

Revamped harness racing program seen as a positive move for Mohawk

Less can be more, with the right timing. That's how Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) is viewing its revamped harness racing program, that went into effect this past week.

While the new format will scale back live racing at Mohawk from 100 to 80 days next year, WEG executives agree that having a consecutive three-and-a-half month season each summer — from late June to early October — will benefit the local racetrack.

"I think the move will allow us to build more momentum at Mohawk," said Bruce Murray, WEG's director of media and community relations. "Up until now, with eight to 10-week sessions in the spring and fall, it seems we just get going and then

we're right back at Woodbine."

Agreed WEG's senior vice-president of racing Hugh Mitchell, "Having a continuous season should definitely help things at Mohawk from a momentum standpoint. A summer session is more conducive to live racing as well. When there's inclement weather, fog can sometimes be an issue there, being so close to the escarpment."

Next season will mark the first time in the 41-year history of Mohawk that it has held a summer session — which, along with a beefed-up stakes race program, could create a lot of buzz at the Campbellville oval.

"The schedule will be decided in December, but we're definitely enhancing our line-up," said Murray. "There'll be a

stakes race just about every weekend."

Mohawk, which had its fall session cut back to five weeks this year, will still continue to have morning qualifying races every Tuesday and Friday throughout the year.

Mitchell said the move won't mean job losses, since both the horse people and support staff work at both WEG venues.

"There's no net impact on staff," he stressed.

For Murray, there's just one little drawback.

"Living out here (in Milton), it's going to be a long winter commuting to Woodbine, but that's more of a personal issue," he quipped.

Vince shines in Quebec City

Ainsley Vince added a new partner to her show jumping success last weekend.

In their first high-stakes event, Milton's 28-year-old equestrian ace and Iron Horse Nicarta — a scopey bay mare owned by Iron Horse Farm — rode to second-place honours in last Friday's \$10,000 Open Welcome at the Quebec City Horse Show.



Ainsley Vince

Going first in a rather sizeable evening jump-off, they delivered another clean round, but needed roughly four more seconds to negotiate the modified ring than Colombia's Roberta Teran and Polyfax.

"That was our first big show and I thought she (Iron Horse Nicarta) was great," said Vince, who qualified a total of three horses for the jump-off, also placing sixth with Uno and eighth aboard Catch 22. "I was really pleased with her."

Two days later Vince was back in the thick of things, guiding Uno to third in the \$50,000 Grand Prix de Quebec jump-off. Their 24.99s finish was by far the fastest — but unfortunately came with one downed rail.

Catch 22 placed sixth, while Iron Horse Nicarta took ninth. Hometown favourite Mario Deslauriers won with Amica. Hornby's Erynn Ballard also showed strongly last weekend. She rode Robin Van Roosendaal to fourth Sunday and fifth last Friday — sustaining just four faults in either event.

Plenty of changes

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The most notable deal saw veteran winger Julian Sarraino, struggling to get ice time this season, traded to Brampton in exchange for 6'2", 205-pound rearguard Louis D'Avino. Milton had been going with five defencemen the past two weeks and can certainly use a little more size and physicality on the blueline.

Also, goalie Thomas Lee is expected to be dealt to either Charlottetown, PEI or the Eastern Conference Trenton Sting sometime this week, while rookie forward Jean-Marc Bourgeois was traded to the Eastern Conference Lindsay Muskies in exchange for future considerations.

Debuting last Friday and assisting on goal number one was gritty fourth-liner Pat Clark — a cousin of former IceHawks sniper Wes Clark — who split last season between Jr. B Strathroy and Jr. D Exeter.

Milton wraps up a three-game home stand Sunday afternoon against Oakville. Game time is 3 p.m.

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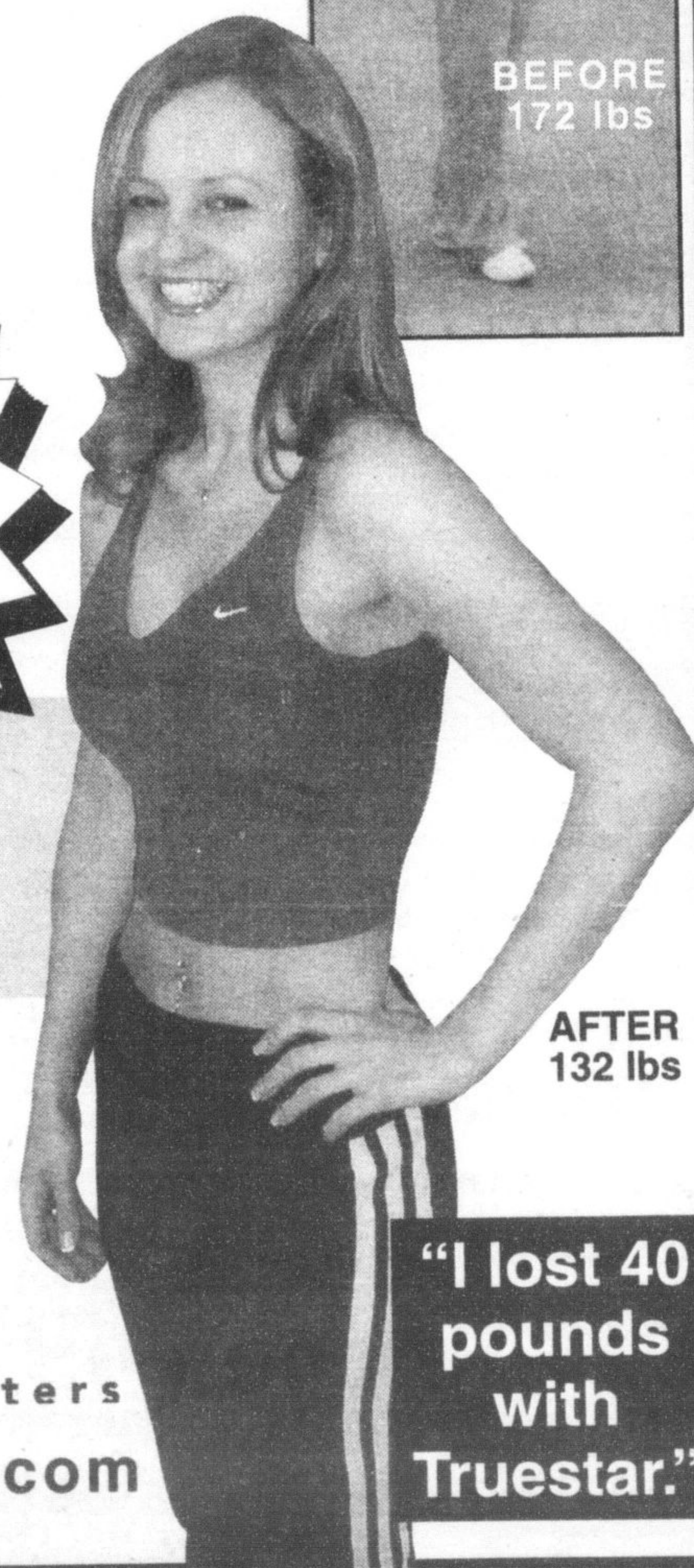
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