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Jonathan Horowitz, track announcer at Arapahoe Park



Jonathan Horowitz, perched above the track, uses binoculars to help him call the horsepowered action at Arapahoe Park in Aurora. Photos by Kathryn Scott Osler, *The Denver Post*

# Speaker of the horse

*Arapahoe Park track announcer Jonathan Horowitz knew his calling long ago*

By Terry Frei *The Denver Post*

**AURORA»** *Oh, oh. Now he'd done it.* In 1999, young Jonathan Horowitz, then 14 and living in Irvine, Calif., was with his parents in The Vessels Club at Los Alamitos Race Course, watching the horses through binoculars and “calling” the races into his own tape recorder. A man, unmistakably a track official, approached the family’s table.

“We thought, ‘Oh, great,’ maybe we were being too loud, or maybe I was infringing on a copyright because I was talking into my tape recorder,” Horowitz recalled recently at Arapahoe Park.

The man introduced himself as Rick Henson, the track’s general manager, and explained that he was the son of Harry Henson, the renowned race announcer at Hollywood Park. The older Henson retired in 1982, before Jonathan was born, but he still perked up at the mention of the name.

Rick Henson, who previously had been the racing secretary at Centennial Race Track in the Denver area, suggested Horowitz send him a tape of his calls. The young race caller did so and Henson was impressed. The track played host to the American Quarter Horse Association Challenge Championships that year, and one of the races, the Youth Association Stakes, was limited to owners 18 and younger. “It was a race for young owners, so they said, ‘Let’s get a young announcer,’” Horowitz said.

The night of racing was on ESPN, so Horowitz’s call of the 350-yard race was on international TV, and it was believed he was the youngest announcer to call a race at a recognized track.

Fifteen years later, Horowitz is spending his fourth summer calling the races from his rooftop perch at Arapahoe Park. His path to the Aurora track’s annual three-month meeting was far from direct. He has done much since age 14 besides calling races — including graduating from the University of Southern California, getting a master’s degree at Maryland and working on several projects as an editor, researcher and writer in the publishing office of the Library of Congress.

For many years, occasional stints as a young guest announcer in the U.S. and England — the

younger he was, the more publicity the tracks received — were enough to satisfy him as he got on with his “real life.” He called races at tracks such as Santa Anita, Lone Star Park in the Dallas area and Turf Paradise in Phoenix.

The most prestigious announcing jobs are held by veterans who work for decades, so this is not a craft with a lot of turnover. Then Arapahoe Park officials called Horowitz in 2011. In essence, the sales pitch was: *Hey, what are you doing for summer vacation?*

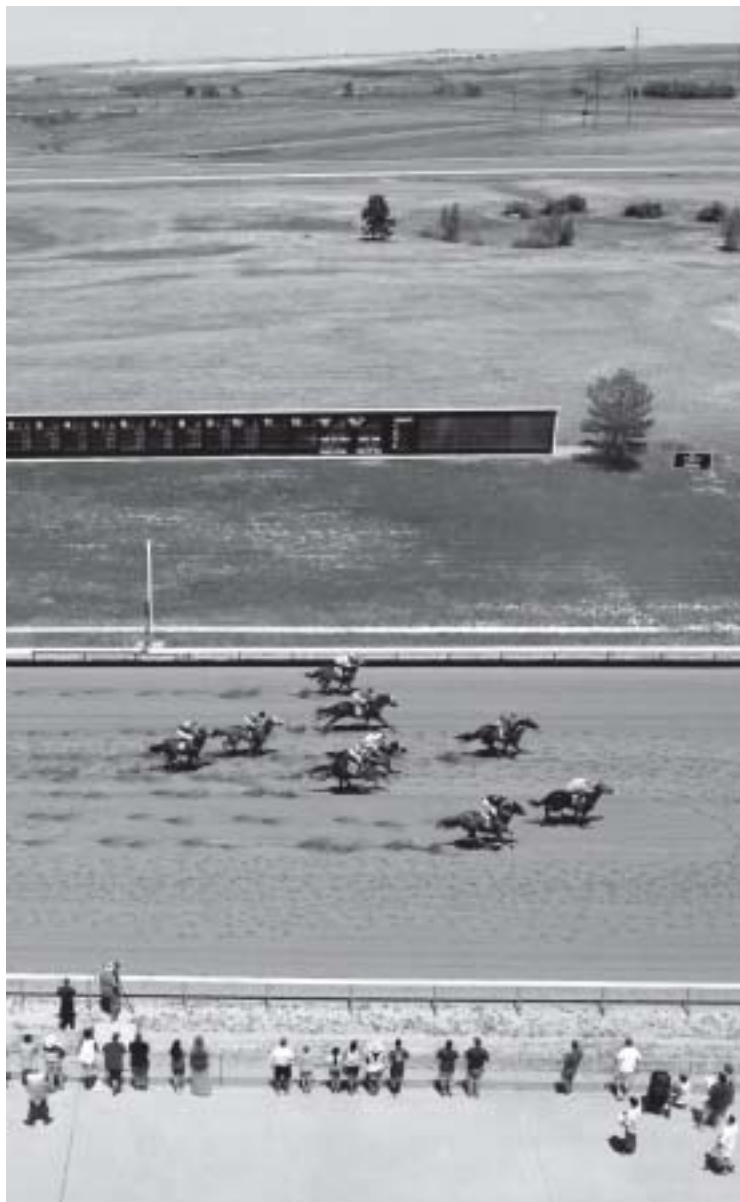
With co-author Susan Reyburn, Horowitz was working on “Football Nation: Four Hundred Years of America’s Game” for the Library of Congress. His boss said if he could do his work by computer while in Colorado for the summer, he should go for it.

A year later, he added the announcing job at the September-December meeting at Zia Park in Hobbs, N.M., and he now has settled into a nomadic rotation as a track announcer half the year and writer and researcher the other six months — or whenever he can wedge it in. He’s about to begin a book about the integration of football.

“If I wake up in the morning and say what do I want to do today, I’d want to do this,” said Horowitz, now a sage 29. “I’m glad to be getting a chance to do this and see where it takes me. ... I’d like to continue growing to take on bigger opportunities. But at the same time, when I have that opportunity, I want to still be involved in other things too.”

Horowitz also announced and broadcast various sports during his days as a USC student. He was a horse announcer first before he came to be passionate about every aspect of horse racing.

“As I got more and more about the sport, the more I appreciated the animals,” he said. “I like to go back to the stable area whenever I



Quarter horses cross the finish line below Horowitz’s perch at Arapahoe Park. “I like to go back to the stable area whenever I can and see the horses up close,” the 29-year-old track announcer says.

can and see the horses up close. I love meeting the owners and trainers, to get an idea of what they put into it and have that translate into my race calls and give me context and perspective.”

A recent day’s first race at Arapahoe Park was a 5½-furlong sprint for Colorado-bred maiden fillies and mares, 3 years old and older. Horowitz greeted the fans, at the track both for live racing and simulcast wagering on other tracks across the country, and soon launched into his race routine. Announcers, you see, don’t just call races.

Stepping in front of the Arapahoe Park banner in his booth, he ran down the field and offered tid-

bits about each horse as he appeared on the screens around the track — and across the nation in sports books and off-track wagering facilities and at other tracks that carry simulcasts.

As post time neared, he looked through the binoculars at each horse, softly repeating their names to match them with numbers and jockey colors in short-term memory that would be wiped clean the second the race ended and preparation began for the next race.

As the six horses neared the gate, he delivered a running commentary, noting, among other things, that first-time starter Krakowianka was especially edgy.

Without looking down at a program or notes, he got the horses through the backstretch and the turn, saying that Krakowianka was “running her own race at the rear of the field.” In the stretch, with Sudies Storm leading, he lowered the binoculars and said, “She’s been second or third in five of her six career races, and now getting her first career win in start number seven — it’s Sudies Storm and (jockey) Travis Wales who score, defeating She’s Savvy in second place and then Isabella Angelina and Gabby Gal.”

Horowitz gave the time of the race, then reached over to his laptop computer to click on and play Wales’ “victory” song, “Sure Thing,” by Miguel.

The rest of the card that day was a mix of quarter horse and thoroughbred races, and Arapahoe Park also has Arabian races on many days. The shorter quarter horse races are especially challenging for announcers, but Horowitz saw and called them early at Los Alamitos and handles them with aplomb. The last race of the day was a 7-furlong thoroughbred race, and going in Horowitz explained on camera that it’s a “hybrid” distance, neither sprint nor a long race. His commentary all day walked a fine line, mixing information designed for the casual horse racing fan with asides that might interest the most hardened of horseplayers looking for edges at the mutual windows.

Grant, a 4-year-old gelding, held on to win. “Grant, getting leg weary, will find the (finish line) in time,” said Horowitz, who then ran down the other finishers. After eventually running through the mutual prices, he tended to final details, telling his listeners of the upcoming schedule and feature races.

He closed with, “Until your next time out at the races, I’m Jonathan Horowitz ... keep picking winners!”

And how had the announcer held up?

“You’re drained,” he said. “You’ve been through so much, memorizing the field and trying to describe the action, accurately and professionally with a little bit of style. So I’m spent. But it’s what I love to do.”

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