

# RE-ELECTION OF FHBPA BOARD WILL PROLONG DISASTER

Reprinted from Dec. '08-Jan. '09

In our last issue, I attempted - in a nicer way than the Florida HBPA executive board deserved - to advise horsemen why not to buy into the malarkey that group sold to the majority of its members. The group is led by its president, Sam (I've never been wrong) Gordon, Treasurer Barry (Ring around the Rosie) Rose and Director Kent (We've got to stick together even if you have to starve to death) Stirling, who have brought South Florida's horsemen to destitution's door.

What is it, one might ask, that makes me seem so bitter? It's because these men and their accomplices, as well-intentioned as they swear they are, are responsible for the theft of my identity.

I can't think of many jobs more difficult and demanding than that of a horse trainer. This is why I have spent most of my adult life fighting for the best possible conditions to benefit them, affording the highest remuneration for their efforts. Giving the FHBPA the benefit of the doubt, it's even possible they actually believe they have taken the right course for the last eight months, the results of which have brought impending disaster to the once-powerful South Florida racing circuit.

My disappointment is not personal because prior to this past April, when the FHBPA board became responsible for withholding the Churchill Downs-Calder simulcast signal, we had worked together constructively for as far back as I can remember. Yet, when I implored the current board at its general meeting in April to restore the vital simulcast signal at Calder while continuing to negotiate an equitable solution with Churchill Downs, my pleas fell on deaf ears.

My August editorial was headlined, "Most Horsemen Won't Live To See The Money The FHBPA Has Squandered," which at the time was more than \$7 million. As of Thanksgiving and three tumultuous months of hardships later, loss of quality horses, trainers, jockeys and bettors has weakened the thoroughbred product beyond belief.

Thus far, at least a \$10 million loss has been substantiated. With that has come the realization by horsemen yet to leave the area that the faith they placed in the promises of the FHBPA board has been a huge mistake.

A third-quarter SEC report reveals that Calder's net parimutuel revenues, which were \$58.8 million for the same period in 2007, were only \$44.6 million this year. Further, in 2007, Churchill Downs paid Calder horsemen purses of \$37 million, while at the completion of the final two weeks of this year's meet, it will be \$11 million less.

Simply put, the well is dry. Calder and its parent company, Churchill Downs, have not taken a penny from the horsemen. These horsemen now better understand that purse money is generated from wagering. The consequence of the FHBPA prohibiting ADW wagering is the major cause of the crisis. As of December, following the opening of Tampa Bay Downs and the resolving of its simulcast situation, Calder remained the only significant racing entity without ADWs.

If the FHBPA's Dec. 18 general meeting does not result in the return of the ADWs to Calder, the final nails might just as well be ordered for the coffin and

## Publisher's Prerogative

By GENE STEVENS



the so-called benevolent association will be held responsible.

The following comes from our Gent At The Races, Keith Christopher's column on page 24. "Horsemen, track owners and Advance Deposit Wagering companies must find a way to end their scorched earth shutdown. In a time of slumping business, it's insanity to deny customers access to your product.

"Keeping players from betting online or via the telephone accomplishes two things, both deadly to horse racing. It pushes players to offshore betting sites, which contribute nothing back to the game, and it encourages the public to find other outlets, primarily the now-ubiquitous Indian casinos, for their disposable income (assuming there is any these days).

"What horsemen have been doing the past year isn't just shooting themselves in the foot, it's pulling their foot up right next to their brain, then pulling the trigger. This is not to say there isn't merit to their position. But taking it out on the ever-dwindling legion of customers is suicidal."

When I learned of the singular accomplishments of Louisiana HBPA president Sean Alfortish, and how he solved his and other states' THG, ADW and other simulcast problems, I contacted him. I asked for his input as to what actions he might suggest be taken to avert the South Florida racing community's further collapse. Please see his straight-shooting reply on page 48.

In a significant portion of his Dec. 11 letter, he states, "From the start, THG's initial 'model' could not work. In fact, as of the writing of this letter I can tell you that the 'model' for THG has been changed numerous times because it was impossible to adopt on a national basis."

He questions why Florida's horsemen have not settled a dispute which should have ended long ago. "Thus far," he says, "the dispute at Calder this year alone has cost the Florida horsemen \$10.3 million in purse money that those horsemen will never recover. Florida continues to be withholding the signal without sound business sense."

He continues, "**FLORIDA HORSEMEN AT GULFSTREAM HAVE ALREADY BEEN OFFERED A HOST FEE BY TRACKNET**

**WHICH EXCEEDS ANY "HOST FEE" OFFER OF ANY RACETRACK IN THE COUNTRY AND HAS BEEN TOLD THAT THE SIGNAL WILL ALSO BE OFFERED TO YOBET.COM AND TVG.COM. I EQUATE FHBPA'S BELIEF THAT IT SHOULD CONTINUE TO WITHHOLD ITS SIGNAL FROM THE BETTORS TO ACCOMPLISHING AS MUCH AS SUICIDE."**

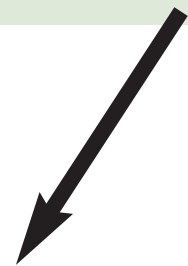
He says, "Florida owners continue to suffer from reduced purses, while the costs continue to rise, forcing people out of the business and bettors to look for an alternative form of entertainment. News flash! Once they leave they are not coming back anytime soon, if ever."

With the February election of FHBPA officers not far off, anything short of giving the boot to Gordon,



JEAN RAFTERY TURFOTOS

**In its heyday, Calder's big stakes days drew crowds like the one above. Today Calder's apron looks like this on most days.**



Rose and Stirling and their underachieving executive board would be blasphemous. It was mind-boggling when I read Stirling's quote about being betrayed by the Louisiana horsemen. Why isn't he angered at his betrayal of his own organization? South Florida's thoroughbred community has paid dearly for the FHBPA's secret agendas, ulterior motives, lies, half-truths, misinformation and delusional demands. The fact that president Sam Gordon has sent his horses to run elsewhere should say it all. Failure to replace the culprits and their accomplices will only sharpen the guillotine which awaits.

