

# TDN *Q&A*

*Breeders' Cup Vice President of Media and Entertainment and life-time racing fan Peter Rotondo will be one of the main characters on the Esquire Network's new reality television show 'Horseplayers' (click [here](#) for a first look at the show), which chronicles a group of bettors as they vie for a spot in the National Handicapping Championship. Rotondo, who graduated from the University of Arizona racetrack program before working for the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, has been with the Breeders' Cup since 2006. He sat down with the TDN yesterday to discuss the show, which will premiere Jan. 21.*



**Horseplayers**  
Esquire Network

**TDN: How did you become involved with this show?**

**PR:** About two years ago, I qualified for the National Handicapping Championship. I was in Las Vegas with my dad and his best friend Lee, who were helping me out. There was a production company there that was interested in the event and horseplayers in general, so the NTRA folks picked a couple of us out to mic us up. Long story short, they pitched it and the Esquire Network bought the show. Ultimately, the production company that wound up producing it--Go Go Lucky--were the ones who did 'Jockeys,' so they knew racing and I



**Peter Rotondo (left) with his father at the track**

knew them very well because we helped them out when they had to shoot the Breeders' Cup many years ago.

**TDN: What's the overall premise of the show?**

**PR:** Basically, we're going to the best tracks around the country and we're trying to qualify, ultimately, for the National Handicapping Championship. These different tracks have tournaments, so the idea is if you qualify there you win a spot at the NHC. In addition, we did travel to the Triple Crown and a couple other spots where there were no tournaments, but it was more of a day at the races to show off the sport and the great crowds

**TDN: Who is in the show with you?**

**PR:** Team Rotondo is me, Dad (Peter Rotondo, Sr.), and Lee Davis, his best friend. Then you have Michael Beychok, who won the million dollars two years ago--the same time I qualified, we actually sat next to each other then he won the million. He's a great guy. He lives in Louisiana. Then there's Christian Hellmers who is from San Diego--young guy, super sharp; one of the best handicappers I've ever come across. He's really an interesting guy. You have Matt Bernier, he's 23 and from Massachusetts. He's the young gun on the show. He qualified last year to the NHC for the first time and he just picked up the game recently. Then there's the old veteran John Conte, who won the NHC about seven or eight years ago, he's an Italian from Brooklyn and he's a character himself. There's Kevin Cox, who used to be a police officer, and he's a professional handicapper now. We call him "the Brooklyn Cowboy," because he wears this huge cowboy hat. They're all great guys.

**TDN: When was this filmed?**

**PR:** We started in May at the Derby and we're still going. The NHC is in a few weeks, so that will be the finale.

**TDN: What can viewers expect to see?**

**PR:** This show is different. This is taking the camera, turning it around a little bit and showing off the horseplayers and the horse owners, who are the ones who make the game go. This is a cool experience to be involved with because it shows off that side of the business. Without gambling, there probably isn't any sport.

**TDN: A common complaint with horse racing is that it's difficult for new fans to understand how to bet. Do you explain handicapping and the basics of betting during the show?**

**PR:** You've got to care about the characters first, I think, to care about what they're talking about. If you don't care about them--whether if you love them or you hate them--what they're talking about is sort of irrelevant whether it's complicated or not. So, I think it's more about the characters.

**TDN: Do you explain how you make your picks?**

**PR:** We'll go through who we like in a race. Of course, we don't go through every race and we'll pull out certain ones and we will try to explain how we came up with it. Team Rotondo is all about pace. Pace makes the race, and we try to explain that in layman's terms and I think we did a pretty good job. So we break it down and as the show goes on and characters get developed, the people watching us will dive into it.

**TDN: Who do you think this show will resonate with?**

**PR:** I think that the core of horse racing fans and the bettors are going to love it because finally it's being exposed. And it's focused on the bettors, and that's never happened before. I think for the general public, it's like anything else, the characters are going to have to carry the load here. I think it's character driven. I think especially for the Esquire brand to be attached to horse racing in this manner is a big deal for racing.

**TDN: How was it to have your picks on air? Was that a nerve-racking experience?**

**PR:** Totally, I mean it's a different dynamic. When there are no cameras or microphones around you pick a race and you win or you lose, but it's just between you and your pals and you're not going to get judged. I felt a lot of pressure--way more than I thought. Someone is actually going to see and hear this and you don't want to look stupid or sound ridiculous, so there's definitely pressure involved.

Of course, we took it very seriously, because at the end of the day, we're trying to qualify for the national championship and when we get there, there's \$750,000 on the line so it's real money besides the ego that's involved with being right. There's really a lot to deal with.

**TDN: What's the best experience you had during this process?**

**PR:** I got to spend seven months at the track with my dad. The idea that he grew up going to the track and took me since I was a baby and now we're at the races and there's cameras following us. So, for him, it's like the greatest thing in the world. Him and his friend Lee are such characters and if you spend time with them you'll immediately fall in love with them. The idea that this is out there is such a cool thing for the family as well. Also, getting to know the guys on the cast. We had a great time shooting. Not everything happens at the races, so we go visit different areas in whatever city we're in and it's pretty cool. It was an amazing experience.

**TDN: How was it to watch a race with the cameras on you? Did it change the way you watched the race?**

**PR:** No, I'm in the racing business, so when the race is not on in my head I'm sort of aware of everything that's happening. But as soon as the race goes, you forget that the cameras are there. We root and really get into it and I think that's going to really come across in the show. It's like a performance, but it's all real. We all lose ourselves in the race, especially my father, he's just out of control. I feel like I got out of control a few times too, so we'll see how it looks. That's the best part of it and why this is the best reality t.v. because whatever happens on the track is the race. You can't fake that. It is what it is.