



President's Update

By Dan Sullivan



Dates, Oh Them Dates

The annual Dates Hearing is set before the Illinois Racing Board on September 22, 2016. This is a very important exercise and it represents whether owners and breeders participate in Illinois racing—or even want to participate. So, Arlington wants 71 programs (215 host days). Hawthorne wants 59 programs (150 host days) and Hawthorne, as Suburban Downs, Inc., wants 80 harness programs (365 host days). Fairmont wants 150 programs.

So, in Northern Illinois thoroughbred owners get 130 days of racing but the owners can watch other tracks race on television the rest of the time. But what will that do to the purses? What will that do with the racing opportunities?

The questions underlying those raw numbers are perhaps much more interesting. With those racing days, will the backstretches at Illinois' remaining three tracks fill? Or, will they be as sparsely populated as they have been?

Will cutting down the race days diminish the number of racing opportunities? Will the standard race day include seven races instead of 10, or nine or eight? Will each race track be able to write two Illinois races per day as required by statute? Can the Illinois races be filled with the dwindling number of Illinois foals?

If the trend lines of the past several years continue, the sucking sounds you will continue to hear will be the horses leaving Illinois back stretches for greener pastures. Whether those pastures are other tracks or just retirement.

What is the sole cause for the trend lines? Purses. The purses just can't get any lower. In fact, they just can't continue at the same level. Why can't they? Because owners cannot and will not subsidize their horses indefinitely.

What is the solution? Gaming isn't going to come fast enough to act as an interim panacea helping to support live racing. So, immediately, any cost pulled from the purse account has to be eliminated. The honey in the honey pot of the purse account is too low to support the bees (owners) that make it possible for the honey to exist.

After slapping stray hands dipping in the purse account what can be done? About all that can be done it seems is hope the tracks try to burnish their business model. That would include helping the purse account by working to increase the attendance at races. The answer to

live racing in Illinois is not to be found in electronic gaming. If you go to the track and you can shoot a gun down the backstretch or in the stands, then any meet and any set of dates the Illinois Racing Board gives will eventually fail.

How can race attendance be increased? By marketing the product and causing people to want to come to the races. Is that a responsibility of the owner or the breeder? No, that is the responsibility of the track. It is the responsibility of the track to want people to come to the races. Why is a focus on marketing approach that important? Because in today's urban society, people don't become fascinated with horses because they grew up with them. They have to be introduced to them. They have to come to appreciate their beauty and their effort.

And why does the track need this effort? Because these are the people that become bettors. The loss of bettor interest by introducing new and younger bettors is critical to horse racing's survival. This is, and will be more and more difficult. Because, right now, young strangers who have never petted a horse have more and more places to try to realize on a bet. Because, the tracks are losing the interest of the bettors when there are so many competitive outlets that can generate excitement. This is the failure of the tracks and it is shown by the date requests when the tracks are more interested in getting host dates than live racing.

A greater focus on live racing is also important in another way. It garners public support for gaming legislation. This is desperately needed right now in the legislature to pass expanded gaming that can expand interest in live racing in Illinois. If there was the huge audience that follows football clamoring for gaming at the race tracks would gaming legislation have passed long ago? You bet it would have passed. The legislature would have ignored the petty bickering of competing special interest groups.

The hope this fall is there may still just enough public support to get a gaming bill passed to help tracks market horse racing. (Not just get gaming to abandon horse racing.) Otherwise, if there is a continued loss of interest in live racing in Illinois, one wonders if it will ever get done. And, if it doesn't get done soon, one wonders how long there will be date hearings.



ATTENTION!

The next eligibility payment for the 2016 Pat Whitworth Debutant and Jim Edgar Futurity is due September 30, 2016.

If you haven't received your sustaining eligibility notice or you have a late nomination, call Dan Arrigo at 847-253-3670

WANTED

Illinois Thoroughbred Breeders
JOAN KAREL: \$924.60 • RALPH FOX: \$4,619.12
GEOFF HERMES: \$283.59 • DAVID SIMPSON: \$187.27
GARY SINDELAR: \$437.46 • PHILIP C. BLUM: \$667.37
RICHARD W. PLETAN: \$1,528.35 • Tracy Carr: \$190.44
Mary P. Ozanic & Randy Bond: \$86.94
Paula Olson: \$1,615.23 • Cleveland Richardson: \$34.50
Estate of John Robertson: \$539.03
Estate of Harry Newman: \$605.49
Tomas Garza: \$671.21 • Sandy Bank: \$96.60

WANTED! The I.T.B.O.F. is seeking contact with the above named persons in order to pay them Breeders' Awards. If you can supply a current name, address, and/or telephone number on any of these persons, you could be of service to a fellow horseman.