



The advertisement features a screenshot of a TrueNicks software interface on the left, showing a 'HYPOTHETICAL Mating Report' with various data fields. To the right, the text reads: 'Broodmare Owners: Find the right stallion with Hypothetical Mating Reports from TrueNicks.' The TrueNicks logo, featuring a silhouette of a horse and rider, is on the far right with the tagline 'Do more than just hope for the best'.

## AP Report: Racetrack Deaths Down Slightly

by *The Associated Press*

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The rush to improve safety since Eight Belles was euthanized at last year's Kentucky Derby Presented By Yum! Brands (gr. I) did little to curb the number of horses dying at American racetracks in 2008, The Associated Press found in a national count.

Although many tracks were already implementing safety reforms when the popular filly pulled up lame with two broken legs after finishing second at the Derby in May 2008, her death on racing's biggest stage gave the effort a national face and new momentum.

However, the AP's count found only a slight change in the number of fatalities in 2008 (1,217) compared with 2007 (1,247). That's around 3% fewer deaths.

"If it were that easy to change, we would have flipped that switch a long time ago," said Mary Scollay, Kentucky's equine medical director, who is assembling an industrywide database on horse breakdowns, the findings of which haven't been released. "We've learned injuries are very complex in their causes, and there are a number of things that need to be critically evaluated."

Racing officials and equine experts are unsure exactly why the total remains so stubbornly high, though they point out racetrack deaths can happen for a variety of reasons. Also, no single change is likely to produce overnight results and many states implemented reforms after the Derby, so their impact would only be felt for part of 2008.

Last year, using open records requests sent to all Thoroughbred racing states, the AP counted more than 5,000 horses that were reported killed at tracks between 2003 and 2007. The number was highest in the 2007 count because some states didn't keep track before that.

The same request was sent again this year to cover 2008. Responses from the states varied slightly because the minor racing states of South Dakota and Wyoming provided totals for 2008 but not 2007, and Kansas, which reported seven deaths in 2007, had none to report last year because its major track, The Woodlands, closed for economic reasons. Also, some states may have slightly altered their record-keeping methods.

By this year's Kentucky Derby, nearly every major racing state had banned anabolic steroids, even though a necropsy showed Eight Belles was not on them. Tracks also scrambled to enhance the testing of their racing surfaces, apply padding to starting gates, replace whips with noisy but less painful riding crops and outlaw a certain kind of horseshoe known to cause injuries.

"I believe, and I think our fans believe, thoroughbreds are competing in a safer environment today than they were one year ago," said Alex Waldrop, president of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association.

Although some of the reforms, such as the steroid ban, took longer to implement and in some states may have only affected a few races later in the year, a comparison between 2007 and 2008 reveals a troubling trend at some of the nation's biggest racetracks.

Of the 26 states that provided statistics for both years, 12 reported more deaths last year than the year before. Thirteen others reported fewer, with Virginia listing eight both years.

California, which hosts by far the most races due to its numerous tracks and ideal climate for the sport, again recorded more than twice as many fatalities as any other state. The AP counted 251 racing and training-related deaths there in

2008, up from 240 the year before.

Louisiana reported the biggest improvement, dropping from 68 deaths in 2007 to 40 last year.

Tom David, the state's equine medical director, attributed the change to a new pre-race exam program that was launched last year following the staggering number of deaths from 2007 - nearly half of which occurred at Evangeline Downs.

"That really threw up a flag we have a serious problem," David said.

Luis Marquez, director of racing in Arizona, where there were 81 horse deaths in 2008 and 80 in 2007, said state budget shortfalls could be hampering safety. His state wants to issue pre-race exams too, but there are 11 unfilled vacancies in the racing office that have made it difficult to keep the same level of injury monitoring, let alone add a new layer.

"An animal may be perfectly fine today, but then tomorrow it doesn't feel good and you're making it race," Marquez said. "When you do a pre-race evaluation, you have a better chance of detecting injury."

Even some tracks with pre-race exams saw their fatality numbers increase for other reasons.

When Turfway Park in Florence, Ky., replaced its dirt surface with synthetic in 2006, there was no fatal breakdown for the first 69 days of racing. Then in the holiday meet last December, eight horses died within a month - twice as many as an even longer holiday meet in 2007.

While Turfway officials are still examining what may have caused the increase, among the theories is that its ban on rear "toe grabs" - shoes that contain metal spikes to aid in traction - might have backfired. While a ban on front toe grabs is now standard in the industry, Turfway has since rescinded its ban on the rear ones.

Since the death of Eight Belles, NTRA issued a checklist of proposed safety changes and appointed a panel led by former Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson to investigate tracks and accredit those in compliance. Churchill Downs, the Derby's host track, was the first to gain approval.

"Accidents can happen," Thompson said, "but if an accident happens, let's see if we can make the results of that accident as minimal as possible."

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