ACED IT
Test Of Faith passes NYSS with flying colors

Chris Brokate

NEWS & VIEWS

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QUARTER ENDED
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WORTH REPEATING
“We’re not going to stop until we beat Mark Weaver and get to 500 horses.”
Summit Bloodstock cofounder Jamie Durnberger-Smith on the stable swelling from two horses to 42 in the last 10 months
“It’s very special when you breed them and raise them and they go out and race for you and win. We enjoy it that way.”
Trainer-owner-breeder Don La Montagne, who’s Ponder The Odds won three straight at Yonkers from Sept. 17 to Oct. 1
“We can do that because we don’t have owners.”
La Montagne on giving Ponder The Odds a week off before her first bid in the filly and mare open handicap
“Everything is in a good spot tonight, man.”
Driver Austin Siegelman about his lineup on the Sept. 4 program to the SOA’s Brandon Valvo
“I know, that’s why I called you.”
Valvo to Siegelman, who interviewed the reinsman for that night’s Driver Insights feature (Siegelman won two races and placed in another two that night)
“I owned one and it wins, then you get the itch; you buy another one and then the next thing you know, you have a bunch of them.”
Ron Buker (and every owner ever)
“So maybe he shouldn’t have sold her.”
Trainer Brett Pelling on owner Melvin Segal selling broodmare Cannae Cammie, then buying her foal Test Of Faith at auction later

“Worth Repeating” and “By the Numbers” features inspired by ‘The Saratoga Special,’ Saratoga’s daily Thoroughbred racing newspaper available at ThisIsHorseRacing.com.

“When this opportunity came about and when Pete Venaglia gave me a call at the end of June, I was thrilled. When they offered me the position, I was totally thrilled.”
Pat O’Brien on getting the executive director job at the SOA
“When I saw the half in :54.3, you could have knocked me over with a feather if he didn’t win.”
Tahnee Camilleri on watching trainee Mister Rebbily pounce first-over on quick fractions in an overnight Aug. 10. The pacer won by 5 3/4 lengths

BY THE NUMBERS
13: Baseball caps given away on the SOA of NY’s social media platforms since August.
5,400: Feet traveled by Micky Gee in his last-to-first win from post eight in the $25,000 open handicap pace Sept. 18, according to the Trakus results chart. That ranges from 13 ft. to 100 ft. more ground covered than his seven rivals.
$1.4 million: Contribution made by the SOA of NY to supplement the purse account during the casino’s closure.
1:52.3: All-age trotting track record set by Stormy Kromer in a $20,250 overnight July 31.

SOAOFNY.COM

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A recent proposal would see live harness racing at Yonkers Raceway move to an all matinee schedule. What happens if Yonkers is permitted to go to daytime?

- Trainers, drivers, shippers, and grooms will be forced to travel to and from the raceway in rush hour traffic.
- Trainers will be forced to add employees at their barn to do the work of those traveling to the raceway during the day.
- Experienced NYS Gaming Commission personnel might have to quit and racing would lose valuable personnel.
- Union workers would lose jobs unless they have seniority and they would bump those without the same or greater seniority.
- The Yonkers Raceway simulcast signal would face more competition during the day than it does at night. New competition would include the nation’s premier signal, the New York Racing Association, Gulfstream Park, and a host of other Thoroughbred signals. In addition, this competition would make it extremely difficult for Yonkers to be featured live on the TVG network regularly as our races are now.
- Handle on live racing will fall, which will be detrimental to the purse account.
- Drivers would have to choose which track to race at (other harness tracks in the region racing during the afternoon include Harrah’s Philadelphia, Pocono Downs, Freehold Raceway, Monticello Raceway, Saratoga Raceway, and Plainridge Park). As Yonkers is one of the only tracks in the region racing Monday and Tuesday evenings, drivers’ opportunities to race both afternoons and evenings will be severely diminished, along with their income.
- MGM’s Northfield Park property and other night signals will benefit.

If Yonkers Raceway gives up night racing, it will clearly not be in the best interests of New York racing.

Daytime racing at Yonkers has historically been limited to international race days, like International Trot Day or French Sundays.

Brandon Valvo
The Trackman Carousel

BY JOE FARALDO

Since Kim Crawford’s departure Sept. 9, the raceway has played decent by asking various people to interview for the job of track superintendent. However, none of the applicants are given a chance to actually show what they can do as they are simply being used on a try-out basis that, in some cases, doesn’t last more than three days.

See the merry-go-round trackmen put on the save-money carousel:

- Gary Wolfe – Sept. 12
- Gerry Rocco, Jr. – Sept. 21
- Justin Parker – Oct. 13
- Gary Wolfe – Oct. 19
- Justin Parker – Oct. 20
- Tim Masters – Oct. 22-24
- Justin Parker – Oct. 26-27

One trackman gives orders to “cut the track” without being on site to oversee whether the work is done properly or at all.

One trackman orders material the next trackman does not favor.

The situation is a mess and not conducive to a consistent, let alone safe, track surface. Additionally, during the day there is no qualified track superintendent at all and on days there is no racing, there isn’t even a crew on site.

Before all this, Yonkers had one of the best track superintendents around and had a track superintendent and an assistant working day and night.

Can anyone think for a given moment that this merry-go-round has the express purpose of giving these men the opportunity to prove their worth by having the necessary amount of time to show their skill and select the best candidate. Obviously, that is what one would do if they were competent and serious about filling track superintendent and assistant jobs.

Couple this with the unhealthy hostile work environment being created at MGM Resorts Yonkers toward those providing essential racing services. Many have been permanently terminated and others fall by the wayside overworked.

Think of the lone public relations release MGM Resorts Yonkers put out before the return of racing and maybe I missed another (if there was one) and . . . well, you get the picture.
BY BRANDON VALVO

Amidst a year marked by unprecedented disruption to the live racing and stakes calendar (and life in general), the New York Sire Stakes Night of Champions at Yonkers Raceway Sept. 12 was a reminder of some normalcy. The nine-race Saturday card featured eight NYSS championships worth $1.8 million and produced worthy winners who have gone on to impress on the Grand Circuit at the Red Mile.

Test Of Faith started the action, entering the NYSS Final for 2-year-old pacing fillies with a 4-for-5 record and as the 1-5 favorite. Jim Marohn, Jr. sent the Art Major daughter from post six, but with DC Batgirl and Heart Of Mine leaving to her inside, Test Of Faith slotted into third around the first turn.

However, the tuck was short-lived as Test Of Faith latched onto the helmet of Jason Bartlett, who drove on to clear the lead with DC Batgirl. Test Of Faith finally made the top passing the quarter pole in :27.2. From there, Test Of Faith asserted her dominance.

Test Of Faith got a half in :57 and three-quarters in 1:25.4. Marohn tapped the filly with the whip heading into the final turn, and she held off first-over Party Queen. Marohn kept the Test Of Faith to task through the stretch and she kicked away to score by 2 lengths in 1:54.1.

After her NYSS Final win, trainer Brett Pelling sent Test Of Faith to the Midwest and she continued to represent breeder Fred Hertrich, III and owners Marvin Segal and Kentuckiana Racing Stable well.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

2020 NYSS Champions
• 2-year-old pacing filly..................Test Of Faith
• 2-year-old pacing gelding...........King James Express
• 2-year-old trotting filly..................Iteration
• 2-year-old trotting gelding...............Steel
• 3-year-old trotting filly...............Hypnotic Am
• 3-year-old trotting gelding ............Hobbs
• 3-year-old pacing filly..................Hen Party
• 3-year-old pacing gelding .............Blank Stare
At Hoosier Park Sept. 25, Test Of Faith won the $220,000 Kentuckiana Stallion Management Pace, utilizing a :25.3 final quarter to score by 2 3/4 lengths with David Miller in the sulky. Test Of Faith then went to the Red Mile, first taking a division of the Bluegrass in 1:50.3 Oct. 2. In the International Stallion Stakes Oct. 9, Test Of Faith went straight to the lead and never looked back. Dominating in 1:48.4, she missed Warrawee Ubeaut’s world record by one-fifth of a second. Test Of Faith’s record stands at 9-8-1-0 with $500,000 earned.

Iteration captured the NYSS Final for 2-year-old trotting fillies in the third race on the Night of Champions card, but her victory wasn’t smooth sailing like her pacing counterpart. Iteration made a break behind the starting gate in the hands of Hall of Fame driver Brian Sears. Although she caught back trotting before the wings folded, Iteration gave the field a 12 1/2-length head start.

Despite the slow beginning, Iteration, co-favored at even-money, found herself in fifth after a quarter mile when two of her rivals went off stride behind leader Splash Blue Chip. Just before the half-mile marker, Sears angled Iteration to the outside, flushing the cover of even-money co-favorite Aela Jamieson. Iteration gapped the cover slightly passing the three-quarters, but quickened stride around the final turn. Sears sent her three-wide turning for home and went to the right-handed stick. With open road in front of her, Iteration stormed down the center of the track, nailing Aela Jamieson on the wire in 1:59.

By Chapter Seven out of the Muscle Massive mare Steamy Windows, Iteration was bred by Order By Stable and is a full sister to two-time NYSS champion and $2.5 million earner Gimpanzee. Iteration is trained by Marcus Melander and owned by Courant, Inc.

Like Test Of Faith, Iteration went to Hoosier Park Sept. 25 and won the trotting division of the Kentuckiana in 1:55. Iteration then finished third in a division of the Bluegrass at the Red Mile Oct. 3 before posting a 6-1 upset in the International Stallion Stakes Oct. 10, beating favorite You Ato Dream by a nose in 1:53.3. Iteration is now 5-for-8 with $307,009 in the bank.

Although beaten by Courant’s Hypnotic Am in the NYSS Final for 3-year-old trotting fillies after making a break in the opening quarter-mile, Julie and Andy Miller’s Love A Good Story turned the tables in the $225,000 Kentucky Filly Futurity at the Red Mile Oct. 11, beating both the New York champion and Hambletonian Oaks winner Sorella in 1:51.2 at 27-1. Love A Good story is now 13-for-20 with $671,634 earned for owners Pinske Stable and Kentuckiana Racing Stable. She was bred by Celebrity Farms.

Hen Party captured the NYSS Final for 3-year-old pacing fillies, going wire-to-wire in 1:53.1 as the 2-5 favorite for Tim Tetrick, Tony Alagna, Crawford Farms Racing, and breeder Fred Hertrich, Ill. She went on to finish third in a $112,500 division of the Glen Garnsey at the Red Mile Oct. 11. She is 10-for-29 with $561,377 on her card.
NEW FACES

SOA of NY hires Pat O’Brien as executive director

BY BRANDON VALVO

Longtime Standardbred owner and experienced businessman Pat O’Brien has joined the Standardbred Owners Association of New York as executive director.

O’Brien’s venture into the harness racing world began in 2008 when he went to the track with friend and Standardbred owner George Hartman. O’Brien was instantly intrigued and spent six months studying all aspects of the game, and in particular, horse ownership.

O’Brien became an owner in 2008. He started with just two horses and his stable grew. To date, he has owned or co-owned 137 Standardbreds who have started in over 1,600 races. O’Brien prides himself on attending his horses’ races in person as often as possible and introducing new fans to the sport.

“I always say, who doesn’t like a horse? You may have people who don’t like dogs, don’t like cats. You never hear a person say they don’t like horses. They are beautiful animals,” O’Brien said. “Every time I bring neighbors, friends to the racetrack, bring them into the paddock before and after the race, they are just amazed by these animals. They can’t believe how quiet and content they are before and after the race, how they’re not high strung. I’m also one of the few owners who always bring carrots for the horses after the races.”

O’Brien’s most notable horse to date is Act Now, a $40,000 buy from the 2012 Lexington Selected Yearling Sale who won 11 of 38 starts and earned $534,539. The multiple stakes winner’s resume includes a 5 1/2-length win in the Lady Maud at Yonkers in 2014.

“The best thing about that race, I was there with about 20 people. I had my cousin from Ireland, his wife and their three boys were out for the race. That was tremendous. I have that picture hanging up in the living room. She was clearly my top horse,” O’Brien said.

O’Brien earned a degree in business from Nassau Community College in 1986 and a degree in Business Management from Long Island University in 1989. He worked at Ford Motor Credit Company until 2009, reaching the level of Branch Manager before the Great Recession hit. O’Brien then took his passion for harness racing full time, focusing on his Pat O’Brien’s Irish Stable. In his free time, O’Brien, a son of Irish immigrants, enjoys spending time with his four siblings and 10 nephews and nieces.

“I worked over 20 years in the automobile financing business, not at a dealership, but in the corporate world,” O’Brien said. “Unfortunately, when the financial crisis hit, Ford Motor Credit Company closed all their offices. I decided not to go back to work. During that time period, I went from owning two horses to 13. All the sudden, I was basically a full-time horse owner.”

O’Brien said he was thrilled to be offered the position of executive director at the SOA of NY after a series of phone calls, Zoom interviews, and finally an in-person interview.

O’Brien’s priorities in his new position include establishing a great working relationship with MGM Yonkers Raceway, protecting the interests of the horsepeople who compete at Yonkers Raceway, assisting in negotiating a contract renewal between the track and the horsepeople, and ensuring the SOA of NY operates efficiently and effectively.

“The SOA’s Personnel Committee received hundreds of resumes from individuals regarding the executive director position and conducted numerous interviews in an effort to find the right person to help the SOA deal with the numerous important issues affecting our members,” said Peter Venaglia, SOA of NY First Vice-President and Chairman of the Personnel Committee.

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NEW FACES — Continued from pg. 5

“Pat clearly stood out as the best of a number of well-qualified candidates due to his obvious passion for and commitment to harness racing that he has displayed as a very involved owner for many years,” Venaglia continued. “We welcome Pat aboard, and we know that our members will benefit greatly from Pat’s efforts on their behalf.”

Jimmy Marohn, Sr. joins as field representative

Jimmy Marohn, Sr. remembers walking winner Meadow Paige around the Yonkers Raceway paddock as a groom for Billy Haughton after the 1967 Cane Pace. Marohn also reflects fondly on winning the 1981 Cane Pace at Yonkers with Wildwood Jeb, one of his 5,358 career driving wins. Although Marohn hung up his driving colors in 2014 after over 44,000 starts, he now finds himself back in the Yonkers Raceway paddock as the new field representative for the SOA of NY.

“Here it is, 2020 and I’m back in the Yonkers paddock. Wow, that was some trip I went on,” Marohn said.

Marohn brings more than 50 years of industry experience to the role, in which he is responsible for addressing the needs of the horsepeople — owners, trainers, drivers and caretakers — at Yonkers Raceway during racing hours. The field representative is also responsible for interacting regularly with the judges and the race office and, at times, the New York Gaming Commission.

“I’m a communication person between the management and the horsepeople and the SOA and the horsepeople,” Marohn said. “If somebody needs a license, if somebody has a complaint, say the judges are having a hard time with somebody or if the drivers need something regarding the track condition.”

Marohn succeeds John Brennan as the SOA of NY’s field representative after Brennan tragically passed from complications associated with the COVID-19 virus in March 2020.

Settling into the new role, Marohn has enjoyed reconnecting with drivers he once competed with and the horsepeople he once raced for. Marohn is also forming relationships with the new generation of horsepeople.

“Now that I’m with the SOA, I remember a lot of people. I always was an owner person; whoever owned the horse, I really raced for the owner. That’s where it starts; it starts with the owner and the trainer. As I look around the paddock, the paddock looks the same,” Marohn said.

“It feels pretty good. The younger drivers may know me by name, but they may not know me. Some of them I do know,” Marohn continued. “There are people that raced there before and everybody I talked to is glad that I got the job. They say, ‘good, you’re one of us.’ Instead of a guy with a suit coming in.”

“I’m just glad that I got the job. For me, it’s a pleasure, something to look forward to,” Marohn said. “I feel good doing it. Plus, I get to see my son race, so I can keep an eye on him, or he can keep an eye on me.”
SUMMER STARS

Leaders emerge in top classes of all divisions

BY BRANDON VALVO

Repeat winners are rare in the preferred and open handicap ranks at Yonkers Raceway due to both the stiff competition and assigned outside posts. However, that hasn’t stopped a number of standouts from racking up victories in the top classes this summer.

• If there is such a thing as mastering the last-to-first move at Yonkers, Micky Gee has done it. The 7-year-old Bettor’s Delight gelding made it three straight wins in the $25,000 open handicap pace from Sept. 18 to Oct. 2. In all three triumphs, Micky Gee started from the outside post position and moped along at the back of the field before lighting the afterburners in the final quarter, circling the field three- or four-wide.

The Lance Hudson trainee also won the open handicap Aug. 21. Sticking closer to the pace after starting from post one, Micky Gee came home in :26.4, stopping the clock in 1:50.4. Jordan Stratton has driven in all four of Micky Gee’s open handicap victories this year.

“I think he can out-pace any horse at Yonkers through the stretch. He’s also had the eight hole more than any horse I know at Yonkers. He’s gotten into the routine of just coming from behind,” Stratton said. “He’s been ultra-consistent. He flies through the stretch.”

Micky Gee is 26-for-72 in his career with another 11 placings. He’s earned $470,986 for owner William Hartt.

• Stormy Kromer established a new standard for trotters at Yonkers Raceway July 31, setting an all-age track record of 1:52.3 (besting the previous 1:53.1 mark jointly held by Grand Circuit winners Plunge Blue Chip and Six Pack).

The victory was one of four straight for the Paul Stafford trainee between July 16 and Aug. 7; the streak began in a $11,600 overnight at Harrah’s Philadelphia and culminated with a local preferred handicap win Aug. 7.

“Most horses, trotters especially, can’t leave as well as he can and be up 5 lengths the whole mile,” Stafford said. “Horses like that, you think are basically out of control and that’s the way they have to go. But he’s such a gentleman on the track. He’s two fingers, he’s doing that all on his own, which is awesome.”

In addition to his front-stepping speed, Stormy Kromer showed his versatility with off-the-pace wins in the preferred handicap and open handicap Sept. 9 and Oct. 2, respectively. The 6-year-old gelding sports a record of 107-29-19-18 with $411,484 earned.

• Between My Ruebe Star and Lady Dela Renta, Shane and Lauren Tritton have the distaff pacing features covered. From July 30 and Oct. 1, the two mares combined for seven wins at the Hilltop, including three in the open or preferred levels.

My Ruebe Star came to America from Australia with the Trittons earlier this year and since then, has been nearly unstoppable, with six wins in seven races.

“We knew with her gait, she would suit the tracks here and she’s probably fitting them better than we could have imagined,” Shane Tritton said. “We think she’s only going to get better with a season of racing under her belt here.”

Lady Dela Renta has become a star of Ron Buker’s stable, now sporting a record of 24 wins from 62 starts and $307,690 in the bank.

“It’s the right trainer for the right horse,” Buker said. “It just goes to show that if you take care of the horse - because they aren’t machines - they’ll take care of you and then they show their full potential.”

Team Tritton

My Ruebe Star is 5-for-6 at Yonkers for Team Tritton.
TRENDING

SOA of NY launches new social media initiative

BY BRANDON VALVO

Beginning in August, the SOA of NY renewed its efforts to engage new and existing customers and promote the races at Yonkers through an enhanced social media campaign. The campaign is focused across the SOA of NY’s Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages and works in conjunction with the SOA of NY’s website.

The campaign has already added several new fixtures to the SOA of NY’s social media pages, including:

- ‘Driver Insights’ - Several nights per week, the SOA of NY features one of the track’s leading drivers on its pages. The driver shares his thoughts on some of his most competitive drives on the card in an effort to provide more information to handicap and bet the races.

- Giveaways - Baseball caps and Dunkin Donuts gift cards have become frequent giveaway items on the SOA of NY’s social media platforms.

- ‘On This Date’ - A feature that highlights the greatest races at Yonkers from past years, the SOA of NY has been sharing replays of International Trots and other stakes races as their anniversaries come up.

- Nightly Race Coverage - Live-tweeting all the action at Yonkers on a nightly basis.

With harness racing fans, owners, and bettors still largely unable to attend the races, it is more important than ever to have a strong social media presence. The most engaging content has proven to be no surprise: photos and videos of the Standardbred athletes themselves. This is an area that the horsepeople can assist in our campaign.

The SOA of NY is asking owners, trainers, and drivers competing at Yonkers to submit photos and videos of your horses. Post to your own pages and tag the SOA of NY, Or send directly to us (brandonvalvo@gmail.com) and we can post for you. Some suggestions for submissions:

Photos and videos from race-day in the paddock or shipping out, training and jogging, or around the barn. Have a special horse in the barn? Write a post about what they mean to you. Anything that makes a fan, ‘feel there,’ even when they can’t be there in person!

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SLOTS SPIN

Casino reopens, racing fans still stuck at home

BY BRANDON VALVO

After receiving the OK from Governor Cuomo Sept. 3, Empire City Casino by MGM Resorts at Yonkers Raceway reopened Sept. 21, more than six months after it temporarily shuttered due to the coronavirus pandemic.

As directed by the New York State Gaming Commission, the casino reopened to patrons at 25% capacity and with strict health and safety protocols in place, such as social distancing and mandatory mask-wearing.

Despite the casino’s reopening, the Governor has yet to allow patrons to return to the racing side of the facility. This decision continues to cause lost revenues from on-track wagering to the purse account and the NYS Agriculture and Horse Breeding Development Fund, which administers the New York Sire Stakes.

The SOA of NY petitioned for approval of the safe return of simulcasting and on-track wagering from leading racing legislators and from the executive branch of state government Sept. 21. The SOA of NY also petitioned MGM Resorts to join in that request and that it bring back many of the key personnel necessary to secure the return of on-site wagering.

In the absence of on-track wagering, bettors are able to watch and play the races through Empire City Bets, the Raceway’s advanced deposit wagering platform. Empire City Bets offers free sign up, free live video streaming and 8% rewards on all Yonkers Raceway wagers (excluding place and show bets).

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P = Present, A = Absent

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SOA of NY/Yonkers Raceway scholarship winners announced

FROM THE SOA OF NY

On Tuesday, August 25, the SOA of New York unveiled the winners of the annual SOA/Yonkers Raceway scholarships.

Sandra Kaufman, Chairman of the SOA of New York John R. Brennan/MGM Yonkers Scholarship Committee, has announced that Jessica Hallett is the winner of the 2020-2021 scholarship award in the amount of $5,000. The second-place award of $3,000 went to Ronald Huff and Dean Blumenfeld picked up the third-place scholarship award of $2,000.

Joe Faraldo, president of the SOA of NY, commented that this year’s award winners are the recipients of a scholarship named after a longtime good friend, horse trainer and SOA field rep John R. Brennan, who lost his life early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jessica Hallett is currently enrolled at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. She is pursuing a double major in behavioral neuroscience and biology with a minor in forensic sciences. Jessica enjoys working in the barn with her parents’ horses and is a member of the NSU Equestrian Team. Jessica’s father John owns several horses racing in New York, Pennsylvania and Florida.

Ronald Huff is currently enrolled at Webber International University pursuing a degree in Criminal Justice Management. Ronald’s father Jake trains horses in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Florida.

Dean Blumenfeld is currently enrolled at Arizona State University pursuing a PhD in Anthropology. Dean’s father Paul trains horses in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The annual SOA/Yonkers Raceway scholarships are awarded to SOA members, or members of their immediate families, or to covered individuals (backstretch personnel) or a member of their immediate families, for study beyond the high school level.

The recipient is chosen on the basis of merit and financial need. The applicants were judged first by an independent third party to produce the top five candidates. Then the committee selected the top three winners from the five finalists. Personal information from all the candidates was redacted when presented to the independent party and the committee to assure a blind judging process.

2020-2021 Scholarship Winners

- Jessica Hallett ..............................................$5,000
- Ronald Huff ..................................................$3,000
- Dean Blumenfeld ..........................................$2,000

Jessica Hallett won the first prize in the 2020 SOA/Yonkers Raceway scholarships

Follow the SOA of NY on Twitter!
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