

NATIONAL NEWS

HBPA CONVENTION

National restructuring set

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

HOUSTON - Directors and officers of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association are optimistic that significant changes made during the association's recent winter meeting will return the HBPA to its previous status as what one of its leaders termed "the best organization to represent the interests of owners and trainers in the industry."

Marty Maline, executive director of the Kentucky HBPA, also has been acting as the national organization's interim executive director. In his assessment of action taken during the HBPA national directors' meeting, conducted Feb. 12-15 in Houston, Maline said he feels all of the criteria has been met for encouraging the renewed involvement of several jurisdictions that have seceded from the national organization during the past 18 months or so.

Among the major changes Maline said he thinks will once again unite North American horsemen's groups:

□ A restructuring of the national office, to be headed by a full-time executive who works specifically and daily on national issues. "Someone who can develop new ideas and programs to benefit HBPA affiliates across the country, and who, with a clear and concise voice, can bring the message of horsemen

to the different industry leaders," Maline said.

□ A plan to move the national office from New Orleans to a location "either in close proximity to the industry's other leading organizations, or at least to a centrally located area with easy accessibility."

□ New membership options, offered at a discounted rate - including individual memberships for horsemen living in states that have no affiliation with the national HBPA. Adding to the allure of this new option, Maline feels, would be those individuals' opportunity to take advantage of HBPA's unique horsemen's insurance program (which includes, among other features, fire and disaster coverage during shipping as well as on track).

□ A tiered voting system that will give more votes to the affiliate states who pay the highest dues. HBPA's executive committee now includes representatives from the top five dues-paying jurisdictions: New England, Kentucky, Florida, Ohio and Louisiana, as well as two at-large states, Michigan and Nebraska.

□ A cap on national dues.

Regarding the possibility of the national office being transferred to Lexington, Ky. - home to numerous racing-related organizations with a national scope - Maline said that while that might seem to be a logical choice (he named Chicago as another possibility), the ultimate decision

hinges on whom the search committee chooses to hire as the new HBPA chief executive.

"It might turn out to be better to move the office to that individual's current home town; we'll just have to wait and see," said Maline, who prefers not to discuss whether he'll be in the running. Meanwhile, assisting Maline with overseeing the affairs of the national office "on a mostly consultant basis" are several other directors from other states.

Maline said the HBPA executive committee will act promptly to develop a list of candidates for the position, while simultaneously scouting out potential relocation spots. September has been targeted for completion of the transition.

Looking at the broader financial picture: Even though HBPA's 1995 operating budget is set at \$200,000 (compared to \$491,000 in 1994) Maline said he predicts national funds will be boosted by the newly created individual memberships, as well as new and former jurisdictions coming on board. Among the latter, the affiliation approved at the Houston meeting, will be the recently restructured California HBPA - consisting solely of trainers and trainer/owners, operating as a separate entity from the relatively new Thoroughbred Owners of California organization. Affiliate agreements with Indiana and Tampa Bay Downs also were approved last week.

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Fine-tuning drug testing

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

HOUSTON - While it serves the racing industry in many beneficial ways, advanced technology also is capable of elevating chemical findings in equine drug tests to hypersensitive levels - often detecting ineffective residual traces of therapeutic medications or infinitesimal vestiges of substances that are prohibited for racing, but such minute residual levels actually have no pharmacological effect on a horse's performance.

Growing numbers of trainers are being fined for positives, under cir-

cumstances in which they believe they have no control. Consequently, helping persuade racing industry regulators to make adjustments to accommodate sophisticated drug-testing methods is a goal set forth by directors of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association, which discussed the issue during its Feb. 12-15 winter meeting here.

In Monday's medication committee session, two potentially significant steps toward that goal were revealed. Dr. Sal Lococo reported that on Feb. 5, a pivotal recommendation came out of the veterinary advisory committee of the American Racing Commissioners Interna-

tional's Quality Assurance Program. In essence, the suggested policy would require all chemical findings in official test samples (equine and canine) to be reviewed by the commission veterinarian or "appropriate veterinary consultant" prior to initiating any regulatory action.

Further: "The ARCI recommends that their members specifically implement procedures to have veterinary consultants review findings for ARCI Class 4 and 5 substances to address trace level detection so as not to lead to administrative action based on pharmacologically insignificant traces of those substances." The recommendation likely will be voted upon at the next ARCI board meeting in April.

The second potential step toward changes in drug testing is closely related to the first. It's the creation of an official training course for the appropriately involved veterinarians or veterinary consultants, designed to heighten their understanding of new chemical procedures emerging from rapidly changing technology - and how those procedures specifically apply to therapeutic drug testing in the racing industry. Ideally, course graduates would return to their respective jurisdictions ready to serve as informed, up-to-date liaisons between lab chemists and track stewards.

Commission requests audit

HOUSTON - Contracts between several tracks and the Texas chapter of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association were approved at Monday's Texas Racing Commission meeting - with one caveat. The commission staff raised questions regarding several procedural problems that surfaced last fall in a 1993 THBPA audit, and in order for contracts between horsemen and Retama Park, Trinity Meadows, Bandera Downs and Manor Downs to receive unconditional approval, the THBPA must provide the commission staff with a final copy of the audit no later than Feb. 27.

Commission spokesperson Jean Cook said the staff doesn't anticipate there being any further problems with the audit, but added that if any questions do remain after Feb. 27, the issue will have to be reviewed at the next commission meeting March 27 - which is just 10 days prior to Retama Park's opening April 7.

But THBPA board member Jerry Windham said he's confident the audit will satisfy the commission staff. "We had already implemented most of the suggested changes at the time the questions arose, which was last November," he said.

-Anne Lang

NATIONAL NEWS

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Betting innovations discussed at forum

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

HOUSTON - New ideas for "getting the racing product to the people" enlightened 100 or so participants at the winter meeting of the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association Feb. 12-15. On Monday, HBPA directors and officers from across the country learned about the concept of at-home betting and combination video card game/race wagering terminals.

Discussing the emergence of home betting was Scott Reneau of Oklahoma-based On Demand Services Technologies, which, in cooperation with United Video Satellite, has been using Maryland as a test market. The home-betting project is still in the early stages, but Reneau said long-range goals are "to build revenue and purses and to enhance the entertainment value of the sport."

Right now, he explained, ODS executives are primarily focused on establishing the idea's credibility. "As much as we hear about the 'vast information superhighway,' access to the highway we're pursuing in Maryland is limited to companies who can prove the worth of their product to the distributors." The major distributors in this case would be cable operators, Reneau said.

Home betting would be facilitated by a set-top converter box. The screen would present a variety of easy options (such as a list of in-state

tracks, the day's card at each track, data on entries, the home bettor's personal account balance and current odds). The race itself would be shown on the screen.

ODS's progress in Maryland will evolve in three stages. First (and nearly completed) is the technical evaluation, based on the acceptability and integrity of the data. "So far the technical results have all been fine," Reneau said. The second phase involves market trials, in which prototype home-betting systems will be installed in 400 homes of people ranging in experience from veteran race bettors to complete novices.

The third and final phase will expand the video product into multiple race cards - involving all of a chosen state's tracks. "All betting will be in-state," Reneau explained, "and we're limiting our focus right now to the seven states that have phone betting."

ODS chose to market the racing industry for several reasons, he said. "Video already exists at tracks; racing is an information-driven activity; there is an identifiable customer base; and the wagering element adds value for everyone." He said his company is aiming at the large proportion of society that might be mildly interested in wagering, but is not motivated enough to go to the track.

"So we don't feel we'd be stealing away the fan who goes to the track every day; he's probably there because he enjoys betting from there. And we're not targeting the person at the opposite end of the spectrum, either - the one who's not interested in betting at all."

Asked about the temptation to tie in with the casino industry, Reneau said, "That's not gonna happen. We're in the racing business."

United AutoTote's corporate vice president, Gerald Lawrence, unveiled his company's self-automated video terminal that offers card games as well as race wagering.

Players have touch-screen access to all the information they need about the offered races, including simple steps for placing a wager. A "window" design allows the player to watch the race he has bet on while still engaged in a card game.

United AutoTote has been testing the terminals at two West Virginia dog tracks, Tri State and Wheeling. The machines have been heavily used at both locations, Lawrence said, adding that during the test period at Tri State, on-track handle has increased 29 percent and attendance is up by 30 percent.

"We've also helped dispel the myth that the typical race player is a 55-year-old white male," Lawrence said. "At Tri-State, our user surveys reduce the average age to 47 - and show that 65 percent of the users are women. So it looks like the wives of those 55-year-olds now have a reason to join their husbands at the track."

Lawrence cited a 1994 Gallup Poll that found 63 percent of people surveyed were in favor of casino gambling. "We've got to figure out how to get a share of this particular growth industry, because the practice of gambling is obviously growing."

INDUSTRY NEWS

Steps outlined for substance-abuse programs

By ANNE LANG

Special to Daily Racing Form

HOUSTON - No magical solution for eliminating pervasive drug and alcohol abuse among backstretch personnel was revealed, but some time-tested methods for alleviating those problems were brought to light during Sunday's substance abuse committee session of the Horsemen's Protective and Benevolent Association, which concludes its four-day winter meeting here Wednesday.

Louisiana HBPA director Revella Norman, primary creator of an extensive substance abuse program in her home state, outlined specific steps for implementing such a program, and shared numerous methods that seem to work best toward participants' recovery.

Norman pointed out that the trainer and/or owner often is the substance abuser's main "enabler," by allowing the suspected activity to continue unchecked. Instead, she suggested, employers should acquire a "tough-love" stance.

"For instance, if payday is Saturday, tell your workers: 'Don't come to me on Thursday (if you've run out of money). You'll have to wait until payday.' People will succeed if you give them those kinds of parameters," Norman said.

Mandatory drug-testing is the more direct approach, she added -

particularly if it's conducted at random, and in cooperation with the respective state racing commission.

"This has worked very well in Louisiana," Norman said. "If people know they might be tested at any time, they're not going to be as prone to use (drugs or alcohol)."

Among Norman's suggested elements for organizing a substance abuse program:

□ **Team strategy** - Devise a council of people who are committed to hands-on involvement in the recovery of people with various addictions. The council structure might include the following: program spearheader, chaplain, qualified substance abuse counselor, legislator, publicity liaison, respected owners and trainers, track management and racing commission personnel; also recovered substance abusers or people currently in recovery.

□ **Financial support** - Solicit partial funding from the local HBPA and large-scale stables. To raise additional money, conduct events such as barbecues or raffles. Persuade local recovery centers to subsidize 30-day treatments for individuals lacking insurance.

□ **Paid staff** - Recruit an executive director from a recovery center or state agency that handles related concerns; also a certified counselor who is qualified to recommend prop-

er substance abuse treatment for each individual. Many professionals at this level often are willing to volunteer some, or even all, of their services.

□ **Ensured continuity** - In states with more than one track, the executive director can set up and oversee a substance abuse program network - including features such as the 12-step recovery process - to provide continuity of assistance for personnel who move from track to track.

Also, coordinate with similar programs in the community, so participants will have a place to go during the off-season.

□ **Point of refuge** - Designate a meeting room to be used only for program-related meetings (Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, etc.) and as a place where backside workers can go to relax in a smoke-free, substance-free environment.

Norman reminded potential program organizers that the success of any racing stable begins at its foundation.

"We worry about casinos and riverboats, but we tend to lose sight of problems that might be occurring in our own barns," she said. "Think of the team that makes your horse run - that hotwalker is as important as the state steward.

"Be sure to educate your assistant trainer and your shedrow foreman,

because they're going to have the closest contact with backstretch personnel.

"This isn't a difficult challenge; all each of you has to do is clean up your own shedrow. Be persistent, have some enthusiasm about your program, and it will get off the ground - I assure you.

"Get your most prominent trainers involved, and the others will follow."

Although she has no formal statistics on racetrack substance abuse, Norman views the widespread dilemma as critical - and warns of what can happen when an individual's addictive cycle is allowed to continue.

"If the disease progresses, you'll end up in a medical facility or penitentiary," she said. "Or you'll die." But a person who chooses to participate in a substance abuse program is making a long-term investment, because even there's a relapse later on, "that person is already equipped with the tools to get back to recovery," she said.

Above all, Norman said, don't try to force participation from known or suspected substance abusers.

"We don't recruit," she said. "We simply make the program available to people, and let them take from it what they will."

INDUSTRY NEWS

HBPA summit to tackle restructuring

By ANNE LANG

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Among the primary topics to be discussed at the Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association's winter meeting this week are a possible restructuring of the national organization; determining realistic threshold levels of equine medication; how to compete with increasing forms of alternative gaming; the pros and cons of simulcasting; and means of combating substance abuse among backstretch personnel.

About 100 HBPA directors and officers - representing 28 affiliate chapters from across the country - have convened in Houston for the four-day meeting, which begins Sunday. One of the chief organizers is Marty Maline, executive director of the Kentucky chapter and the HBPA's interim national executive director.

"As a result of a (Feb. 3) meeting in Florida, where representatives of several Eastern horsemen's groups exchanged ideas on creating a new regional or national model, I feel there will be some presidents interested in discussing the restructuring of the national organization to satisfy all concerned," Maline said.

New York's HBPA affiliate split from the national organization last year, joining California, which earlier had done the same. The restructuring talks in Houston will focus on ways to prevent more affiliates from seceding.

Another concern to be discussed, Maline said, is the issue of enhanced drug-testing methods - which now are able to detect substance traces at the most infinitesimal levels.

"The problem is, our testing has become almost too sophisticated," Maline said. "For instance, it's been said that a commercial airline pilot

can fly a plane with up to 150 nanograms of cocaine in his system, yet two or three nanograms of a prohibitive substance in a horse is called a positive."

As an example, Maline referred to Procaine penicillin - a painkiller that is prohibited but is often used to lessen the pain of injection when treating an injured horse with antibiotics. When the recovered horse starts running again, even as long as a month after the injection, a few nanograms of Procaine can show up on tests and render a positive, Maline said.

"So at this point, we have to grapple with the question: At what point does the substance stop having a pharmacological effect on the horse? Should trainers be fined for something over which they have no control?"

To help alleviate the problem, Maline said, one topic will be the

possible hiring of an equine medical director to act as a liaison with track stewards "to point out when a certain detected drug doesn't have an effect on the performance of the horse in question."

How best to market racing amid the proliferation of casinos and other gaming venues is certain to be a subject of debate, Maline said. "Also, the effects of simulcasting on other areas of live racing: Does it enhance the live program or act as a detriment?"

Guest speakers include Gerald Lawrence of United AutoTote, who will explain how new technology in his field can improve the marketability of thoroughbred racing; Scott Reneau of ODS Technologies, who will discuss the emergence of at-home betting; and Mike Sheehan from Harris & Harris of Kentucky, who will talk about additions and changes to HBPA's newly offered general liability insurance program.