

Maryland Equine History: Galloping Through Maryland's Rich Thoroughbred History

However, racing's allure seemed to have lost its spark as handles and attendance declined. Washington, D.C., lawyer Frank deFrancis and his partners Bob Manfuso and Tom Manfuso bought both Pimlico and Laurel and injected some much needed cash into the operations. DeFrancis died suddenly of a heart attack in 1989. The De Francis Memorial Dash is run in his honor and is the final race in this year's Mid Atlantic Thoroughbred Championships (MATCH Series).

Frank deFrancis' son Joe deFrancis took over his stake in the tracks and continued operating Pimlico and Laurel Park with the Manfusos until he bought them out in 1993. Bob Manfuso, who continued breeding and training race horses out of Chanceland Farm in West Friendship, died in 2020 at the age of 82.

The late 20th century brought reversals to Maryland racing, driven in part by policy decisions at the state level. Unlike Maryland, nearby states approved slots at racetracks and handles declined in Maryland as bettors went elsewhere. Purses in Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania dwarfed those available in Maryland.

It was not until 2008 that Maryland voters approved a state constitutional amendment permitting slot machines and allowing a portion of the slots revenue to be used for reviving the horse racing industry. This amendment

aided the struggling Maryland Thoroughbred industry significantly, and breeders began coming back to Maryland to continue Maryland's long and impressive history of Thoroughbred breeding and racing.

Thoroughbred Racing Today

The economics of Thoroughbred racing in Maryland today have improved somewhat since the late 20th century. The Stronach Group, now called 1/ST Racing, purchased Laurel Park and Pimlico in 2002. The company has made capital investments in the barns and clubhouse at Laurel Park, and is working with state and local authorities to make significant capital investments in Pimlico.

In addition, Maryland now permits slots at racetracks, and in April of this year, the General Assembly expanded wagering on horse racing to permit betting at all six casinos in the state, as well as at M&T Stadium and Oriole Park.

Maryland Thoroughbred racing has also risen above the COVID-19 pandemic and was able to hold 140 racing days with limited spectators in 2020. The typical racing calendar was a bit jumbled with the summer meet at Timonium being canceled and the Preakness Stakes being pushed to October as the final race in the 2020 Triple Crown.

The Preakness returns to May this year, and to

its traditional spot as the middle Triple Crown race, as the crown jewel of Maryland's 2021 racing calendar featuring 170 racing days, including seven days of live racing at Timonium.



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The first Maryland Million Day was held on October 18, 1986 as a day to celebrate and promote Maryland-bred horses. Founded by Jim McKay, the day of racing continues today under the new name Jim McKay Maryland Million Day with Monday Morning Qb being the most recent Maryland Million Classic winner (2020).

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