Setting The Standard

From the Executive Corner

COLUMN

by DOUG BURGE

As summer approaches, and with the foaling season now behind us, it is time to reflect, evaluate, and recognize the work and investment made by our numerous California breeders. It is this investment that produces the racing athletes who are so vital to the future of racing in the Golden State.

With California-breds making up well over 50 percent of the field sizes in Northern and Southern California, it is vastly important that an ample number of quality Cal-breds be produced on an annual basis.

The incentive and restricted racing program, by law, is provided to encourage agriculture and the breeding of better horses. Understanding the importance of quality and quantity, we at the CTBA continuously review the live foal crop as well as the number of mares bred to the top stallions. With that said, The Jockey Club recently released some facts and figures pertaining to California breeding. Among those statistics was the fact that the registered California foal crop from 1996 to 2005, grew 11.8 percent compared to a 5.2 percent increase for the entire North American registered foal crop. While that 10-year period showed a significant increase, the number of mares bred since that time has declined 18.3 percent. This will ultimately have a negative impact on the number of future foals born.

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Such a decline in the number of foals is concerning. However, there is evidence that the bulk of the 1,000 broodmares removed from production are mostly those poor producing mares. The economics associated with breeding and raising young horses has forced certain non-performing mares either to states with lower quality racing or into retirement. This is supported by the significant increase in the average book size to California-based stallions, especially those leading the sire rankings, as well as the record number of graded stakes horses now produced in the state.

As previously stated, this balance of quality and quantity is extremely important to racing in California. We continue to work with the TOC (Thoroughbred Owners of California) and racing associations to offer the opportunities and incentives to produce an optimum number of foals to support the racing that exists. Historically, the June issue of *California Thoroughbred* dedicates numerous pages to highlight the current foal crop. This issue is no exception, as some of California future stars appear on pages 34 to 41.

Also in this issue, as featured on the cover, is the eighth running of the $1.32 million Cal National California Gold Rush VIII at Hollywood Park on April 29. Once again, this event not only proved popular with owners and breeders (as over 100 horses entered the 10 races) but also with the betting public across the country.

The on-track handle was up nearly three percent with total handle increasing by nearly nine percent. Also, the out-of-state handle was up over 24 percent, showing that bettors across the country appreciate the large competitive fields.

And, of course, it was gratifying to see the 2005 CTBA Sales' Northern California Yearling Sale graduate Leesider winning the $250,000 Cal National Snow Chief Stakes. An added bonus was having this classic-winning race's namesake (Snow Chief himself) paraded prior to the running. This great day of racing is featured on pages 19 to 30.