

Suffolk opens today with hopes still on casino

By LYNNE SNIERSON

Suffolk Downs opens for its 76th season of live racing today and track officials are optimistic despite the lingering impasse over expanded gambling in Massachusetts.

"The gaming issue hangs over our head, but there has been positive public dialogue of late and there are a lot of reasons to feel very good about this new season," said Chief Executive Officer Chip Tuttle.

Suffolk Downs has en-

tered into a strategic alliance with Caesars Entertainment to develop a destination resort casino on the property should favorable legislation pass, but the immediate focus is on hosting a successful meet from now through November 5. A new contract reached between the track and its horsemen over the winter calls for an average daily purse distribution of \$103,125, which is a 30 percent hike over 2010 levels. The higher purses will be allotted over fewer

days of racing as long as the state statute requiring 100 live programs can be changed to 80 days.

"Our agreement with the horsemen remains in effect and we are optimistic that we can get that done in the next couple of weeks so we'll be able to comfortably honor all of our agreements and statutory regulations," said Tuttle.

In a break from tradition, Suffolk will card live racing only three days per week — on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Satur-

days — to be able to pay the higher purses and offer fuller fields. The horsemen have responded by filling the stable area and entry box. John Rigattieri will defend his title as top trainer and multi-time champion Charlie Assimakopolous has another powerful stable of runners. In addition to the New England stalwarts, several new outfits have shipped in from Florida and the Mid-Atlantic region and renowned rider Joe Rocco, formerly based in New Jersey, Maryland,

and Delaware, will be in the jockeys' room on opening day.

Today also is the 136th running of the Preakness Stakes and fans can watch and wager on the middle jewel in the Triple Crown to be simulcast from Pimlico Race Course. To accommodate for the 10:45 a.m. first post at Pimlico, Suffolk will open its doors at 10. Post time for Suffolk's first of nine races, highlighted by a \$16,700 maiden special weight for fillies and mares, is 1:15 p.m.

This year, bettors will have several attractive new wagering options, including 10-cent superfectas on every race and a 50-cent wager on the Pick 3 and Pick 4. The track offers free admission and parking throughout the season.

But there will be no Mass Cap, once the graded stakes race that was Suffolk's signature event. As the track enters its 76th season, there are no plans to revive the Mass Cap nor have any other stakes races been announced.

SATURDAY, MAY 21, 2011 BOSTON HERALD