

The gait sure is familiar

ANNE
LANG



Last month, when a landmark experiment involving cloning human embryos was revealed at an American Fertility Society meeting, the unexpectedly sensational news triggered horrified reactions around the world.

Objections largely stemmed from a fear that if human cloning became a viable option, the unique genetic identities of future newborns would be jeopardized or eliminated altogether.

The "unique genetic identities" of thoroughbreds have been staunchly protected for centuries, and that's not likely to change. But amid the human cloning furor, I found myself fantasizing about what could happen if thoroughbred breeders began emulating, for instance, the cattle industry - which started cloning the embryos of some exceptional milk cows in 1980.

Imagine if equine cloning had been a universally accepted practice for the past 20 years or so. Racing fans in a dozen states might well have thrilled to see

clones of Seattle Slew, Affirmed or Alysheba competing under different jockeys, at different tracks, under different trainers and at different distances - simultaneously.

A handicapper's dream ... or a nightmare?

For starters, The Jockey Club would have its hands full with the complexities of a Clone Division. And racing programs would have to indicate "C" for clone or "O" for original.

Or maybe this particular Brave New World could be initially confined to one track (Jurassic Downs?) featuring a caliber of racing guaranteed to pack the grandstand.

A veritable Breeders' Cup card every day! Breakdowns? Retirements? No problem. Just reach into the freezer and presto! Three years later, you've got a reincarnated Best Pal, Lure or Sky Beauty.

Kinda scary, isn't it, when you really start to examine the consequences of messing with nature? As fervently as we might wish for exact copies of Ruffian or Secretariat, so much of racing's magic comes from the unknown result of the next breeding.

It's a genetic crapshoot each time, regardless of the black type, blue blood or greenbacks involved. We're an industry of gamblers, in constant pursuit of elusive, perfect combinations. And it's a safe bet that we'll keep it that way.

□ *Anne Lang is the Texas breeding correspondent for Daily Racing Form.*