

# News from the **North**

By Richard Scheidt

## Racing News: The Long and Short of it

While the official opening day for the current Golden Gate Fields meet was December 26, 2008 racing has been taking place at the track since late September. With Bay Meadows closing last fall, Golden Gate has absorbed the majority of racing dates in Northern California. Though a few horsemen may long for a change of venue, we've noticed that some positives have emerged on track at the Gate.

One such positive is the emergence of Kentucky Derby hopeful Chocolate Candy, winner of the California and El Camino Real Derbies. And who hasn't been impressed with the success of Sundays on track with Dollar Days, attracting an average of over 4,300 patrons? Best of all for horsemen is the fact that the purse account is back in the black largely due to revenue-producing "dark" Wednesdays in January and February.

As Golden Gate strides along, the California Fairs are on the horizon. Stockton is back in its traditional spot leading off the summer, beginning June 18, followed by three weeks at Pleasanton. Vallejo is next, celebrating its 60th year of racing for one week, followed by turf racing in Santa Rosa. Golden Gate is not to be left out of the summer fun, holding two weeks of fair racing beginning August 12. Overlapping with Golden Gate is the Humboldt County Fair in Ferndale, followed by racing at the State Fair in Sacramento. The Big Fresno Fair wraps up the summer with two weeks of un-overlapped racing in early October, but not before we are back in the Bay Area for four weeks at Golden Gate.

The fairs will once again have a single racing secretary in Tom Doutrich, who has developed a balanced stakes schedule including six stakes for two-year-olds. Other changes for 2009 include a five-day race week for the majority of the summer and planned four-day race weeks in September, a traditionally tough time of year to fill races.

## TOC Seminar Focuses on Racing Office Operations

A group of more than 30 Thoroughbred owners attended TOC's seminar at Golden Gate Fields in February. The program touched on pre-race meet preparation from the standpoint of the racing office, track management, and TOC. Other topics discussed in detail were the role of the racing office, how condition books are developed, purse structures, stakes schedules, revenue generation, and under and overpayments.

Golden Gate Fields' General Manager Robert Hartman detailed the processes for purse projections beginning several weeks prior to racing, and the importance of forecasting efficiently to avoid any potential overpayments. Tom Doutrich, racing secretary for the California Authority of Racing Fairs, explained how stall applications and horse inventory play into condition book preparation, and how the racing office charts races year-round by use of a matrix.

TOC Vice President, Northern California, Tom Bachman,

demystified TOC's role in these processes. He cited recent examples as to how reducing the number of race categories helped increase field size; and he emphasized that less is more when considering the number of racing days while horse inventory is low, and stressed the importance of a strong stakes program and the development of a competitive two-year-old program.

For the entire schedule of events including the 2009 Educational Seminar Schedule visit [toconline.com](http://toconline.com).

## It Pay\$ to Play the TOC Owners Challenge

The second annual TOC Owners Challenge Handicapping Contest qualified three owners in 2008. Jeff Hug, Robert Huson, and Dennis Decauwer qualified to be part of Team TOC in one of two contests conducted exclusively for TOC members. Hug qualified in October at Golden Gate Fields, while Huson and Decauwer qualified at Hollywood Park in November. The three earned spots in the NTRA National Handicapping Championships (NHC) this past January in Las Vegas. Prize money for the NHC totaled \$1 million, with the top prize of \$500,000.

All three made good accounts of themselves by placing in the top half of the event with 300 participants. Decauwer did



Jeff Hug, Dennis Decauwer, and Robert Huson.

extremely well in the two-day event, finishing second overall. He was in first position until a long shot in the last race of the day bumped him into second place by a mere \$3.50 in the final standings. The good news is, Decauwer took home \$150,000 for finishing second.

"It was a thrilling experience," said Decauwer. "While I was disappointed not to win, I was very appreciative of the chance to participate and win the second prize. As an owner," Decauwer continued, "I have a great appreciation for the opportunity this contest affords to win an Eclipse Award, and I will definitely be going back to try again in the future."

You too can earn a shot at the big money in next year's NHC by qualifying at one of the two TOC Owners Challenge contests in 2009. Contests are scheduled for August 22 at Del Mar and October 3 at Golden Gate Fields. Check our schedule of events on our website for further details.