

INDUSTRY LEADERS ADDRESS ISSUES RELATED TO

- *Racing Surfaces*
- *North American Foal Crop Size*
- *Racing Calendars*
- *HISA*
- *Marketing*
- *Wagering*





INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING SURFACES

By Bob Ehalt

X @BobEhalt



COGLIANESE PHOTOS/RYAN THOMPSON

Looking back on the past 12 months, the horse racing industry endured a year filled with a seemingly endless array of peaks and valleys.

There was euphoria through the heroics of horses such as Cody's Wish, Arcangelo, and Mage. Yet there also were unsettling challenges in the form of a spate of fatalities at Churchill Downs and Saratoga Race Course and declines in wagering, purses paid, and race dates.

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series starts today with a question on racing surfaces. In the following days panelists will be asked to provide their thoughts on foal crop size, racing calendar/field size, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, marketing, and wagering.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.

TODAY'S QUESTION: *In terms of equine safety, can significant progress still be made in racing on dirt surfaces? In what ways? Should there be more racing on all-weather surfaces?*

Tony Allevato, president, NYRA Bets/chief revenue officer, New York Racing Association: We can always do more to make things safer. If you look at the Oklahoma training track at Saratoga, we had nearly 10,000 horses train over that track with no fatalities this year. That shows you can race on a dirt track in a safe manner. But ultimately, as we try to get fatalities down to zero, you have to look at all options and technology comes into play, as it does in every other sport. So, we have to take a serious look at synthetics as an option. That's one of the things we are studying and doing our due diligence on. You can't look at the numbers and say there's nothing there.

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COGLIANESE PHOTOS

Tony Allevato

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING SURFACES

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Shannon Arvin, *president and CEO, Keeneland*: We believe all options should remain on the table with respect to track surfaces, and research should focus on determining the ideal track surface for Thoroughbred athletes. We believe the solution to this challenge may well be in "reconditioned" dirt surfaces, such as those that exist at Keeneland, Santa Anita Park, and Del Mar. All were repurposed into dirt surfaces with a consistent asphalt base and vertical drainage system that enhances their ability to perform with their respective components of sand, clay, and silt. I would also add that Saratoga Race Course's newly renovated Oklahoma training track has proven to be a safe dirt surface. If we accept that the three most important things about dirt track maintenance are "water, water AND water," then the superior ability of these reconditioned dirt tracks to deliver the desired percentages of water content that ensures consistency throughout the track surface makes them worthy of comparison to synthetic surfaces with respect to safety. There are further agricultural technologies that we need to explore in GPS mapping and moisture sensor devices on our track equipment that can allow us to improve our capabilities on any given day in various weather conditions. While there is value in exploring all-weather surfaces, we believe that racing on all-weather surfaces should not be heralded as the sole solution to race track safety. There is a lack of understanding and science regarding how best to install these surfaces in different climates, and further, there is not currently a vendor that could meet the demand. Regardless of the composition of the track, all track surfaces require consistent maintenance and oversight. Standards for routine track maintenance, including what types of equipment are required, should be implemented so there is greater consistency in tracks and track maintenance standards.

ANNE M. EBERHARDT



Shannon Arvin

Dr. Dionne Benson, *chief veterinary officer, 1/ST Racing*: There are certainly opportunities to make dirt racing safer for horses. One of the things that we have done at 1/ST Racing is to require horses to be monitored in training. Seeing horses once every few weeks, at best, when they are entered to race misses most of the horse's racing life. What I found is that watching these horses on a regular basis allows us to intervene more often before the horse even makes it to the starting gate. This, coupled with attending vet entry and training exams and work sign-ups and checks, as have been done at Santa Anita Park since 2019, yielded a 0.00 musculoskeletal fatality rate in racing on the dirt surface in 2022. Simply put, it is proven that veterinary interventions by both the trainer's and the track's veterinarians can make racing safer on all surfaces.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT



Dr. Dionne Benson

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Louis Cella, *president, Oaklawn Park*: I would not make a broad statement or presumption that dirt surfaces are inferior to all-weather, or turf surfaces as relates to equine safety, since no track will protect an unsound horse. Every dirt track surface is unique to its environment. Too much or too little rain impacts it; chemicals mixed in northern track surfaces are completely different than tracks that do not use chemicals at all. In our view, consistent and safe tracks are what is important, regardless of surface.



Louis Cella

Dennis Cornick, *part owner of Flightline through West Point Thoroughbreds*: If one truly studies the numbers, progress has been made. Unfortunately, this is an industry where injuries and fatalities will happen. One of my biggest frustrations is the one-sided focus on the negative versus the emphasis on the positive. Social media is one of the biggest culprits here. The voices of the negatives seem louder and more powerful than those of the positives. While we should always strive for zero injuries and fatalities, it is not realistic. Many of the injuries have unfortunately been high-profile, and in clusters at major tracks, creating a major wave of negativity and poor perception. We must look for ways to consistently reduce injuries and fatalities without turning the core of the sport upside down. An



Dennis Cornick

analogy is football and head injuries. Research is being conducted into select rule changes, better equipment and safety protocols, etc. But nobody is saying the core of the sport needs to change. Racing needs the same approach. Better understanding of track maintenance, increased vet checks, therapeutic advances, research, select rule changes, etc. Not turning the core of the sport upside down. Ask the question about unintended consequences relevant to any decision. In football, there are protest groups against the violence of the sport that get little air time. The NFL squashes them because they are united and a strong holistic group. Our industry allows PETA to become a spokesperson for the sport. The NFL would never allow any outside groups to gain momentum in damaging their brand.

Brad Cox, *trainer*: We can always do things to enhance and promote safety with racetracks, be it with more breaks during training hours or maybe by delaying training hours when there are concerns with the weather. I'm personally happy and content with racing on the dirt. We do race and train on synthetics at Turfway Park, but I don't see a need to expand the synthetics to other tracks. Synthetic has its place, but I'm a fan of racing on dirt and we should continue to move forward with it. There are concerns with all tracks, including synthetics. I find the injury rates are about equal on dirt and synthetics.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Brad Cox

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Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, Monmouth Park: I still remain committed to racing on dirt surfaces and progress needs to be made on improving safety of dirt surfaces. At Monmouth Park, we are committed to spending as much of our revenues as possible to maintain a safe surface. Unfortunately, no matter how much money or expertise is spent on safety and safe surfaces, the breakdown number will never get to zero. Monmouth Park has been exploring a synthetic surface at the Meadowlands for several years but the cost is \$10 million and we simply do not have the money. We have been attempting to get financial help from the state. The reason is related to cancelling racing because of rain making the turf course unsafe to use, but that problem is attributable to only having turf at the Meadowlands because of the high cost of switching to dirt.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Drew Fleming



BILL DENVER/EQUI-PHOTO

Dennis Drazin

Drew Fleming, president and CEO, Breeders' Cup: At the Breeders' Cup, we have seen firsthand the success that comes with investing in safety and integrity measures—whether racing on dirt, turf, or all-weather tracks. However, there is no question additional data and research on the safety and efficacy of all-weather surfaces is required, and that's why we are honored to work with others to continue to analyze various components of racetrack surfaces with a goal of creating an ideal racetrack surface. It is important to note that it is not simply a dirt versus all-weather surface question. We must further analyze all the components of racetrack surfaces, including cushion, drainage, base layer, and moisture levels. The concept should be focused on creating an ideal racing surface based on a myriad of factors, including geographical differences, form, and breeding.

Jim Gagliano, president and COO, The Jockey Club: There are a lot of variables to consider on the matter of dirt and all-weather surfaces, including regional environment. So, I can't really answer the question with a general answer. However, what is certain is through scientific research we have already made great progress in improving the safety of the racing surfaces. It is important that this research continues and all track operators adopt the protocols and standards set forth by HISA.



IFHA/SCOPDYGA

Jim Gagliano

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Eric Hamelback, CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association: I do believe significant progress still can be made in racing on dirt surfaces through data collection and research. The progress will need its roots from tested, peer-reviewed, and ongoing research. However, the industry must acknowledge that risks cannot be eliminated in horse racing. We all should continue to do our part to mitigate risks, but those who believe risks will or can be eliminated are not functioning in reality. The dangers of regulating horsemanship out of horse racing has already begun to rear its ugly head. Our mission statement clearly states that our organization strives for the highest standards of horsemanship to continuously improve the care, health, and safety of the horse. We are always focused on anything that can be done to make horse racing safer. We need a reversal of the trend rather than just accept fewer horses making fewer starts. Especially in those regions with record purse levels, we must find creative ways to incentivize ownership in the industry, making it more palatable for owners to pay training bills, which are significant. Perhaps it's time for the industry to consider a system of sorts that gives owners and trainers a chance to

run against similar competition, alongside our claiming races. I strongly believe that slashing dates and number of races is not the answer, but we cannot just sit by and think everything will just work itself out. We should be advocating for fixing our issues, and not just being reactive to them.



Eric Hamelback

Joe Harper, president and CEO, Del Mar: We're always looking at ways to improve maintenance to our track surfaces, and Del Mar continues to allocate significant resources to ensure that our main track and turf course are among the industry's best. Over the last several years Del Mar and Santa Anita have shown that racing on dirt can be among the safest in the sport. For tracks that routinely deal with inclement weather, synthetic surfaces can be a useful option.



Joe Harper



Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management: Dirt racing is the backbone of American racing. California has done an incredible job improving safety for dirt racing. Dr. Francisco Uzal from UC Davis provided this information in a report to the California Horse Racing Board on Dec. 14, 2023. All-weather surfaces do not work for all horses, just as turf does not. Thus, let individual states decide based upon their individual needs.

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Lisa Lazarus, CEO, HISA: At HISA's request, NYRA recently formed a new All-Weather Surfaces Committee to bring some of Thoroughbred racing's top leaders together to evaluate the potential impact of various surfaces on equine injury rates. The committee's goals include determining (1) which surfaces, either on their own or in combination, are safest for horses; (2) the current state of all-weather surface technologies, including supply-chain and maintenance issues; and (3) how the sport can address the potential economic and logistical challenges of ensuring that the safest possible surfaces are in place at racetracks across the country. The Committee is already in the process of commissioning additional research and reviewing currently available data with the goal of making a recommendation to HISA and to the sport at large concerning the introduction of additional all-weather surfaces in Thoroughbred racing. These are important questions, and we need to make sure to use all the data and analysis at our disposal to get this right.



Ed Martin

Ed Martin, president, Association of Racing Commissioners International: I personally believe that the track surface data collection efforts of HISA need to be married with their equine injury data and research of Dr. (Sue) Stover. Personally, I would trust Dr. Stover's take on this.



COURTESY LISA LAZARUS



MARK MAHAN PHOTO

Top: Lisa Lazarus
Bottom: Dan Metzger

Dan Metzger, president, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association: Racetrack safety is perhaps the top priority facing our industry. Any decisions related to racing surfaces, specifically dirt and synthetic, must be based on solid science, data, and economic implications to all industry stakeholders. The recent news that the Oklahoma training track at Saratoga had no fatal breakdowns over seven months with more than 9,100 timed workouts clearly showed that significant progress was made to improve equine safety on dirt surfaces. Racetracks need to make financial investments in racing surfaces and horsemen need to embrace new technologies and innovation, including equine wearables, to ensure the welfare and safety of our horses and jockeys.

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Ron Moquett, trainer: The art of taking care of a racetrack is slowly being replaced by the science of maintaining a racetrack. We are replacing feel and experience as the guide for what we do to the surfaces by scientific calculations of materials and satellite measurements. Any novice can tell you we place more energy and emphasis on safety of our training and racing surfaces now than we ever have, which is good and should continue. However, if we don't breed sounder horses it doesn't matter. While the breeding side of our industry continues to prioritize on the sales more than longevity of the horse, the rest of the industry will have to look for ways of keeping an inferior product as safe as possible.

Maggi Moss, owner: Each and every track hiring the best professionals to ensure an even and safe dirt surface based on ever-changing weather and environment factors would be a good start, which HISA is doing. Nobody knows better than trainers, exercise riders, and jockeys as to how horses are coming back and handling the track. Each track should have the availability of these crucial participants to speak about the track and its effect on the horses. Each track should have the necessary equipment and personnel to listen and address these concerns and remedy the issues with the tracks. Hopefully new technology and continued improvement stops tragic breakdowns. Two very public breakdowns at Saratoga started a firestorm, and rightfully so. Due to the public reality of these two breakdowns that were much more visible to the public, a knee-jerk reaction gravitated toward synthetic tracks as the answer. Millions were spent on that years ago and was equally as troublesome as to soft tissue injuries, the weather, and the betting public. Most of us that endured that attempt at synthetics dealt with other issues as to soundness and other injuries to the horses. Going back to synthetics turns the breeding industry upside down and changes every dynamic of

COUDY PHOTOGRAPHY



COUDY PHOTOGRAPHY



Top: Ron Moquett
Bottom: Maggi Moss

the racing product. I feel the talk of synthetics was a knee-jerk reaction without the memory of a very failed experiment of this in the past.

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Graham Motion

Graham Motion, trainer: I don't know all the statistics, but I do know that it is black and white that racing on synthetics causes less equine fatalities and if that is what we are striving for then we should pay attention. There has been some improvement in dirt tracks, certainly Keeneland would seem to have improved their surface significantly with

the renovations including improved drainage. With the amount of turf racing that we now have we need to do a better job of protecting and maintaining our turf courses. Synthetics offer a great alternative to running on turf in extreme conditions while also protecting the turf.

Mike Mulvihill, president, insights and analytics, FOX Sports: I'm certainly not an expert on racing surfaces but I find the statistics showing a significantly lower breakdown rate on all-weather surfaces compelling and I think that in the long run, the American game has to move in the direction of synthetic surfaces.



Mike Mulvihill

Joe Orseno, trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association: The main problem with dirt surfaces is that the track superintendent needs to keep the surface even and have a good base. To accomplish this, the superintendent has to have the right materials on the track, work the surface daily, add the right amount of water, and be willing to listen to the exercise riders and trainers in the morning. Even the best racetrack surfaces in the country were not designed to support racing and training 12 months a year. With all-weather surfaces, I am finding that most horses get over the all-weather surfaces very well and seem to handle it. Horses are recovering better following all-weather races or breezes. This may not be true for all horses, but for the most part, I am finding that most horses like the surface and are staying sounder. It seems that the track superintendent has an easier time maintaining this surface, compared to the dirt surface (which is inconsistent most of the time).

John Ortiz, trainer: Dirt racing is essential to the game. It's a traditional and classic surface. It's a forgiving surface. Weather has a lot to do with the problems. The times we saw a lot of catastrophic injuries, you usually had a very rainy season. The track operators need to be aware of the weather and let the track maintenance people do their jobs. With the technology we have, we should be able to monitor the dirt and turf courses very well. If there's a way to add a synthetic track as a second or third surface that will be helpful because it gives you a backup plan in bad weather. But dirt should be the primary surface.



Joe Orseno



John Ortiz

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Dr. Mick Peterson, director, *University of Kentucky Racetrack Safety Program*: The primary difference between dirt and synthetic is uniformity of the surface. The biomechanics of synthetics are inferior to turf and dirt but the surface is more consistent. Aging and degradation of synthetic surfaces is also a concern. Variability in dirt surfaces is primarily due to differences in mechanical properties resulting from inconsistent moisture content. Improved moisture control and maintenance combined with the improved design of the base and profile can reduce the disparity in outcomes as demonstrated by the redesign of the dirt at Del Mar. Training and support of racetrack maintenance personnel, and the professionalization of the maintenance role are also needed. The question fails to address the additional challenge. Turf racing is increasing in popularity and importance to the overall sport. High-profile failures of turf surfaces indicate the need for improved turf surfaces. Having golf experts explain how to grow grass on a putting green is inadequate for 1,000-pound animals traveling 35 mph and has led to high-profile failures.



Mike Repole



Dr. Mick Peterson

Mike Repole, owner, commissioner *National Thoroughbred Alliance*: There's a lot more we can do with horse safety. Dirt racing is what people get excited about most. There should be all-weather options. I love what Gulfstream Park is doing with the all-weather option. The new Belmont Park will have two turf courses, a main track and a synthetic course. If tracks can put in three surfaces it will be helpful. I'd suggest putting in an all-weather training facility at the track and that can help with the safety of horses. In the past when tracks went from dirt to just synthetics that didn't work, but making synthetic an option, whether through training or racing, is brilliant. You can go from turf to synthetic if there's rain but if it's a very muddy track that doesn't look too safe you could also move the dirt races to synthetics. Synthetic tracks have a future here but going 100% synthetics is not the answer. It doesn't grow the sport.

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Tom Rooney

Tom Rooney, president and CEO, National Thoroughbred Racing Association: Although I'm not a scientist with expert knowledge on racing surfaces, I think that we should be open-minded to the safest possible options that are available to best protect our equine and human athletes. Whether that's a dirt track or an artificial surface, which statistics show may favor

safety, we should explore all options. We have all heard compelling evidence for the advantages of synthetic tracks and look forward to participating further in those discussions.

Tom Ryan, managing partner, SF Bloodstock and Racing: I do believe that significant progress can still be made on improving equine safety on dirt surfaces. Improvements should involve enhancing track maintenance, optimizing cushioning, and utilizing moisture monitoring technology. We need a more scientific approach to surface management. No two tracks are the same and, therefore, need individualized management. Equipment at most tracks is antiquated. We've been using the same equipment for decades, which only makes a track look even at best. Current-day tillage farmers use far superior technology and equipment. This is an area where racetracks and HISA need to work closely together. Historical track testing and data points need to be upgraded immediately. All-weather surfaces offer benefits in heavily rain-affected jurisdictions. I love it as a training surface and a substitute for negatively rain-affected turf and dirt racing. A safe option should always be available in those situations where the weather conditions may affect the safety of traditional surfaces.

John Sikura, owner and president, Hill 'n' Dale Farms: There has been a lot of talk about synthetic surfaces. As an industry, we cannot mandate racetracks to install these surfaces and I still believe a dirt surface to be safe to conduct racing. The addition of a synthetic training track would be a great alternative for inclement weather and perhaps lessen the everyday wear and tear on horses in training. I think there should be a traveling team that routinely inspects all racetracks and implements standards that must be adhered to in order to conduct live racing. A failure to address issues of track maintenance and surface compliance would revoke the ability to run until remedied.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

**Top: John Sikura
Bottom: Tom Ryan**

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING SURFACES

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Mike Smith, jockey: I believe that progress can be made in racing on dirt surfaces. Technology and resources are available for tracks to ensure that the dirt surface is maintained in a way that ensures consistency and the proper cushion. Additionally, racetracks should have experienced and qualified personnel and equipment to maintain the surfaces specific to that racetrack. As in the past, there are different materials that the tracks can mix with the dirt that will allow the horses to get over it safely with the proper bounce. Unfortunately, for various reasons, there are tracks that have very hard kickback, which hurts both the equine and human athletes. Based on my experience, when the kickback is hard, it is a very good indicator that the surface is also hard. It is essential the racetrack receives the appropriate amount of moisture and is being maintained properly. With regards to the all-weather surfaces, there are certain benefits of all-weather depending on the location of the track and the time of year and moisture content. However, I do not believe it is a solution for all racetracks. Additionally, there is not a lot of give. Jockeys can attest when there



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Mike Smith

is a spill on some synthetic surfaces, the jockeys do not slide compared to the way they do on dirt and turf and their bodies absorb the direct impact. During the time when certain tracks were attempting to have a synthetic surface, there were many more (jockey) injuries that were more significant. While I personally do not agree with some of the synthetic surfaces, if racetracks are going to use it, there must be further research to determine the impact and long-term effects on the health and welfare of the participants, and there must be more education to those who are going to be responsible for maintaining.

Nick Tammaro, track announcer at Sam Houston Race Park, handicapper: This topic feels so 2008. All kidding aside, the last thing that needs to be done is a hasty move to full-scale implementation of synthetic surfaces. I'm aware of the safety numbers and fatality rates. However, my personal thought is that there are people out there thinking there will be zero fatalities. I hate to say it, but that is simply NEVER going to happen. We need to utilize the work of the experts across the world to establish and maintain safe dirt tracks, which I still think are the best solution long-term for the game. The effect that wide-scale racing on synthetics will have on the breeding industry will be so significant over time that what we think is a short-term fix will end up being a long-term rupture. Additionally, it would behoove us to start acting as if we aren't the only country in the world running on dirt. Various countries in South America, the Middle East and (East Asia) all race on dirt and turf.



SAM HOUSTON RACE PARK

Nick Tammaro

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Najja Thompson, executive director, *New York Thoroughbred Breeders*: It's imperative we, as industry stakeholders and racing participants, do everything within our power to ensure the protection of our equine athletes on every surface on which they compete. That begins with a comprehensive study of all equine injuries including fatalities and their rate of occurrence for each racing surface. Additionally, we must investigate changing weather patterns with extreme wet or dry weather as it relates to track maintenance and if there is any causal relationship. I have full faith pending the results of those investigative studies that everyone in our industry, including racetrack operators and stakeholders, owners, breeders, and bettors, would be in favor of having our equine athletes compete on only the safest surfaces. One emerging area, which I believe will vastly improve the health and safety of our equine athletes, is the increased use of wearable monitoring technology. As important as the study on racing surfaces is, the same holds true for the active monitoring of our equine athletes daily to identify the likelihood of injuries before they occur.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Najja Thompson

Elliott Walden: CEO, president, and racing manager, *WinStar Farm*: I think progress can be made on dirt. I am not a fan of racing 100% on all-weather surfaces. If I were racing czar, I would implement three surfaces where possible, like Gulfstream Park has done and Belmont Park will have, and create a balance of racing that would lessen the number of races run on dirt while maintaining dirt racing at the highest level. Let's not forget we have made significant progress. We trained on all-weather at WinStar for 10 years, and it came with its own set of problems. Our experience is more soft tissue injuries that would take longer to heal. We have 400-500 individual horses come through our rehab/training center each year so the numbers are significant. I realize we need to continue to address the issue of horse safety, and I think progress can still be made even though it is unrealistic to think it will be zero fatalities.

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. **BH**



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Elliott Walden



INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

By Bob Ehalt

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Looking back on the past 12 months, the horse racing industry endured a year filled with a seemingly endless array of peaks and valleys.

There was euphoria through the heroics of horses such as Cody's Wish, Arcangelo, and Mage. Yet there also were unsettling challenges in the form of a spate of fatalities at Churchill Downs and Saratoga Race Course and declines in wagering, purses paid, and race dates.

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series continues today with a question on foal-crop size. Throughout this week, panelists will provide their thoughts on racing surfaces, racing calendar/field size, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, marketing, and wagering.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Shannon Arvin

TODAY'S QUESTION: *What are some things the industry could do, or your organization could do, to turn around the declining foal crop numbers? Or does it make sense for the sport to plan to be smaller in the years ahead and chart a path forward with those expectations?*

Shannon Arvin, president and CEO, Keeneland:

Let me start by saying that a reduction in the foal crop may not be entirely negative, as previous numbers indicated an overproduction, with many non-commercially-viable foals born annually. That said, we certainly want stabilized foal crops going forward. Two observations about what I feel is contributing to the declines follow. We've seen steep declines in the regional markets, where a lack of infrastructure deters people from being able to expand their programs outside of Kentucky. For growth, they need healthy local racing programs with sustainable purse structures, breeders' awards and stallion awards, and programs to develop racing fans. A number of important racing states failed to invest alternative revenues effectively into growing the sport and industry. For that reason, there needs to be a public push to educate legislators in regional areas about the importance of the horse industry to their localities. Also, the polarization of the sales market and stud fees continuing to rise will make it tough to grow the foal crop. More breeders are paring down their mare numbers and focusing on quality over quantity. Control of various sectors of the industry, such as breeding, racing, wagering, etc., has become very centralized, and a more evenly distributed ecosystem would be beneficial for the foal crop and ultimately, for the sport.



RICK SAMUELS

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Dr. Dionne Benson

Dr. Dionne Benson, chief veterinary officer, 1/ST Racing: Frankly, we do not have a foal crop decline—we have an owner decline. If there were more demand for foals, there would be an increase in breeding. The lack of demand is in my opinion due to, in part, a shift from most people who owned racehorses as a hobby versus

now more owners see them as a potential business. Therefore, if we are going to make this an attractive business for those individuals, we need to find ways to make it more affordable for the trainer and owner. Are there ways to use volume purchasing power to decrease hay, feed, and medication costs? Are there ways to improve costs for trainers for Workers' Compensation insurance? If we can decrease those costs, they can be passed along to owners who may see this as an opportunity to have an amazing hobby that also is affordable.

Louis Cella, president, Oaklawn Park: This is a huge issue and participants within our industry need to get together and have a candid discussion. Breeders,



Louis Cella

tracks, horsemen, everyone. The decline in foals is so alarming that many tracks will simply go out of business. And, yes, we are preparing for fewer foals. The horse shortage is very real.



Brad Cox

Brad Cox, trainer: Breeders in Lexington say having "B" and "C" level tracks are very important for the sport in order to create opportunities for horses. All of the horses in a crop will not compete at the top tracks and these tracks allow more horses to compete. That may not increase the foal crop but at least it can maintain the foal crop level.



Dennis Drazin

Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, Monmouth Park: In New Jersey, we have increased our foal crop (albeit we are down from 20 years ago) by adding breeder incentives. Our New Jersey-breds run for 25% more in a restricted race and 40% more in open company. Creative incentives for state-bred races can increase state-bred crops. I do remain concerned that our national foal crop size is decreasing and we will have to live with that reduction and plan for ways to address it. I think a breeder/farm owner think tank should be formed.

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Drew Fleming, *president and CEO, Breeders' Cup*

While there are many state-bred incentive programs available for breeders and owners, these vary greatly depending on location and available resources. The industry needs to keep investing in its product in order to provide opportunities for breeders to succeed and increase their operations. The breeding industry is the foundation of the Breeders' Cup program, which we have administered for 40 years. During this time, the Breeders' Cup has allocated purses and awards in excess of \$900 million to owners, foal nominators, and stallion nominators through the Breeders' Cup Challenge Series: Win and You're In, the Dirt Dozen Bonus Series, and the \$31 million Breeders' Cup World Championships. We recognize the many challenges breeders face, and we are committed to continuing to support them through the world-class program we have developed, which is overseen by our board and members, all key industry constituents.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Drew Fleming

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Jim Gagliano, *president and COO, The Jockey Club*: Tough question. It's an expensive sport for owners and that is why partnership and fractional ownership participation have increased in recent years, which has been very important to the sustainability of the sport. While contraction of the foal crop is difficult to reverse, there is an opportunity to foster growth in regional markets where a very significant portion of the reduction has occurred. As such, any efforts to help grow regional markets, including incentive programs designed to attract better stallions and mares, would help. The Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance was founded on the principle that everyone would give something to support the transition of horses from the racetrack, but as one of the principal supporters of the TAA, we are not seeing that transpire. Our industry spends a lot of money for aftercare, but it is not enough to care for the population of horses exiting the track every year. Thoroughbreds in a second career should not be looked upon by the industry as the wastage of the sport of horse racing, or as a failure of a breeding program. Thoroughbreds have value: they are Olympic athletes, therapeutic horsemanship partners, kids'



Jim Gagliano

hunter/jumper mounts, adult trail horses, and more. Any path we chart forward to improve the sport and breeding needs to include Thoroughbred aftercare and alternative careers for our horses.

Eric Hamelback, *CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association*: I don't believe my organization can do anything. We are not in charge and never have been. On the contrary, the same breed registry has been in charge of protecting the Thoroughbred breed since 1894. While the foal crop has seen its gains and losses in my professional career, it has seen a steady decline since 2010. Only one year, 2015, was there a half-of-a-percent increase in the foal crop, yet from 2010 to 2022 our foal crop dropped more than 30%. If we continue on our current path, there is no question the industry will constrict. Among other factors, the foaling crop has a direct correlation with the potential profit that one can realize from racing after breeding or purchasing horses commercially. When the profit margins are cut due to the excessive expenses now being laid on horsemen in the industry—and when new participants are discouraged from entering the industry because of draconian penalties and lack of due process, transparency, and accountability—there is no question our industry will contract. One thing we should keep at the forefront: It's not a horse shortage we have, it's an owner shortage.



Eric Hamelback

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, *consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management*: This is an interesting question with many layers. In life, opportunity is key. With a few stallions having such large books, it has limited the number of mares available to others. With costs escalating, we need to afford the owner/breeder a chance to create income and profit with his/her mares. In racing, we need to grant all owners purses worthy of their investment and costs. Due to gaming, several states have more enhanced purse structures than others. We need to create more equality here and share the wealth for all racing jurisdictions to be strong. They do this in other sports to make teams more competitive and create income. We don't need to make the sport smaller. We need to enhance the opportunity for more states to be successful. We have breeders' awards. Let's now strive to provide racing awards. Bret Jones had some thoughts on this to help our sport and his ideas truly need to be investigated and embraced.

Lisa Lazarus, *CEO, HISA*: We believe that the chances for the foal crop to go up can only be maximized if HISA ensures the safety and integrity of the sport. If HISA is able to increase confidence in the

safety and integrity of racing, and therefore in racing's future prosperity, we believe owners and breeders—and potential owners and breeders—will see increased value in investing in and being a part of Thoroughbred racing for years to come.



Lisa Lazarus



Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

Dan Metzger, *president, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association*: Perhaps the second-most important issue facing Thoroughbred racing is the decline in the foal crop. Several years ago TOBA convened a meeting of our member state breeders associations to discuss the foal crop. The primary reasons cited for the decline included negative economic conditions and a smaller owner base, especially in the regional markets. While the foal crop has dropped approximately 50% in the last two decades, several states, including Kentucky, Indiana, New York, and Pennsylvania, have fared better than the rest of the country, due in part to strong racing and breeders incentive programs and a healthy racing environment. Racetrack closures have also contributed to the drop in the foal crop. A number of these track closings have occurred in major metropolitan areas, negatively impacting our fan base, as well as current and potential owners. The sport must address the rapidly changing economic and societal changes and if the foal crop continues its decline, we must adjust accordingly, specifically with the racing calendar.



Dan Metzger

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Terry Meyocks

Terry Meyocks, CEO and president, Jockeys' Guild: The industry needs to focus on bringing out all the positives of our sport to mainstream media, including focusing on equine and human athletes. By sharing the stories of the horses, jockeys, backside, etc., you create an experience

that people will want to share and be a part of. This will attract much needed new individuals to our sport. The industry needs to do a better job of informing the public of not only the changes in the new safety measures, but also to provide evidence that these efforts are having real results. This will increase the interest in participating in racing. Obviously, more people attracted to the sport will create a greater demand for the foal crop, and breeders may be more inclined to meet the increase. There needs to be greater cooperation between the breeding and the racing industry. The racing industry, too, should consider for the next generation of breeding, whether it's for speed, synthetic surfaces, turf or distance dirt races. Furthermore, the breeding industry must be held to a standard to ensure that the foal crops are producing horses which are sound and durable to prevent injuries and foster longer racing careers. There are certain changes that have been inevitable and we must plan accordingly. Over the last decade, a number of racetracks have reduced race days and the number of races and are continuing to do so, while others have permanently closed. It is essential that the Thoroughbred industry, as a whole—including the breeding and racing industries—recognize the need to move forward in a responsible manner while providing the best product available.

Ron Moquett, trainer: Supply and demand. Unfortunately, I believe we are in the retraction phase now. The first thing we must do is make horse racing more attractive for people to be involved with. We've spent so long letting the perception be pushed that people in horse racing don't like horses or that you're all greedy if you're in the sport. It's a wonder to me that people who care what their friends and neighbors think about them are still in it. I find myself spending much more time defending misleading perceptions than I do promoting the sport. It's hard to march forward with any plans of progress when you're constantly on your heels in a defensive posture. Hire a spokesperson or group to educate and promote our sport. Provide transparency for the public and make it OK to be involved in the sport again, and the numbers of those wanting to be involved will go up.



Ron Moquett



Graham Motion

Graham Motion, trainer: There is going to be less horses racing and we need to adjust accordingly and do it better. Quality over quantity and I don't necessarily mean the quality of the horses competing, but the way that racing is managed.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Mike Mulvihill

Mike Mulvihill, president, insights and analytics, FOX Sports: Between declining foal crops and declining starts per horse, industry contraction seems inevitable. The sport will consolidate around the best and most premium meets, which means fans will be more likely to engage with the sport via TV coverage, which isn't necessarily a bad thing as the fan development model for all major sports is occasional live attendance and frequent media engagement.

Joe Orseno, trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horseman's Association: Part of the reason why we have declining foal crops is that the middle market of end users has shrunk. It is no longer economical to breed yearlings unless you can reasonably expect to sell for over \$50,000, and what incentives does a buyer have to campaign a horse at a track with low purses? Between training fees, vets, vanning, registration, jockey mount fees, and shoeing, it costs owners \$4,000-\$5,000 per month. So, unless a horse competes at the allowance or stakes level, it is nearly impossible to break even on a consistent basis. If we want to encourage owners to buy and campaign horses at the lower level, there needs to be better opportunities for them to earn more money.

Mike Repole, owner, commissioner National Thoroughbred Alliance: I think spending time planning on decline is a defeatist attitude. I think we should gather in one place, people from all ends of the industry, and have a round table where we have a real agenda with real issues and we have some tough conversations. Then all of a sudden you can make decisions. The only way this sport thrives is if everyone has a seat at the table and we trust a third party to make decisions based on the best interests of the sport. At the end of the day that might impact somebody negatively but if it's good for the growth of the sport then people have to accept it. Right now people want the sport fixed as long as it doesn't affect what they are doing. To me that's a selfish attitude. Why can't we have revenue sharing like the NFL? If you want to take 10% of my earnings as an owner and spread it around for the good of the game, I'm for it. Nobody is working together to grow the sport, which is stupidity. There isn't a business mind in this sport that impresses me. We need to grow the sport. The way to grow the sport is dealing with issues and fixing them. The level of frustration for almost everyone in the sport is at an all-time high. Once we make positive changes we can market the sports to fans, gamblers and owners. Let's grow the sport.



Mike Repole

(continued on page 21)



Joe Orseno

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Tom Rooney, president and CEO, National Thoroughbred Racing Association: It's critically important that we keep and attract new owners to our sport, whether it be in a syndicate or at an individual level. While we keep trying to do everything we can to bring in new people, it might be inevitable that the foal crops might settle into a number that's more in tune for where we are as a sport currently and where we are going in the future. However, we don't want to get to the point where there is a very small group of people that own all the horses that are competing at a couple elite tracks. It would be like having Major League Baseball without the minor leagues—how would you know who the best players are, what the upcoming talent looks like, while allowing everyone to participate?



Tom Rooney

Tom Ryan, managing partner, SF Bloodstock and Racing: I honestly feel there's an excellent supply-demand balance in the current marketplace. My sense is the numbers will stabilize with management. A supermajority of people now breed to sell as the industry has evolved over the last two decades. Our commercial market seems right at capacity, in my opinion. We need more focus on quality over quantity.



John Sikura

John Sikura, owner and president, Hill 'n' Dale Farms: Declining foal crops are strictly an economic expression of the fact that it's tough to succeed as a breeder. Stud fees are too high and costs have outpaced purses in real dollars. No one decreases production of any commodity with steady or increasing demand. This trend will continue unless the above issues are addressed. To date all factions of our industry are about short-term gain and the overall health of the industry is not a forefront issue. If you look at California we could be on the verge of losing an important state in our industry. We have not lifted a finger to be contributory to a solution or share lucrative subsidies in a way that helps everyone. The graded stakes committee continues to downgrade grade 1 races in the state; further exacerbating this exodus. No California will further reduce the foal crop.

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Tom Ryan



INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES FOAL CROP SIZE

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Nick Tammaro, track announcer at Sam Houston Race Park, handicapper: Well, I don't work at a farm, nor am I in the bloodstock business, so I can't do anything to create more foals. On the flip-side, we need less racing. We also need to simplify conditions that are used in racing offices that simply give horsemen far too many options. The declining foal crops will make it harder to simply have the requisite number of horses to conduct the same number of programs. We also need a drastic reduction in graded stakes. We have far too many, specifically grade 1s. The tail is wagging the dog in this situation and the real race has become seeing how quickly horses are whisked off to the breeding shed. This is not sustainable long-term. The game has contracted in the last 10 years and will likely do so on a larger scale in the next 10. We've lost, or could lose, racetracks in metro areas like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and Boston. These are huge population centers where it will be that much harder to develop racing fans without any on-track product. One thing that we can largely agree on, and horseplayers are the biggest contrarians around, is that nothing helps develop fans like the on-track experience.



SAM HOUSTON RACE PARK

Nick Tammaro



SKIP DICKSTEIN

Najja Thompson

Najja Thompson, executive director, New York Thoroughbred Breeders: Between the New York Thoroughbred Breeders and The New York State Thoroughbred Breeding & Development Fund we have worked together to make it as attractive as possible through program incentives, awards, and initiatives working alongside the racing stakeholders in New York including NYRA, NYTHA, and Finger Lakes Gaming and Racetrack to make the Empire State the most attractive place to bring your mare and foal a horse eligible to participate in our state-bred program. We have increased our breeder awards for New York-bred progeny sired by New York stallions and for those sired by horses outside of the state to historic rates. We have worked with NYRA to ensure New York-breds have an attractive year-round racing program. At Finger Lakes, we have cultivated an attractive purse schedule for New York-breds to compete and advance through their race conditions. Our state-bred program features an attractive stallion stakes series that features over \$2.3 million in purses, and we have secured purse parity for New York-breds on the NYRA circuit starting with 2-year-olds in 2026 that increases the value of New York-breds at the sales. Ultimately, we all must make it attractive with incentives and improving economic conditions for more individuals to breed horses which hopefully will lead to increasing the national foal crop.

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. **BH**

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BH SURVEY: INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDARS

By Bob Ehalt

X @BobEhalt

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series continues today with a question on racing surfaces. Throughout this week, panelists will provide their thoughts on foal crop size, racing calendar/field size, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, marketing, and wagering.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.

TODAY'S QUESTION: *With smaller foal crops and horses making fewer starts, what changes, if any, would make sense for the racing calendar?*

RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM/VERONICA R. BRANSON



Tony Allevato

Tony Allevato, president, NYRA Bets\chief revenue officer, New York Racing Association: You have to find the right balance of being able to present a consistent product to your fan base while not diluting the product you are delivering. Striking that balance is going to be a challenge so I think you are going to see tracks in different markets aligning to create a circuit to take advantage of the talent that is out there and make sure we are not spreading horses out running in the same race on the same day at three different tracks.

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COADY PHOTOGRAPHY/MARIA MCCLELLAN

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

(continued from page 23)

Shannon Arvin, *president and CEO, Keeneland:* Racing calendars should be coordinated in a way that captures and holds the attention of fans. The industry needs regional markets not only to buy our horses but to develop new fans, new future trainers and vets. A potential solution is to take a serious look at how many races we run on an average race day. Most race cards are too long for fans to attend and handicap, and labor intensive for trainers and their stable crews. Baseball is a great example of a sport reimagined—reducing game times to much success this season. Royal Ascot runs seven races a day, and creates a great experience for patrons and participants. By running fewer races on certain days, and perhaps shortening the time between races, we can offer a better product for most sectors of customers. We should also consider promotion of wagering and creation of more fan-friendly wagers around events in addition to the Kentucky Derby (G1). To further enhance integrity and confidence among our customers, this conversation also should address how we can be more transparent about our pricing models. Ultimately there are only two real revenue sources: gambling dollars and new ownership dollars. The gambling dollar creates consistency and therefore sustainability, and we need to grow this through creatively engaging handicappers and the public to generate more interest in our great sport.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Shannon Arvin

Dr. Dionne Benson, *chief veterinary office, 1/ST Racing:* Given where we are at as an industry, the rightsizing of race days is important. When there are multiple racetracks running within a few hours' drive of one another at the same time, it stretches the horse population too thin which could impact safety. Personally, I would like to see a mandatory break for horses each year. I do not believe this requires a break from racing everywhere. Instead, I would require every horse to take an eight-week break from racing and high speed works every 52-week period. For some horses this may be in December to January, for others it would be from June to July. This would allow horses to have some downtime where they are lightly worked or turned out. Research out of Australia has shown that breaks in heavy training annually can reduce musculoskeletal injuries. As a vet, the health and safety of horses is the ultimate measure of our industry's success and I believe we need to do whatever we can do to continue to elevate our standards, adjust our practices, and put horses first.

Louis Cella, *president, Oaklawn Park:* There is just too much racing. All year you can catch a race somewhere. There is no circuit, though we are trying to build one in our region. There is no start and end date to the calendar. I do believe as tracks close, this issue will work itself out to some degree.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Dr. Dionne Benson



COURTESY OAKLAWN PARK

Louis Cella

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Dennis Cornick, part owner of *Flightline through West Point Thoroughbreds*: With the exception of the boutique meets, there should be fewer race days across the board. Focus on the quality of racing vs. the quantity. Stats have shown that people will come, and the handle will thrive on weekends and holidays when large fields are assembled with quality horses. Make those destination weekends.

Brad Cox, trainer: As I came up as groom and hot walker, people always talked about giving horses a break in the winter. Now the racing calendar is always going. Once the Breeders' Cup is over you turn your attention to the Kentucky Derby (G1) and Kentucky Oaks (G1). Then it's the Preakness Stakes (G1) and Belmont Stakes (G1). Saratoga is important and then there's the Breeders' Cup again. It's a long, demanding year and while it would be good to shorten it, but I'm not sure what can be done about it.

Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, *Monmouth Park*: New Jersey has reduced its calendar over the years to address the problem but nationally, or at least regionally, we need to cooperate more to avoid putting our races and stakes on the same day and planning similar race schedules. Mike Musto, executive director of the New Jersey Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, has advocated for a plan that offers purses of \$1 million a day, every day, and to have all the tracks in our region to agree not to run on top of each other and to reduce days overall. For example, we would end up sharing all our horse colonies by permitting shipping to run and there would be high purses. But each track would agree to cut days and cooperate in a logical circuit. We should learn a little from the Covid experience. Huge days with multiple stakes and high purses in every category would benefit everyone but I doubt if everyone would cooperate on Mike's plan. Nevertheless, it may be what we all need to save an industry from a smaller foal crop.



COURTESY DENNIS CORNICK



ANNE M. EBERHARDT



BILL DENVER/EQUUS-PHOTO

Top: Dennis Cornick
Middle: Brad Cox
Bottom: Dennis Drazin

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Drew Fleming, *president and CEO, Breeders' Cup*: Rather than discussing ad hoc changes, American racing would benefit from considering a pattern committee model. For example, the European Pattern Committee has led the way on an international level by creating a balanced, high-quality annual program. Ensuring a series of races are planned over ideal distances and times of year, the committee develops a racing schedule designed to test the best horses of all ages. This comprehensive program of races, thoughtfully scheduled throughout the season, is designed to make sure the best horses cannot avoid meeting each other on every occasion. It is important for American racing to continue to explore best practices from other jurisdictions as we endeavor to address challenges and opportunities to grow our sport.

Jim Gagliano, *president and COO, The Jockey Club*: Tracks need to work together to stop overlapping races, and keep big races at dates/times that don't compete with each other. Also, I'd like to see even more investment into purses for stakes races for 4-year-olds and up.



JOCKEY CLUB PHOTO

Jim Gagliano



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Drew Fleming

Eric Hamelback, *CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association*: I would start by not running innocent, good people out of the industry. We need common-sense regulations for horsemen. We must focus on equine health and welfare, along with putting horsemanship first. What doesn't make sense is the unfunded mandate that jeopardizes smaller tracks with the crushing costs from a duplicative bureaucracy. Those who believe the collateral damage of smaller tracks closing will help the field sizes of the bigger tracks, are not seeing the entire picture. Losing markets does not help horse racing. We need a reversal of the trend rather than just accept fewer horses making fewer starts. Especially in those regions with record purse levels, we must find creative ways to incentivize ownership in the industry, making it more palatable for owners to pay training bills, which are significant. Perhaps it's time for the industry to consider a system of sorts that gives owners and trainers a chance to run against similar competition, alongside our claiming races. I strongly believe that slashing dates and the number of races is not the answer, but we cannot just sit by and think everything will just work itself out. We should be advocating for fixing our issues, and not just being reactive to them.



DEBIS BLAKE/NATIONAL HBPA

Eric Hamelback

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Joe Harper

Joe Harper, *president and CEO, Del Mar*: Racing is consolidating, but less can be more if we offer customers a stronger product to wager on. There's a lot of talk about emulating Hong Kong and Japan. And while they both have advantages that racing in the United States doesn't, we can learn from their quality over quantity approach.

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, *consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management*: I believe we need to have year-round racing to keep the fans interested and involved. Horses do need to run and compete. They have their own built-in time when a bit of R&R is needed. As for the racing calendar, it would be helpful to have the stakes schedules of various tracks reviewed and coordinated. Let there be many opportunities for handicap horses spread out. Not two or three similar races run within a short time of each other. Couple other thoughts to coordinate with all of this: We need to find a way to bring a Tex Sutton-type service back for our horses. We are all about the horse and doing the right thing, and this would truly benefit the horses and allow them to travel for stakes races and compete much more freely

than what we have now. We need to work together by respecting the accomplishments and achievements of different professionals in our sport. For example, we have the trainer insurer rule. Then let's apply it. If a trainer abuses the rules, then that trainer is the individual who is monitored and obliged to complete and submit all the paperwork. Let's honor the integrity and professionalism of those who do it right! This is so important.

Lisa Lazarus, *CEO, HISA*: The structure of the racing calendar falls outside of HISA's remit, but we are encouraged by any conversations being had in the industry that focus on driving meaningful change in the best interest of equine safety.

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COURTESY LISA LAZARUS



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Top: Lisa Lazarus
Bottom: Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

(continued from page 27)

Dan Metzger, president, *Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association*: The simplistic answer is to run fewer races at all levels so that the number of horses in inventory can support the field size required to provide an appealing racing product. Over the last 10 years the average field size has been below eight horses a race with only small variations from year to year. The one exception was in 2020, when the average field size increased by 0.41 over 2019. The pandemic forced the industry to conduct more than 9,000 fewer races that year. When racing reopened fully in 2021, nearly 7,000 more races were run than in 2020 and the average field size decreased by 0.53. A sweeping reduction in races imposed on the industry is not the correct answer, but the industry needs to better balance the number of races with its horse inventory. Significant increases in the foal crop and starts per runner do not appear to be on the horizon, so a collaborative redevelopment by stakeholders of the racing calendar at a state and regional level is warranted.



Terry Meyocks



Dan Metzger

Terry Meyocks, president and CEO, *Jockeys' Guild*: With the decrease in the foal crops and the availability of horses, the industry must have open and frank discussions to determine what is working in order to ensure the racetrack is providing the best product possible. All aspects of the Thoroughbred industry must work together for the future of racing and to continue to promote our great sport. We must determine the most prudent ways to help racetracks remain viable, provide the best and safest product, and increase purses. Additionally, we have a responsibility to protect our product and be aware of the changes with casinos and sport wagering, including the impact and influence on the racing product. Racetracks might consider racing circuits in certain regions of the country to prevent overlapping dates because of the decreasing horse population and the trend toward horses making fewer starts. As a whole, the racing industry should strongly support each racetrack to have more trainers on each backside. These efforts would likely improve the product and field size, which in turn may encourage fans and handicappers to wager more and to provide a better overall experience.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Ron Moquett, trainer: I would hope that at some point we start to focus on and promote racing horses past the age of 3. So much of our sport is centered around getting to the Kentucky Derby that we lose sight of what is best for the breed and sport. Have more prestigious and lucrative races for older horses that would entice owners/trainers to not let getting to the Derby be the only thing that matters with our best runners. The Derby and all the races that lead to it are important but so was Cigar's march to immortality. With the losses of tracks and their feature races such as the Massachusetts Handicap and Hollywood Gold Cup—along with the Pimlico Special Stakes (G3) being offered with a purse less than most state-bred stakes in Arkansas and New York—it seems to make the racing calendar after May much less interesting for older horses with fan familiarity to be involved.

Maggi Moss, owner: Long ago, it seemed like the industry was breeding a sounder horse. Horses are retiring early to become stallions, usually due to an injury. The amounts of monies being generated both at sales and with breeding is astronomical. Ironically, the middle market both at sales and at the racetracks has almost disappeared. This, along with a dwindling foal crop, and the antiquated system of races written, has created a very real shortage of horses, both for owners and at the tracks. The claiming game has radically changed, making it almost impossible to claim a horse. So, if owners or participants have a firm business plan without the desire to lose a great deal of money, and they can't buy them or claim them, owners dwindle and this sport simply goes back to the sport of kings, with fewer owners and sadly, fewer trainers or participants in racing. Hence, the extremely small fields, and tracks struggling to fill races. Breeding horses strictly for speed, and sales where the fastest a horse works increases their value, obviously leads to fewer and fewer horses able to run, or even make it to a track. These dynamics are about money, winning the graded



COADY PHOTOGRAPHY



HODGES PHOTOGRAPHY

Top: Ron Moquett
Bottom: Maggi Moss

stakes, not about the survival of smaller tracks or the smaller owners and trainers and horses making fewer starts every year. Breeding sounder horses, stopping artificial fixes in lieu of raising a natural product is up to the breeders. More regulations or supervision over the sales to stop practices that are not ideal is happening but not soon enough.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Graham Motion

Graham Motion, trainer: I think the situation in California is of particular concern. They don't have access to the horse population that we have on the East Coast. On the East Coast better scheduling would help so that the same racetracks aren't competing for the same horses.

Mike Mulvihill, president, insight and analytics, FOX Sports: Football is king in American sports and that's not likely to change anytime soon. Every sport that can adjust its calendar to minimize football competition should seriously consider doing so. It's challenging for horse racing to have its season-ending championships in the heart of football season. It's also clear that two of the most iconic meets in the American game—Saratoga Race Course and Del Mar—have prime positions just prior to the start of football season. One admittedly radical idea would be to change the racing calendar to start with Labor Day weekend and end with the Breeders' Cup in late summer. While the



Mike Mulvihill

transitional years would be disruptive, ultimately a change in the universal birthday and in the breeding calendar would result in more mature 3-year-olds competing in the Triple Crown and a more advantageous calendar that would culminate in an August Breeders' Cup at one of the jewel venues of the sport.

Joe Orseno, trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association: Most tracks are under state mandates as to how many race dates they need to annually offer. It would be up to track management to get creative to make the most of those dates.

John Ortiz, trainer: It's important for the racing secretaries to know the horses at their track and create the proper condition book for them. You want nine- or 10-horse fields, not five or six. You want spots where your horses can compete effectively. It's hard to create field size when you have so many tracks in the same area who are a van ride away, but creating the races for horses on your grounds can help with that.

Mike Repole, owner, commissioner National Thoroughbred Alliance: A big help would be increasing the foal crop so we have more horses. We need to get more people involved in racing in all areas and this is where revenue sharing can help people at smaller tracks. I have 10-12 trainers working for me at all different types of tracks and by supporting these young trainers we can bring more people into the game and have better circuits.



Joe Orseno



John Ortiz



Mike Repole

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

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Tom Rooney, president and CEO, National Thoroughbred Racing Association: While there is a lot of coordination of race conditions and post times happening already, there can always be improvement. Our goal as an industry should be to maximize the eyes on each race and therefore increase the betting potential. Similarly, condition books should be better coordinated so that horses in regional markets can have more race options. These minor adjustments would help not only to increase handle, but to increase viewership of the sport overall.



Tom Rooney

John Sikura, owner and president, Hill 'n' Dale Farms: I don't have an opinion on the racing schedule. For the past 25-plus years horses have trended to participate in year-round racing. I grew up in an era when horses got time off and racetracks took a break in their schedule. With the advent of simulcasting, I don't see any change or downtime in racing.

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Tom Ryan

Tom Ryan, managing partner, SF Bloodstock and Racing: I believe the key is a blockbuster Triple Crown series. The Kentucky Derby purse must be \$10 million and paid down to 10th place. Nobody skips the Derby with \$10 million on the table. We need the best horses to show up every time. Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes need to be \$5 million each. There should be three weeks between races. Add a bonus system for horses accumulating the most points across the three-race series. The spacing is equally vital to the success of the Preakness and Belmont stakes weekend schedules. Horses across the stakes calendar can't bounce from Keeneland to the Derby to Baltimore and New York without better spacing.



John Sikura

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES RACING CALENDAR

(continued from page 31)

Najja Thompson, executive director, New York Thoroughbred Breeders: The importance of year-round racing is essential. Not only for the sustainability of our sport long-term, as a viable gambling option throughout the year, but also for the livelihood of all participants. Ultimately, what any future calendar looks like will depend on the horse population in each respective jurisdiction and circuit. We must consider smaller owners and trainers who are able to make most of their income during the seasons (aside from the marquee spring through summer months) if not, that could lead to a greater decline of our foal crop than anyone could anticipate. There needs to be more collaboration and partnership between racing jurisdictions, state breeder organizations, sales companies, and gamblers on what we can do to increase the demand and keep racing competitive with attractive field size, which in turn will increase the demand. At the same time, I also think it's important for our self-governing organizations such as the American Graded Stakes Committee to remain objective in their review of races. If the argument is made to decrease the number of graded stakes nationally, let's ensure it is at an equitable distribution and not one region or area that is heavily impacted over others.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Najja Thompson



JETTA VAUGHNS

Elliott Walden

Elliott Walden, CEO, president, and racing manager, WinStar Farm: I think we need to work together to make a more cohesive calendar. I am not a racetrack executive, so this might be an unpopular idea, but I do not understand why Laurel Park needs to run against Parx Racing, Monmouth Park, and Delaware Park all in the summer? Isn't there a way whereby each track makes their day a big day of the week and the focus of the eastern seaboard would be on Parx on Monday and Thursday, Laurel on Tuesday and Wednesday, Monmouth on Friday and Sunday, and Delaware on Saturday? This is an arbitrary schedule, and there might be a better solution. But I see a way where these tracks work together and jockeys would travel, horses would travel, and we reduce the number of races to increase field size.

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. **BH**

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BH SURVEY: INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

By Bob Ehalt

X @BobEhalt

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series continues today with a question on HISA. Throughout this week, panelists will provide their thoughts on racing surfaces, foal crop size, the racing



calendar, marketing, and wagering.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.

TODAY'S QUESTION: *What has the Horseracing Integrity & Safety Authority meant for the industry? What has it done well and what could it do better going forward?*

Tony Allevato, president, NYRA Bets/chief revenue officer, New York Racing Association: NYRA has been strongly supportive of HISA since the initial piece of legislation was introduced almost 10 years ago. For the first time the sport now has a unified set of national safety and integrity standards to replace an outdated system that relied on patchwork regulation. There's going to be some growing pains and I really believe people need to be patient and give HISA a chance to find its footing. I think Lisa Lazarus addressed this directly at the (University of Arizona Global Symposium on Racing), basically saying "We're still finding our way." It's going to take time. Like everything else in horse racing, there is no silver bullet that can cure all ills. You can't flip a switch and every problem will go away. That's how it is with HISA. If we give it time and work to get everyone rowing in the same direction, then HISA will be successful.



COGLIANESE PHOTOS

Tony Allevato

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

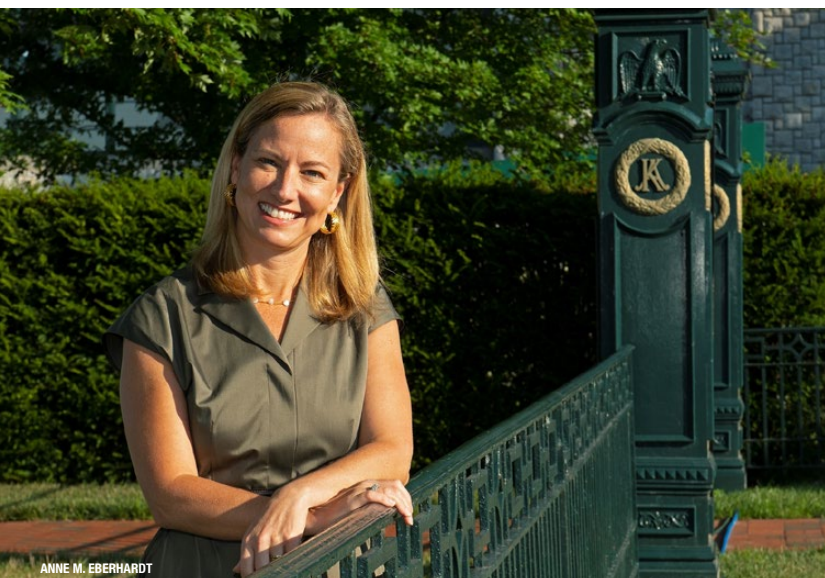
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Shannon Arvin: *president and CEO, Keeneland:* Keeneland has fully supported HISA from its inception as a landmark step toward building a better, safer sport that will strengthen public confidence in racing. As HISA has become reality, its role in providing consistent rules governing medication and racetrack safety across all jurisdictions has become even more critical. The challenges racing has faced, especially this past year, demonstrate that the industry needs HISA more than ever to codify the culture of safety and integrity that will protect and modernize racing for our fans, participants, and, most importantly, our horses. HISA is providing valuable leadership for our industry in exploring the use of developing technology to advance safety and integrity efforts. Among the most exciting initiatives are HISA's collaborations with Amazon Web Services and Palantir to apply artificial intelligence to identify horses at risk for injury before they race. HISA's path forward will be an evolution. Implementing uniform measures to improve the sport is an enormous task. HISA is doing an admirable job in undertaking its critical work and has shown the ability to revisit and alter some measures post-implementation if they prove not to be successful or appropriate, and I have confidence they will continue

to involve industry stakeholders in decisions. Lisa Lazarus is willing to speak with and sincerely listen to any industry stakeholder who has something to say about HISA, and what is best for the sport and the horse. Racing must unite to demonstrate its commitment to act in the best interest of the horse and use every tool and technology available to protect the safety of our equine athletes. Our future depends on this commitment.

Dr. Dionne Benson, *chief veterinary officer, 1S/T Racing:* HISA has provided a mechanism for the industry to implement best practices and the highest-level medication rules. The anti-doping and medication rules signify the first time in United States racing where most Thoroughbred racing states are consistently regulated with implementation of those regulations occurring simultaneously. It is crucial that these rules be implemented equally for them to have meaningful impact. At 1/ST, we are committed to the principles of integrity, transparency, and accountability for both horse and rider. We are encouraged by HISA's mission and hope that it continues to enforce regulations, improve transparency, and develop new requirements, such as the implementation of veterinary-monitored training at all regulated facilities, to carry the momentum forward as we work industry-wide to create a sustainable future for our sport.

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(L-R): Shannon Arvin; Dr. Dionne Benson

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Louis A. Cella

there are lawsuits, and who knows what the outcomes will be. But for Oaklawn Park, if HISA were thrown out today, we would not change a single thing, as we had previously implemented most of the HISA rules anyway. We would maintain every rule, every penalty, and every procedure HISA has created.

Louis Cella, president, Oaklawn Park: It is a work in progress, but it should be a net positive for the industry. The same rules, the same penalties, the same procedures can only help us. Finally, uniformity. Typical of our industry, it is very difficult to get everyone in the same room. HISA did that. Yes,



Dennis Cornick

much needed mission statement and something that will be beneficial to the industry in the long-term. No individual should question the intent, need, and mission. What they have done well to date is to lay a foundation to hopefully reach their desired goals. Unfortunately this has been overshadowed by what I feel was poor planning, and a group that moved way too quickly out of the gate without stepping back and understanding the true consequences of decisions that were not well thought out. Communication was not a strong point, and the consistency objective seemed to take a back seat. Lessons learned will

Dennis Cornick, part owner of Flightline through West Point Thoroughbreds: HISA was originally created to implement, for the first time, a national set of integrity and safety rules that are to be applied consistently throughout the industry. This was their obviously

tell you that anytime an organization is embarking on a road that has never been traveled before, the question of unintended consequences of any and all actions is a primary consideration in its planning and implementation. No embryonic organization can take one step forward and two steps back and maintain credibility. Rebuilding this credibility should be a short-term focus, and run in parallel to any policy changes and enforcement. They did not at all consider the negative impact on the brand of the industry while trying to do the right thing. If they did, someone made some serious mistakes in judgement along the way.

Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, Monmouth Park: HISA has the potential to ultimately have the entire industry bound by a national regulatory process which previously operated state by state with no consistent uniformity. By expanding HISA to include safety, uniformity as well as drug and testing national guidelines, the racing industry has the ability to move the sport forward and restore the public faith in the legitimacy of the sport and the appearance of a level playing field designed to catch the cheaters. Unfortunately the biggest failures are the lack of funding, which is costing horsemen and racetracks significant obligations to pay the cost of the HISA /HIWU budgets. When Congress acted in December 2022 to pass amendments intended to cure constitutional concerns expressed by the Fifth Circuit, the amendments were attached to a trillion-dollar omnibus bill with no funding for HISA. In addition, several lawsuits challenging HISA's constitutionality and attacking HISA have driven up the costs by millions of dollars in legal fees. Lastly I remain concerned that ultimately Lasix will be banned completely, instead of just stakes horses and 2-year-olds, and field size as well as the health of our horses will be affected.



Dennis Drazin

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Drew Fleming, president and CEO, Breeders' Cup: By establishing rules and regulations across all states that are in line with international standards, implementing swift adjudication protocols, and launching a robust anti-doping and medication control program, HISA has established much-needed uniformity while providing the kind of fair and transparent oversight our sport desperately requires. Although Thoroughbred racing has a long and storied past, we know it will only have a bright future if we make safety and integrity our top priorities. HISA's partnership with Palantir Technologies to create a data-enabled tool to assist industry stakeholders in identifying horses at risk for injury before they race is revolutionary and a key component of ongoing efforts to improve equine safety. We believe analyzing all types of data will give us a better understanding of root causation, which will enable us to further mitigate risk. Lisa Lazarus has also done a phenomenal job of seeking out meaningful input from a cross-section of constituents. Continuing to build upon the foundation that has been established, with safety and integrity as the cornerstones, will be crucial going forward.



Drew Fleming



Jim Gagliano

Jim Gagliano, president and COO, The Jockey Club: At long last, HISA has provided horse racing with national, uniform rules and protocols that are putting our sport on par with other national sports and with international racing jurisdictions. HISA has collaborated well with the industry, examples of which include its excellent websites and apps, regular townhall meetings, its horsemen advisory committee, ombudsman, and now the provision of pro bono legal services. Prior to HISA, what racing commission ever took on outreach like this? HISA keeps the public up-to-date with its press releases and newsletters, including sharing its accomplishments after one year and sharing its progress during 2023 and its goals going forward in the December newsletter. As to what can HISA do better? It needs to continually prove to all stakeholders that it is effective, efficient, and as transparent as possible.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Eric Hamelback, CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association: As you know, we believe that HISA is an unconstitutional law and as such any action taken with respect to its provisions is not within the boundaries of the law. Until the law is proven to be constitutional, there will be pushback and uncertainty. To date the unnecessary sweeping changes, along with HISA's non-transparency, has meant only confusion and disruptions in the lives of horsemen and women in horse racing. HISA has brought about a universal recognition for the goal of uniformity across state racing jurisdictions—a mission pushed by the National HBPA for well over a decade. However, uniformity of bad rules does no one good. HISA has also shown racing participants that a blatant power grab by the elite members of the industry was possible. Now those participants know that they must be vigilant and work for the betterment of the industry by stopping

HISA in its current form. HISA failed to consider the strong positive efforts already made within the industry and saw fit to incorrectly proclaim there was a need to start from "a blank sheet of paper". If HISA would have utilized existing structures, relied upon tested scientific evidence, and taken advice from horsemen, I believe much of the chaos could have been avoided. And, yes, we do have a plan to make racing better and safer than under HISA: It's the Racehorse Health & Safety Act.

Joe Harper, president and CEO, Del Mar: We've seen first-hand at Del Mar and in California the positive impact enhanced reforms and oversight can have on equine safety. For HISA, implementing these same reforms throughout the country has been a heavy lift, and obviously there have been some growing pains. Lisa Lazarus and her team have performed very well under some difficult circumstances. Based on the safety results in California over the last few years, I'm optimistic that a similar outcome can be achieved across the country under HISA.

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DENIS BLAKE/NATIONAL HBPA



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

(L-R): Eric Hamelback; Joe Harper



INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management: Originally, HISA was presented to establish uniform medication rules for our industry. State to state, we were to have consistency. What it has done well is working to establish uniform medication rules and regulations. What it can do better is working with industry professionals to iron out requirements and costs of the program not initially detailed. Examples: confusion about the rules, the excessive paperwork required by trainers, vets, and staffs were not specifically outlined; nor were the discussions about penalties for allowable medications. Owners have been given more vet expenses for pre-work exams, etc. Testing levels are in question especially about withdrawal times for allowable and legal medications. Testing labs need to be uniform in levels and their presenting of results. Due process of an individual's rights is important to prevent horror stories and peoples' lives and careers being jeopardized. THIS needs to be corrected. Suddenly, unbeknownst to many, HISA's voice began to encompass the entire sport, but knowledge that professionals have in specific fields needs to be recognized again and appreciated. We need to let the individual states have a voice, trainers train, vets practice, and the gamblers know we are working for their protection and consistency. To strengthen our entire sport, communication amongst a confederation of states is essential. We need to unite all the individual businesses involved in racing: owners, trainers, veterinarians, racing jurisdictions, etc., in our sport under one coalition. Working together is key!

Lisa Lazarus, CEO, HISA: Implementing uniform safety and anti-doping rules for Thoroughbred racing across the country—for the first time in the sport's history—has been a game changer, and we're optimistic about what's possible for the future of safety and integrity in racing if the industry continues to work together. That said, we hold ourselves to a high standard and certainly believe there are things we can and will do better going forward. In 2024 we



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

are focused on: 1) continuing to collaborate with all industry participants, including racetracks, horsemen, breeders, veterinarians, and sales companies; 2) applying state-of-the-art technology to HISA's vast and unique set of data to help solve some of the industry's most pressing problems; 3) using user-friendly technology to ease administrative burdens on veterinarians and other racing stakeholders; 4) exploring additional funding mechanisms—both governmental and private—to reduce the financial burden of regulation on the industry; and, 5) ongoing education for horsemen, stewards, and racetrack personnel to ensure everyone understands HISA's rules. I hope racing participants will agree that one thing we've done well so far is listen. When something in our rules isn't working, we make a change. We've actively solicited industry feedback and have adjusted course several times to ensure we're doing what's in the best interest of equine athletes and treating all racing participants fairly. We will continue to take a collaborative approach in 2024 and beyond, and we encourage anyone with questions or concerns to reach out to us anytime.

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COURTESY LISA LAZARUS

Lisa Lazarus

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Ed Martin, *president, Association of Racing Commissioners International*: HISA has the potential to be a major positive influence, but the jury is out as a quiet skepticism seems to grow. Anti-doping and fatality results so far track the system it replaced, despite new programs and expanded authority. In many ways the previous state-centered system was solid, although nobody argued that improvements were not needed to achieve common lab testing, uniform rules, and multi-jurisdictional investigations. It was rare for a commission to lose a drug case and the chain of custody systems all held up in court. HISA brought total uniformity to the rules, which is good. The expected consistency in testing is a work in progress as revealed by questions from the metformin cases. With all the Thoroughbred testing labs taking direction from one client, we should be there by now. But they're working on it. HISA appears to be good at collecting data. How that connects to policies to safeguard our horses remains to be seen. They are working on that too. Initial missteps assuming people guilty until proven innocent hurt them immensely as has a gestapo approach to barn searches and provisional suspensions later dropped after someone has lost weeks and perhaps months of income. It's un-American and not how to treat people. Nobody seems to have been fired for that doozy. HISA needs total transparency to gain public confidence. Public meetings and records access can allay fears of unequal treatment. Working with everyone, including one's detractors, builds respect. The time for that is way overdue.

Dan Metzger, *president, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association*: While the future of HISA is challenged in the federal court system, we must acknowledge that at present, it is the law of the land. With that in mind, TOBA, along with the Kentucky Thoroughbred Association, Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, and the Thoroughbred Owners of California, formed a coalition two years ago to address



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM PHOTOS



MARK MAHAN PHOTO

Top: Ed Martin
Bottom: Dan Metzger

the rules and regulations proposed by HISA. The issues that HISA is addressing are very complex and difficult. The system of state-by-state regulation was obviously not working and a national approach was the best and only option remaining to address our sport's failings. HISA was established to set a level playing field for all industry stakeholders, bring uniformity across all racing jurisdictions, and improve drug testing. There have been stumbles out of gate by HISA, and fortunately they are addressing some of these issues, but not all. HISA's leading role in addressing racetrack safety is critical to protect our equine and human athletes and we commend them for this important work. Areas of improvement would include harmonization of drug testing standards at HISA-accredited labs, as this directly relates to integrity and fairness to all participants.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Terry Meyocks, *president and CEO, Jockeys' Guild*: HISA brings national oversight to create uniform regulations and testing, which the industry was lacking. Our industry does not have a history of working well together for the betterment of the sport, thereby creating the need and opening the door for federal oversight. The method in which HISA was established and the rush to adopt and enforce the rules, coupled with lack of communication with the majority of interested parties, created many issues. In the beginning, HISA was overwhelmed and under-staffed. However, the Guild and HISA have now established a working relationship and are addressing many areas impacting the jockeys. The Guild has, and continues to be, adamantly opposed to the rule pertaining to the use of the riding crop and the fines and penalties that are assessed. The Guild believes there are more important, pressing matters than the riding crop. The Guild and HISA are working together to create mental health and wellness programs for jockeys, and hopefully eventually the rest of the industry. Uniform concussion



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Terry Meyocks

protocols and a national medical database for jockeys have been established, as the Guild had been advocating to establish for over a decade. Through HISA, racetracks will be required to maintain certain standards pertaining to medical staff and emergency response protocols. HISA must continue to have direct dialogue and be receptive to the input provided by not only jockeys but with all respected industry parties in order to develop uniform rules that are fair, assure the wellbeing of our equine and human athletes, and protect the overall integrity of our industry.

Ron Moquett, *trainer*: Regardless of how it got here, it is here. HISA has attempted to provide some things all horsemen have wanted for years such as uniform rules and penalties. In the last year they have included horsemen in advisory positions, and I am hopeful that horsemen continue to have input on the issues that are so important to the industry and our livelihood. I believe the impact of the advisory group has been huge and will be seen more and more in the future. Remember, horse racing will not be saved by regulators alone. The industry has been carried throughout its existence by common sense horsemen who have a passion for the animal and sport.



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Ron Moquett

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Maggi Moss, owner: Any change in life and laws that affects us all is supposed to be turbulent. None of us like change, for it creates fear and unknowns. With that said, I think it is easy to forget how many different regulations we had and the disparity and dysfunction that created. We forget that drug infractions lingered on forever, some cases lasting five to six years with no resolution. We forget past discovery of dangerous designer drugs that harm horses, and even killed them. The past patchwork of regulations had inequalities of contaminants and nonsensical punishments and strict liability of "trainer responsibility." We forget the outrage over blatant cheating with the (Jorge) Navarro and (Jason) Servis cases and how many owners and trainers lost enormous purses and wins to obvious cheaters. Perhaps, we also forget how many horses died horrific deaths. We also forget everybody was calling for change but inaction continued, for what seemed forever. HISA took over an enormous task that required uncomfortable change, all while having to fight a divided industry with lawsuits. HISA was brought forth due to inaction in the industry and a stagnant and unworkable attitude of a status quo that

was not working.

HISA has created a uniformity and known set of rules that applies to everyone, and continues to listen and change unworkable regulations. HISA had a set of congressional rules put in their lap, and is answering the industry's needs to make change to make them workable. They are attempting to create a fair playing field which is imperative moving forward, along with a much needed protection of the horses and jockeys.

Graham Motion, trainer: This is something that I have felt the industry has been lacking for a long time, some kind of national standard/oversight and there have certainly been growing pains. Some policies seem to have been put together hastily, perhaps under time constraints. I am disappointed that some trainers have been put through complicated situations that could have been avoided. As a trainer who serves on the committee I can say that when we bring up our concerns/ suggestions, most of the time we are listened to. Over time the problems may dissipate but they will never go away. This is complicated and we are dealing with animals in a far from perfect environment. I believe there are steps that can and should be taken in order to protect horsemen and women more. At the same time I am grateful for what is being done toward the safety and well-being of the horses and jockeys which was well overdue. To the knockers and naysayers, for the 30-plus years that I have been training, very little has been done to improve the integrity of our sport and that is how we got here. If you still don't believe we need it, just watch what has been going on in West Virginia.



HODGES PHOTOGRAPHY

Maggi Moss



CHAD B. HARMON

Graham Motion

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Mike Mulvihill

Mike Mulvihill, president, insights and analytics, FOX Sports: The very existence of HISA sends a positive signal to fans and regulators that the biggest stakeholders in the sport are taking equine safety with unprecedented seriousness. It's unfair and unrealistic to expect perfect solutions in the first year. That HISA exists at all is a win for everyone who cares about the safety of the horse.

Joe Orseno, trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association: While I am aware that HISA was created to help improve racing, there are still many problems. HISA created a set of rules, and then formed a committee to try and fix their rules. Unfortunately, the feedback from the committee is that HISA disregards any input from the committee. The formation of HISA has put a huge



John Ortiz



Joe Orseno

financial burden on the horsemen who are forced to cover their operating fees. These fees, in turn, trickle down to the owners and trainers. We are all well aware, that in any sport, there are always people who will try and get an edge over the competition. This is also true in horse racing, but the creation of HISA is not going to stop that. People who were cheating before HISA will find a way to cheat now. The addition of HISA has not seen a decrease in the number of racetrack injuries. When HISA first began, the horseman were told that it was to implement uniform drug rules. That is a reasonable goal and good place to start.

John Ortiz, trainer: It's a sensitive subject to any trainer. I want to promote safety and fairness in the sport. The idea is a good one. But there could have been a bit more preparation. It feels like rules have changed frequently and as a horseman who wants to do what's best for the athlete, taking away some things because certain people abuse them is not the answer. At the end of the day we are still trying to manage the horse's health and fitness. It's good for the industry if we can all work together so we not worrying about our livelihoods being at risk all the time.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Dr. Mick Peterson, director, *University of Kentucky Racetrack Safety Program*: The dream of uniformity in regulations is being achieved. Moving forward the regulation of horse racing will need to improve and the data will need to be assessed in a manner that can lead to improved safety and welfare for both human and equine athletes.

Mike Repole, owner, commissioner of the *National Thoroughbred Alliance*: HISA is going to be very good for the industry. How we got to HISA is an embarrassment to the sport. We basically couldn't self-police or come to an alignment on a national level. I'm against having so much government control but this was forced upon us and in the long-term working with Lisa Lazarus and her people is going to be good. But Lisa and HISA need to surround themselves with more people who are in the industry, top trainers, owners, breeders, and track executives, because everyone has different issues. I do think they are willing to listen. I've always said when you open a restaurant you open for family and friends, and then have a soft opening, and then you open to the public. HISA just opened to the public overnight and they've made some mistakes and they lost some credibility and they hurt some people and some reputations. I'm disappointed in that. I warned them about coming out like that, but there's no future in horse racing without HISA. The industry needs to work with them to make the sport better.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Top: Dr. Mick Peterson

Bottom: Mike Repole

Tom Rooney, president and CEO, *National Thoroughbred Racing Association*: HISA has resulted in greater fairness and national uniformity across the sport of Thoroughbred racing. Prior to HISA's implementation, the rules across the country were different in many jurisdictions and therefore often conflicting with each other. While some have argued for a return to disparate state standards, horse racing clearly effectuates interstate commerce and therefore, like every other professional sport, should have nationwide standard rules that level the playing field for the entire sport. While some of the implementation rollout was a little bumpy at times, I know that HISA is diligently working with its constituency to make the sport better overall.



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM/JAMES S. WOOD

Tom Rooney

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Tom Ryan, managing partner, *SF Bloodstock and Racing*: Implementing uniform standards across a diverse industry has proven very challenging. I feel HISA has done a reasonable job overall, especially being flexible and listening to horsemen when regulations need to be adjusted to a more sustainable structure yet holding participants to the highest standards. There is a need for more transparency in the decision-making processes and communication to ensure stakeholders clearly understand the rules and regulations. Contamination and thresholds are topics that need immediate attention. Testing laboratories and requirements need to be held to the highest standard. Horses don't live in a sterile environment, and as we know, there are an untold number of hands placed on each animal on any given race day. Contamination is happening nationwide; these cases need to be adjudicated by people with the best working knowledge of our industry. If we continue to test at



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Tom Ryan

the current levels, this issue will persist. Overall, I feel HISA is on the right track and has the scope to be transformative. It's been a steep learning curve for regulators and participants. HISA needs to continue to reset in areas where the current regulations are not practical or sustainable. I would like to see HISA start to focus on racetrack surfaces as I feel this is also a very critical topic, building data and identifying where possible improvements can be made.

John Sikura, owner and president, *Hill 'n' Dale Farms*: The introduction of HISA as a regulatory body and oversight of equine safety has been problematic but not unexpected. Anytime you have such a massive overhaul of common practices, it takes much trial and error to get it right. I see the organization as a positive notwithstanding necessary changes being implemented such as reining in overzealous enforcement and voluminous paperwork requirements of owners and trainers. We need the sport to be conducted as safely as possible and this agency has been granted the right of oversight so we have to help make it better.



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John Sikura

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SAM HOUSTON RACE PARK

Nick Tammaro

Nick Tammaro, *announcer at Sam Houston Race Park, handicapper*: As a horseplayer, HISA has had no impact other than additional scratches. The task the organization has is daunting but I do think a lot of what was laid out by leadership in Tucson (at the symposium) sounds promising. Everything they do is going to be met with a healthy dose of skepticism for the time being. However, I do think most people, regardless of their place in the game, ultimately want to see the organization successfully implement policies and procedures that limit the participation of at-risk horses, identify and wipe out crooked trainers, and provide some uniformity that we've severely lacked. Some of that uniformity has to come in the form of stewarding. Long before arguably the most embarrassing decision New York racing has ever seen in the (Dec. 16 Great White Way division of the New York Stallion Series Stakes at Aqueduct Racetrack), there have been deep problems with inconsistency that hurts all stakeholders involved from horsemen to horseplayers.

Najja Thompson, *executive director, New York Thoroughbred Breeders*: The implementation of HISA and HIWU has benefited our sport in working to provide a uniform set of rules and testing procedures in nearly every racing jurisdiction. Following the longstanding concerns from racing, bettors, and outside observers on the perceived actions of bad actors, especially following the private investigation that led to federal indictments and convictions, I believe HISA and HIWU not only work to further help keep our sport clean and safe, but as well on our overall social license to operate. Of course, the execution of HISA has not been without growing pains. However, I believe they have been transparent in their process and procedures while also being collaborative. Reaching out to include the feedback of horsemen and industry experts in advisory groups was not only smart but also shows their openness to ensure the federally mandated legislation is carried out fairly. Looking ahead, I think HISA will continue to improve and operate more efficiently. Hopefully that efficiency will also help to lower the assessment fee costs currently paid by horse owners and racetrack operators.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Najja Thompson



INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES HISA

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Elliott Walden, president, CEO, and racing manager, WinStar Farm: HISA had an up and down year. I think of the Teddy Roosevelt's words, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming." Lisa Lazarus and her team are in the arena and moving us forward. What I really like about HISA is they are listening. They have adjusted their stance on numerous topics over the last year, and we have a voice. They will listen and adjust if they feel they need to. I am supportive of HISA. I would like to see a little more communication than just through an email or website with the industry. Sometimes, it feels like judgments are made and communication could be improved.



JETTA VAUGHNS

Elliott Walden

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. **BH**

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SKIP DICKSTEIN

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

By Bob Ehalt

X @BobEhalt

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series continues today with a question on marketing of the sport. Throughout this week, panelists will provide their thoughts on racing surfaces, foal crop size, racing calendar/field size, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, marketing, and wagering.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.

TODAY'S QUESTION: *Is racing being marketed properly and should more money be invested in such efforts? What can the sport do to attract more fans?*



MICHAEL BURNS



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM/VERONICA R. BRANSON

Tony Allevato

Tony Allevato, president, NYRA Bets/chief revenue officer New York Racing Association: What we are doing is marketing to our audience, people who are interested in horse racing or can become interested in it. I think there is a big opportunity, with sports betting on the rise in the United States, to tap into a new group of potential fans. But this illusion out there that we are doing nothing is wrong. Some of the most creative people work for smaller tracks—and I have worked with the NFL and other professional sports. Horse racing has a lot of very creative people. We just don't have the ammunition to market like the major professional sports can. However, we have a big opportunity with television. We have FanDuel TV, which is basically a 24-hour network dedicated to horse racing, and FOX Sports dedicates 1,200 hours a year to horse racing. We should be looking at that and saying, 'What can we do to educate and entertain people so that they want to come to the races and make it a go-to experience?' So, I think the industry does a good job with marketing. We're all embracing interesting new ways to promote the sport effectively using television, digital, and social media.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Shannon Arvin, *president and CEO, Keeneland*: Keeneland invests in outreach and development initiatives aimed at growing racing's fan base and creating a more diverse community of participants. We are fortunate at Keeneland to enjoy strong support from our local community and fans. We do not take this for granted, and will continue with creative marketing strategies on a number of fronts, including a robust social media and digital presence. Our year-round fan education and engagement efforts target all age ranges. Among the most popular are our behind-the-scenes guided walking tours and our Sunrise Trackside programs, where families and visitors watch morning works, enjoy activities for the kids, and pet a horse. If we get our fans close to the horse, the rest takes care of itself. We design our programs to provide fun experiences and opportunities for kids to learn about Keeneland and the horse industry from childhood to young adult. We have a Collegiate Opportunities Program, and we work with mentorship organizations like Amplify and Ed Brown Society to raise awareness about careers in the horse industry. We also believe it is critical for racing to remain competitive with other sports and entertainment venues. That goal and our mission to perpetuate the very best in Thoroughbred racing have driven Keeneland's construction of a new



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Shannon Arvin

paddock building, the first in numerous enhancements to expand viewing and hospitality experiences available to the public at Keeneland. This project is central to our mission as it will allow us to welcome more fans and give them a variety of world-class experiences during our race meets, sales, and beyond.

Dr. Dionne Benson, *chief veterinary officer, 1/ST Racing*: At 1/ST: we recognize that to attract the next generation of fans, integrity, safety, and accountability goes together with the guest entertainment experience. For me, that begins with horse and rider safety—not only on "big" days or at higher-profile tracks, but every track, every day. We know that younger fans expect more and that the social license for Thoroughbred racing requires an ingrained commitment to safety. Attending the races and feeling the energy of the horses is truly a unique experience. When you blend that feeling with world-class entertainment and hospitality, like the Preakness Stakes (G1), Pegasus World Cup Invitational (G1), or Santa Anita Derby (G1), you have a combination that is unmatched by any other experience—and our team does it best! Recently, I had the privilege of attending the Japan Cup (G1) at Tokyo Racecourse. What struck me the most while there were the number of younger fans. While U.S. horse racing certainly has more competition from other professional sports, I believe that by working together as an industry we can find a way to reach the younger audience and convert them to horse racing fans.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Dr. Dionne Benson

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Louis Cella, *president, Oaklawn Park*: This question suggests our industry should use a national, consistent message for all jurisdictions, which I do not agree with. The Jockey Club uses a national message of integrity and focuses on the national American Stud Book and is a major influence in industry programs like Equibase. HISA focuses on nationwide issues of safety and consistency. The NTRA focuses on equine welfare and integrity while trying to increase the popularity of our sport. These entities should focus on national issues that impact all of us equally. However, how Arkansas markets to its fans is completely different than how NYRA markets to its fans, or California or Florida to its fans. What might resonate in Arkansas might not resonate in Kentucky. Our industry learned that lesson with a national advertising campaign which largely was not effective, especially in Arkansas. This issue is uniquely reserved for each jurisdiction. Unfortunately, we all have marketing budgets that are defined and which we must follow.



Louis Cella



COURTESY DENNIS CORNICK

Dennis Cornick

Dennis Cornick, *part owner of Flightline through West Point Thoroughbreds*: Marketing in our industry is awful. I don't know any other way to say it. Having headed up marketing and sales for a \$6 billion organization, I am appalled at the industry approach to marketing. Marketing is the branding of an organization, and how it is viewed both internally and externally. The industry does an awful job. Every significant industry decision going forward should have an associated marketing conversation with it. While marketing is done at a local racetrack or organization level, it is not consistent and does not consider the industry as a whole. I strongly believe a national marketing organization should be funded and created to address the problem. This group should work hand in hand with local organizations and racetracks. It should also coordinate with HISA as they appear to have no marketing sensitivity at all. There are many lessons learned and best practices that can be adopted from corporations and sports leagues that have had issues, and worked hard to change perceptions. Marketing is a journey and long-term process. Perception does not change overnight. The issue is that every day we don't have a coordinated industry approach and focus, the brand gets tarnished more and more.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Brad Cox, trainer: We have a hard time promoting horse racing because of the negativity out there about the sport. I grew up in Kentucky and wanted to become a trainer, which was something you could be proud of in that part of the country. You'd tell people you're a trainer and they would ask about the Kentucky Derby (G1) or any good horses in your barn. Now someone finds out you're a horse trainer and the first question they ask is about fatalities. There's a very negative cloud over the horse racing industry and a large part of that comes from media coverage. I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but that's the way it is. The bad stuff makes the news. Someone told me the best defense is a good offense and I don't know if we have an "offense" in horse racing. On a positive note, I think the Breeders' Cup does a good job of marketing but that's a weekend of racing. They do a good job as well with their "Win and You're In" stakes but overall, for day-to-day racing, I feel it's a struggle to promote the sport in a positive manner.

Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, Monmouth Park: Racing should increase its marketing spend and utilize ideas and technology used in other major league sports to enhance our product and attract a new fan base. Sports betting and fixed odds wagering have the potential to increase our handle and crossover

wagering opportunities to capture a younger demographic. It's up to us to embrace it. The future is everyone has a phone with apps that can lead to customers having a 24/7 opportunity to wager. The trick will be to make our venues destination resorts to get live customers back to the track.



Dennis Drazin



Brad Cox

Drew Fleming, president and CEO, Breeders' Cup: There is no centralized marketing effort for our sport, which in and of itself is a problem. The industry is severely fragmented compared to other sports industries. At the Breeders' Cup we are investing substantial resources in marketing to help raise awareness not only of our brand, but of the entire sport. The first thing we need to do to attract new fans is to prove that our sport is safe and clean. A sport rich in integrity is going to thrive.

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Drew Fleming

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Eric Hamelback

Jim Gagliano, *president and COO, The Jockey Club*: I think we would all agree that just as Thoroughbred racing needed national oversight of medication rules and track safety, it also needs a national marketing arm. We need to get the best stories out about the sport. America's Best Racing has been doing that for more than a decade and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others in the industry to expand our marketing investments. Furthermore, in an effort to grow more fans, the sport should explore streaming partnerships with Amazon, Apple, and others for both live racing and unscripted reality shows featuring personalities involved in the sport. Those types of shows, if done correctly, can help create an emotional hook for the viewer to become curious enough to watch a race, bet on a race, and attend the races. Last thought on this subject, we need to get away from claiming races and move to a rating system that is more easily understood and, I believe, better protects the investment into a horse and its welfare.

Eric Hamelback, *CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association*: No, racing is not being marketed properly and we need to be focused on how to fund marketing efforts. The NTRA was established years ago to be the marketing arm of the industry. To date, it has failed in that mission. In 2018, I outlined at the National HBPA Conference how the horse racing industry could mirror what the PGA did many years ago in order to promote golf. The concept received positive response but efforts had to be tabled. I look forward to bringing that concept up again. But to whom? I would like to see the promotion of horse racing come from the industry. The NTRA no longer acts as a voice for the entire industry, nor is the organization a league office for racing participants. The funding for marketing needs to be driven by those in the industry and overseen by horsemen and women who understand horse racing. I believe the industry should be encouraged by initiatives such as Amplify Horse Racing and also the industry coming together for ventures such as the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, the Retired Racehorse Project, and the Thoroughbred Industry Employee Awards—which were all driven by horse racing participants with the intent to highlight our sport.

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Jim Gagliano

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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COURTESY HARBUT BLOODSTOCK

Greg Harbut

outside of that I don't see a younger base that supports racetracks anywhere else in the country. We also need to market toward a more diverse racing fanbase from an ethnic standpoint. As a whole the industry markets one segment and that's the white male, 55-70-years-old bracket. That's worked for a while, but now we are seeing declining foal crops, ownership groups, and wagering across the board. We have to do something different. There's only so many times you can go to a pond without restocking it. Anywhere outside of racing you see a diverse audience in a healthy sport. Racing needs to get on board and market to a more diverse audience.

Joe Harper, president and CEO, Del Mar: As an industry we need to allocate more resources to promote the improvements that are being made in equine safety and welfare. The recent NTRA campaign, "Safety Takes The Lead," is the type of communication we need to

Greg Harbut, owner, bloodstock agent: Racing has not been marketed properly at all. Most certainly we need to invest more dollars into proper marketing. We must do a much better job of marketing to a younger and more diverse demographic. Here in Kentucky we are

blessed to have Keeneland, but outside of that I don't see a younger base that supports racetracks anywhere else in the country. We also need to market toward a more diverse racing fanbase from an ethnic standpoint. As a whole the industry markets one segment and that's the white male, 55-70-years-old bracket. That's worked for a while, but now we are seeing declining foal crops, ownership groups, and wagering across the board. We have to do something different. There's only so many times you can go to a pond without restocking it. Anywhere outside of racing you see a diverse audience in a healthy sport. Racing needs to get on board and market to a more diverse audience.

Joe Harper, president and CEO, Del Mar: As an industry we need to allocate more resources to promote the improvements that are being made in equine safety and welfare. The recent NTRA campaign, "Safety Takes The Lead," is the type of communication we need to do more of. In California we developed the Horse Power Coalition, which uses social and digital media to highlight the positive aspects of our industry, such as equine safety, jobs, and economic impact. Earlier this year a member of California's Senate told me, "You guys are doing some excellent things, but not enough people know about it."



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Joe Harper

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management: The presentation of the sport needs to be more positive. The focus should not be about who is not running, but who is. Promote the positive!!! People bond to horses and love them. The horse caretakers adore them. Play to the positive while continuing to clear up and correct the other aspects of the sport requiring more direction. Marketing is essential. We need to create promotions and interest to bring people to the track and live racing. The giveaways have consistently been popular. We need to revitalize this. We all have our caps, t-shirts, tote bags from times past. Another promotional concept: LET'S GO RACING! What other sporting event offers you the opportunity to get paid by winning money for having fun? Keep entrance costs and food prices realistic. Family Day, College Day; they all matter. Doggie day competition has been a hit. Offer bonus scratch-off tickets when fans come in the door and let the funds apply for future bets. Again, LET'S GO RACING!



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

Lisa Lazarus, CEO, Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority:

We all want a safe, clean sport that grows and prospers. We want people talking about Cody's Wish, about the first female trainer to win a Triple Crown race, and about the myriad of other incredible stories that unfold at racetracks across the country year-round. Our job is to ensure a clean, fair sport so negative narratives disappear and all that's left are the amazing stories about the equine and human athletes who make our sport so special. HISA should never be the story. We'll leave the marketing to the marketers and continue to work to ensure that the public can truly have faith in the safety and integrity of the sport so that the marketers can be proactive instead of reactive.



COURTESY LISA LAZARUS

Lisa Lazarus

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Ed Martin, *president, Association of Racing Commissioners International*: As one who once was responsible for the tourism marketing for the State of New York (i.e. "I Love NY"), I have never thought the marketing of horse racing has ever been as creative, coordinated, or multi-faceted as it needed to be, although it has gotten better in recent years. Somebody clearly needs to be in charge of this and it doesn't matter who. Everyone needs to feed into that entity and stay consistent with the plan. Other sports seem to be able to do this, but in racing we have different organizations with different agendas that often vie for primacy or relevance. Stepping out of the box will sometimes bring the ire of those tied to the ways of the past. Yet that is what must happen. New fans will not come unless horse racing is fun, exciting, interesting, and rewarding. Everyone wants to have a good time. Most people have a good time when they win money, laugh, help a good cause, attend a party, interact with friends, eat good food, consume beverages, have music, and get to dance. It's all right there. Even if you lose money, if you had fun doing it, the fun is what you remember. If we continually focus on the negative, we shall never have time for the positive. This should not be complicated.

Dan Metzger, *president, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association*: Over 25 years ago, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association was founded with broad support across the industry. A significant amount of financial resources were dedicated to the promotion of the sport across the United States, but regrettably, due to several factors, the NTRA discontinued its national marketing. NBC Sports does a tremendous amount of marketing around the Kentucky Derby and to a lesser extent, the Preakness. FOX has a campaign for the Belmont Stakes (G1) and Travers Stakes (G1), and the Breeders' Cup promotes its year-end championship. Much has



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM PHOTOS



MARK MAHAN PHOTO

Top: Ed Martin
Bottom: Dan Metzger

changed in the 25 years since the NTRA was founded, and while big event days are heavily promoted, we need stronger marketing campaigns promoting horse racing as a sport, and just as importantly, the gambling opportunities associated with it. With proper funding from the industry, we need for the NTRA to lead a new national marketing campaign.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Ron Moquett

and trade talk that give the impression we are in trigonometry class rather than talking about exciting horses doing what they were born to do. We need fresh ideas that allow people to fall in love with the sport, gain respect for the animal and the betting will follow. If all we talk about is the gambling they'll walk to a casino and put their gambling dollars on blackjack. I've been saying this forever... But Bueller?? Bueller??



Graham Motion

Ron Moquett, trainer: Are we being marketed at all? I can't remember a single campaign since the "Go Baby Go" series. We have a very interesting sport but would-be fans have been lulled to sleep for years by the thought that we will attract new younger fans with the Ferris Bueller's teacher style of spouting off ROI numbers, percentages,

Graham Motion, trainer: We could do better although marketing has improved. On your average race days, however, you still find mostly older retired men betting on our sport. In order to compete I would imagine it's imperative that we appeal to a younger crowd as it's now so easy to bet on most sports.

Mike Mulvihill, president, insights and analytics, FOX Sports: The best and most effective marketing of horse racing is the TV coverage itself. I think that across Fox, NBC, and FanDuel TV—the TV partners—do a great job of marketing the sport. There's more horse racing on national broadcast TV this year than ever before. I often like to say that horse racing is a poem, a puzzle, and a party and that unique position is being presented well via TV. Marketing isn't just a tagline or a 30-second promo; it's a brand that's established over hundreds of hours of live TV coverage. Racing must continue to lean into the fan development opportunity that more and better national TV coverage brings.

Joe Orseno, trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association: With the addition of sports betting in casinos, the racetrack is at a disadvantage. There is little to no advertising for horse racing except for the Triple Crown races and Breeders' Cup.

In order to attract new fans, they need to promote the horses and the sport, not just the gambling. Once more people are attracted to the sport, the gambling will follow.

John Ortiz, trainer: What I love about Keeneland is that they do a lot for the community. They sponsor a lot of events at the local level. Tracks should be mindful of how to support the surrounding communities, even during times when they are closed. They should sponsor more things in the community to help offset the bad news about the sport. We need to present the beautiful part of our game to show all the positive things we do.



Mike Mulvihill



Joe Orseno



John Ortiz

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Mike Repole, owner, commissioner of the *National Thoroughbred Alliance*: Racing is not being marketed at all and then the problem grows when all of the public relations about an entity that has no marketing is negative. The PR about horse racing is negative 95% of the time. It's a disaster for the brand and it's all self-inflicted. We have reactive PR or no comment at all. Then when you voice your opinion, you have people who want you to be quiet. There are so many positive things and great stories in horse racing that nobody gets to hear and learn about. All you hear is the 2% bad news and any company or business faces that. But in racing, unlike other businesses, there is no positive communication or PR. There is no marketing, learning, teaching, coaching, and mentoring of the next generation of horsemen, horse owners, fans, and gamblers. In the end this could be racing's biggest disaster because the sport is closer to disappearing than thriving right now. We need to work as an alliance on marketing and PR and how well we do it will determine if the sport thrives or dies.



Mike Repole

Tom Rooney, president

and CEO, *National*

Thoroughbred Racing

Association: Though the

NTRA's focus has evolved,

there is validity in the idea of

a unified voice and a national

marketing effort if executed

correctly. To that end, the

NTRA has recently created a

series of videos titled "Safety

Takes The Lead" which are

available on our website

highlighting the hard work that

goes into making our sport as safe as possible. We as a

sport do a lot of things extremely well, but we all have to

do a better job of telling our story to the general public.

Tom Ryan, managing

partner, *SF Bloodstock*

and Racing: I see minimal

mainstream effort to market

horse racing, which infuriates

me. Industry organizations

are doing little to prevent

misinformation in the age

of social media. There is no

individual or group taking

ownership of the marketing

and promotion of the sport

as a whole. We need to

educate consumers on every

level, from betting to investing; we need to explain

the intricacies of racing and produce a more palatable

product. As long as we describe ourselves as a sport of

kings, we will struggle to attract a broader audience;

syndication can revolutionize and reinvigorate the

sport. It creates an entry point for a vast audience. We

have the best year-round sport played at some of the

best venues in the world. People love horses. We need

to learn how to work together and grow this sport back

into the mainstream.



COURTESY NTRA

Tom Rooney



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Tom Ryan

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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John Sikura, owner and president, Hill 'n' Dale Farms: The promotion of our sport is either woefully inadequate or non-existent. There is no source of funding or daily content that permeates media platforms unless you read industry publications. There is no proactive attempt to package our sport or attract new fans. The current strategy is to malign the sport from within or react to a crisis with a defense that has no traction with people who are predisposed to reject the sport because they have never been exposed to our positives. A national campaign by media professionals that is well-funded should be a priority but to date is not. Every product has a national campaign to polish their image and reach consumers. We do not despite the decline in relevancy or any other metric we can measure.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

John Sikura

Mike Smith, jockey: As an industry, we need to be putting in more efforts to market horse racing to the mainstream population and media. Although horse racing has been around much longer than some sports, we cannot expect to maintain the status quo without exploring new ideas and providing new insight. Specifically, we need to attempt to do what many of the other sports have done: create a connection with the people. This can be done with storytelling and sharing insight about the lives of people in racing. When a person has an emotional connection, they become more invested. This has been done in baseball, football, basketball, and most recently Formula One. In horse racing, we tend to focus so much on the negative aspects and very little on all of the positive stories and wonderful people that have dedicated their lives to our sport. The industry fails to promote the jockeys as the longtime athletes of the sport, which is ironic considering the fans have more access to jockeys than just about any other professional athlete. Historically, the public has connected and related to jockeys more than any other industry, unless there is a "superstar" horse such as Secretariat, Zenyatta, or Justify. We need to utilize social media to expose horse racing to younger generations. They eventually become adults who will continue to create generations of fans. Horse racing is typically only covered in the mainstream for Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup races or when there has been a catastrophic occurrence. We need to utilize social media to expose horse racing to the younger generation.



BENOIT PHOTO

Mike Smith

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Nick Tammaro

Nick Tammaro, *announcer at Sam Houston Race Park, handicapper*: Quite simply, no. Marketing efforts have centered on sundresses, bow ties, fancy hats, and drinks and other items that bury the actual product. That will draw the attention of some people and expose them to some aspects of the sport. However, racing is a gambling game. If you are not attempting to market it as such then you're missing the chance to develop long-term customers. The various marketing efforts we have seen from different organizations have a target audience that is unlikely to develop long-term fans. One thing that we do at Sam Houston is hand everyone a tip sheet for free when they walk in with selections and wagers for each race at \$10 or less. These are simple, targeted wagers, win bets on 4-1 shots or more, cold exactas, cold daily doubles, simple Pick 3s, etc. Patrons can simply take the tip sheet to the window and make that bet. There are so many barriers to creating long-term bettors, from pricing, to data, to complicated wagers; the only thing we can try to do is tackle some of them and simplify them. If betting is not part of your focus when marketing—in my humble opinion, you're missing the mark.

Najja Thompson, *executive director, New York Thoroughbred Breeders*: Increased awareness and exposure to racing will always be a benefit in helping to grow the sport and widen our demographics. Often, I think we, as an industry, only focus on wanting to attract younger generations, which is important to our long-term sustainability. However, in my opinion, it's just as important for us to focus on attracting "Gen X" and "baby boomers" who are close to reaching retirement. This segment of society is more likely to have access to disposable income and the free time to cultivate into becoming knowledgeable participants in the sport as gamblers, live race attendees, owners, and breeders. Attracting more fans begins with more engagement. I think what NYRA has been able to do in their partnership with FOX Sports sending their signal nationwide has been extremely beneficial in attracting new eyes and a new audience to our sport. That also extends to our legacy industry partnerships with NBC Sports and broadcasting our premier races and race meets from the Triple Crown to Breeders' Cup and marquee meets such as Saratoga, Del Mar, Keeneland. Accessibility to racing is always the largest obstacle and racetracks such as Keeneland broadcasting their feed on YouTube and strategic acquisitions, such as the one between FanDuel and TVG, will help to further get racing in front of more people in households and devices which should benefit us in attracting and cultivating more fans moving forward.

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FASC-TIPTON PHOTOS

Najja Thompson

INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES MARKETING

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Elliott Walden, CEO, president, and racing manager, WinStar Farm: It is not being marketed properly because we have no national marketing plan. I do believe more money should be invested in marketing and I have heard that the NTRA would like to take that on. We have all these alphabet groups and I think it is a good idea to let one of them make marketing their core area of focus. I heard Mike Repole state we should take 10% of our handle (about \$1 billion) to try and grow the sport. It is an interesting idea, though a negative is that it would only tax horse owners through smaller purses yet there are so many more groups that would benefit from an overall marketing plan. Mike's ideas are big ideas, and we need to figure out a way to implement them without getting stuck on the negatives. The great thing about the horse industry is we have successful people from different walks of life, and they merge into one industry. What



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Elliott Walden

if we had a committee of five brilliant minds that have marketed their own product in their field, and had them oversee a \$100 million campaign a year for five years with the NTRA? Would that move the needle? I believe it would.

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. **BH**

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES WAGERING

By Bob Ehalt

X @BobEhalt

To discuss several of the important issues facing the sport as a new year approaches, BloodHorse has assembled a panel of about 30 industry participants to participate in the 2023 BH Year-End Survey where they can provide their thoughts on six key topics and generate meaningful discussions on these issues.

The series wraps up today with a question on wagering. Throughout this week, panelists have provided their thoughts on other important issues.

While BH realizes there are countless other voices that could have been included, the hope is that these answers will spark meaningful discussion within the industry. Anyone who would like to offer their opinion is encouraged to submit them in writing to editorial@bloodhorse.com for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor. Longer pieces can be considered for an Our Voices column.

TODAY'S QUESTION: *With a changing betting landscape in the United States as more and more states allow legal sports betting, what can racing do in this atmosphere to bring more bettors to the sport?*



COGLIANESE PHOTOS

Tony Allevato



EDWARD WHITAKER/RACING POST

Tony Allevato, *president, NYRA Bets/chief revenue officer, New York Racing Association*: You're seeing companies like Churchill Downs, NYRA, and the Stronach Group partnering with sportsbook companies and I believe that's the direction we all need to go because sports betting is here. It's not going anywhere. If you look at the history of horse racing as other forms of gaming expanded, it never helped horse racing or expanded it or benefited it. So when horse racing was the sport of kings that was when people were more closely tied to the horse and horse racing was the only game in town in terms of gambling. Then you had lotteries and casinos pop up and that slowly took away from the racetrack experience. Now sports betting is here and it's going to be very, very popular and we have to make sure we can ride the coattails of it and capture even a small percentage of those people and convert them to racing fans. If we don't do that, the people we will lose to sports betting because they only have a limited amount of money in their wallet will be a real negative for us. That's why we need to align with the sportsbooks. They have a tactical advantage over the racing industry with their war chest for marketing and database of fans and we have to make sure racing is front and center with their offerings. Television is also important because there's always more money to bet on a televised event and that certainly applies to horse racing.

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INDUSTRY PANEL DISCUSSES WAGERING

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Shannon Arvin, *president and CEO, Keeneland*: This year Kentucky legalized sports wagering, which kicked off in the fall and has been met with tremendous success statewide. Keeneland supported the sports wagering initiative to further our mission to attract new audiences to horse racing and teamed with Caesars Entertainment and Red Mile Gaming & Racing to launch the Caesars Sportsbook at Red Mile, Central Kentucky's only retail sportsbook. Racing should explore how professional sports are benefiting from sports wagering and its ability to creatively adapt betting menus to develop new fans, drive interest, ticket and merchandise sales, and attract publicity for their respective sports.

Dr. Dionne Benson, *chief veterinary officer, 1/ST Racing*: While this is not my area of expertise, I know that our team is utilizing modern connectivity and touch points for the consumer to create a world-class wagering experience. An easy-to-use betting platform to allow new customers to understand how to bet—like we have with the 1/ST BET app—is a critical piece in the evolving sports wagering landscape. Horse racing has a unique opportunity to tie into the overall sports betting market and should consider new ways, such as



Dr. Dionne Benson



Shannon Arvin

offering incentives to entice those who wager on other sports to bet on horse racing. Again though, I come back to safety for horse and rider as the foundation for success across our industry—full fields with strong, sound horses is the best product racing can offer.

Louis Cella, *president, Oaklawn Park*: While our national patron base is becoming increasingly older, Oaklawn Park focuses on attracting a younger patron base. That simple. We market that it is fun and "cool" to attend the races—not to gamble but to have fun. We are in the business of selling horse racing, not gambling. We offer daily marketing programs for our fans to receive free food and free gift shop items and free wagers by simply showing up. We subsidize all our F&B items. We offer petting zoos and climbing walls for kids in the infield during our warmer months. We host Hall of Fame days where all national HOF trainers and jockeys are celebrated, and our fans get to interact with them and receive souvenir posters and can receive autographs and pictures with them. We sell horse racing and the pageantry surrounding this great sport. And our fans respond. In part, this is why we had over 17,000 fans (on Dec. 9). If we do our job correctly, the wagering part will take care of itself.



Louis Cella

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Dennis Cornick, part owner of *Flightline through West Point Thoroughbreds*: From a business perspective, the most important piece of the industry is the handle. Without a certain level of handle, you don't have a business. Many other tangential aspects of the business are fed by the handle. When the slots and casinos were gaining momentum, the industry found ways to partner with these groups and bundle the elements of both as a positive impact to handle. The sports betting trend in this country is far more impactful than casinos. There must be a creative way of incorporating sports betting into the business, whether it is the FanDuel model at the Meadowlands, or the co-mingling of select sports and horse racing bets and parlays, it needs to happen. Sports betting will only gain greater momentum and our industry needs to be on that train. Obvious other ways to attract customers are reduced takeout, larger rebates for various levels of players, greater transparency in the sport, and a positive overall perception. There also needs to be a greater awareness on the part of racetrack management on the daily decisions made at individual racetracks that impact horseplayers. I know several players that have left the game because they feel that these individual race-day decisions make a tough gambling game even more difficult. There were no better negative examples than several instances at Saratoga Race Course this past summer. Races being taken off the turf after certain pools are locked in, no ability to gain refunds, etc. This game can't afford to undermine the confidence of the bettors with daily decisions, or the money will be taken elsewhere. Accountability and transparency is needed.

Brad Cox, trainer: We need to figure out a way so that you are not at the track for four or five hours. I don't have the answer, but if you can shorten the time between races it might help get the younger fan involved. Racetracks also need to go back to making the racetracks more inviting for fans with a



COURTESY DENNIS CORNICK



AMY GASKIN



BILL DENVER/VEU PHOTO

Top: Dennis Cornick
Middle: Brad Cox
Bottom: Dennis Drazin

comfortable environment and amenities that allow for a more enjoyable time spent there.

Dennis Drazin, CEO and chairman, *Monmouth Park*: We need to increase and expand entertainment opportunities at our venues to encourage live attendance.

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Drew Fleming

Drew Fleming, president and CEO, Breeders' Cup: To capitalize on sports betting legalization in the U.S., racing must be offered on the same shelf as other sports. Imagine being a retailer in this day and age without having a presence on Amazon. We must put our product where bettors are consuming betting content. Our partners at FanDuel have been a

leader in this effort and are the first sportsbook to provide their millions of sports-betting customers the opportunity to wager on racing from a shared wallet through their sportsbook platform. A rising tide lifts all ships, and there is an incredible opportunity for horse racing to grow its base of bettors by embracing this changing landscape.



JOCKEY CLUB PHOTO

Jim Gagliano

Jim Gagliano, president and COO, The Jockey Club: Work with, not against, sports betting. We need to make sure the wagering on racing and other sports is available from the same app and wagering balance in each state as we see expansion of sports wagering. Continue to make it easier to bet on racing and use lower takeout as a marketing tool. The sport should also experiment more with fixed-odds wagering.

Eric Hamelback, CEO, National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association: No. 1: accessibility to free data. The statistics used in handicapping horse races are collected off our horses' performances—yet those horse owners do not get compensated for the data generated. In other sports we are handed tremendous amounts of data that are accessible to the average bettor without having to jump through ridiculous hoops. Unfortunately, our industry has made a business of locking data down and selling it back, often to the owners themselves. At a minimum, basic past performances should be free online for every track and readily available to the public as part of the payback to owners. The strangled control of the raw data inhibits innovation, especially from younger, tech-savvy handicappers that the industry wants to attract. We must make our industry accessible on various platforms while still protecting the owners' interests and investment. There is a future for different forms of wagering, such as fixed odds, but that cannot be done at the further expense of shorting our owners. On this topic, we must never lose sight that many of our sport's owners are also huge bettors. We repeatedly have seen wagering on races as a successful way to attract new owners. I've said time and again that owners and bettors are the two most important groups in horse racing. I'm confident that keeping bettors and owners in mind with everything we do will lead to a far better outcome for the sport as a whole.

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DENIS BLANE/NATIONAL HBPA

Eric Hamelback

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ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Joe Harper

Joe Harper, *president and CEO, Del Mar*: It's critical that horse racing is offered on the same platform as other sports wagering options. It's equally important that customers can use the same wallet to wager on horses and sports. Stakeholders in California worked very closely with FanDuel/TVG to accomplish this on their platform. As an industry we need to push other ADW/sport wagering operators to implement similar cohesiveness. If racing is positioned correctly, sports wagering can bring our sport to a very large and new audience.

Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs, *consultant, Thoroughbred breeding, racing, and management*: We need to make the atmosphere positive, fun, and compelling. There should be cozy areas with big screen TV's showing games and racing where people can sit down, handicap, eat, and enjoy the day of racing along with other sports. Embrace all of it! California needs to get on board with sports wagering. For the states who have it, they are in a good position! This idea is just a thought, not a public idea yet. I'm just thinking a bit outside the box, but create some wagers based upon racing which are different. For example, an over or under. Add up the final odds for the first 3 finishers per the toteboard with over or under betting. If you think it will be between 5-10, bet accordingly. It's just a thought but anyone can do this without knowledge of racing. The fan could bet and it would be treated as a bet with a mutuel payoff.

Lisa Lazarus, *CEO, Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority*: Bettors want to know that the product they're betting on is fair and that everyone is competing on a level playing field. Through our national, uniform Anti-Doping and Medication Control Program, HISA is working to ensure that the sport is fair and clean while providing racing participants with a transparent, expedited, and fair process for addressing anti-doping and medication violations.

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COURTESY LISA LAZARUS



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Top: Lisa Lazarus
Bottom: Dottie Ingordo-Shirreffs

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Ed Martin, *president, Association of Racing Commissioners International*: The regulatory costs of HISA are already causing some small and mid-sized venues to explore alternative ways to have horse racing without simulcasting to escape the new regulatory structure and costs. Because of the quantity and quickness of our races, horse racing is a potentially attractive product for sports books. We have a ton of content and sportsbooks are proving an ability to market wagering on all sorts of contests in all sorts of ways. To fully benefit from this growing opportunity, racetracks and horsemen may need to not only move quick but rethink the existing business model. It would be ironic if an unintended consequence of HISA is that the extent of their increased regulatory costs may force the development of a new business model for small and mid-sized racetracks, their horsemen, and drive portions of the sport into partnerships with the sportsbooks. An evolution is surely underway and those who are flexible, creative, and entrepreneurial in redrawing what horse racing can look like will most likely succeed. But someone has to go first.

Graham Motion, *trainer*: Make it more interesting, carding 12 or 13 races on any given afternoon becomes repetitive and dull. Less is better. Let people leave the races wanting more.



CHAD B. HARMON

Graham Motion



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM PHOTOS

Ed Martin

Mike Mulvihill, *president, insights and analytics, FOX Sports*: Horses and horse racing are soulful. Online sports betting is frankly soulless. Racing has to emphasize the qualities that are more satisfying than just staring at your phone. Racing can't compete with sports betting on either takeout or volume of betting opportunities, so fan satisfaction has to come from other qualities: the art of handicapping, the unrestrained fun of a day out at a good track, the enjoyment of being around the animals. Horse racing has to build its brand on the unique qualities that make it more than a digital roulette wheel.



WALLY SKALLU

Mike Mulvihill

Joe Orseno, *trainer, president of the Florida Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association*: Attracting new people to the sport will automatically increase the betting.



GULFSTREAM PARK

Joe Orseno

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John Ortiz, trainer: Like with marketing, we have to promote wagering on the sport by reaching out to people, like college students. Show them what goes on behind the scenes and try to educate them, so that they are not just betting on their favorite name, number, or color. Maybe we can add bets on trainers or jockeys. You want people to have an enjoyable time. Oaklawn Park gives a bonus on some bets for betting on-track and more tracks should do that to encourage people to come out to the track.

Mike Repole, owner, commissioner of the National Thoroughbred Alliance: We have to fix the gambling model. The takeout is insanely high. The odds can shift so quickly against the bettors. The sport is more focused on growing the takeout than growing the pie. Let's grow the handle. Horse racing had a 50-year head start on gambling and if it was in a better position, even 10 years ago; then with all the new money with gambling on your phone we could build the annual handle to \$25 billion. If we do it right we could reach \$30 billion. It makes no sense that the bets we make in horse racing are the bets that Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble made back in Bedrock. Why can't we have prop bets, head-to-head bets, (jockey) Irad Ortiz with three or more wins on a card? People may not know what a trifecta is but they can understand the



ANNE M. EBERHARDT



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

Top: John Ortiz
Bottom: Mike Repole

2-horse beat the 8-horse. We could have odd or even bets. In roulette you get a lot of money bet on red or black. You can simplify betting to get more money into the handle. It's not that hard. We are leaving a lot of gambling money on the table. It's not only sinful but an embarrassment to the whole sport.

Tom Rooney, president and CEO, National Thoroughbred Racing Association: Sports betting represents a tremendous opportunity for horse racing and one that we cannot let pass us by. The next generation of sports bettors, who are making exotic bets and parlays from their smart phones, need to be able to bring in bets on horse races to get them engaged in the sport. The parimutuel vs. fixed odds betting structure is a challenge we as a sport need to overcome. It would be a huge loss to not engage these new avid sports bettors that are currently betting on traditional sports and bring them into the fold with horse racing.



RACE TRACK INDUSTRY PROGRAM/JAMES S. WOOD

Tom Rooney

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Tom Ryan

Tom Ryan, managing partner, SF Bloodstock and Racing: We need to collaborate with other sports to create crossover events. Horse racing is a very intimidating sport in its current state, and gambling is inexplicable to beginners outside of a straight-win bet. I'm not an expert on technology, but saying we're behind the times is an understatement. There is significant room for improvement in the product. Other sports have worked it out. We need to unify and follow suit. Sports betting is growing at a furious pace. Yet, horse racing betting is in decline.



John Sikura

John Sikura, owner and president, Hill 'n' Dale Farms: The world of handicapping is intimidating to the new fan. I am not an expert on wagering, but fixed odds, proposition bets, and innovative new wagering products should be part of the pari-mutuel platform. Odd-even bets, trainer and jockey titles are all propositions that could be wagered on.



Najja Thompson

Najja Thompson, executive director, New York Thoroughbred Breeders: In a world of increased legalized sports betting, we have to work to attract new bettors to racing by promoting the frequency of opportunities to wager versus a standard football, basketball, or baseball game. There are multiple of opportunities and ways to wager on a horse race in comparison to other sports. Education on how to bet of course

is our biggest obstacle, but we should look to grow and lower the bar for new bettors by working towards the implementation of prop bets and fixed-odds wagering such as in New Jersey, that will help to lower the learning curve and help our overall marketing in attracting new eyes as well. The addition of more cross country and across track wagers as well should lead to increased opportunities and action to draw in new betting crowds who are used to wagering parlays.



Elliott Walden

Elliott Walden, president, CEO, and racing manager, WinStar Farm: The thing that comes to mind is access. We have improved our coverage of the sport over the last decade with FanDuel TV and FOX. We have to make our analysis more sticky. Maybe it is interviewing jockey Irad Ortiz Jr. before the card on his mounts for the day. Maybe it is pinning down (trainer) Todd Pletcher on which of his five horses has the best chance today. Continue to build the behind-the-scenes stories that fascinate the average fan. I was in a very non-descript hotel for the Breeders' Cup south of Arcadia and was amazed to hear stories of fans that came from all over the U.S. to see the Breeders' Cup. What drove them to be there? Do we know? A few recognized me and they were able to talk about horses with a guy on the inside. It fascinated them. We need more access.

Note: TOBA and The Jockey Club (through a subsidiary) are co-owners of BloodHorse. BH

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