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OPENING DAY AT SUFFOLK DOWNS



Suffolk Downs opened its 75th anniversary racing season Saturday. The photo above shows one of the day's 10 live races — a day in which female jockeys combined for five wins. A crowd of 11,212 attended Saturday's festivities, which coincided with the Preakness.

Just the beginning

Live racing returns; expanded gaming is around the corner

BY JOSHUA RESNEK

The opening of Suffolk Downs for another racing season Saturday may have marked the last time racing only is the main venue at the venerable track.

With the state's expanded gaming legislation moving ahead quickly in the House, where a bill was already approved and reported out favorably and in the Senate, where that body is apparently writing its own bill, it is likely that next year's opening of Suffolk Downs could find it with a license to make it a casino as well as a horse racing track.

The opening Saturday — 11,000 attended — was the 75th Anniversary racing season that got underway with a bang.

It was a gorgeous day and many families came

out to enjoy it.

"It was nice to see so many people having such a good time," said Chip Tuttle, the track's chief operating officer and the architect of its talent to have it designated a casino.

The state is on track to expand gambling in Massachusetts and it is believed Suffolk Downs is in the lead among investors aiming to snare a casino license.

The historic track opened on July 10, 1935. Over the years, it has been the incubator for some of the most historic names in horse racing.

Seabiscuit, Whirlaway, John Henry, Cigar and Skip Away all got their start at Suffolk Downs and went on to careers with varying degrees of success.

Seabiscuit, of course, is the best known star thoroughbred to come out of Suffolk Downs during its long history.

Opening day also brought out a small cavalcade of local notables, who attended a wonderful,

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Boston City Councilor Felix Amayo, State Senator Anthony Petrucci, Suffolk Downs principal owner Richard Fields, Boston City Councilor Sal LaMattina, Jockey David Aris, Derek Brodin, and trainer Anthony Ryan.

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invitation only affair in the Top Sider Room.

This room is Suffolk's finest vantage point of the track from high above.

The track's ownership was present, as were hundreds of invited guests from Revere, East Boston, Winthrop and Chelsea.

Noted among the crowd were former State Senate President Robert Travaglini, State Senator Anthony Petrucci, Representative Kathi Anne Reinstein, East Boston city councilor Sal LaMattina, many Revere city councilors and a

large turnout of local business leaders and friends of the track.

It is expected that the expanded gaming bill should be ready and voted into effect sometime in mid-July. What it will be exactly in its finished form is up for debate.

The Saturday opening at Suffolk Downs went off without a hitch — a harbinger of sorts of much bigger things to come for the track — as it entered its 75th and perhaps most important year in its history.