

Racing returns to Fort Erie

By **BRAD PETERS AND RAY SPITERI**

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As the trainers and jockeys begin arriving at the Fort Erie Race Track for the 113th season of live racing at the historic border oval there is a feeling of expectation and excitement surrounding the new season.

According to the racetrack's director of communications, everyone associated with the track are expecting a big year.

"We're in the midst of planning for 2010 and we look forward to a bright year," said Daryl Wells Jr. "Everyone seems keen to get going with a new outlook to life at Fort Erie Race Track."

That new outlook comes courtesy of the Fort Erie Racing Consortium -- the new, nonprofit management group that was created not only to prevent the possible closure of the track, but to supply some much needed stability for the horsemen who run their animals at the track.

"(The consortium) have a lot of ideas. They've been meeting with all the employees and the management. We're putting our heads together ... and everyone's excited," said Wells.

More than 1,000 stalls have been allotted to 120 trainers as thoroughbreds begin making their way back to town in advance of the 113th season of live racing in Fort Erie.

The season is scheduled to start May 1.

For Nick Gonzalez, last year's leading trainer, the sense of expectation is a little more personal.

Gonzalez, who will be seeking his fourth Fort Erie training title, is closing in on 1,000 career wins. He is 31 away.

"I really hope we get the win at Fort Erie," he said. "It would be fine if it happens at Woodbine, but Fort Erie is home and we've already started planning a mini celebration."

The veteran trainer also has the larger success of the track in mind. To that end, he said he has a full barn and is having his horses move in right away.

"We'll start with about 30 and add more as we go along," said the veteran trainer.

Training will be from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. through to April 3. Effective April 4, training will take place from 7 a.m. until 11 a.m. Once the season gets underway, training will start at 6 a.m.

Subject to regulatory approval, the track will offer 78 days of live racing. Opening weekend will feature live racing Saturday through Monday.

Beginning the following weekend, the track will begin its regular schedule, racing Sunday through Tuesday, through to Oct. 26.

The \$500,000 Prince of Wales Stakes, the second jewel in Canada's Triple Crown, will run July 25.