

TOC: Ready for the Challenges that Lie Ahead

The events of 2005 must give those of us who invested hearts and wallets in racing an uneasy feeling at the very least. Who can look without a sense of fear at weekday attendance figures that seem to be artificially inflated to reach 3,000? Even the Dodgers are doing better. So I won't try to "spin" a story for you that's made of tattered whole cloth.

California, we have problems. But in the dim, graying sunset there MAY exist the seeds of rejuvenation for racing. I am far from ready to claim that it's a dead issue. Your 15-member TOC Board is at work finding ways to reinvigorate Thoroughbred Racing. Hopeless? No, not at all. Difficult? On a scale of 1 to 10, it's a 15.

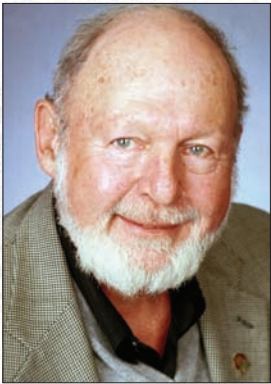
We are, however, at the center of action and negotiations that will help fulfill TOC's stated mission of protecting owner interests. We have long believed that racing is a partnership affair, in which horsemen are joined by racing associations, breeder representatives, trainers, guilds, unions, pari-mutuel operators, and owners who by their choice pay the bills, which keep racing alive. It appears that in times of stress and even crisis, instead of coming together, we find each entity fostering its own objectives, stranding California on its endangered island.

We need only take note of the wearying process of using two racetracks as cash cows being milked to support the process of tearing them down. They will disappear when rebuilding plans are approved. In the end, the steps will erase racing's heritage and replace it with real estate ventures. The events of this past fall – losing turf racing at Hollywood Park – left the track serving races of 4 and 5 horses as a staple. Hollywood's promise of replacing the hard-surfaced main track with Polytrack teeters on the winds of increasing expense.

There are other important challenges to be met – both big and small – that will reverberate through any efforts TOC might undertake. Below are examples of a new "gloves-off" attitude toward adjusting:

1. The ADW "mess" that restricts bettor access must be refocused. Discussions and negotiations are being replaced by hard-nosed demands that must be met. If they are not, TOC is prepared to use its powers to enact economic sanctions that can bring increased purse revenues by lowering fees now paid to ADW providers.
2. We view the Del Mar corporate structure as a key factor in the track's successes in the face of other tracks' failures. It operates as a not-for-profit organization, managed by a solid unit of horsemen and executives dedicated to racing's success. Clearly it works. TOC is completing its legislative "want" list. Among the items near the top is the promotion of the concept of not-for-profit operation of old and perhaps even new racing venues.
3. TOC is seeking a path to invigorate the marketing of racing, so that it concentrates the efforts on luring a new and vital audience to racetracks as entertainment venues. Hand in hand with the state-fostered CMC, we believe there is a way to begin this process.
4. TOC continues efforts at creating a more coherent and profitable statewide racing calendar, presenting a more balanced and coordinated offering of each track's major and minor stakes.
5. Race dates requests will no longer be treated as if they were "business as usual." In light of existing changes, we are prepared to go to the mat over where, when, and how races may be carded.

By the 15th of January the Board will be reviewing a multi-faceted, gloves-off strategic plan stretching out more than five years. Highlights will appear in my next Chairman's letter.



Alan Landsburg