

From the Executive Office



Let the Sun Shine

In last month's editorial, I mentioned that I had recently attended a series of meetings that focused on future racing events for leading state-bred horses. In that article, I specifically concentrated on one of these potentially exciting racing days, the NTRA Great State Challenge. It has now been confirmed that the Challenge will be held Dec. 7, 2002, at Sam Houston Race Park, carrying total purses of \$1.5 million and featuring six races matching the top horses from various states.

The other promising and extremely lucrative day of racing that we have been discussing is the Sunshine Millions. This is the \$5 million day of racing that will feature California-breds versus Florida-breds. Perhaps most of you have seen the write-ups on this event in the various equine publications. I would like to stress that the parameters for this are still being configured and final approval from all parties still needs to take place in the near future.

This idea of the Sunshine Millions, or the Sunshine Cup as it was originally called, was first presented to us by Frank Stronach (Chairman of Magna Entertainment) in the summer of last year. The initial draft of the proposed series called for four to six races held at both Santa Anita and Gulfstream Park with total purses at each location in the neighborhood of four to \$6 million.

An event such as this would significantly elevate the worth of and demand for quality Cal-breds and Florida-breds. An annual day of racing with such high purses, places an added premium on the value of California-breds. This would further stimulate the production of horses with the emphasis on breeding quality.

Magna would fund a portion of the purses, and the breeders and horseman in California and Florida would fund the other portion. Although the details need fine tuning, it is obvious to see why we're so excited about the probability of such a series.

As expected, the major obstacle to the initial concept was funding. An \$8 million day sounds great, but the bottom line was that it was going to be very difficult for both California and Florida to fund at that level. Plus, the original home and home format resulted in concerns regarding shipping and field size. For example, if a horse won a particular Sunshine Cup race at one location by a significant number of lengths, why would horses that ran behind the winner ship across country to meet that horse again?

With this in mind, Dick Hancock (Executive Director of the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association) and I drafted a new proposal that would address these issues. The latest plan would have four stakes races each at Santa Anita and Gulfstream Park—on the same day—with total purses of \$5 million. This split, \$2.5 million in purses at each location, was a much more feasible plan. Six of the eight races would carry a purse of \$500,000 each, with the two 3-year-old races (one for fillies and mares and one for colts and geldings) offering a purse of \$1 million each. The six \$500,000 races would include two sprints, two races for older horses and two races for older horses on the turf.

In regards to the latest proposal, discussions on the sources of funding for the races held at Santa Anita have included contributions by Magna, a small shift in California-bred stakes dollars currently allocated during the Santa Anita winter/spring meet, the allocation of purse money generated through handle on that day, and nomination, entry and starting fees. Negotiations for the funding of the races are still ongoing, however we are optimistic that an agreement will be made so that the inaugural Sunshine Millions Day will be held in January of 2003.

With so much potential benefit at stake for the California breeding industry, we will work diligently to try and make this event a reality. I will keep everyone posted as to our progress.

—Doug Burge