

[https://www.nola.com/entertainment\\_life/article\\_18c10ad7-e7f8-5a02-a1d7-cb96f5603b60.html](https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/article_18c10ad7-e7f8-5a02-a1d7-cb96f5603b60.html)

# Horses, money and people converge for the 2018-19 season at the New Orleans Fair Grounds

BY SUE STRACHAN | [sstrachan@theadvocate.com](mailto:sstrachan@theadvocate.com) NOV 19, 2018 - 7:00 AM

1 of 8



Horses burst from the gate for the fifth race on opening day at the New Orleans Fair Grounds Thursday, Nov. 15

[Buy Now](#)

ADVOCATE STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

For the thoroughbred horses in the New Orleans Fair Grounds paddock, Thursday was just another day at the races, even if it was the opening of the track's 2018-19 season.

These horses are a year-round profession, or obsession, depending on whom you meet.

At the paddock's center, owners and trainers watched intently as horses made their way around the small oval or stood in the stalls, some still and calm, others frisky in the cool early-afternoon air.

Among those in the thick of it was trainer Tom Amoss, with a 3-year-old thoroughbred named Latrobe's King. Amoss came to the track as a kid, got his start in the stables while in high school, and after graduating from Louisiana State University, returned to move up to training his first horse in 1987. He trains 60 horses, including those in GMB Racing Stables, owned by Gayle Benson.

Splitting his year, like most trainers, between different locations, Amoss returns to New Orleans for the winter.

“Being from New Orleans and growing up at the Fair Grounds, I always like coming back,” said Amoss. “I see fans year after year, and there are quite a few of them. Probably 50 percent are regulars. I don't know their names, but we know each other, ask about how our summers went.”

Horse racing at this spot in Gentilly has been happening off and on since 1839, with the racetrack formally established in 1852, making it the second-oldest track in the United States after Freehold Raceway in New Jersey.

In 2008, the track, now owned by Churchill Downs Louisiana, moved opening day from Thanksgiving to a week earlier. But for many New Orleanians, coming to the racetrack on Thanksgiving is a tradition that endures, with a new group of fans getting dressed up in fancy clothes and elaborate hats. This year there will be 10 races on Thanksgiving Day featuring the \$75,000 Thanksgiving Handicap; first post is 11 a.m.

Food options range from fancy buffets to carryout po-boys and gumbo. Last year, the track fed more than 10,000 people on Thanksgiving.

It's this old tradition, continued and revitalized by millennials, that Amoss thinks is “really cool to come out and see.”

Last week, some regulars discussed bets and checked out the racing program, while others just took a quick glance, or like Steven Badie,

didn't bother. "Once I see the jockey name and trainer name, I already can kind of predict," he said. "Right now I wasn't looking for a special race." He said he was at the track to pass the time while waiting for an electrician at a nearby apartment complex he manages.

Badie says he doesn't go by the odds. "They got pickers (of odds) at every track who don't know nothing about the backside," he said, referring to information about the horses that isn't reflected in racing statistics. For example, a horse could have been hurt since its last win, or not looking its best — insight that isn't available to those who don't have access to the barn.

When asked what a racing fan should consider in a horse, Amoss says to look at the animal's overall health. Does it have a bright coat? A good, clean walk? Is it focused and not too wound up?

In the winner's circle last week were owner Alexis Claire and trainer Eduardo "Lalo" Rodriguez with Cookies Are Good, ridden by jockey Sophie Doyle. These two also split time between the fair grounds and other places — for Claire, who owns 10 horses, it is Chicago

and Kentucky in the summer, New Orleans in winter. “I’ve been coming to New Orleans for four years,” said Claire. Rodriguez has trained horses at the Fair Grounds for 20.

Like big hats on Thanksgiving Day, traditions keep the Fair Grounds community coming back every fall.

“The barn I worked in as a stable hand is the same barn I train out of now,” said Amoss. “I have gone from being low man on the totem pole to guy running that barn.

“Every year when I come back, and I sit down in my chair and get to work — and I get here at 4:30 a.m., my staff at 5 a.m. It is not unusual to reflect back to those early, tough days,” Amoss reminisces. “But I always reflect with a smile because I have great memories of working my way up as a trainer.

“And that is what the Fair Grounds is all about: the memories I have, the tradition it has, so coming back here is certainly a homecoming with fans, but my own personal homecoming with the track and the love I have for it.”

**CORRECTION: Daily Racing Form is not provided by the New Orleans Fair Grounds, which provides a racing program.**

## **You May Like**

Sponsored Links by Taboola

### **U.S. Cardiologist: It's Like a Pressure Wash for Your Insides**

Gundry MD Total Restore Supplement

### **Shut The Front Door! It's Amazing These Trucks Are Under 30K!**

New Trucks | Search Ads

### **What 5 Car Wax Sealants Were Voted Best of 2019?**

VehicleBuff Review

### **3 Dangerous Foods People Feed Their Cat (Without Realizing It)**

Dr. Marty Feline Prime | Supplement

### **Netflix Saying Goodbye To These Shows This November**

refinery29.com

### **It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year. It's Gaming Season.**

Empire Blazing Winter

### **Don't Sell Your Old Mac, Try This Trick First**

MacKeeper

### **Jolie Back Zip**

\$199 - thefryecompany.com

---

**MORE FROM THE ADVOCATE**

**MORE FROM OUR PARTNERS**

- Lafayette attorney permanently disbarred for stealing from clients
- Torn-up LSU turf causes stir; field to be replaced after season: 'Looks like a goat ranch'
- The new plan for old Charity Hospital is foolish, Healing Minds NOLA president says
- 'Hostility, anger, insults' at first meeting of St. George, city-parish leaders; legal fight looms
- John Bel Edwards calls Eddie Rispone 'godfather' of Louisiana's troubled voucher program

- 
- 
- 
- 

---

Recommended by

|