$6,620	4	0	0.07	0.00
3	Northern Soldier (03, Yankee Victor)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(C D Little Trooper, $240)	$240	21	0	0.20	0.64

** includes Southern Hemisphere foals; ¶ Indicates a first-crop sire*



Wyoming-bred Bobby Chancelot (outside) winning the 2026 Thoroughbred Sweetwater Derby

With the family track gone, Eugene Joyce would go on to manage tracks in Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas but those Wyoming memories stayed strong. In 2011 he would return and purchase a struggling Wyoming Downs. With racing at a low point, he began to find any way he could try to keep racing going. He would put together small fair meets, which allowed him to get simulcast wagering going. It was a toehold but wasn't going anywhere very fast.

That would soon change.

In his days working at Lone Star Park, Joyce had met Corey Johnsen, who went on to become part owner and president of Kentucky Downs. While that track offered just a few live race dates a year and served as a popular simulcast outlet with its location on the border with Tennessee, close to Nashville, it would make history in 2011 as the first track in the Bluegrass to offer HHR.

"IT'S BEEN A LABOR OF LOVE; A LOT OF BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS FOR 15 YEARS. IF AND WHEN I STEP DOWN OR STEP ASIDE, I THINK I'VE LEFT THE INDUSTRY IN PRETTY GOOD SHAPE GOING FORWARD."

—EUGENE JOYCE, PRESIDENT OF SWEETWATER DOWNS

Packaging pari-mutuel wagering in a game that plays similarly to a slot machine would prove a wild success that eventually would spread to every track in Kentucky, include satellite locations tied to those tracks, and see new Quarter Horse and Standardbred tracks added. By 2013 Kentucky Downs was enjoying success and Johnsen suggested to Joyce that it could be a fit for Wyoming.

Joyce credits the legislature for seeing the long-term vision and realizing that racing wasn't asking for a handout, only a tool that it had always used—pari-mutuel wagering packaged in a machine.

"It certainly helped that I had a history, and my family had a history in Wyoming," Joyce said. "They saw that we didn't ask for anything for three years and we had just kind of rolled up our sleeves. They could certainly appreciate that.

"Also, the Kentucky story resonated. They were kind of shocked when we told them that before historic horse racing, even Kentucky was in trouble."

HHR would help Kentucky strengthen its racing circuit, provide lucrative breeder funds, and help generate interest at sales. The industry success has spurred state success in terms of economic impact of jobs and services directly and indirectly tied to Thoroughbred racing.

"It helped that HHR was doing so well in Kentucky as our lawmakers view that as the gold standard," Joyce said. "They saw how even Kentucky had been losing racehorses and broodmares to states with added-gaming and HHR got their racing engine going again."

Joyce said it's been important to update lawmakers on what HHR is

COADY MEDIA


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2026 LEADING SIRES IN WASHINGTON

For daily updated sire lists visit BloodHorse.com

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2026 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2026 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative BT SWs	Cumulative A-E Index	Cumulative Comp Index
1	Alternation (08, Distorted Humor), Blue Ribbon Farm	$3,500	58/36	0/0	0/0	(Chicory Blaze, $183,890)	$1,550,796	*335	11	1.11	1.15
2	Conveyance (07, Indian Charlie)	Died, 2023	39/24	0/0	0/0	(Lunar Module, $101,904)	$639,377	151	5	0.93	0.96
3	Straight Fire (14, Dominus), Blue Ribbon Farm	$2,500	21/10	0/0	0/0	(Courtside Action, $106,420)	$551,424	102	4	0.91	1.22
4	Coast Guard (05, Stormy Atlantic), El Dorado Farms	$2,500	31/14	1/1	0/1	(Mattie Goincoastal, $74,560)	$469,020	154	10	0.54	0.54
5	Barkley (13, Munnings), El Dorado Farms	$2,500	30/13	0/0	0/0	(Ima Track Star, $69,440)	$447,887	52	1	0.47	0.47
6	Running Tap (08, Tapit)	N/A	4/4	0/0	0/0	(Alluring Valentine, $32,528)	$81,233	32	0	0.26	0.37
7	Private Gold (00, Seeking the Gold)	N/A	4/2	0/0	0/0	(Boss Like Beth, $43,492)	$63,074	199	4	0.48	0.55
8	Raised a Secret (10, Songandaprayer)	N/A	8/3	0/0	0/0	(Secret Zipper, $17,810)	$61,609	36	1	0.35	0.64
9	War Power (06, Pulpit), Frances Long	Private	2/2	0/0	0/0	(Pistol Power, $20,768)	$27,618	36	1	0.36	0.39
10	Gold Rush Dancer (13, Private Gold), Blue Ribbon Farm	$1,500	4/1	0/0	0/0	(Melba's Gold, $13,100)	$15,723	28	1	0.29	0.56
11	Mr. Rancho Vista (05, Northern Afleet)	N/A	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Young Life Laura, $8,000)	$8,000	11	0	0.37	0.46

2026 LEADING SIRES IN WYOMING

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2026 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2026 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative BT SWs	Cumulative A-E Index	Cumulative Comp Index
1	Chips All In (09, North Light)	N/A	10/4	0/0	0/0	(Tmt All Inclusive, $27,040)	$96,124	14	0	0.27	0.44
2	Trojan Nation (13, Street Cry)	N/A	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Warring Thunder, $12,170)	$20,102	20	0	0.14	0.62
3	Finnegans Wake (09, Powerscourt), Wolfpaw Stables	$1,500	3/1	0/0	0/0	(Jet Set Rebel, $12,017)	$18,797	21	0	0.42	1.00
4	¶ Special Effort (20, Ghostzapper), Unknown Wyoming	Private	1/0	0/0	0/0	(Wannabepoolboy, $8,470)	$8,470	5	0	0.27	0.45

** includes Southern Hemisphere foals; ¶ Indicates a first-crop sire*

bringing for the industry as well as the state overall. He noted their most recent study found that horse racing and HHR had an economic impact north of $250 million.

"When you compare that with 15 years ago—there's no comparison. Fifteen years ago it would have been close to zero impact. There was no racing going on. There was nothing happening," Joyce said. "Now, at just one HHR location that we have in Evanston, we have 105 employees."

Some five years ago Joyce sold his controlling interest in Wyoming Racing but stayed on as a partner. He also is president of Sweetwater Downs in Rock Springs. The track is owned by Wyoming Horse Racing, which in October was purchased by a subsidiary of the Chickasaw Nation's Global Gaming Solutions from Nick Hughes, John Sheldon, and Pete Liguori. Global Gaming WY purchased the track and 13 historical horse racing and off-track betting outlets of Wyoming Horse Racing.

"For nearly 20 years, Global Gaming Solutions has proven to be a catalyst for expanding our footprint in gaming, racing, and entertainment in Oklahoma, then into Texas and now Wyoming," said Dan Boren, Chickasaw Nation Secretary of Commerce and Global Gaming Solutions board chairman. "Our proven expertise and commitment to customer experiences align seamlessly with the established Horse Palace OTBs and racing operations."

Joyce's leadership role at Sweetwater Downs allows him to exercise his true passion: carrying out a successful race meet.

"The thing about live horse racing is it's communal. It's a collaborative enterprise," Joyce said. "You've got to work with the horsemen. You have to work with the jockeys, the track maintenance crews, the fans. Management has to be tuned into all of that.

"But when it all comes together, it is a rare thing of beauty."



COADY MEDIA PHOTOS

Wyoming-bred fan favorite Jimmy Jams won five of six starts to begin his career this year, with victories coming both at Wyoming Downs and Sweetwater Downs

HHR PROVIDES FOUNDATION

Johnsen has experienced such beautiful race meets. After pointing Joyce in the HHR direction, Johnsen would be brought on as an adviser in launching HHR in Wyoming. While crediting Joyce as the driving force, Johnsen used his Kentucky experience to help Wyoming racing toward a success story of its own.

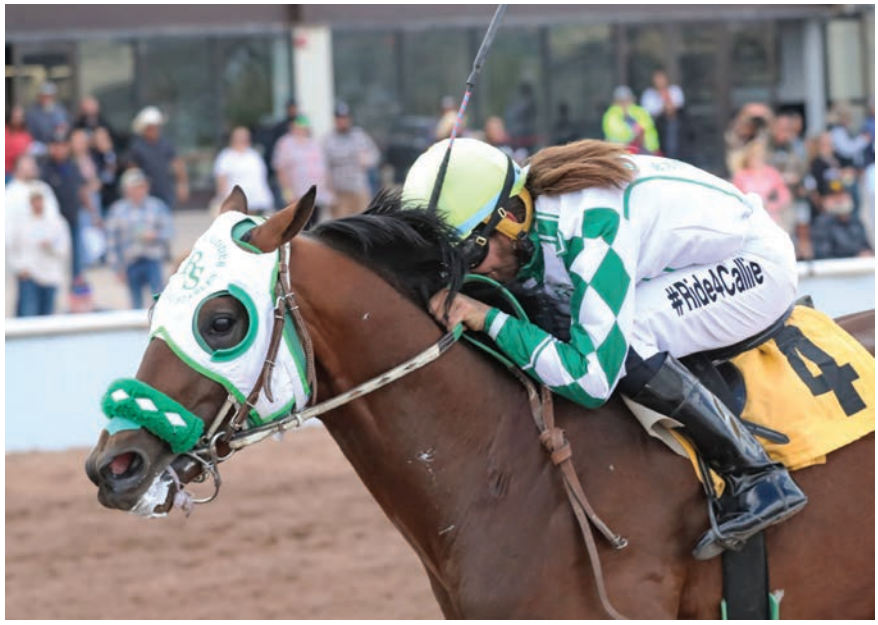
One of the advantages for Kentucky Downs was its location close to the Tennessee border. It was able to attract HHR players from the Nashville market. Kentucky has since leaned into that approach with additional tracks and satellite facilities close to the Tennessee border, where casino gaming is not allowed.

Like Kentucky, Wyoming has placed HHR satellite facilities close to state borders with Utah, drawing players from the Salt Lake City area to locations in Southwest Wyoming; and Colorado, drawing players from Northern Colorado communities such as Fort Collins to locations in South Wyoming.

"Keep in mind that we're the least populated state in the union. Some 75% of customers at our HHR locations are from out of state," Joyce said. "We call these touristic dollars. There are people coming in here that are benefiting our racing program, our purse money, and the Wyoming breeder program."

Johnsen, who races throughout the country under the CJ Thoroughbreds banner, has made sure to have a racing stable in Wyoming. He's thrilled to see how far the state has come and where it might be going.

"I've always had kind of a simple compass. It's just to always try to make things better for horse racing," Johnsen said. "To be able to clearly do that in Wyoming, after having had a hand in helping in Kentucky, that's very, very gratifying. That's what motivates me every day."



Lion Throne winning the 2026 John Schiffer Memorial Derby, named for the late Wyoming state senator who helped pave the way for HHR

COWBOY UP

HHR Lifts Wyoming Thoroughbred Racing

TRACK	DATES	RACES	STARTS	RUNNERS/ RACE	PURSES	PURSES/ DAY	PURSES/ RACE
2026							
Energy Downs	6	21	122	5.81	$365,500	$60,917	$17,405
Sweetwater Downs	16	76	567	7.46	$1,639,100	$102,444	$21,567
Wyoming Downs	23	106	824	7.77	$1,652,225	$71,836	$15,587
Totals	**45**	**203**	**1,513**	**7.45**	**$3,656,825**	**$81,263**	**$18,014**
2025							
Energy Downs	18	62	491	7.92	$983,950	$54,664	$15,870
Sweetwater Downs	16	59	425	7.20	$747,100	$46,694	$12,663
Wyoming Downs	14	86	745	8.66	$1,121,050	$80,075	$13,035
Totals	**48**	**207**	**1,661**	**8.02**	**$2,852,100**	**$59,419**	**$13,778**
2024							
Energy Downs	15	57	417	7.32	$743,300	$49,553	$13,040
Sweetwater Downs	17	45	306	6.80	$477,200	$28,071	$10,604
Wyoming Downs	19	95	827	8.71	$1,249,700	$65,774	$13,155
Totals	**51**	**197**	**1,550**	**7.87**	**$2,470,200**	**$48,435**	**$12,539**
2016							
Central Wyoming Fair	6	15	98	6.53	$68,100	$11,350	$4,540
Energy Downs	4	13	94	7.23	$60,500	$15,125	$4,654
Wyoming Downs	8	14	102	7.29	$62,650	$7,831	$4,475
Sweetwater Downs	3	6	40	6.67	$30,000	$10,000	$5,000
Totals	**21**	**48**	**334**	**6.96**	**$221,250**	**$10,536**	**$4,609**

Joyce is proud of the stability HHR has brought to Wyoming, allowing for breeders to have confidence as they start on plans that will take years to come to fruition.

"I keep a trophy I won for champion Wyoming-bred 3-year-old of 2022," Joyce said before adding with a laugh, "He was the only Wyoming-bred 3-year-old to start that season."

Joyce, in part, was making the point that it takes a few years for breeders to believe in a new program which is why it took a while for trust to build before people made that investment. He now sees that belief building. In 2025, 103 mares were bred in Wyoming, nearly double the 56 bred there in 2024. The number of stallions improved from 17 in 2024 to 21 in 2025.

Joyce noted that Wyoming Downs, drawing from the larger population of Evanston, has fared better than Sweetwater Downs. He said there's no shortage of loyal fans though at Sweetwater and after seeing a number of them return day in and day out, Joyce awarded them with lifetime passes. Lamb described race days in Wyoming as a county fair type atmosphere with plenty of cowboy hats.

Wyoming Downs and Sweetwater Downs also are joined by 307 Horse Racing's Energy Downs in Gillette. Next year it's expected that Bally's Cheyenne Park will open, after it pushed back its initial opening date of October 2026. In a joint release in September, the Wyoming Racing Commission noted that the track wasn't quite ready to go for this year while Bally's Wyoming emphasized that it would still move forward for next year.

"Bally's and the commission share the goal of creating a racing experience that meets the expectations of Wyoming's racing community, participants, and fans," said Bally's Wyoming general manager Kerry Smith. "The progress at Bally's Cheyenne Park builds upon a strong foundation already in place, including the existing 1-mile oval, barns, and other key infrastructure.

"We are proud of the significant progress that has been made since Bally's acquired this project and throughout the company's continued investment. Moving the inaugural meet provides the time necessary to complete the remaining work and ensure Bally's Cheyenne Park is positioned to deliver the quality racing experience everyone expects."

Lamb added that in two years Wyoming has gone from 700-800 stalls to 1,100 as horsemen arrive from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. Johnsen and Lamb said horsemen displaced from Northern California and that state's fair circuit have been showing up in Wyoming. Joyce noted that in terms of career trajectory, Sweetwater Downs gets "horsemen on the way up and horsemen on the way down," while adding that the jockey colony has improved as the new money has flowed.

While Wyoming does not participate in interstate wagering and is not under the regulation of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, racing leaders in the state said they're trying to do things the right way. Johnsen helped organize a Wyoming affiliate of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and Joyce said he has spent millions of dollars on top machinery to keep his track in good shape. Pointing to the changing racing landscape, tracks in Wyoming purchased some of their equipment from tracks that have discontinued racing.

Lamb noted that HISA could be an option for Wyoming down the road, noting that timing-wise, it would make sense to look at that option once all HISA litigation has been resolved.

In terms of Thoroughbred racing, Wyoming previously was perhaps best known as the answer of some trivia as the final resting place of the first Triple Crown winner, Sir Barton. Today it's becoming a viable option for owners, breeders, trainers, and jockeys. Wyoming is very much looking forward.

Joyce thrills at how it's beginning to work for so many people. As he wrote in a submission to the Wyoming Eagle Tribune as things were taking off: "Success is always sweeter when you share it with friends. I couldn't be happier to see my neighbors, community, and the state I love benefiting from Wyoming's horse industry, which is leaving even our boldest predictions in the dust." BH



The future continues to look bright for Wyoming horsemen with the expected arrival next year of Bally's Cheyenne Park