

NATIONAL NEWS

AAEP CONVENTION

Vets: Be prepared for breakdowns

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

Dr. George Mundy says tracks need a plan

SAN ANTONIO - The veterinary community is taking an active role in helping to alleviate an increasingly negative public image caused by breakdowns and fatalities in nationally prominent horseraces. And the Kentucky Racing Commission's chief veterinarian, Dr. George Mundy, is among the leading activists.

During a session devoted to equine rescue management at the Association of American Equine Practitioners convention here Tuesday, Mundy offered advice on handling initial triage of the acutely injured racehorse. As consulting veterinarian to the Breeders' Cup, Mundy directed a beefed-up veterinary team whose intensive pre-race inspections were widely credited for contributing to the first breakdown-free Breeders' Cup in several years.

But Mundy's comments to his colleagues focused on racetracks in general, many of which he declared as woefully unprepared to handle race-day catastrophes.

"I continue to be amazed at the number of tracks where you've got (someone) sweeping the stands during the races, then a breakdown occurs and it's (that same person's) job to run down there, fire up the tractor and head for the emergency scene," Mundy said. "Dealing with racing injuries requires a plan."

Mundy recommended devising a communications network, preferably a radio system with a designated dispatcher, capable of instantly linking key personnel - including racing officials, veterinary officials, trainers, track supervisors and even the press box - because "if the publicity people are in on the picture, there's much less chance of misinformation getting out to the media."

To further ensure swift and safe rescues, Mundy stressed the importance of a full ambulance team including driver, horse handler and veterinarian. And to help minimize the dramatic effect of catastrophes that occur before the grandstand, he advised placing the

horse ambulance at the quarter pole.

The ambulance, he continued, should be equipped with a hydraulic lift to lower the vehicle's floor to ground level, "in order to reduce the effects of trauma to the injured area." Inside the ambulance, immediate steps should be taken to stabilize the injured area.

In cases of major fractures, strains, tears or other non-weight-bearing injuries, Mundy recommends using items such as fiberglass casts or compression boots to encase the limb, regardless of whether the injury appears to be career-ending.

"When you're not sure, it's better to err on the side of conservatism and provide that extra support," he said. "Every day, new rehabilitative techniques are being brought into this field by our colleagues. We must be able to do all we can (in triage) so that those innovative practices might be put into effect."

Mundy said pre-race inspections are essential at all levels of racing.

"This procedure has had a marked influence on preventing racing injuries and should be carried out as a part of every race day at every track. When it comes to dealing with racing injuries, we need a professional approach. And veterinarians are the best-qualified individuals to implement that approach."

On a related topic, Mundy reported that at thoroughbred racetracks in Kentucky during the first half of 1992, career-ending and catastrophic injuries occurred at a rate of 22 per 14,540 starts. In his own review of a seven-month period at Kentucky racetracks, Mundy found that there were 3.3 muscu-

loskeletal injuries and 1.4 catastrophic injuries per 1,000 starts.

Also during the equine rescue session, Dr. Leah Estberg of the California Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System, which conducts postmortems on all horses who die on California racetracks, shared her findings from a study of horses who died during 1991. Estberg specifically evaluated racing-related factors possibly associated with increased risk for catastrophic injury or illness.

Exercise-related injuries accounted for 83 percent of the deaths in 1991, Estberg said, and 88 percent of those were musculoskeletal. Of the 163 deaths caused by an exercise-related injury, 83 were incurred while racing and 80 while training. Among Estberg's findings: For fatal musculoskeletal injuries, males were at twice the risk of females, and 4-year-olds were at twice the risk as 3-year-olds.

Injuries to females during training were significantly more frequent than injuries suffered while racing, although the comparison rates of injuries to males in training as opposed to racing were fairly even, Estberg said. And females injured while training were mostly younger than females injured while racing.

Dr. Susan Stover, of the University of California at Davis veterinary school, discussed patterns of pre-existing stress fractures in racehorses, based on a study of pelvis, scapula and tibia bones with complete fractures obtained from horses that died on California racetracks.

What Stover found was evidence of pre-existing stress fracture disease in almost all 18 cases.

Lavin named AAEP head

SAN ANTONIO - Dr. A. Gary Lavin of Prospect, Ky., was installed as the 39th president of the American Association of Equine Practitioners during their annual convention here.

Lavin, who practices primarily at Churchill Downs, has been acting AAEP president since February, following the death of then-president Dr. Dan Evans.

- Anne Lang

NATIONAL NEWS

AAEP CONVENTION

Report reveals interesting patterns

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

SAN ANTONIO - A much-anticipated report on racing injuries and breakdowns presented during the American Association of Equine Practitioners convention here earlier this week was dismissed as anticlimactic by those who came to hear conclusive deductions.

Ever since a Sports Illustrated article published in the Nov. 1 editions - which promised that Dr. Julia Wilson's AAEP report would reveal never-before-released statistics reflecting an alarmingly high trend of equine racing fatalities - the racing industry, veterinary community and racing public had been awaiting Monday's presentation with a mixture of dread and curiosity.

But as Wilson had stressed in a Daily Racing Form article last week, the data drawn from racing-injury reports that she has been gathering for the past two years is nowhere near complete, as the overall picture still lacks significant input from some key sources.

Instead, the presentation Wilson delivered to a room packed with her colleagues focused on a series of emerging patterns she is discovering in her review of the data - which has come from 35 racing regulatory veterinarians representing 34 racetracks who have filed 1,090 injury reports on thoroughbreds and 61 on racehorses of other breeds. And the reports continue to arrive every week.

"This is not designed to be a

great scientific study," Wilson said. "It's a survey, and it's an ongoing project in need of constant fine-tuning and upgrading."

Wilson had been a veterinarian before becoming an epidemiology doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota.

She's still waiting for information from the Jockey Club on how many horses were racing at each of the meets for which she has data.

Given those missing elements, the fact that the injury report form was not as detailed as it might have been and the tendency of some veterinarians to

submit incomplete information, Wilson was able to present only an abstract analysis of the data by the time of the convention. The following trends - along with some actual numbers - were among those she said were beginning to develop from thoroughbred reports included in the database so far:

□ A total of 996 injuries was reported on dirt surfaces and 94 on turf courses. Of those injuries, 866 fell into the musculoskeletal category.

□ The most frequently injured areas were left forelegs, and the most common injuries were bowed tendons, followed by ankle breakdowns.

□ Ankle breakdowns on dirt surfaces were the most frequent injuries that resulted in euthana-

sia. This type of trauma occurred mostly on the backstretch, and often on the first turn. Ankle breakdowns were most common among 4- and 5-year-olds.

□ While hind-leg injuries were not frequent, most were fatal.

□ Twice as many fillies as males suffered bowed tendons. Bowed tendons occurred most frequently on the first turn, followed by the backstretch. The frequency of bowed tendons increased among

older horses, but Wilson said she does not know how many of those were rebows.

□ Cannonbone injuries occurred mostly on the back-

stretch and first turn, and were reported most frequently on 3-year-old colts.

□ Carpal injuries occurred mostly in the stretch, represented mostly by 4-year-old fillies.

□ Of the reported injuries, 545 occurred on fast tracks and 151 on off tracks. More bowed tendons occurred on fast tracks and also more ankle breakdowns, while more suspensory injuries and fractures occurred on off tracks.

□ Cases of heatstroke were most prevalent at tracks located near large bodies of water.

Wilson followed up her presentation of those patterns with these comments.

"We're beginning to see that gender plays an important role, and that we need to pay a lot of atten-

tion to the track surface," she said. "For instance, how high-banking as opposed to low-banking pertains to injuries, or how various managements tend to their track surfaces.

"Intertrack comparisons are premature at this point, because we're still awaiting the Jockey Club numbers. But it's going to be fascinating to continue studying these trends to see if the differences are mostly in track design or in the quality of the horses."

Also interesting, Wilson added, is that so far the 2-year-olds aren't cropping up in any significantly high-injury categories - contrary to what many critics of racing young horses might expect.

Defending her decision to talk publicly about the study at a time when so many elements of the study were missing, Wilson said she and her project advisors felt that the AAEP convention was an invaluable opportunity to promote the project within the veterinary industry. The study already has been funded for 1994 with contributions from RCI, AAEP, the Thoroughbred Racing Associations and the American Quarter Horse Association. All names on survey forms are being kept strictly confidential.

And Wilson's ultimate goal for her part in the project?

"I want to reveal some high-risk areas where we as veterinarians might intervene to help alleviate racing injuries," she said. "At this meeting, I believe we succeeded in getting people talking about it and putting on their thinking caps."

The data drawn from racing-injury reports is nowhere near complete, as the overall picture still lacks significant input from some key sources.

EQUINE PRACTITIONERS CONVENTION

Horse's welfare issues addressed

By **ANNE LANG**

Texas correspondent

SAN ANTONIO - Issues pertaining to racehorse welfare - with considerable emphasis on improving methods for streamlining drug administration procedures - were raised during several committee meetings conducted during the first two days of the 1993 American Association of Equine Practitioners convention, scheduled to continue through Wednesday here.

Addressing the AAEP Racing Committee and Racetrack Regulatory Committee was Dr. Robert Gowen, administrator for the Quality Assurance Program of the Association of Racing Commissioners International. Gowen said that one of the QAP's top priorities for 1994 will be to pursue accreditation of all QAP member laboratories by the American Association of Laboratory Accreditation. Ideally, he said, each laboratory will eventually be using standardized testing procedures.

Gowen reported that significant progress was made toward reaching the QAP's major goals for the past year, which included producing a revised drug classification list and withdrawal time recommendations for selected therapeutic medications. From a list of 725 drugs, a special committee of veterinarians assigned

each drug to one of five classification categories. That list was approved by the full QAP committee and sent to all racing commissions.

"We then wanted to pinpoint those drugs for which veterinarians might desire withdrawal time recommendations," Gowen said. After polling members of the Veterinary Advisory Committee and numerous AAEP practitioners, the special committee came up with a list of 10 candidate drugs - all in the Class 4 or Class 5 therapeutic categories - for receiving recommended withdrawal times. That list will be subject to full QAP committee review in January.

"I'm very happy that some recommendations were made," Gowen said. "But withdrawal times are always controversial because there are many variables." Gowen pointed to the varying capabilities and techniques of laboratories as examples.

On a related note, Gowen said that in January, Elisa Technologies will release a do-it-yourself test kit for Procaine, which will include steps similar to home pregnancy tests used by women. Elisa plans to follow up this new concept with home-test kits for other commonly used racehorse drugs as well, Gowen said.

"It's good, because it allows owners to police themselves," he said.

Reinforcing an AAEP goal of improving the health and welfare of the racehorse, Dr. George Mundy, chief veterinarian for the Kentucky

State Racing Commission, detailed his ideas for Nat Vet, a proposed national veterinary data base to be shared by Thoroughbred Racing Associations' member tracks. The data, he explained, would include prerace injuries, racing injuries, race-day medications, vets' lists, infectious-disease monitoring, drug-testing records and horse locations.

"This would be a big step toward uniformity and a probable decrease in racing injuries," Mundy said. "We need the industry to support this system, and I think the AAEP can go a long way toward promoting it to other factions (such as The Jockey Club, ARC, TRA, etc.)."

Acting on the advice of Chicago-based veterinarians Ron Jensen and Mary Scollay, both of whom were deeply involved with treating horses affected by last summer's equine viral arteritis (EVA) outbreak at Arlington, the Racetrack Regulatory Committee voted to endorse the concept of a clearinghouse (such as the University of Kentucky's Gluck Equine Center) to provide national preparation guidelines for dealing with outbreaks of equine infectious diseases; and also endorsed the concept of recommending that all racehorses be vaccinated against EVA.

Since EVA is transmitted through semen, Jensen said that "we could probably eliminate this disease entirely if we vaccinate all the colts before they're sexually mature."

AAEP CONVENTION

Agenda: Accentuate the positive

By ANNE LANG*Special to Daily Racing Form*

SAN ANTONIO - Racehorse injuries and breakdowns - closely related subjects of growing concern among industry participants as well as the general public - are two of the key topics to be discussed at this year's American Association of Equine Practitioners annual convention, scheduled here for Sunday through Thursday.

In addition to the obvious goal of providing solutions, new perspectives revealed in several sessions may help offset negative publicity resulting from the past year's inordinate number of media reports on racing injuries and breakdowns, which added fuel to an already

fiery debate over who, or what, is to blame for the frequency of racetrack traumas.

Causing particular indignation in the racing world was a recent *Sports Illustrated* article, which many felt depicted racetrack veterinarians as heartless automatons who routinely administer dangerously excessive doses of painkillers and steroids to potential equine casualties.

Dr. Julia Wilson of the University of Minnesota, the *SI* story announced, would expose "just how bad the (fatality) numbers are" in a paper to be presented at the convention. Wilson is indeed on the agenda, but she says the last thing she's trying to do is trash the industry.

"I was especially disappointed that they painted such a negative image of racetrack practitioners," said Wilson, who galloped racehorses while working as an equine veterinarian in Virginia. "I know there are bad apples out there, but I'd disagree with the assessment that they're the majority."

"Also, they gave the (injury and breakdown) research efforts so little space, and they left out the fact that the racing industry is beginning to change its attitude and is becoming much more supportive of this kind of research," she added.

Wilson has been involved in research for the past two years that started out as a pilot project initiated by the Association of Racing Commissioners International, intended to implement ways of making racetrack injury reports more useful to the industry.

Most of the injury data collected for the study has come from Arlington and, earlier, from the now defunct Canterbury Downs. On Sunday, Wilson will present

"a description of what's in the database, rather than any great hypothesis testing or anything more advanced," she said. "That will be done in the near future, but not in time for this meeting - in part because we're still waiting for information from the Jockey Club on how many horses were racing at each of the meets for which we have data."

Because those numbers change on a daily basis, Wilson added, she was unhappy that the *Sports Illustrated* article's inclusion of some of the statistics she'd collected appeared as a distorted summary of her work, which is nowhere near finished.

Financial commitments from the ARCI, the AAEP, Thoroughbred Racing Associations and the American Quarter Horse Association will guarantee her project's budget of \$11,000 for 1994. Interest has also been expressed by the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and a grant request will be submitted to the Grayson Foundation for 1995.

Wilson said she hopes her abstract "will add credibility to the project, and garner further support within the veterinary side. If we take the philosophy that veterinarians are the leaders in reducing injuries, perhaps we can help persuade other members of the industry - particularly the thoroughbred community - to follow along."

Wilson has her own opinions on how to alleviate the regularity of breakdowns and injuries.

"Track surfaces could use a lot of improvement - I feel that's one of the biggest areas where we can all make a difference," she said.

A related session will be "Rescue & Management of the Acutely Injured Horse."