

## **A Sad Goodbye**

**By Barry Meadow**

You may not know the name Lenny Moon. But what he has to say may cause you to think, even if just a little bit, about the cost of your love of horse racing. No, not the dollar cost, though that may be considerable. The human, emotional cost.

Moon founded a website, Equinometry.com, five years ago. He wrote nearly 300 articles for the site, ranging from exposes on the economics of handicapping contests to analyses of major races, in a breezy, easy-to-read style. Unlike virtually every racing site that offers free articles, Moon had nothing to sell—no picks, no systems, no books, no computer programs. The website was entirely free. (He did offer a modest pay site, Wager Logged, that tracked a player's betting results in various categories, though it seemed to have few users.) His goal, he wrote, was to help educate both new and experienced horseplayers.

For years before developing his websites, Moon went to the track mostly on weekends, often accompanied by his father and brother and some friends. "It wasn't just about betting," he wrote, "it was about the experience." When online betting became available, the trips became less frequent, even more so after he got married and had kids. That's when, he said, "Things went south. Sitting at home in front of a computer every weekend was no fun for me or my family. I allowed myself to be consumed by the sport."

And running his websites worsened the alienation. "Starting the websites only enhanced that effect," he observed. "I spent all my time handicapping, betting, playing online contests, reading or writing about the sport. [In addition to his websites, Moon also wrote articles for Horseracingnation.com and HANA's newsletter.] It took time away from those I cared about. I missed family events. I upset many people. It destroyed my life because it dictated my daily schedule."

Without mentioning dollar amounts, Moon said he had some winning years, and some losing ones. He was able to earn seats at the National Handicapping Championship

and the Horse Player World Series, though his total earnings for these events and the online and on-track tournaments he participated in were small. Unlike so many others forced to drop out of horse racing, money wasn't the issue. It was something far greater.

“Looking back, I feel like a fool,” he wrote. “Rather than enjoying a challenging game of skill, I allowed it to take over my life. The money came and went and could never pay for the hurt I caused those I cared about.”

The websites are gone now. So, he hinted, was his marriage. He wrote, “I have lost everything that mattered to me and nothing I can do can change that.”

So he's done with all the handicapping contests that took up so much of his time for so little reward. He's done with all aspects of handicapping and betting. Done with a hobby/business that was so much a part of his life.

I can relate to much of what Moon wrote. For nearly 30 years, gambling was a major source of my income. I never had anything else that accounted for as much money as I made gambling on horse racing before I finally retired in 2011. And that includes all the other things that I did to earn money--the ratings I sold (which I had developed for my own betting), newsletters I produced, books and articles I wrote, as well as the homes I sold and the jobs I had before I took up gambling in earnest in the mid 1980's.

But there was a cost. There always is. There always seemed to be another race coming up. Though I had handicapped it hours earlier, I'd still have to study the pools and make last-second decisions. I watched tapes and revised my numbers every day. And like Moon, much of my leisure time was spent reading books or articles about the track. Couldn't leave a stone unturned. And the stress—it was never ending. I'm a bad loser, so instead of having the attitude that most bets are going to lose and I shouldn't worry about it, I seemed to take every lost photo or bad trip personally.

Much like a businessman who's always working late, or a golfer who spends every weekend hitting a little white ball, I neglected my family. Or should I say families, since I got divorced twice before settling down with my current wife; at least, I finally got that part right. They made the sacrifices, not me—I was just doing my job. They suffered—not me.

Was it worth it? Financially, yes. Otherwise...hard to say for sure. It's impossible to compare the life you've actually lived with one you haven't.

Moon compiled a list of questions that you might use for a self-evaluation:

Do I skip family events for horse racing?

Do I spend every weekend at the track or playing online contests?

Do I have to forego other activities because of money lost on horse racing?

Do I have negative mood swings after a bad day betting?

Do I think I'll win big betting on horse racing or winning a big handicapping contest and be able to retire early?

Have I lost any friends the last few years because of horse racing?

Have I neglected my family because of horse racing?

Moon wrote, "If you answered yes to any of these questions, it's time to step back and think about what you are doing. If you answered yes to many of them, you need to find professional help. Spending time with those you care about, exploring the world, and learning as much as you can are just a few things that are infinitely more important than cashing a ticket."

It's a question we've asked before in these pages: Where does horse-race betting fit into your life? Is it a pleasantly diverting hobby, or an obsession that wreaks havoc on your personal relationships? Is it an exciting break from your regular routine, or an all-consuming emotional and financial drain?

A new year is about to begin. Time, perhaps, to consider these questions. And to make some decisions. Lenny Moon has made his. What about you?

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