

# 2025 Saratoga Preview: Top Trainers and Jockeys and the Best Spots to Bet Them

BY Noel Michaels

Irad Ortiz Jr., shown signing autographs for young fans at Saratoga last year, has led the upstate New York track in wins during its summer meet for three consecutive years heading into 2025. (Eclipse Sportswire)

The [Saratoga Race Course](#) summer season attracts the best horses and horsemen, not only from New York but from everywhere. Trainers from many circuits point their best horses to Saratoga, and the competition for winners is stiffer at the Spa than it is anywhere else. And when it comes to the nation's leading riders, there is no meet in the country that can compete with the quality of the jock's room at Saratoga. The title of leading rider at Saratoga carries more prestige than anywhere else.

Which trainers and jockeys will lead the way and make hay for handicappers at the 2025 Saratoga meet? Let's take a closer look.

## Leading Saratoga Trainers

**Chad Brown** and **Linda Rice** finished in a tie for the 2023 Saratoga training title with 35 wins apiece, but it was all Brown in 2024 when he dominated the standings with 45 wins to run away with the meet title. Before Rice's big season in 2023, Brown and **Todd Pletcher** had owned the Spa title for more than a decade since 2011. Brown won the training titles at Saratoga in 2018-19, and in 2021-22. Pletcher's most recent meet title was in 2020. He also won in 2017 and every year from 2011-2015 as a part of his 14 overall training titles at the Spa.

Bet Brown, Pletcher, and Rice horses, but don't bet them indiscriminately because that won't make you any money. Bet them in their best spots. For Pletcher, we're talking about dirt races, and in particular 2-year-old races. Pletcher outpaced every other trainer each season for more than a decade with juvenile winners until 2024 when his seven 2-year-old winners fell short of Brown's 10 winning juveniles. Brown rules Saratoga turf routes, where he annually tops all trainers in wins and stakes wins. He won a total of 26 turf races in 2024, which was more than three times as many as any other trainer.

Rice owes much of her success at this time of year to high percentages in dirt routes and turf sprints. When Rice tied atop the trainers' standings in 2023, she led all trainers in dirt wins with 29, with Pletcher second (21 dirt wins). In Saratoga turf races that year, Brown led all trainers with 19 winners. In terms of current form from these top barns, Brown and Rice led all trainers at the spring/summer Belmont at the Big A meet in what could be a precursor to another Spa battle for leading trainer in 2025. Pletcher almost always lays relatively low during the preceding meet so he can gear up his stable with horses ready to win at Saratoga. This year should be no exception.



## Saratoga Trainer Trends

Plenty of other trainers will be good bets at Saratoga. **Mike Maker** is known for getting off to hot starts at Saratoga, so bet him early. Maker tied for second with Pletcher in the 2024 trainer standings with 22 wins. He won 12 races at Saratoga in 2023, had 17 wins in 2022, and had 25 wins in 2021. Despite this, Maker often gets overlooked. His average win payoff of \$11.70 in 2023 was best amongst the eight leading trainers at the meet.

**Brad Cox**, whose horses went 14-for-54, 26% in 2024, has become a high percentage annual Spa threat after also winning 14-for-51 (27%) in 2023, 11-for-46 for 24% in 2022, and 13-for-48 for 27% in 2021. Most of Cox's wins were on the dirt, so only bet him on the main track. His Spa turf percentages are low.

After several recent years in a row of being a liability for bettors at the Spa, **Mark Casse** finally had a breakout season in 2024 when he won with 15 of 53 starters for 28%. Which version of Casse will show up this year, good Casse or bad Casse? Only time will tell, but you can exercise caution for the first few weeks of the meet because his wins tend to come in the second half of the season, or in his horses' second or third starts of the meet. **Norm Casse** doesn't tend to have a lot of starters at Saratoga, but he does well with the ones he has. He won with an astonishing 7 of his 12 starters in 2023 and had 3 wins from 16 starters in 2024.

More trainers that would have made you money in 2024 and could again do so in 2025 include **Philip Bauer** (6-for-17, 35% in 2024 after going 5-for-21, 24% in 2023 and 6-for-13, 46% in 2022), and **Saffie Joseph Jr.**, who finally became a factor at Saratoga with a record of 11 wins from 35 starters for 31%. **George Weaver** won 10 races from 44 starters (23%) in 2023 and is always one of the Spa's top winners in turf sprints. He had monumentally bad luck in 2024 when he won only 3 times but had 12 seconds, meaning that his starters still hit the exacta 30% of the time. Others coming off hot seasons in 2024 with fewer starters were **John Ortiz** (6-for-12, 50%), **Al Stall Jr.** (5-for-12, 42%), and **Robert Falcone Jr.** (5-for-16, 31%).

**Steve Asmussen** is coming off his quietest Saratoga season in years (5-for-40, 12.5%) and shows a declining pattern at Saratoga since 2021 when he won 19 times. He has since gone 13-for-49 (27%) in 2022 and 11-for-52 (21%) in 2023 before his decline to 12.5% last year. Asmussen continues to win a bunch of stakes races at Saratoga, however, making that a particular area of strength for him. Asmussen's main weakness at the Spa is on the turf, where he has a miniscule win percentage so far this decade.

Trainers who had disastrous seasons in 2024 included **Wayne Potts** (2-for-33, 6%), **Rob Atras** (1-for-25), **Danny Gargan** (1-for-22), **John Terranova** (1-for-28), **Jena Antonucci** (1-for-30), and **Chris Englehart** and **James Ferraro**, who both had no wins from 28 and 35 starters, respectively.

## Top Saratoga Jockeys

**Irad Ortiz Jr.** is the favorite to win another Saratoga riding title in 2025. Either Irad or **Jose Ortiz** have won every Spa jockey title since 2015 with the exception of 2021 when **Luis Saez** took the title that year with 64 wins. Irad won the 2024 title with 52 victories to outbattle **Flavien Prat** who won 45 times (Prat led all riders in terms of purses won with \$6,610,757). Irad also ran away with the 2023 meet title with 62 winners and the 2022 title with 55 wins. **Dylan Davis** and **Tyler Gaffalione** (who is recovering from an injury and plans to ride often at **Ellis Park** this summer) finished tied for third place in 2024 with 36 winners, and **Manny Franco** was fifth with 29 wins. The remaining jockeys that finished 2024 with more than 20 wins at the meet were Jose Ortiz (26 wins), Saez (24 wins), and **Junior Alvarado** (22 wins). Veteran **John Velazquez** remains a constant in the Spa jock's room. In 2024 he won 14 times from just 98 mounts for 14%.



## **Spa Jockey Angles**

Bet the best jockeys in their best spots. At the 2024 summer Saratoga meet, Irad Ortiz Jr. led all jockeys in terms of winners on the dirt with 32 and winners on the turf with 20 wins. On the main track, the next-leading winners were Prat with 27 wins and Gaffalione with 24 wins. On the grass, Prat was second with 18 wins and Davis was third with 17 winners.

Irad Ortiz led all jockeys in terms of juvenile winners in 2024 with 13 victories aboard 2-year-olds. Davis had a great season aboard 2-year-olds with 10 winners. Two years ago at the 2023 Saratoga meet. Irad Ortiz was by far the leading winner of 2-year-old races with 16 (24%). That season's next leading riders in 2-year-old races were Franco with 9 wins and Gaffalione with 8 wins.

In stakes races, 2024 was a record-setting year overall for Prat and a part of his annual total happened at Saratoga. Prat won 18 Spa stakes races last year with a big 38% win rate and with a huge 79% of his stakes horses in the money.

Irad Ortiz led all jockeys with mounts aboard favorites with 83 and thereby his average win payoff at the 2024 meet of \$7.70 was the lowest amongst all jockeys. By far the most profitable jockey for bettors among the riders in the top 10 during the 2024 season was Dylan Davis, whose 36 winners returned at average payoff of \$16.80. When you also consider Davis's average win payoff in 2023 was \$18.90, you have a legit reason to bet Davis's mounts in 2025. **Luis Rivera Jr.** led all riders who rode at least five winners in terms of average payoff in 2024. His eight winners had an average payoff of \$24.90.



# SARATOGA SUMMER MEET

2025 STAKES SCHEDULE



| RUN DATE                   | STAKES RACE   | GRADE      | PRIZE     | AGE      | DISTANCE       | CLOSING DATE |
|----------------------------|---|------------|-----------|----------|----------------|--------------|
| Thursday, July 10, 2025    | De La Rose (NW GSS in 2024-2025)                        | Listed     | 135,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Friday, July 11, 2025      | Coronation Cup  | III        | 175,000   | F3YO     | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, July 12, 2025    | Dunkin' Diana   | I          | 500,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 1/8 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, July 12, 2025    | Bowling Green   | II         | 200,000   | 4&UP     | 1 3/8 (Turf)   |              |
| Sunday, July 13, 2025      | Quick Call pres. by Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation  | III        | 175,000   | 3YO      | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Wednesday, July 16, 2025   | Suzie O'Cain (NYB)                                      |            | 150,000   | F3YO     | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Thursday, July 17, 2025    | Rick Violette (NYB)                                     |            | 150,000   | 3YO      | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Friday, July 18, 2025      | Shuvee  | II         | 200,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 1/8          |              |
| Saturday, July 19, 2025    | Coaching Club American Oaks                             | I          | 500,000   | F3YO     | 1 1/8          |              |
| Saturday, July 19, 2025    | Caress  | III        | 175,000   | F&M 3&UP | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, July 19, 2025    | Alfred G. Vanderbilt                                    | II         | 400,000   | 4&UP     | 6 Furlongs     |              |
| Sunday, July 20, 2025      | Honorable Miss  | II         | 200,000   | F&M 4&UP | 6 Furlongs     |              |
| Wednesday, July 23, 2025   | A.P. Smithwick Memorial                                 | I          | 150,000   | 4&UP     | 2 3/8 (Stp)    |              |
| Thursday, July 24, 2025    | Curlin pres. by Casamigos                               | Listed     | 135,000   | 3YO      | 1 1/8          |              |
| Friday, July 25, 2025      | Amsterdam pres. by Albany Med Health System             | II         | 200,000   | 3YO      | 6 1/2 Furlongs |              |
| Saturday, July 26, 2025    | Lake George pres. by Surfside                           | III        | 175,000   | F3YO     | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, July 26, 2025    | Jim Dandy pres. by Mohegan Sun                          | II         | 500,000   | 3YO      | 1 1/8          |              |
| Sunday, July 27, 2025      | Glens Falls   | II         | 250,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Wednesday, July 30, 2025   | Johnstone (NYB)   |            | 150,000   | F&M 3&UP | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Thursday, July 31, 2025    | Evan Shipman Stakes (NYB)                               |            | 150,000   | 3&UP     | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Friday, August 1, 2025     | National Museum of Racing Hall Of Fame                  | II         | 400,000   | 3YO      | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | Saratoga Special  | II         | 200,000   | 2YO      | 6 1/2 Furlongs |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | Saratoga Derby Invitational                             | I          | 750,000   | 3YO      | 1 3/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | Test pres. by Ticketmaster                              | I          | 500,000   | F3YO     | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | Whitney (BC)  | I          | 1,000,000 | 4&UP     | 1 1/8          |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | Troy  | II         | 300,000   | 3&UP     | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, August 2, 2025   | FanDuel Fourstardave (BC)                               | I          | 750,000   | 4&UP     | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Sunday, August 3, 2025     | Adirondack  | III        | 175,000   | F2YO     | 6 1/2 Furlongs |              |
| Wednesday, August 6, 2025  | Birdstone   | Listed     | 150,000   | 4&UP     | 1 3/4          |              |
| Thursday, August 7, 2025   | Galway  | Listed     | 150,000   | F3YO     | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Friday, August 8, 2025     | Ballston Spa  | II         | 300,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 9, 2025   | Fasig-Tipton Saratoga Oaks Invitational                 | II         | 500,000   | F3YO     | 1 3/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 9, 2025   | Sword Dancer (BC)                                       | I          | 750,000   | 4&UP     | 1 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Sunday, August 10, 2025    | Mahony  | III        | 175,000   | 3YO      | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Wednesday, August 13, 2025 | New York Stallion Series - Statue of Liberty Division   | Restricted | 150,000   | F3YO     | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Thursday, August 14, 2025  | New York Stallion Series - Cab Calloway Division        | Restricted | 150,000   | 3YO      | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Friday, August 15, 2025    | Smart N Fancy   | Listed     | 150,000   | F&M 3&UP | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, August 16, 2025  | Skidmore  |            | 150,000   | 2YO      | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Saturday, August 16, 2025  | Alabama pres. by Keeneland Sales                        | I          | 600,000   | F3YO     | 1 1/4          |              |
| Sunday, August 17, 2025    | Bolton Landing  | Listed     | 150,000   | F2YO     | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Wednesday, August 20, 2025 | Jonathan Sheppard Memorial                              | I          | 150,000   | 4+UP     | 2 3/8 (Stp)    |              |
| Thursday, August 21, 2025  | Albany (NYB) pres. By Albany Distilling Company         |            | 200,000   | 3YO      | 1 1/8          |              |
| Thursday, August 21, 2025  | Fleet Indian (NYB)                                      |            | 200,000   | F3YO     | 1 1/8          |              |
| Friday, August 22, 2025    | Seeking the Ante (NYB)                                  |            | 150,000   | F2YO     | 6 Furlongs     |              |
| Friday, August 22, 2025    | Yaddo Stakes (NYB)                                      |            | 150,000   | F&M 3&UP | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | DraftKings Travers                                      | I          | 1,250,000 | 3YO      | 1 1/4          |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | H. Allen Jerkens Memorial                               | I          | 500,000   | 3YO      | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | Lake Placid   | II         | 400,000   | F3YO     | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | Resorts World Casino Ballerina (BC)                     | I          | 500,000   | F&M 3&UP | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | Forego (BC)   | I          | 500,000   | 4&UP     | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 23, 2025  | Personal Ensign (BC)                                    | I          | 500,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 1/8          |              |
| Sunday, August 24, 2025    | West Point Hdcp (NYB)                                   |            | 150,000   | 3&UP     | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Sunday, August 24, 2025    | Funny Cide (NYB) pres. by Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital |            | 150,000   | 2YO      | 6 Furlongs     |              |
| Wednesday, August 27, 2025 | P.G. Johnson pres. by Snap-On                           | Listed     | 150,000   | F2YO     | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Thursday, August 28, 2025  | With Anticipation                                       | III        | 175,000   | 2YO      | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Friday, August 29, 2025    | Perfect Sting   | Listed     | 150,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 Mile (Turf)  |              |
| Friday, August 29, 2025    | Bernard Baruch  | Listed     | 150,000   | 4&UP     | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |
| Saturday, August 30, 2025  | Spinaway (BC)   | I          | 300,000   | F2YO     | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 30, 2025  | Prioress  | III        | 175,000   | F3YO     | 6 Furlongs     |              |
| Saturday, August 30, 2025  | Flower Bowl (BC)  | II         | 500,000   | F&M 4&UP | 1 3/8 (Turf)   |              |
| Sunday, August 31, 2025    | Jockey Club Gold Cup (BC)                               | I          | 1,000,000 | 3&UP     | 1 1/4          |              |
| Sunday, August 31, 2025    | Disco Partner (NW Gr. SS in 2024 - 2025)                |            | 135,000   | 3&UP     | 5 1/2 (Turf)   |              |
| Monday, September 1, 2025  | Spendthrift Farm Hopeful                                | I          | 300,000   | 2YO      | 7 Furlongs     |              |
| Monday, September 1, 2025  | Saranac (NW of a Gr sweepstakes in 2025)                | Listed     | 135,000   | 3YO      | 1 1/16 (Turf)  |              |