

The Battle is Over; The Building Begins

The morning of Wednesday, November 4, I awoke before dawn. Groping for my robe in the dark, I crept down the stairs and scuttled out to the driveway where the morning newspaper awaited me in its dew-covered cellophane wrapper.

My eyes, grainy and tired from peering at post-midnight television news reports just hours before, managed to focus on the large bold headline: "Betting Ok'd In Heavy State Turnout." Hardly a dramatic proclamation of triumph, but decisive enough to convince me that the last 12 hours or so had not been a dream, after all.

Only 90 percent of the state's votes had been tabulated as of the Austin paper's press time, but the margin of "for" vs. "against" votes on pari-mutuel horse racing was more than substantial enough to ensure ultimate victory. Then, and only then, did I allow myself a joyous whoop of delight. We did it! We did it! We did it!

As I raced to work that morning, eager to celebrate with fellow TTBA staff members (all of whom would receive countless telephone calls throughout the day and week from horsemen all over the state, many just checking in to say, "Hey! Can ya believe it?"), I reflected on all the activity that led to the November 3 victory at the polls.

I thought of all the dozens of county and civic events at which dedicated racing enthusiasts, often most predominantly the Texas Women for Pari-Mutuel forces, who volunteered hundreds of hours to man booths providing education and information at the grassroots level.

Other people, far too numerous to mention by name, who devoted their

By ANNE LANG
Texas Thoroughbred Editor

time and expertise to raise the consciousness level of their communities by talking to various civic groups and providing informative printed material on the benefits of racing for Texas.

People like THRA's Ricky Knox and Ken Campbell, who so assiduously laid the groundwork for, maintained and carried through a massive phonebank network, speakers' forum, direct mail campaign, media blitz and string of successful fundraisers. Not only did these men venture above and beyond the call of professional duty in working virtually around the clock and around the state, they somehow managed to keep smiling and rise above the constant undercurrent of grumbling provided by numerous prophets of doom. And that was just among certain small ranks of alleged racing supporters — we won't even talk about the flak they had to endure — indeed, that *all* of us had to endure — from the Opposition.

As the statewide referendum date drew near, there were thousands of horse people all over Texas who wore their pari-mutuel buttons daily, talking up the issue to anyone who would listen, patiently refuting the rhetorical arguments of the ill-informed. People who invested their own hard-earned dollars to host fundraisers ranging from backyard barbecues to giant country-western blowouts; and who mailed postcards and letters to all their friends and all the people they do business with, urging their support in the referendum.

There were people who plastered bumper stickers and racing banners every place they could think of; people who, like me, spent several hours the night before the vote nailing up yard signs on strategically-placed telephone poles around town, ignoring the indignant horn blasts of passing motorists whose political opinions differed. And people who wrote letters to the editors of their newspapers and appeared on local television talk shows to spread the good word about pari-mutuel.

All that hard work paid off, at last. Not just the hard work of the last 12 months, either. Passage of pari-mutuel wagering in Texas is the most fitting reward possible for all those faithful horsemen who stubbornly chose to stick it out all these many, many years — tirelessly hauling their runners hundreds of miles each season to tracks in the surrounding states; shipping their mares off to those same states for breeding; reluctantly standing their best stallions in those states where the action was more prevalent.

But the times, they are a-changin'! Let the other states start hauling to Texas now, because WE will set the standard for all of it: racing, breeding, training. The works. And we will ensure continued improvement of the breed by designing a model Texas-bred program, offering numerous, incomparable incentives for choosing "home-grown" every time.

The echoes of the Opposition's false accusations and ominous predictions will fade into oblivion as Texas' pari-mutuel racing program begins to take shape. Appointment of

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the most diligent, qualified and informed racing commission available will lay the foundation for racetrack operations that will be above reproach. We will live up to our emphatic promise to the people of Texas to provide good, clean, strictly-regulated horse racing that will offer enjoyment for millions of residents and tourists year-round, jobs for thousands of Texans, a shot in the arm for agriculture and oh, so much more.

Lastly, let's not forget the single factor that motivated us to get involved in this exciting business in the first place: the mighty Thoroughbred horse. Whether our level of involvement is as an owner or breeder, a veterinarian or a trainer, an exercise rider or a stable hand, even the most hardened individual among us admits to at least some degree of passion for the breed.

That familiar lump in the throat, tear in the eye or flutter of the heart might occur at the moment a newborn foal wobbles to its feet for the first time . . . or when that two-year-old filly you bred, raised and trained in your back field pounds across the finish line with a three-length victory in her maiden race . . . or when the stallion you're hand-grazing suddenly snaps his head up in mid-bite, ears at attention, nostrils flaring and eyes focused on some distant image that we, as mere humans, will never be privileged to see or hear — that unmistakable Look of Eagles.

The Thoroughbred. It's why you're reading this magazine today. It's why you sacrificed so many pleasures, options and common sense to stay in the breeding and racing game. And it's a big part of why we have at last arrived on the threshold of a great new era in Texas racing. The Thoroughbred has finally been granted the right to compete with the best of 'em on Texas soil. And we're going to see to it that the road to the finish line will be first-class, all the way, every time.

Because the Thoroughbred deserves nothing less.

Happy Pari-Mutuel New Year,
Texas! 