

Fifty Ideas in 50 Minutes

1. “Early Bird Specials” – Adjusted takeout for betting early (15+ minutes to post)

2. Adopt a ratings system

Just because claiming races make up the majority of U.S. racing programs, that does not make it right, or healthy. Claiming races are a holdover from an ancient era when a familiar bunch of horses were passed among a group of local owners and trainers as a handy way to create competitive fields and move merchandise. The claiming game has come a long way since then. Huge claiming outfits are little more than glorified chop shops, dealing in horses for the short money and moving them on. The constant change in routine and care is counterintuitive to the welfare of the animals. Studies have shown that claiming horses suffer injuries and fatalities at a greater rate than their non-claiming counterparts. The answer is an eventual transition to the kind of ratings system that has proved so efficient in jurisdictions around the world. Owners can run at all levels without risking their horse. Racing secretaries can simplify their condition books and fill races more efficiently. And the horses will benefit most of all.

3. Make horse racing on TV easier to understand

Make television presentations for the general public more user friendly, instead of odds like 7-2, which isn't something most people understand, develop an algorithm that establishes a likelihood of winning percentage... this horse has an 85% chance of winning, this horse has a 25% chance of finishing third... Repackage big event racing programs to offer a more condensed, visually appealing, on-screen graphic format to capture first-time viewers.

4. Expanded Children's Programs

Introduce kids to horse racing through fun programs like track tours and hands-on experiences. These early moments inspire lifelong careers and passion for the sport. By expanding and funding these programs, we'll build the next generation of trainers, owners, and fans to ensure racing's future.

5. Better information about equipment on 1st time starters (+ win % info)

Many races have first-time starters but we are not given equipment information. You will see a race with horses making their debut wearing blinkers but if you are playing horizontal bets it does not help. Plus, it would be nice to know trainer's win percentages when their debut runners wear blinkers.

6. Adjust win pool takeouts to make them more attractive (instead of offering Pick 4 or Pick 5 lower takeouts, make the win prices more attractive)

7. Scrap the graded race system

If ever an institution has outlived its usefulness, the American Graded Race system fits the bill. It was born in the early 1970s as a short-cut for European bloodstock markets to understand the hierarchy of North American racing. That's right—it was a sales tool. Over the decades, the system mutated into a Swiss Army knife of applications—stakes race conditions, qualifying points for high-end events, mitigation of jockey suspensions, mandated purse amounts, advertising. Grades are calculated through a closed loop of data that evaluates backwards while diverting attention forwards. Regional prejudice abounds, especially in today's wildly imbalanced climate of casino boosted purses. Europe, for whom this monster was created, changes a Group race rating once in a blue moon. Charlie Cella once stopped using the grades of his major Oaklawn stakes because he didn't like how they were treated. Canada pulled out completely from the system, and that was a good idea.

8. Programs for Veterinary College for students

Have Racing organizations and racetracks develop programs to pay for students to attend veterinary college. They sign a contract that their debt is forgiven for a five-year period after graduating, provided that they work as an attending or regulatory vet at the racetrack.

9. NFTs for Racing and Breeding

Use NFTs to bring in high-net-worth individuals who thrive on unique investments. Offering digital ownership, perks, and engagement opportunities expands our audience beyond traditional buyers. NFTs can modernize the sport and attract new participants, driving long-term interest and innovation.

10. Decimal odds to replace fractional odds

Can we at least try decimal odds? I know current customers will be resistant, but it's much easier for newcomers to acclimate.

11. Embrace social media influencers (local influencers/local events)

12. Preserve and protect (know and protect horse racing's history + HOF at every track)

“To know nothing of what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child.” That's from Cicero, who lived a long time ago but he still makes sense. This occurs to me when I'm confronted by examples of Thoroughbred racing forsaking its own history. For horse racing to maintain any kind of foothold in modern society, it must not be shy about displaying its deep connection to the essence the American experience. As racetracks are closed, torn down, and only some to be rebuilt, their history becomes part of the rubble. Much was lost at Bay Meadows and Golden Gate. And as for Hollywood Park—we can't even find the bronze statue of Bill Shoemaker and Swaps that greeted clubhouse patrons for more than half a century. Publicity departments should be replaced by preservation departments. Every racetrack should have a space somewhere dedicated to a combination Hall of Fame/museum that can be rescued if need be as a stand-alone resource worthy of survival.

13. “United Way” for OTTBs/aka, OTTB funding

Develop a United Way type program where everyone in the industry can contribute to the aftercare problem by payroll deduction of small amounts. There are nearly 200,000 people employed in the racing, breeding and associated industries in thoroughbred racing. If just half of those individuals gave \$1 each paycheck, you’d have millions to fund aftercare, backstretch health and pensions and childcare for the people that need it most. First use of funds... Set up a national clearing house for horses that need to be retired from the racetrack to assess their viability for retraining, rehoming, or permanent retirement.

14. NFT Royalties for Horse Ownership

NFTs can embed royalty structures, allowing breeders to earn from race wins, sales, and future foals. Already successful in music and art, this tech rewards breeders fairly, encourages quality breeding, and strengthens the market.

15. Easier explanation for why 3-1 pays \$8 rather than \$6

As we try to introduce the game to newcomers, we still have to explain that 3-1 odds pays \$8. The rest of the world pays \$6 for 3-1. Once again, a lot easier to explain.

16. Behind-the-scenes access (starting gate, paddock, etc.)

17. Read these books

I would like to believe that in order to be hired by any kind of Thoroughbred racing company, an applicant must be familiar with the history of the sport. And by history, I mean events that took place before the applicant was born. You can fake the language of the game, but not the lore. To that end, these three books should be required reading: This Was Racing, an essential collection by Joe Palmer, humorist, horseplayer and newspaper columnist for the New York Tribune. The Fireside Book of Horse Racing, edited by David Alexander, a treasure chest containing works by Grantland Rice, Damon Runyon, Red Smith, and even D.H. Lawrence. Finally, A History of Thoroughbred Racing in America, by William H.P. Robertson, a deep dive perfect for long winter evenings. It was published in 1964, and unfortunately, there has been no second volume. But there’s always hope.

18. A collective pool of industry “talent” for sharing ideas for big racing events

Develop a collective pool of talent in the industry that organizations can pull from for big events and create think tanks so that ideas are shared collectively, best practices are used to promote our product and supply enough staff so that every track benefits.

19. AI Condition Book

An AI-powered condition book saves trainers time and helps racing offices fill races efficiently. Trainers can instantly match horses to eligible races, boosting field sizes and handle while streamlining the process for everyone involved.

20. A photo finish camera precisely on the finish line at all tracks (expedite results)

How about a camera that is exactly on the finish line? With today’s technology, we should know within 20 seconds the final placings of a race. Instead, some tracks have the finish before the winning post, and some have it after. Portable rails on turf courses make it even worse. There should not be an angle. It should be perpendicular to the course.

21. Create way more social media content

Track needs to be the clearing house for all pics/videos from horsemen.

22. See these films

I’ve been writing a series about horse racing movies for Thoroughbred Racing Commentary. I highly recommend Boots Malone from classic category and Jockey from the contemporary. Anyone working in the industry, though, should sample more nourishing fare as well, and in that spirit I recommend these three documentaries: Racetrack, by the famed documentarian Frederick Wiseman, a fly-on-the-wall portrait of New York racing through a brief 1983 time frame that speaks to universal truths of the game. The First Saturday in May, by the Hennegan brothers, Brad and John, who imbedded themselves in every aspect of the 2009 Kentucky Derby and emerged with a masterpiece of insight and celebration. Lost in the Fog, by John Corey, a sad, inspiring tale because you know how it ends, but you won’t regret the time shared with these remarkable people and their very special horse.

23. “High health certificates” for horses racing internationally

Develop a high health certificate for horses competing internationally at the graded/group level. Current USDA regs make this burdensome, expensive, and redundant.

24. Analysis Tools for Buying Horses

AI-powered tools can provide data-driven insights on pedigrees, past performances, and conformation, reducing risks in horse buying. These tools enhance decision-making, improve valuations, and increase market liquidity.

25. Stewards using the inquiry sign more often and faster

Stewards need to light the inquiry sign as soon as possible. They will say they are looking at it, but it denies the betting public the ability to see the same camera angles that they are watching.

26. Develop an app to help newbies handicap races

Help novices handicap by assigning points to desired attributes in their horses - kind of creating an RPG character with different skills [speed, closer, class, breeding etc].

27. Get them straight (Hovdey v Privman)



guy is Jay Hovdey – pictured here with my old pal, the great racing mule Black Ruby. She's the one on the right. For many years, both Jays worked for the Racing Form, both were based in California, and both were named Jay. This for some reason confused people terribly. Jay Hovdey would be congratulated for an honor Jay Privman received. Jay Privman would be called out for something

Jay Hovdey wrote. Jay Privman would be asked about his wife, Julie Krone, who is married to Jay Hovdey, although Jay was among Jay's groomsmen at our wedding, which didn't help. As recently as last month, I was praised by someone for something that Jay Privman had done. I was gracious and offered no correction, because by now I'll admit – I'm a little uncertain myself.

28. Interactive maps at racetracks, making it easier for newcomers to find their way

Tracks need to develop infrastructure that makes the user experience seamless and helps guide them on their journey. For the novice race goer, RFID bracelets scan into kiosks showing them where concessions, merchandise and best race viewing locations can be found. Interactive maps and wagering guides available on their phones, if you are near the paddock, the phone instructs you the best path to view the horses and provides information on each runner in an augmented reality, imagine focusing on a horse in your app and all of the information about that horse appears above it.

29. Blockchain Horse Health Records

Blockchain technology offers secure, accessible horse health records, reducing time spent searching for medical information. It improves efficiency, enhances care, and ensures transparency for trainers, vets, and owners.

30. Stewards making decisions based on what they saw, rather than waiting for a jockey to lodge an objection

Stewards need to light the inquiry sign and not leave it up to the riders to file a claim of foul. The rider might not want to claim against a big stable or against the agent's other rider. My question is if the rider does not claim foul, is the default to make it official?

31. Group wagering tickets offered by track handicapper

All guests can buy into group tickets selected by expert.



32. Put the Eclipse Awards on the road

The Eclipse Awards Dinner once was a moveable feast. Through the first 30 years, the Oscars of horse racing were presented in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, New Orleans, Las Vegas, San Diego, Palm Springs, and, believe it or not, Washington, D.C. This invigorated the event and exposed the best face of the sport to a variety of audiences, which is always a good thing. When the event became underwritten in large part by the Stronach Group and First Racing, the Eclipse Awards became a near permanent Florida fixture. Now Resolute Racing has become the title sponsor, and Resolute's John Stewart is not a slave to the status quo. In 2025, for the 13th time in the 15 years, the event will be back in Florida. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, there probably was a prior commitment. But starting in 2026, let's put the show back on the road.

33. Open house days at tracks with tutorials

Develop open house days at local racetracks where there is no pressure, no dumb questions mentality, offer free food and entertainment to come out and learn about horse racing. First-time visitors should be given access to good unused seats and should be given betting vouchers to place a wager. People in seats means concession sales, wagering, and merch sales opportunities. Can upsell the next time but need them in the door the first time.

34. Racing & Breeding Fan Engagement App

A fan engagement app can gamify learning and create immersive AR/VR experiences, like virtual stable management or race-day simulations. This approach attracts younger fans, modernizes the sport, and fosters new ownership interest.

35. Let race watchers know who was claimed before the horses leave the gate

Can you tell us who was claimed before the race? Some harness tracks do it. It makes watching claiming races more interesting.

36. Bigger field size = bigger purse

37. Grandchildren Day

This is Edward Erickson, my paternal grandfather and all-around sports nut. He is the reason I am here, or anywhere in the racing world today. I might have found horse racing on my own, but it was this guy who took me to Agua Caliente and Del Mar. When we lived for a brief time in St. Louis, we had to find a racetrack for his visit, and so we discovered Cahokia Downs across the river. I realize grandparents are different today. Grandpas surf the net and grandmas play pickleball. But kids take their cues far more from doting grandparents than demanding, judgmental parents, which is why every racetrack in every town should have a special day or days encouraging Grandparents and their Grandchildren to be treated like kings and queens. I guarantee you will make more young fans than all the social media in the world.

38. Youth Clubs (and field trips) at Race Tracks

More tracks should embrace their local young community, creating Youth Clubs for Racing Enthusiasts, partner with schools to develop clubs that educate students about racing, welfare and offering field trips to tracks and hands-on experiences with horses on the backside. Develop co-op work programs with local high schools for curriculum credit.

39. Streaming Services

Make horse racing easier to watch with a centralized streaming platform, eliminating the need for betting apps or outdated subscriptions. Following NYRA's lead, this approach simplifies access and attracts a broader audience.

40. More accurate (and timely) information about track conditions

Track conditions need to be as accurate as possible. Many cards stretch on for six hours and they need to be updated whenever possible. Recently a track had the main track listed as "Sloppy-sealed" while the Equibase chart for the race had it as "Sloppy." Dr. Scott Palmer of the New York Gaming Commission is working on a moisture content rating for dirt and turf courses that might be the answer.

41. Stop with the jackpot bets

42. Access to horses in the flesh

Richard Mandella said several years ago that the closest most people get to a horse anymore is on a merry-go-round. He's not wrong, although there are plenty of two dimensional horses galloping across the video screens right now. Fine, but there is nothing to compare to the real thing, and I am for anything that enhances the live racing experience through exposure to our four-legged stars. I've witnessed the joyful reaction of people of all ages when in close contact with horses. On big event days, along with the wine tastings and food trucks, there should be paddocks set up with a variety of breeds, with retired racehorses familiar to horseplayers, and displays of equine versatility. A few years ago in Albuquerque, for the premiere for the movie 50-to-1 about the 2009 Kentucky Derby shocker by Mine That Bird, they blocked off main street and set up a corral. Then, to great fanfare, Mine That Bird himself stepped off a van to the cheers of the crowd, right there in front of the theater.

43. Cross promotions with other sports

Develop cross promotions with other sports, capitalize on the sports figures that are active in thoroughbred racing, look for ways to cross promote in their sport.

44. Data Transparency

Unlocking data like past performances and breeding records fosters innovation and engagement. Transparent data builds trust, empowers decision-making, and ensures horse racing stays relevant in a tech-savvy world.

45. Preserve horse racing history now (through interviews)

Racing has a great history but it doesn't always embrace it. I would try to find a benefactor or a government grant to finance a project that would interview many people while they are still with us. Today's portable high-definition cameras make it easy to do this without a big production team.

46. Bad Beat Booth

(instead of complaining to their friends, bettors can tell their bad beat stories to the track designated BBB rep, top bad beat stories of month/year win prizes)

47. Get smart, California

Here's an idea for California racing, because if you listen to California racing people, the sport will disappear within a few years if a supplemental source of purse funding is not developed. For that to happen, racing needs the cooperation of state government. And for that to happen, state government needs to listen to racing's representatives. On the undercard of the Nov. 1 Breeders' Cup program at Del Mar this year there was a stakes named for Senator Ken Maddy. He was the state senate leader in an era when the party politics of California were pretty much split 50-50. He was a pragmatic guy who loved racing and carried the ball for the sport on a host of legislative matters. The racing business as we know leans decidedly conservative, while today California politics is dominated by the other team. That should not matter. The health of horse racing should be apolitical. Racing must find their new Ken Maddy—buy one, rent one, whatever it takes—so that the interests of racing can be heard where it counts.

48. Create "lookbooks" with fashion designers

Partner with fashion designers to create a lookbook for racing style, invite influencers and do a GRWM video, do contests with influencers to drive young fans to track to meet them.

49. Expanded Influencer Program (targeting the younger generation on social)

Engage younger audiences with influencers on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. By showcasing racing's excitement and tradition, influencers can modernize the sport's image, attract new fans, and secure its future.

50. Explain why a claim was voided

Can you explain why a claim was voided? We see in a horse's past performances that a claim was voided but it could have been due to injury/sickness or the claim slip was not filled out accurately. Not all voided claims are equal but we are not told why.



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