

## Summit Issues Recommendations to Improve Racehorse Safety

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The Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit ended Tuesday in Lexington after more than 40 participants worked together to draft action plans in six areas to improve conditions in the Thoroughbred industry. The six areas were Education and Licensing; Racing Conditions/Racing Office; Research; Health and Medical Records; Racing Surfaces/Shoeing/Hoof Care; and Breeding Practices.

Specific recommendations included the following:

- Research, develop, and publish additional statistics that will provide insight into the durability and longevity of progeny of breeding stock.
- Make efforts to have scientific research more widely distributed among industry stakeholders.
- Examine the use or ban of certain horseshoes, such as toe-grabs, in the wake of presentations and research by Dr. Sue Stover and other summit participants.
- Develop a uniform on-track injury reporting system for horses and humans.
- Provide continuing education for all horsemen, exercise riders, and farriers, and make initiatives like the Groom Elite program more available throughout the country.

According to Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation president Ed Bowen, there also were recommendations concerning medication. They will be passed along to the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC).

"It would be a redundancy of effort because they are making such progress," said Bowen of the decision to let the RMTC direct the medication effort. "It seemed like the most efficient use of manpower. We don't want to get in the way." He added that the recommendations involved "continuing to expand the knowledge of which medications should be used."

The Jockey Club and the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation underwrote and coordinated the summit. Keeneland served as host.

The impact of the summit's work in the industry remains to be seen because summit participants lack the authority to require cooperation. Dr. Rick Arthur, the equine medical director of the California Horse Racing Board, acknowledged the challenge, but was optimistic that the summit's recommendations would make a difference.

"We have no authority," he said. "All we have is our ability to persuade the people who are responsible in their specific areas to go in the direction that we're recommending. It's a very disjointed industry and it's very parochial in a lot of ways. Everybody has their own little territory. But I think this (making racing safer) is an important enough issue that the industry will come together, and we actually feel very positive that we have some ideas that can move forward very quickly."

Money should not be a problem in carrying out any of the recommendations, according to Bowen.

"As far as I can tell, with everything that is being put forward, either we (the Grayson Foundation) have the funds for, or in many cases, it's a just a matter of suggesting things to the rest of the industry," he said. "As far as generating statistics and generating education materials, we either will fund that or hope that we get the cooperation of other organizations."

Participants in the two-day summit included trainers, owners, breeders, racetrack and sale company officials, and veterinarians. Several weeks before the event, they received information packets containing research papers, articles, statistics, and public comments that addressed various health and welfare issues.

The summit opened Monday with a public session during which several scientific reports were presented and three panel discussions were held. Participants were divided into six groups for closed sessions in the afternoon. According to a press release from The Jockey Club, each group was asked to list at least three critical issues associated with the decline in the racing careers of Thoroughbred horses over the last 50 years in terms of fewer years raced and fewer starts per year and to list action plans for each issue. At the end of afternoon, the moderator from each group presented their recommendations.

Monday evening, the participants received write-ups about the day's group discussions and were asked to prioritize the issues in terms of importance.

Tuesday morning, there were brief scientific presentations, which were followed by strategic planning sessions during which each group focused on one of the issues and identified a primary objective, a related objective, responsible parties, and resources. Each group also developed criteria for success and came up with a timeline to address its issue. A final report of the summit will be distributed to each participant before the end of October, according to The Jockey Club.

"I was very impressed with how organized it was and how well all the participants stuck to the format," said Ric Waldman, a Kentucky-based consultant who manages the careers of stallions at Overbrook Farm and elsewhere. "For the time spent, we came away with some excellent ideas and plans of implementation. We accomplished as much as one can accomplish in the planning stage. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting, and we'll find out how much gets implemented at the end of the day, but I'm very optimistic that much will come of this."

The Jockey Club didn't provide details of the action plans in a press release issued following the summit. But during a press conference, summit participants discussed how some of the recommendations would be implemented.

For example, Dr. Mary Scollay of Florida already is working on a uniform racetrack injury reporting system for horses.

"The form that we're looking at (for reporting injuries) is in a draft phase, and it's a form that I'm already using in my jurisdiction," she said. "There will be a meeting of racing regulatory veterinarians that will be sponsored by the RMTTC at the AAEP

(American Association of Equine Practitioners) convention in December. I'm expecting there will be some jurisdictions there who have meets coming up in the spring or the summer and will say, 'We'd like to try it at our place and get back to you.' The information that's generated over a period of time could be looked at in terms of general trends. And then, I would hope that maybe by the first of the next year (2008), there would be something in place for national participation. But we have to achieve consensus on the data that we collect and the format that we collect it in. We need to have buy-in from the whole industry and, in particular, the regulators."

Bowen also discussed some details of the plans for developing and reporting the statistics on the durability and longevity of breeding stock progeny.

"What we have in mind is a list of stallions that are the leading stallions on the basis of such things as percentage of starters from foals and average starts per foal," he said. "We'll probably look at the average distance per victory. It's nothing particularly arcane or complicated. If it turns out that the top horse by those measures has very little commercial appeal, the breeders are going to have to make a decision. What we would like to think is that it would highlight some horses that are pretty good bargains and then that would help to strengthen the breed in future generations. I'm prepared to live with the fact that we might offend some people, but what we're trying to do is to help people create a horse that will be safer and sounder. "