

AP

## Tracks to Monitor Horse Injuries

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By Jeffrey McMurray, Associated Press Writer

### 30 Racetracks to Begin Monitoring Injuries to Horses Starting Friday

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) -- Just over a year after Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro shattered his leg in the Preakness, 30 racetracks across the country are set to launch a program to record on-track injuries to horses.

Under the new system, veterinarians at each track will fill out a standardized form to compile detailed reports of the injuries. The pilot program begins Friday at tracks from California to Florida, including three in Kentucky: Churchill Downs, Keeneland and Turfway Park.

Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, where Barbaro suffered his ultimately fatal injury last May, hasn't yet signed on.

The monitoring system, one of the suggestions generated last October at an industry summit on horse welfare and safety in Lexington, will give tracks better information about not just how many injuries there are but also what causes them.

While most tracks have been keeping records of injuries -- particularly catastrophic ones -- the data was almost useless when comparing one to another because of different definitions used by the onsite veterinarians. For example, one track might consider racetrack fatalities only to be horses euthanized that day, whereas others could include horses such as Barbaro that died several months later.

"It is not going to be an absolute panacea to eliminate injuries," said Mary Scollay, association veterinarian at Calder Race Course and Gulfstream Park, who developed the system. "It is going to be a tool racetracks can use."

Scollay is compiling a computerized database, which will determine not just what percentage of horses are injured on a given race course but also the types of injuries, the location on the track where they happened and details about the horse -- including breeding history and any medications they may have been using.

The results will be kept confidential, released only to the reporting veterinarians, who will share them with the tracks.

"It is not my intention to allow this database to be used to point fingers and say, 'Your track is bad, your track is good, your track is worse than someone else,'" Scollay said. "That's not constructive."

Although the horse community was examining racetrack safety well before Barbaro's ill-fated run, officials acknowledged the public outcry over that incident expedited things.

"When that happened, the industry was at a loss to be able to answer the question, 'How frequent are injuries?'" said Ed Bowen, president of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation. "A lot of people took it as kind of an embarrassment that this industry can't answer that simple question."

There are many proposed solutions to making tracks safer -- from synthetic surfaces to improved guard rails -- but track officials are hoping to use this information to determine which would be most helpful.

Lisa Underwood, executive director of the Kentucky Horse Racing Authority, said the new reporting form is similar to the one that has been used in her state. But, she said there are huge advantages to centralizing the information.

"We were compiling the data, but we didn't have the manpower to then go forward and do the studies," Underwood said.