



TY Green

CTBA BOARD MEMBER

GOLDEN GATE CLOSURE DELAYED UNTIL JUNE

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."

—President John F. Kennedy

Unless you've spent the last few weeks in Aaron Rogers' black-out room, you know that a monumental change has come to California racing. The Stronach Group announced that Golden Gate Fields, which has been running continuously since 1941, would be closing its doors forever in December of this year. This announcement rightly sent shockwaves through the industry and those who depend on it for their livelihood. Without a permanent base of racing in Northern California, the hundreds of horses stabled at Golden Gate would have to either move to Southern California or leave the state.

While the Stronach Group encouraged Northern California trainers and owners to relocate to Santa Anita, most were uncertain about whether they wanted to uproot their lives to seek competition on a new circuit. Although the Stronach Group offered assurances that races would be available for Northern California horses with higher purses, there was a genuine concern as to how many of those horses would fit in the seemingly higher level of Santa Anita racing. Many Northern California connections considered either leaving the state or leaving the game altogether. In short, California racing faced the greatest challenge in its illustrious history.

We at the CTBA recognized immediately the potential impact the Golden Gate closure could have on our members. We also recognized that the key short-term issue was time. Northern California racing interests needed time to either establish an

alternative racing circuit or plan a relocation south. While we had to plan for the scheduled Golden Gate closure, our immediate focus was on brokering an agreement between all interested parties for more time.

While this may not seem like a daunting task, given the time frame, it took a monumental effort to bring about a resolution. CTBA officials worked with the CHRB, CARF, the Stronach Group and the TOC toward some resolution. Literally hundreds of hours of negotiations took place over the period of a few weeks and, finally, at the 11th hour, a compromise acceptable to all parties was reached by which Golden Gate would remain open through June 2024. That extension gives CARF, or any other interested party, an opportunity to establish a Northern California racing circuit. The resolution is not perfect, but it is the best that could be reached.

By now you've no doubt heard that the resolution allows Northern California racing revenue to remain in the North while there is racing in the North. That foundation allows CARF or other interested parties to build a circuit utilizing existing facilities. There is certainly more work to be done, and the CTBA will provide whatever assistance it can toward that goal. The CTBA firmly supports racing in both Southern and Northern California.

That brings us to the "future" portion of President Kennedy's quote at the beginning of this article. Like it or not, the future of racing in California is tied to economics. In closing Golden Gate Fields, the Stronach Group cites economic losses as its primary reason. The challenge for Northern California will be to use the existing facilities at Sacramento, Pleasanton, and Fresno (and hopefully Santa Rosa) to create a viable circuit.

There are reasons to be optimistic. The Fairs all have fixed infrastructure in place. Some work will need to be done, such as adding turf courses where possible, but the CARF facilities are in excellent condition and don't carry the deferred maintenance costs of Golden Gate. Moreover, the closure of Turf Paradise, a sad day for our Arizona neighbors, does provide an opportunity for CARF to fashion racing programs to attract those horses to the new circuit. It is axiomatic that with more horses, the fields are bigger and handle is higher. Larger handles translate to bigger purses. We are very optimistic that the "new" Northern circuit is the beginning of a new era. At the same time, the CTBA is working with the Stronach Group to enhance the rewards and opportunities for California breeders.

It should go without saying, but the CTBA encourages all its members to support Northern California racing. A very significant number of California-breds run in the North, and supporting that circuit is critical to our breeding industry. The CTBA will be working with CARF to do whatever we can to enhance racing in the North and looks forward to a long and bright future for California racing.

Finally, we cannot emphasize enough the amount of work, dedication, and cooperation that went into reaching this resolution. The obvious players, who we thank, are CARF, the Stronach Group, and the TOC. While no one individual was responsible for the result, we want to recognize the effort of the CHRB, particularly board member Oscar Gonzalez. Oscar is dedicated to protecting racing in both Northern and Southern California and was relentless in making sure a compromise was reached. **CTB**