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## PRESS RELEASE - AJAX DOWNS

### Hawkin the Straw Takes Futurity, Brian Bell Wins Leading Jockey and first Battle of the Breeds is a Hit!



Erik and Joyce Lehtinen's Hawkin the Straw rolls to victory under Brian Bell in the Alex Picov Memorial Futurity - Clive Cohen photo

**AJAX DOWNS, OCTOBER 25, 2023** - The 25th and final day of the 2023 Quarter Horse season at Ajax Downs was packed with drama and excitement throughout the afternoon.

The featured race, the \$76,680 Alex Picov Memorial Futurity for 2-year-olds, one of the richest Quarter Horse races in Canada, was won by the rising star **HAWKIN THE STRAW**, an Ontario bred owned and bred by Erik and Joyce Lehtinen of Uxbridge. ON. The Futurity win by Hawkin the Straw also solidified the jockey title for Brian Bell.

Hawkin the Straw, won one of two Trials for the Picov Futurity on Oct. 4 and was sent off as the 5 to 2 second choice to Eye Tempt You, winner of the slightly faster Trial. Trained by Jason Pascoe, Hawkin the Straw had the smoother beginning from post position 10 at the start of the 400-yard dash and led all the way to win by half



a length in a time of 20.531 for an 83 speed index. A pair of 20 to 1 longshots, Willie Lump Lump and General Skywalker, finished second and third respectively.

"He was really feeling good before the race," said Bell. "I had all the confidence in the world in him and once we broke from the gate, he was always in front. I was very impressed. He's one to watch for next year."

Hawkin the Straw had three starts in Indianapolis before he came to Ajax and won a maiden race and his Trial. The son of Bf Farm Boss now has 3 wins from 6 races and over \$45,000 in earnings.

For Bell, 41, this was the third consecutive year the Lindsay, ON resident has won the Picov Futurity from post position 10. The victory, Bell's 26th of the meeting, clinched the rider's title by wins, QROOI points (252) and purse earnings (\$269,234 US). Bell, who is closing in on 800 career victories, will spend the winter preparing young racehorses for training early in 2024.

\*Ajax Downs also hosted its first-ever **Battle of the Breeds** dash, an 870-yard race around a turn for Quarter Horses versus Thoroughbreds.

The inaugural Battle of the Breeds was won by Magen Finnessy's **AZURES ROYALTY**, an Ontario bred Quarter Horse who battled on the lead with the Thoroughbred Red Maple, trained by Joe Humber from Fort Erie, and another Quarter Horse, Maryland Magic, before pulling away to a 1 3/4 length win. Ridden by Neil Husbands and trained by Brooke Sisson, Azures Royalty raced the distance in 47.07. Ajax Downs hopes to put on a couple of Battle of the Breeds races each month in 2024.



*Into the stretch in the Battle of the Breeds. Azures Royalty (grey horse) was the winner.  
-Clive Cohen photo*

\* **Jason Pascoe** was Ajax Downs' leading trainer for the sixth consecutive year and won 37 races with Bob Broadstock second with 23 wins. **Milena Kwiecien** was the leading owner with 21 wins over James Bogar who had 17.





The very good 3-year-olds **SNOW MOOSE** and **SOUR CANDY**, both winners on the final day of the season, each won a meet-leading 5 races during the year and figure to be the top contenders for the Ajax Downs' Horse of the Year when the awards are presented in February.

Ajax Downs' General Manager Emilio Trotta reported that **wagering was up over 10 percent** from a year ago. "Our Sunday race days are always packed but now we are seeing our Wednesdays in the summer becoming more and more crowded. Quarter Horse racing is growing in popularity."

The 2024 Ajax Downs season is scheduled to kick off in May. The track's **expansive simulcast room is open throughout the winter** and spring for watching and wagering on tracks throughout the world.

Visit [www.ajaxdowns.com](http://www.ajaxdowns.com) for special events during the winter.

***Live Like The Gates Just Opened***

**Live Quarter Horse Racing May to October  
Wednesdays & One Sunday a Month &  
Thanksgiving Monday**

**Watch our website for all this seasons events [www.ajaxdowns.com](http://www.ajaxdowns.com)**    