

## *From the Executive Office*



# In A Great State of Mind

While in Tucson, Arizona, for the Annual RTIP (Race Track Industry Program) Symposium on Racing last month, I attended a series of meetings that focused on future days of racing featuring top state-bred horses. One of these events, the NTRA Great State Challenge, has recently been finalized and announced by the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA), and is slated to be held in early December. This date is ideal as it would be 30 to 40 days after Cal Cup.

This event will feature six races matching horses from various states. A state will send one representative for each race, with eight states guaranteed a horse in every race. As expected, California is one of the guaranteed states along with Florida, Kentucky, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Maryland and Texas.

The idea of the Great State Challenge originally surfaced a few years ago in meetings between the various state breeders associations. The thought was to highlight our individual state-bred day winners, and have them compete amongst one another with the hopes of crowning an overall champion. We believe that such an event would further emphasize the prestige and importance of our individual state championship days. Plus, it would give us some bragging rights for the rest of the year.

With the allocation of \$1.2 million from the NTRA and Breeders Cup, the day featuring top horses from various states will now become a reality. The NTRA and Breeders Cup should be commended for their efforts, both financially and managerially, in working with the state associations to schedule this event for 2002. This is a prime example of the NTRA concentrating its efforts at the individual state levels, something it had been periodically criticized for not doing in the past.

The State Challenge will offer total purses of \$1.5 million. Each race will be advertised at \$250,000, and carry a guarantee of \$150,000, plus \$50,000 for Breeders' Cup nominated horses, and an additional \$50,000 from each state-bred fund to be used strictly for any top placing horses from that specific state.

From this \$50,000 state fund allocation, a maximum of \$30,000 (60 percent to the winner) per race would be paid from the fund, with the remaining \$20,000 reverting back. Therefore, if California-breds were to win all six races, the CTBA would only be responsible for allocating a total of \$180,000 to this event, arguably worth the amount for promotional value alone. The CTBA will earmark 50 percent of the Annual Stallion Registration fees to offset the association's commitment to purses. This amount had previously been allocated to purses for the California Sires Stakes.

The six state challenge races include: two juvenile races at seven furlongs; a sprint for 3-year-olds and up at six furlongs; a turf race for 3-year-olds and up at 1 1/8 miles; a filly and mare race for 3-year-olds and up at 1 1/16 miles; and the Classic for 3-year-olds and up at 1 1/8 miles. A selection committee consisting of members of the participating state associations as well as racing officials, will decide as to which horses are chosen to represent a specific state. Discussions will continue to take place on other particulars, such as payment of shipping costs, purse percentage distribution, etc.

The NTRA solicited proposals from various tracks interested in hosting the event. Sam Houston Race Park in Texas was chosen as the host site for the inaugural running. While I am supportive of this choice and do believe Sam Houston will do an excellent job hosting the event, I am somewhat concerned with the lack of market penetration of their signal. With the success and future of this event related to the economic viability of producing the day, I am hopeful that wagering locations throughout the country will be receiving the simulcast signal. These races should have large, competitive fields and be very popular with the bettors, thus generating significant handle.

All in all, I am excited about the prospects of the Great State Challenge, and am looking forward to a strong showing from our Cal-bred contingent.

— Doug Burge