

Fighting The Good Fight



From The Executive Corner

by ROBYN BLACK

I want to begin by thanking the Board of Directors of the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA) and its Executive Vice President, Doug Burge, for all their support these past few years. The CTBA is a vital part of horse racing's future and without its voice I would be pessimistic about the future of this sport in California. The time and effort these individuals give each month often goes unnoticed, but without them there would be no CTBA.

Thoroughbred racing is facing challenging times and bold leadership is critical to our future. Other gaming interests are very aggressive, they have deep pockets and have a clear vision for their future. We have been very successful these past three years in Sacramento, defending any Internet Poker attempt which excludes horse racing and we are getting ready for the real fight in 2014.

The CTBA board and staff work hard to make it look easy but their dedication and generous gifts of time and talent have been key to our success in the Capitol. I also want to thank Sue Greene for her tireless efforts to protect the breeders' interests in the Golden State and for always offering to help host legislators, walk the halls, testify in committee or take on any other task that will help us in the fight. Her love and dedication for racing are a force to be reckoned with and I will miss her guidance, wisdom and support as the CTBA's President. Little does she know we don't plan to let her go off to greener pastures!

In 2013, the CTBA worked with Assemblyman Manuel Perez (D-Coachella) to pass AB 432 which was then signed by Governor Brown. AB 432 will protect Breeder's Incentives and Awards Programs should the state move forward with any exchange wagering agreement. The Assemblyman took a special interest in racing and even brought his wife and son to the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club last summer to learn more about the sport. His commitment was very helpful when we ran into initial opposition on the bill from an ADW provider but he moved forward and, with a great effort from Doug Burge, we were successful in the end.

The CTBA also played a significant role in the passage of SB 472 by Senator Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo). The bill was amended in the final weeks of session to allow for the Hollywood Park Casino to continue to operate its satellite wagering during the three-year period granted by the legislation to divest limited partners under current licensing requirements with specified conditions. The bill ran into opposition from other gaming interests and the CTBA, along with the Thor-

oughbred Owners Of California (TOC), were able to help move the bill to the Governor's desk and secure a signature. Thanks to our combined efforts, this important satellite facility will continue to operate and expand in the future.

However, by far and away the big fight was and is Internet Poker.

Over the past decade, the Native American tribes have continued to grow and succeed building new casinos, adding thousands of new slot machines and building tremendous political clout. They have spent the last four or five years fighting amongst themselves over I Poker, some tribal interests partnering with Las Vegas casinos, some with electronic gaming experts, some digging in dead set against any expansion, and some just dead set against allowing horse racing to be any part of it.

Tribal interests seem to finally have to come to agreement on the major pieces of I Poker in California, with only one interest still dividing them; horse racing. The battle will begin in earnest in January, with tribal interests and card rooms ready to move forward with legislation. We could be looking at three different bills in the state senate and a federal bill which does little for racing. Make no mistake, we are going to have to work harder than ever to make sure racing is not left behind when the legislation is passed.

The closing of Hollywood Park is yet another wakeup call to folks in Sacramento that as important as we are economically, and for employment and tourism, Sacramento must look towards policies that will protect and enhance California racing.

There is good news and reason for optimism, though. Santa Anita Park is investing in a location that only makes "The Great Race Place" even more spectacular. Del Mar is also investing in its future by building a new turf course in anticipation of hosting a Breeders' Cup. Legislators are taking the time to come to the farms and to the track and learn more about the beauty and importance of racing. We have a Governor and administration who care about racing and, most importantly, we have great people and great horses to help us tell that story.

We have an incredibly rich history built on agriculture as well as sports and entertainment. We need only to look other sports and gaming interests to realize we need to enhance the fan experience going forward and, lastly, we must not be spectators to our destiny but instead grab it by the reins. 🐾



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