

Mind what you say, now

There was a time, prior to this year's catastrophe-free Breeders' Cup Day, when it looked like the indisputable power of television was going to bring horseracing to its knees.

Nationally televised breakdowns in previous Cup events, the Triple Crown and other prominent races had further tainted an already-jaded public view of the sport. Reinforcing those images were some sobering, if sometimes sensational, print media reports - but the vivid impressions left by television arguably have been the most lasting and damaging.

Unfortunately, the revitalized efforts many industry participants are putting forth toward improving racing's myriad problems don't make the six o'clock news. It's usually the grisly stuff

the networks are after, and they'll get it wherever they can find it. Whether you're a jock's valet or a general manager, you never know when somebody might shove a live microphone in your face and demand that you tell America why so many racehorses are dying agonizing deaths and why nobody in racing seems to care. Joan McGrath and Myrna Pedersen travel around the country helping people to become "media-ready" for such occasions. At the recent American Association of

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questions like, "How does it feel to kill a horse?"

The tricky part, as they pointed out, is not just to redirect the antagonism, but to segue into a reply that says something positive about the sport. Granted, that's not so easy. Most average people are just short of terrified in an interview situation. Others, well-accustomed to the media spotlight, let careless answers get

At the recent AAEP convention, they tested veterinarians' ability to respond gracefully to questions like, "How does it feel to kill a horse?"

Equine Practitioners convention, they tested veterinarians' ability to respond gracefully to

them into trouble - as Craig Perret can attest.

Progress in media-readiness is being made with organized efforts such as the AAEP's On Call veterinarians, who are on the scene at televised races to offer expert analyses ranging from bucked shins to five-horse spills. But there are experts at all levels of racing, and if a reporter needing information seeks you out, it's probably because you're an expert at your particular job. And if you keep that in mind as you deliver your carefully worded answers, you might even find the confidence to plug the industry somewhere in your reply.

Don't let the sound bytes bite you.

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