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## Objectively Measuring “Success” in the Racing Industry

An *opinion* is one thing there will never be a shortage of in the racing industry!

Ask a horseman for his opinion on just about any subject, and be prepared for one of the most passionate expressions of personal belief you may ever observe. Never mind if there isn't any factual basis for the opinion, it is bound to be expressed as forcefully, and with as much conviction, as one would expect from a scientist who had devoted her entire professional life to the study of a single issue!

It's all well and good to have an opinion on a subject; heck, it's our right as Americans. But, is it really the only basis upon which we want to make important, critical decisions about the future of racing in this great state?

In just about every other aspect of our lives – personal or professional – most of us go out of our way to gather as much information as possible about a subject before we make a decision that will have anything other than a trivial impact on our lives. When we're sick, and our doctor is unsure of the origin of the illness, we see a second, or a third, and sometimes a fourth doctor about our condition. In choosing a school for our children, we visit the campus, look at the graduation rate, research its professors, we do everything possible to ensure that we are giving them the best chance to succeed in life. God forbid any of us ever get involved in a lawsuit, but if you do, one thing is for sure, you're going to want the best lawyer you can find, who will leave no stone unturned in getting to the truth and facts that will exonerate one of liability!

Why then when it comes to making critical decisions about the future of California racing, are we content to have such decisions made based largely on opinions devoid of factual basis? To do so in any other aspect of our lives would seem irresponsible, yet it is precisely what a few noisy antagonists are advocating this industry do: “Ignore verifiable facts about the many improving aspects of California Thoroughbred racing since the first engineered surface was installed, and go back to archaic dirt racing surfaces.”

Huh...?

After years of seeing declining average field sizes, California racing has been enjoying increasing field sizes since the introduction of engineered surfaces. Players from around the country have noticed this fact, and welcomed it, as is evidenced by increasing out-of-state handle. Overall, there have been far, far fewer breakdowns than was the case on our old dirt tracks; demand for on-track stall space is approaching all-time highs; there are stunning increases in the number of horses working over these surfaces compared to prior years on dirt surfaces; out-of-state stables have come west to run in California for the first time in many years; horses are making more starts; and, the best news of all: *purse revenues are up!*

All of these trends reflect increases in the traditional indicators by which the success of racing has been measured! Yet, despite that success, the antagonists have seized upon Santa Anita's Cushion Track failure to drain during a severe early January rainstorm as some form of definitive proof that the decision to employ this new technology was a horrible mistake that must be reversed immediately. In my opinion, they are incorrect! While that one Cushion Track surface may not have been the “all-weather surface” its manufacturers said it would be, until the deluge it was clearly a far safer racing surface than the prior dirt track!

The severe January weather was not limited to Southern California, as Northern California saw more than its fair share of wind and rain. By all accounts, Golden Gate's Tapeta surface handled the rain extraordinarily well, draining as represented. Unfortunately, after a long period without incident, there was what seemed to be a rash of breakdowns on-track, at least in comparison to the prior period. Again, and true to form, the nay-sayers saw that misfortune as an opportunity to proclaim that these surfaces are failures. In doing so, they have chosen to overlook the fact that several of the horses breaking down were making either suspicious, severe drops in class or running at the very bottom levels, after having demonstrated no or suspect physical abilities.

If it is fair to blame a surface for all such breakdowns, one must ask at what point is it also fair to question the judgment of individual horsemen who choose to get one more race out of a sore horse,

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