

A Good Time To Reflect



From the Executive Corner

by DOUG BURGE

Photos by RON MESAROS

The recent Hall of Fame ceremonies and Annual Awards Dinner honoring the California champions of 2007, proved to be a huge hit and a glorious celebration for the large number of attendees. In a time in which racing in the state is at a crossroads due to the negative trends facing all facets of the industry, such a celebration and acknowledgement of our successes is indeed welcome. And very much needed.

With a record number of 19 California-breds winning 27 graded stakes races last year, there was much to highlight. Nearly every divisional winner had won multiple graded stakes, including many grade I's. One could ask any of the breeders, owners, trainers or jockeys in attendance and there would be no doubt that we are producing better horses in California.

I can remember years ago, when we were honoring winners of only restricted stakes as year-end Champions. That is certainly not the case anymore and it is a credit to the strength of the California-bred incentive and racing program, as well as the breeders in the state, that we have all raised the bar significantly.

It should be noted that this year has started exactly where we left off in 2007, led by Golden Doc A (grade I Las Virgenes Stakes) and Georgie Boy (grade II San Vicente Stakes). Both of these promising three year olds are on track to represent the Golden State in the two big races in Louisville (the Kentucky Oaks and the Kentucky Derby) on the first weekend in May.

With all that said, we do need to find ways to expand the opportunities and returns for our Cal-breds. As our quality of horses produced has increased, our quantity has declined significantly for the past few years. The number of mares bred and resulting live foal crop has dropped nearly 20 percent due mainly to the high costs of breeding and racing horses in state along with the stagnant return.

This subject was indeed the focus of the Annual Business Meeting, held prior to the awards dinner. An improvement in these economics is a major goal of the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA), as we continue to work with others in the industry. This is very critical, as we are extremely dependent on the horses produced locally for our racing product, both in Northern and Southern California.

The conclusion of the awards dinner included the inductions into the CTBA's California Hall of Fame. Reinstated last year, the Hall of Fame has become a prestigious highlight of this event.

The three individuals and two equine heroes who were inducted at this event have all made lasting impressions on California racing. Congratulations again to John Harris, Mel Stute, Russell Baze, and the connections of Decidedly and Flying Paster. To hear their stories and witness firsthand the appreciation from their friends and colleagues, was a wonderful treat for all in attendance. As stated earlier, racing could use more days like this one. A complete recap of this festive event begins on page 39. 🐾

