

The pen is mightier than . . .

The scene following the race-track license hearing was typical of similar occasions: Members of the media scurried in all directions, scrambling to buttonhole the principal players.

Interviewing a major investor, I found myself in a familiar position as the only print journalist among several reporters surrounding the subject. And, as usual, I was the only one asking questions - even after being jostled by aggressive cameramen seeking closer proximity.

Hovering outside the circle of mini-cams and lights were the hairsprayed broadcast journalists, relying on their technicians to tape the questions as well as the answers for the 6 o'clock report. A zoo opening and apart-

ment fire would complete their afternoon.

Had they done any research prior to this hearing? Not likely. Had they ever covered a racing-oriented event before? Maybe, maybe not. But they're not worried. Whether in a courtroom, tack room or winner's circle, they know the industry's print people will be there to elicit the necessary responses from the key sources. All they need to add is a quick summary voice-over for the film.

Prompting mixed opinions among member of the National Turf Writers' Association has been, the recent question of

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whether to allow broadcast journalists into the organization.

Of the 49 members responding to a mailed survey, 24 said no, 16 said yes and nine were uncertain.

Supporters' comments were largely mild, while the opposition issued such remarks as "broadcast journalist is an oxymoron" ... (they're just) "shills for the race-tracks" . . . and (allowing them in would be) "like selling your soul to the devil." Strong sentiments from well-traveled scribes.

Admittedly, my own experiences have left me with a general disdain for a predominantly flavor-of-the-day medium whose

reporters, unfortunately, are rarely allowed to specialize. (Chris Lincoln being one of the notable exceptions.) I also agree with the numerous purely print turf writers who feel we need our own organization.

But pooling our collective expertise with electronic media resources could go a long way toward boosting racing's suffering image. Simply an annual workshop or two might produce some innovations and solutions.

They've got the pretty pictures, we've got the practical prose. Surely we can find common ground for new ways to educate while entertaining.

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