

		Racing Stock Owners: Evaluate potential of a pedigree cross with Named Foal Reports from TrueNicks.		
				

Turfway Injuries Down in January

by Esther Marr

Date Posted: 2/10/2009 5:36:19 PM

Last Updated: 2/10/2009 8:41:06 PM



Photo: Pat Lang

A month after Turfway Park experienced eight catastrophic breakdowns during its 21-day holiday meet, state veterinarian Dr. Bryce Peckham and Turfway president Bob Elliston were on hand at a Feb. 10 Kentucky Horse Racing Commission meeting in Lexington to present commissioners a much more positive report.

"It gives me great pleasure to present this report," said Peckham, who was recently named chief racing veterinarian by the KHRC. Peckham's most recent report, which encompassed the last three days of the holiday meet and the first 20 days of the winter/spring meet, included three fatal injuries, none of which had occurred within the last month.

The period accounted for 2,162 starters, which is about 200 more than the December report. There were 14 pre-race vet scratches during that period, as opposed to 12 in December, and 10 ambulance runs,

down from 16 a month ago, when there were fewer racing dates.

"This is very, very positive," said Peckham, who noted he had studied the effect of Turfway lifting the ban on rear-shoe toe grabs Jan. 1.

Toe grabs, which are thought to provide greater traction, are banned in most jurisdictions on the front shoes. Keeneland and Turfway had also banned them on rear shoes because of a belief the all-weather surface provides enough traction. Turfway lifted the ban after vets thought they devices would be useful when horses race around turns.

Since the ban has been lifted, Peckham observed a gradual increase in horses wearing the toe grabs, which was up to 72% of all the entrants at the Northern Kentucky track Feb. 8.

Elliston noted that since Turfway began racing on its Polytrack surface in September 2005, there had been an average of one catastrophic breakdown per 1,000 starters, versus around three per 1,000 starters on the conventional dirt surface. The national average in 2007 for conventional surfaces was a little more than two breakdowns per 1,000 starters.

"In that horizon, we have seen nearly a 50% reduction in breakdowns relative to the national average on our all-weather surface, so we're pretty happy about that," Elliston said. "We're making progress, and when the (eight breakdowns) occurred in December at Turfway, we were alarmed. We're happy now that we've return to normalcy."

In examining reasons behind the sudden increase in breakdowns in December, Elliston said he learned from several veterinarians how most injuries can be "multi-factorial," and several things can happen over a period of time to contribute to a specific issue with a horse.

"Since we can't rely on one fact set or one amount of data, we've redoubled our efforts," Elliston said. "We evaluate every possible potential cause of relationship that could go into that number. The best way we do that is not rely on anecdotal data, but accumulate as much actual data as we can from every source possible.

"There really isn't a standard for that. We're getting smarter, thanks to The Jockey Club and (Kentucky equine medical director) Dr. Mary Scollay's uniform injury reporting system. We're going to be much better off two years from now, but we've got to deal with this today. The standard we're trying to create is to investigate every single catastrophic injury like the FBI would investigate any kind of crime."

Elliston said Turfway is accomplishing that through multi-fact sets, repetitive interviews with people who had come in contact with fatally injured horses prior to their breakdowns, and video evidence to examine the track. He said exercise riders every morning fill out forms for track officials to give them a sense of the consistency of the racing surface.

“So I would feel very confident telling you we collect more data from the participants on our track than any other track in North America,” Elliston said. “I hope others will take that experience and learn from it like we are. Just the fact that we’ve returned to normalcy in January doesn’t cause us to put this aside and say everything’s OK. We’re going to continue to collect data.”

Turfway has been more aggressive with the maintenance of its surface since January, with crews using three different types of equipment to work the surface throughout the night--especially in extreme temperatures--in order to better groom, redistribute, and mix the fibers in the Polytrack.

“We were aggressive prior to that, but we’re checking every process to make sure we’re doing the best,” Elliston said. “I think as we move through this, in spite of the uncomfortable position all of us were in December, we’ll grow and learn from this. I continue to remain very supportive of the all-weather surface at Turfway. I think it’s a huge benefit to our horsemen, track, and riders.”

Copyright © 2009 The Blood-Horse, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[SUBSCRIBE to *The Blood-Horse* magazine TODAY!](#)