

Casino betters odds for track

► Suffolk Downs opens its 75th racing season Saturday — will it be the last before gaming legislation is passed? ► Racetrack a contender for resort casino status if a bill is OK'd ► Empty grandstands and small purses could change very soon (page 41)



► Suffolk Downs, which hosts its first horse race of the season this Saturday, is hoping to catch its

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Fortunes up for Suffolk Downs?

► East Boston racetrack envisions life as a prime-time resort casino — if Beacon Hill passes gaming bill ► Suffolk's 75th season kicks off Saturday

Suffolk Downs has long been plagued by geographic isolation, dwindling purses and vast swaths of empty seats in the grandstand.

But if an expanded gaming bill passes on Beacon Hill, the outlook for the East Boston racetrack — opening its 75th season Saturday — may soon change.

"There's a light at the end of the tunnel," chief operating officer Chip Tuttle said.

State of gaming

- The Senate is working on its version of the expanding gaming bill.
- The House last month passed DeLeo's bill calling for two resort casinos and up to 750 slots at each of the state's four racetracks.
- Earlier this week Gov. Patrick said it's a "fair question" whether he would veto a proposal permitting slots.

Suffolk is the only active thoroughbred track left in New England, making it tough to attract top competition. Further, Suffolk plans to offer daily purses of \$85,000 to \$90,000 — a fraction of what other East Coast tracks pay.

However, Suffolk Downs, one of two racetracks in or near House Speaker Robert DeLeo's district, is considered a contender for one of the state's resort casinos.

The bill being mulled by Beacon Hill could clear the way for "a world-class destination resort with horse racing as the centerpiece," according to Tuttle.

"If you look at states where they've combined gaming and racing ... without exception, the racing product improves," he said. "We think we can do that."



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