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The reports of HRU's death were premature

By Bill Finley

When I pulled the plug on Harness Racing Update (HRU) I got over 600 emails, tweets and Facebook messages from people who told me how upset they were that we closed the publication down. Everyone was nice and complimentary and it was gratifying to hear from so many people. I always thought the readers appreciated what we were trying to do - to be a real harness racing publication, not something that was full of fluff. But it wasn't until we closed that I realized just how much the harness industry liked what we were doing and had come to depend on it.

Fortunately, some people were not willing to let us walk away quite so easily. A group of industry insiders came to me and said they wanted to bring HRU back. It wasn't going to be easy and there were some serious obstacles that had to be overcome, but these people pulled it off. With this issue, it is official - Harness Racing Update lives again.

That's not to say it will be exactly the same. I will still be involved, but in a much smaller role, primarily as one of the freelance writers that contributes to the paper. The reins have been handed over to a new editor, a new captain, and that is Dave Briggs. There could not have been a better choice.

Briggs was the publisher of *The Canadian Sportsman*, the oldest harness racing magazine in North America until it folded after 143 years in 2013. I have followed his work and I know what makes him tick. He has the same drive I have, is a real journalist - and not someone who cuts and pastes press releases - and he has even more passion for the sport than I had. Remember, deep down I was an interloper from the Thoroughbred world.

In addition, he is bringing back as much of the HRU team as possible - led by the two Deans, Towers and Hoffman - because the contributors were integral to HRU's success. Briggs is as good a harness racing writer as there's ever been. And, yes, you're going to get a few stories from yours truly, as well. I'm just not going to fill up seven pages of copy three nights a week like I used to, which nearly led to a nervous breakdown.

Yet this is not the time to celebrate. Not yet. I folded HRU because with the amount of hours I had to put in it was not worth the money I was making. If the new team runs into the same problem - a general lack of support from the advertisers - then the new HRU won't last nearly as long as the old HRU did.

I will never understand why people didn't give HRU the support it needed. We were read by more people than any industry publication of its kind and we were read by virtually every single person that was part of the upper echelon of the sport, the very people most likely to buy your yearling or breed to your stallion. On top of that, our ad rates were

considerably lower than anyone else's in the industry. Advertising with us was the ultimate no-brainer, yet so many just didn't get it. The only thing that I can think of - and I was warned about this - is that harness racing has a terrible problem accepting anything new and different.

Just as importantly, we were doing a service for the industry, providing it with its only source of serious news. How important can an industry be if no one writes about it? What does that say about its viability and its future? Harness racing needs HRU.

So if you advertised before, advertise more. If you advertised a little, advertise a lot more. If you didn't advertise at all, shame on you, and let's get with it. The future of this publication is in the hands of anyone who has anything to sell or market.

Dave Briggs and the others who are responsible for bringing Harness Racing Update back to life are doing the sport a tremendous favor. Your support is critical to its long-term viability.

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What you can expect from the new HRU

By Dave Briggs

Before I get to what you likely want to know most - what changes we are planning for Harness Racing Update (HRU) - it is important to thank Bill Finley for being so gracious and helpful while turning over the business. We won't forget that without him, HRU wouldn't have existed in the first place and we are sensitive to the fact that as its founder, HRU is his baby. We pledge to work hard every day to strengthen and lengthen its legacy.

Admittedly, that won't be easy. But that won't deter me. For 20 years I have covered the sport for a variety of publications - most notably as the long-time editor of *The Canadian Sportsman* - because I have a passion for the people and horses of this great game.

I am not an owner of HRU. As such, I am flattered - and, admittedly, a little overwhelmed - that the new ownership has placed its faith in me to give HRU a second life.

Ultimately, that is why HRU is back. Enough interested parties believe the publication provided a viable and valuable service and deserved another shot. I share that belief. Harness racing has suffered enough losses already and some weren't prepared for HRU to become another good thing gone too soon.

What changes can you expect? Initially, not a lot.

Our plan is to publish on Friday and Sunday mornings through May when the publication schedule will expand to Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings until the end of

stakes season. There will also be extra issues during major sales and stakes events.

Our focus is to keep as much of the original team intact as possible - including writers Dean Towers and Dean Hoffman, and even Bill Finley, on occasion when the mood strikes him and his schedule allows. We hope to augment their fine work with some of the best and brightest journalists working in the industry today and also surprise you from time to time with some fabulous guest columnists.

We are already planning to strengthen coverage of the Midwest and Canada, while maintaining a strong focus on the harness racing jurisdictions in the eastern United States. Plans also call for expanded coverage of horse sales.

Through it all, we will be committed to the principles of fair, accurate reporting and pledge not to shy away from uncomfortable topics when necessary.

If you believe in the potential of HRU, I ask for your support and suggestions and patience in the early going while we get it fired up again.

To that end, in order to better service you the readers and advertisers, we need to hear from you. We need to know what you loved best about Harness Racing Update and what you think HRU can do better. So, please take a second to complete our short, three-question survey.

[The New HRU Survey](#)

Together, we can help HRU thrive in its second act. I can't wait to get started.



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