



Medication, safety issues to the fore

Thoroughbred Safety Committee updates progress, makes recommendations at Round Table Conference

by Tom Law

THE TWO most omnipresent issues facing American Thoroughbred racing were front and center as the Jockey Club's 56th annual Round Table Conference on Matters Pertaining to Racing truly lived up to its name on August 17 at the Gideon Putnam Hotel and Resort in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Medication and drug testing reform and equine welfare and safety took center stage at the annual gathering of high-ranking officials, industry executives, and decision-makers who chart the course of this country's Thoroughbred industry. The work of the Jockey Club Thoroughbred Safety Committee—formed just days after the death of Eight Belles as she galloped out after finishing second in the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1) on May 3—dominated the proceedings as speaker after speaker outlined the progress of the group that has already shaken up the industry's landscape through its anabolic steroid, toe grab, and whip-related reform recommendations.

"Change is needed, and it's needed now," Jockey Club Chairman Ogden Mills "Dinny" Phipps told the assembled group in his closing remarks. "We're not looking for credit; we are looking for change."

After opening the two-hour meeting with updates on the activities of the Jockey Club and some recommendations from American Horse Council President Jay Hickey on how the industry should handle possible federal intervention, the entire second half of the Round Table was dedicated to the Thoroughbred Safety Committee and the changes that group would like to see made in racing.

Four prominent individuals—WinStar Farm owner Bill Casner, California Horse Racing Board Equine Medical Director Rick Arthur, D.V.M., Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association Chairman Alan Foreman, and safety committee member and respected equine surgeon Larry Bramlage, D.V.M.—outlined at least a portion of the path the committee hopes will lead to changes in the industry.

Toe grabs

Casner, a proponent of the movement to eliminate toe grabs in American racing, outlined several key points in his "Toe Grab Recommendation" presentation, which included a video analysis showing the differences in horses wearing flat shoes versus those with toe grabs.

"You can see from these videos and from the data that these devices are not only damaging for our horses, but also how dangerous they are for our riders," Casner said. "The possibility of an accident puts the rider in peril and all the other riders be-

hind him in peril as well."

Casner called for a total ban on the use of toe grabs on the front feet of racehorses, which was part of the Thoroughbred Safety Committee's recommendations in June. The committee also called for the elimination of anabolic steroids in race training and racing, and made recommendations involving whip-related reforms prior to making four new recommendations to the Round Table (See text of Thoroughbred Safety Committee Chairman Stuart S. Janney III's speech, page 20.)

Casner also said the industry should pursue additional funds for research to study toe grabs and for the development of standard practices for farriers and for the training of farriers.

Janney called Casner's presentation "powerful" and pointed out several racetracks that have already adopted the recommendations of the safety committee in relation to toe grabs.

"In a short period of time, both California and Kentucky have adopted the committee's recommendation by legislative action, and the racetracks in the state of New York have done so by house rule," Janney said. "Other racing associations like Penn National Gaming [Inc.] have also stepped forward and accepted a leadership role on this issue. It is now time

[Race Course] in eight of nine races and at Del Mar in seven of eight races [on August 16]," Arthur said.

Arthur's tongue-in-cheek comment that "trainers claim they have no idea why their horses have high TCO2 [levels]" drew several chuckles from the crowd. He later said that the use of furosemide, the generic name of the diuretic Salix, was also in need of additional study as a performance enhancer related to TCO2.

"The question is why [is Salix a performance enhancer]?" Arthur said. "Is it in the decrease in [bleeding], as many racetrack practitioners like me believe? Is it the loss of roughly 20 pounds from urine diuresis, as some physiologists have claimed? Or is it the increase in TCO2? What we do know from our analysis, whatever the mechanism, the effect is added to the TCO2 effect."

Arthur said American racing should take pride in its drug testing program, which has "tested our athletes longer and for more drugs than any other sport with one glaring exception. The exception is anabolic steroids, and that is changing."

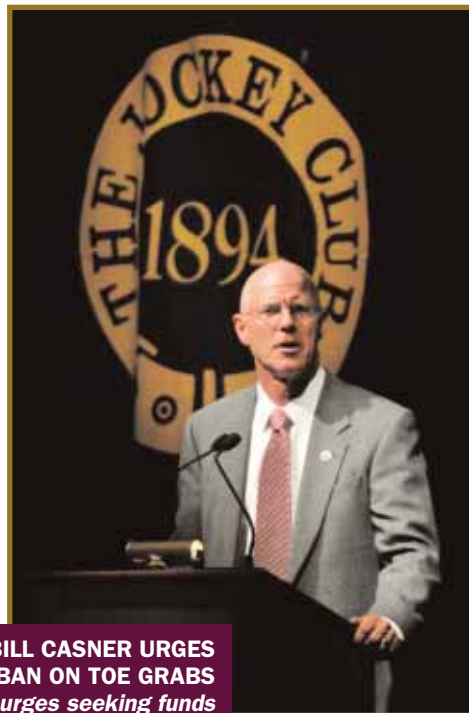
"I became cynical of the use of anabolic steroids long ago when I saw how their use altered the training of horses," Arthur said. "John Kimmel said it best at the racing forum at the [Association of Equine Practitioners convention] a few years ago. As most of you know, John was a practicing racetrack veterinarian for several years before he became

a trainer. John stood up in front of 100 racetrack veterinarians and asked, 'When are you going to ban anabolic steroids?' He went on to say that anabolic steroids allow a trainer to train a horse harder than would otherwise be possible naturally.

"Keep in mind intensity of exercise has been related to catastrophic musculoskeletal racehorse injuries ... there is unpublished data in California relating anabolic steroids to exercise intensity and fatal injuries."

Drug testing

Foreman also discussed the medication and drug testing issue in his speech



BILL CASNER URGES TOTAL BAN ON TOE GRABS
Also urges seeking funds to develop standard practices for farriers

jurisdictions.

Foreman closed by outlining seven suggestions on how to fix the drug problem in racing:

- Establish a reference, research, and testing lab controlled by the racing industry;
- Establish strict industry lab standards for drug testing and implement them in the quickest and most practical means;
- Consolidate the drug testing lab system and reduce the number of labs;
- Invest in research and development;
- Develop a new generation of scientists, toxicologists, and pharmacologists;
- Ask the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium to revisit and recommend uniform withdrawal time guidelines based on existing research; and
- Recognize the importance of, and significant work performed by RMTC.

Photos courtesy of Jockey Club

Soundness issues

Bramlage, a surgeon at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital in Lexington and a frequent participant in the AAEP's On Call veterinary team that explains equine injuries to the public during racing's televised events, outlined the results of a data-rich study that sought to refute some charges in the "popular press" that were incorrect about the soundness of racehorses.

Bramlage said the two following charges were refuted by the Thoroughbred Safety Committee by statistical analysis:

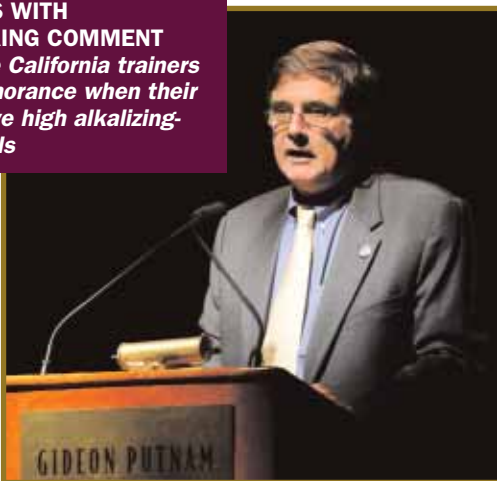
• The training and racing of two-year-old Thoroughbreds is predisposing these horses to accelerated rates of injury and prematurely shortened careers; and

• The Thoroughbred industry is raising horses only to sell, not to race. This is weakening the breed to the point they are unable to race.

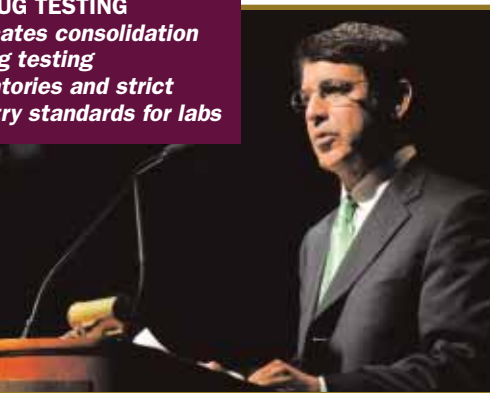
"The data is definitive," Bramlage said. "It shows that horses that began racing as two-year-olds are much more successful, have much longer careers, and, by extrapolation, show less predisposition to injury than horses that did not begin racing until their three-year-old year."

"The environmental and economic reality of racing the young adult horse is the area where we must concentrate our efforts to disentangle the current rate of decline in average starts per racing career and address the safety or soundness components. The data shows the Thoroughbred approaching a racing career is capable as an athlete and the successful older horse is racing a sustained career." ♣

RICK ARTHUR DRAWS CHUCKLES WITH MILKSHAKING COMMENT
Says some California trainers profess ignorance when their horses have high alkalinizing-agent levels



ALAN FOREMAN DISCUSSES PROBLEMS IN DRUG TESTING
Advocates consolidation of drug testing laboratories and strict industry standards for labs



Tom Law is managing editor of THOROUGHBRED TIMES.

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