

Reader Forum

'Encourage Change'

Over the last month it has really started to sink into me that harness racing is dying, and will never be the same within the next few years.

Those of you that know me personally know that I am an eternal optimist. My glass is always half full. I have devoted my life to harness racing since the age of 13 when I called my first harness race. Today I find myself doing what I love best, promoting our sport at Tioga Downs and Vernon Downs, and I can't think of doing anything other than working in this industry. Harness racing has so many great aspects, from the great horses to the wonderful people involved in our business. It is hard for me to sit idly by and watch our great sport crumble while doing nothing.

Recent articles have told the story: "Michigan governor vetoes funding for racing," "Harness racing in Quebec at a seeming end," "Slots revenue to purses reduced in Pennsylvania." I have to

believe that other states will be reducing money to the horse men in the very near future, like Pennsylvania has done.

Many of the recent yearling sales have seen declines. An exception is the Ohio Selected Jug Sale, which in my estimation was up only because the number of horses being offered was down from previous years. The Morrisville Sale was down; the Lexington Selected Sale was down. One bright spot was the Standardbred Horse Sale, which saw an increase this year after falling last year.

One of the greatest racetracks to ever exist, the Meadowlands, is on the balls of its feet, and is losing money each year. I can't see the taxpayers of New Jersey footing the bill much longer. I could be wrong, though. Have you seen the handle results from the Breeders Crown at Woodbine? In 2008 at the Meadowlands, patrons wagered \$5,020,659 on 13 races, and in 2009 at Woodbine, patrons wagered \$2,686,982 on 12 races, more than \$2.3 million

down. In 2006, when Woodbine hosted the Breeders Crown, the handle was \$3,813,910, down more than \$1.1 million when comparing the event at the same place.

Our customers have begun to speak loud and clear, and they are telling us to change. Do we really believe that this sport would exist as it does now without expanded gaming in these jurisdictions? Is there a future in harness racing? Does anyone even care anymore?

I have started to hear some chatter recently about moving forward and doing "something," but actions speak louder than words. The time is now. I read that the definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." Sound familiar?

These are the issues we need to work on. First and foremost, we need to fix the problems within our industry.

• We need to quit arguing amongst ourselves. Who is correct and who is



Bow River
Fine Equestrian Jewelry

Contact us at
art@bowriverjewelry.com • www.bowriverjewelry.com
(440) 255-1222 • Toll Free US 1-888-860-7483

Major credit cards accepted

incorrect will not amount to a hill of beans if we don't have an industry to work in or on. We need to work on and with our No. 1 people: the customer.

There is a newly formed group you may have heard of known as Horseplayers Association of North America. We need to sit down with them, as I believe our customer must come first. This group, in my opinion, has a realistic view on how to solve some of our problems in the industry. They identify one of the biggest problems as being the takeout rate at each track and rebating. We must embrace the concept of the takeout rate being too much and we must also embrace rebating. Both of these topics come up numerous times on the HANA Web site, www.horseplayersassociation.org. Take a look at their Web site with a keen eye focused on what they are saying about the takeout rates and rebating.

•We also need to address racing dates. Why should Pocono Downs and

Harrah's Chester go at the same time of the year, and why should Chester race right along with the Meadowlands and Yonkers? Are we not defeating our purpose? The Meadowlands pools are the only ones large enough to accommodate a "big bettor" in the United States, as far as harness racing is concerned. This issue needs to be addressed.

We race way too much and, to add insult to injury, everyone races at virtually the same time. We are diluting our wagering pools to small amounts, offering the high players nowhere to bet the big money. The glut of racing results in horse shortages that cause small fields and produce an inferior product for the gambler, which in turn they don't want to bet.

•We need a marketing plan, but only after we fix our "inside the industry problems" like takeout rates, rebating, race dates, our integrity situations, cleanliness of racetracks, small wagering pools and programs being too complicated for beginners.

Speaking of programs for beginners, I found it hard to believe that Tioga and Vernon were the only two regular users of the beginner's racing program that the Marketing Committee at the USTA developed.

Dr. Joan Zielinski has again been commissioned by the USTA to report on the problems in harness racing. Her first report was released on Aug. 19, 1991. Now it is almost 2010, and I bet when this next report comes out, it will say many of the same things it said back then. It may well report that the state of harness racing is much worse than in 1991.

From her report in 1991 I took this part about marketing: "The best way to kill a poor product is through a lot of good advertising." She is saying we must fix our internal problems before marketing to the masses, and I could not agree more. After we fix our woes we will need to address having a marketing campaign, and I believe it needs to be not only grassroots but also nationally

BE VICTORIOUS WITH HOPE'S VICTORY

S J'S PHOTO – DREAM KOSMOS – NEARLY PERFECT • 4,1:54.1F (\$263,410)

Hope's Victory was a tough competitor on the Pennsylvania Sire Stakes circuit, winning the PA All-Stars and a division of the Keystone Classic at 2, and finishing in the money in the Reynolds, and PA Sire Stakes divisions for 2 and 3-year-olds. He went on to compete successfully in the open ranks, hitting the board 24 times in 33 starts as a 4-year-old, with 16 wins, taking his lifetime mark of 1:54.1f at The Meadows. As a 5-year-old he hit the board in 23 of 29 starts. He continued to take down his competitors at 6 and 7, taking a mark of 1:54.1 at Colonial Downs at 6.

This is Hope's Victory's second season at stud. His offspring are eligible to the rich Pennsylvania Sire Stakes program.

STUD FEE:

\$950 Live Cover / \$850 A.I.

Mares with 1:58 or better record, or two or more mares: \$600.



Standing at Rock Oak Stables

Contact Joel Brenneman

1314 Springs Rd.

Springs, PA 15562

814.662.9108

Also Standing:
Madison River
Well Dressed
KF St Patrick



Visit Hope's Victory,
KF St Patrick and
Madison River on STARS
for more information and
hypothetical mating reports.

done through mass media, social networks and so forth.

Do you know what the sad part about this is? Casino operators don't care one thing about horse racing, and that seems ridiculous to me. At Tioga Downs we promoted the last night of racing in 2009 on Sept. 12, and we packed the place. It was the biggest night we ever had on our gaming floor as well. The one thing casino operators don't get or don't understand is that 50 percent of the racing customers will play on their gaming floor.

I am certainly not trying to upset anyone and be negative—as I said my glass is always half full and it will continue to be. But sometimes I think that glass is about to get knocked over. I am trying to get the industry to wake up and make changes. We seem to have been in a deep coma for quite some time, and we need to encourage change

in our sport.

I am ready to step forward and encourage change. Who else is ready?

If you have any comments or suggestions or if you have ideas you would like me to explore, please contact me at Jasonlbj01@aol.com.

Jason Settlemoir, USTA director,
District 8 (New York)

USTA Needs Younger Leadership

I read with great interest Ivan Axelrod's commentary on USTA directors. Although reasonable people disagree about the productivity and usefulness of the current crop of directors, there can be no disagreement about the fact that the current USTA bylaws impede the inclusion onto the board of many talented, hard-working, creative members of the harness racing community.

There are silly, outdated geographical impediments to becoming a director.

There are unseen political impediments as well. Until the USTA changes its rules to encourage the addition of new blood, ideas and energy onto the board, the organization, and its leaders, will continue to earn the scorn of a great many of its members.

USTA leadership must get younger, broader, more diverse and more quickly able to react to change. Unless that happens, and soon, it is quite likely that there won't be a board, because there won't be a USTA, because there won't be a harness racing industry.

Andrew Cohen, Englewood, Colo.

Hats On

My copy of the November *Hoof Beats* arrived yesterday, and I was taken by the photo of a moment at the 1952 Standardbred Horse Sale (Here They Come, p. 26). I suppose it wouldn't have been much different than another 1952

Body Builder™

Natural Alternative to Steroids...

The First, and Still the Best, for over 17 Years!

Works so well that others try to replicate it.

DON'T BE FOOLED!!!

They do not use the same quality of ingredients.

BODY BUILDER is cheaper because of the dosage and obvious results!

Bottom line **BODY BUILDER** was the first and is still the best. *Our Secret?* We use the highest quality ingredients and have a proprietary, unique way of mixing them. So what? The key is absorption! Without that, you don't get what you want, no matter what you add, no matter how many more ingredients are used.

We get the best possible ingredients and pay nearly 3X as much for them. It is that simple. That is why just 15 cc (one tablespoon) daily does the trick.

One Bottle + One Horse + Two Months = OUTSTANDING RESULTS!!



For the money, there is no better supplement with faster turn around results than **BODY BUILDER!**

17 years of repeat customers prove it. From yearling and 2-year-old prep to race horses and competition horses, to broodmares and stallions. Yep, it works for all.

**TRY IT! YOU WILL LOVE IT!!
GUARANTEED!**

**EQUIADE
PRODUCTS**

1-800-413-3702
(201) 568-5551
(201) 568-0084 fax
www.equiade.com

Available in various catalogs and at your local tack shops, distributors (Big Dee's, Dover, Heartland, Jack's, Jeffers, KBC Int., KY Vet, Smart Pak, Stemmens) and veterinarians. Also approved in many countries.



photo of a Broadway theater audience, an interior view of a Pan American passenger plane or the Kentucky Futurity.

The attendees at the sale wore suits or sport coats, white shirts and ties—and hats!

Today, the Broadway theater audience is often seen in upscale sweat suits. The planes today often have people who wear baseball hats throughout the flight. Tank tops and shorts are common at the Kentucky Futurity—or the Jug—today.

I like the casual styles of today, but I am still taken by the number of hats in the photo.

Mike Carter, Lecanto, Fla.

Help Standardbreds

The November article on Captain Zoom is a very nice and touching story.

One of my biggest complaints in this sport is owners who make a ton of money off their horses, and then dispose of them like worn-out tires. I regularly donate to the Standardbred Retirement Foundation, but I would always include in a story like this an address or Web site where people that were moved by the story can donate. In these tough economic times, it is important to have people be able to give right after they have been affected by a story like this.

I have many times suggested that \$100 should be set aside from every purse race of \$5,000 or more to go to the care of retired Standardbreds. This tiny amount would not hurt anyone financially and would force owners to contribute to the well-being of horses after their racing days are over.

Jim Fuhse, Manasquan, N.J.

Editor's note: For a complete list of Standardbred adoption groups, please visit <http://standardbreds.ustrotting.com/adoption.cfm>, and to help find Standardbreds needing homes, visit our partnership page with *The Horse* at www.thehorse.com/Horses/Available.aspx?breed=standardbred.

'Cover Up' Racing's Problems

I think it is time we "cover up" the state of harness racing. I am not saying we should pretend everything is

wonderful, but there is a need to put a positive spin on harness racing.

The USTA Web site is downright depressing at times. Yes, harness racing has its problems; I'll be the first to admit it. But I think the USTA needs to promote a more positive spin in harness racing. I don't need to tell you that as a breed registry, one of the USTA's mandates is to promote the Standardbred horse.

Many people talk about how we need to get new people and owners involved in the sport. What is one of the first sites a prospective owner is going to check out? The USTA's Web site. Well, if you are Joe and Jane Potential Owner, and you look at the Web site and read about how harness racing is on its last legs or in serious trouble, what do you think they are going to do? Forget about horse ownership.

Look at the Jockey Club or AQHA sites. Both of these sports are having problems just like harness racing, yet if you look at their Web sites, you wouldn't be able to tell they were having problems.

I am not saying the USTA should hide its head in the sand and not report these stories. But is it possible to have a general public Web site where the negative stories are kept off, or have a "members only" section to access these types of articles? It just seems to me if one of the problems harness racing has is attracting newcomers to the sport, the last thing we need to do is knock it down on a Web site meant to promote the breed and racing where newcomers may come to look up more information about the sport.

For the record, this is not just a USTA phenomenon: Standardbred Canada also airs the dirty laundry on its Web site.

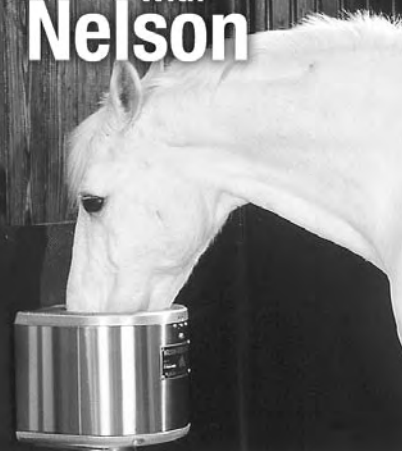
Allan Schott, Mahwah, N.J.

We welcome your input. Here's how to reach us.

- Mail: Reader Forum
Hoof Beats
750 Michigan Ave.
Columbus, OH 43215
- E-mail: hoofbeats@ustrotting.com
- Fax: 614.222.6791

Please include your name, address and phone number. Letters are subject to editing for clarity and space.

Water & Feed With Nelson



Automatic Waterers & NEW Horse Feeders

Featuring stainless steel construction and a removable bowl for easy cleaning.

Heaters are available in waterers for all-season reliability.



Nelson — setting the industry standard since 1949.



Water Consumption Indicator. You know if a horse is not drinking.

Call For A FREE Brochure
Or To Order Direct:
1-888-844-6606
www.nelsonmfg.com

NELSON®

Nelson Manufacturing Company
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404 U.S.A.