

## **NTWA Newsletter from President Tom Law**

Greetings fellow Turf writers, I hope this letter finds everyone well and enjoying the summer and most importantly accepting of my apologies for the somewhat tardiness of my monthly newsletter.

Obviously the Triple Crown season is complete but the hectic workload for a Thoroughbred racing writer in the U.S. is anything but light these days with the ongoing situation involving Barbaro and the openers at Del Mar and Saratoga Race Course. I hope that everyone is still able to sit back and relax a bit this summer and hopefully take in some great racing at either of those venues or perhaps just at your local track on a lazy summer afternoon.

There are several important issues percolating during these summer months, not the least of which is the 47th annual National Turf Writers Association awards dinner scheduled for Wednesday, November 1 at The Olmstead in Louisville. Those that attended the last few NTWA awards dinners in Louisville will be quite familiar with The Olmstead, which proved to be a wonderful site for the event on several occasions in the past when the Breeders Cup World Championships was staged at Churchill Downs.

In mid-June, I met with NTWA Secretary/Treasurer Jill Williams and former NTWA Secretary/Treasurer Dan Liebman in Lexington to discuss this year's event.

Dan worked for several years as the point man on the dinner and deserves a ton of thanks and gratitude for making it so successful and enjoyable each year. Dan generously agreed to volunteer to help out on the planning of this year's event, and additional volunteers are always welcome, particularly those that live and work in the Louisville/Lexington area.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Jill Williams, and Dan Liebman in the future if you're interested in helping out with the dinner. The dinner also features a silent auction, so members should be mindful that we're on the lookout for good items that will raise money for our Charitable Foundation.

As many of you know, three awards sponsored by our organization are given out each year at the dinner. Jill Williams polled the members and although the response from our membership was somewhat disappointing, we've come up with a good list of candidates for the Joe Palmer Award for meritorious service to racing, the Mr. Fitz Award for typifying the spirit of racing, and the Walter Haight Award for outstanding achievement in Turf writing.

Please be on the lookout for a ballot listing those finalists and please submit your vote so the award winners may be truly representative of our organization.

In other business, Tom Pedulla and I participated in a conference call with representatives of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and *Daily Racing Form* to discuss the

2006 Eclipse Awards and the 2006 Eclipse Awards dinner and ceremony scheduled for January 29 at the Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. This year's Eclipse Awards ceremony falls on the weekend between the NFL conference championships and the Super Bowl in Miami.

The committee reviewed the procedures for the Media Eclipse Awards, determined that the format followed in 2005 would once again be in place in 06.

The committee also discussed voter turnout, for lack of a better term, which in 2005 was 83% when 274 of a possible 329 ballots were returned by eligible voters. It should be noted that NTWA members returned about 80 of its ballots, a number that is somewhat disappointing. Some members choose not to vote because they feel it is a conflict of interest, which is fine, but simply forgetting or procrastinating is unacceptable.

Most importantly, the committee addressed the possibility of expanding the Eclipse Awards. As many of you may know, the idea of adding categories to the current list of Eclipse Awards was pitched earlier this year by Keenelands Rogers Beasley, who circulated a memorandum to racing secretaries around the country to gauge their interest in possibly adding championships for three-year-old male turf, three-year-old filly turf, filly and mare sprinter, and turf sprinter. The possibility of adding a division for milers has also been proposed.

Thoroughbred Times wrote a news story that outlined support from 28 of the 30 racing secretaries polled by Beasley supporting the addition of three awards for filly and mare sprinter and the two three-year-old turf divisions. Daily Racing Forms Steven Crist and The Blood-Horses Ray Paulick also responded with columns on the subject. For those that have not read the above mentioned articles, they are attached at the end of this letter.

No additional divisions will be added to the Eclipse Awards for 2006, but the committee elected to form a subcommittee to also include racing secretaries to further explore the subject. As I was quoted, I would only recommend the addition of a division if it is voted on and passed by our entire membership.

Another issue of importance to our membership involves the recent cutbacks at the NTRA and Breeders Cup Ltd., which eliminated 20 positions as part of a major restructure of the jointly operated companies. Cuts were made at the NTRA/Breeders Cup offices in Lexington and New York and in several departments.

One department at the NTRA/Breeders Cup that is valuable to the NTWA members is the communications department, and many of you know and work frequently with people like Jim Gluckson, Eric Wing, Joan Lawrence, and Bonnie Cooper. Former NTWA President and hugely respected Louisville Courier-Journal Turf writer Jennie Rees penned an excellent piece that I thought should be passed along to the members that is attached below.

*Colleagues:*

*With the NTRA making drastic cuts in personnel, we must emphasize to the NTRA/Breeders Cup boards the importance of the NTRA communications department. If you go back to the days when the old DRF wanted a letter from your editor just to get the basic statistics on a jockey this for a story on deadline - you know what I mean. Many of you might not even realize how much you benefit from that departments services, but I would ask you to spend a moment to reflect.*

*Think of the ongoing Barbaro situation, and how NTRA communications has facilitated the national conference calls to provide updates. If you ever listened to one of the weekly conference calls heading into the Triple Crown or Breeders Cup, especially those with hard to get trainers. Or if you simply the next day went to the transcript at ntra.com to get quotes that made your story. We might not appreciate all that goes into those conference calls, setting them up and executing them, cajoling certain trainers to participate.*

*Yes, we now can get answers to specific statistical questions from Equibase after-hours and on weekends, and this is not to diminish Equibases own increasing helpfulness. But Equibase is not set up to provide the media extensive statistical information on a major scale.*

*I would implore racetrack publicists likewise to think about their own situations and how NTRA communications has helped them out. Remember how NTRA communications oversaw the media setup for the Philadelphia Park after the Derby with John Servis, making it orderly and where reporters knew what to expect?*

*Remember how quickly NTRA Communications got a conference call together when Point Given was injured and retired and we didnt have to worry about trying to get Bob Baffert on the phone individually? The stories we all got from their conference call with the connections of Triple Crown winners a few years ago?*

*Maybe NTRA Communications provided background on a topic, suggested who would be good to interview for a story, answered a question about an aspect of the industry that you didnt understand, helped you know who to contact at a racetrack for a certain story, looked up a trainer and jockeys success rate together. Or maybe you got the information from a reporter who got it from NTRA Communications. Maybe your newspaper was able to get a photo to go with your story because they downloaded it off ntra.coms media center site.*

*Think if we didnt have it. Dont take NTRA Communications for granted.*

*I know many of us are personal friends with their staff Joan Lawrence, Eric Wing, Jim Gluckson, Bonnie Cooper - but Im thinking selfishly here. I do not want to go back to the days before Thoroughbred Racing Communications which NTRA Communications took over when there was no national publicity office for horse racing.*

*In these days when few of us are fortunate enough to be full-time turf writers and when racetracks are gutting their publicity departments, it is critical to have an entity such as NTRA Communications. It is tougher than ever to get horse racing in the publics eye, and we cannot underestimate the relationships, good-will and benefits that this department which already is much smaller than it was a few years ago does for both the mainstream and trade press as well as racetracks themselves.*

*If NTRA Communications assists your job covering or publicizing horse racing, please let interim commission Greg Avioli and the NTRA and Breeders Cup boards know their*

*publicity/communications arm is vital. Avioli's email is gavioli@ntra.com.*

*This comes strictly from me and is done without the knowledge of anyone on the NTRA Communications staff.*

*Warmest regards,  
Jennie Rees  
(Louisville) Courier-Journal*

Jennie also suggested that I include the names of the NTRA/Breeders Cup board members and they are:

NTRA: Robert Elliston (Turfway Park), Craig Fravel (Del Mar), Robert Green (Philadelphia Park), Jim McAlpine (Magna Entertainment), Thomas Meeker (Churchill Downs Inc.), Nick Nicholson (Keeneland), Charles Hayward (NYRA), Robert Clay (Breeders' Cup Ltd.), G. Watts Humphrey Jr. (Breeders' Cup Ltd.), Ogden Mills Phipps (Jockey Club), William Heiligbrodt (TOBA), Alan Landsburg (TOC), Alan Foreman (THA), Joe Santanna (HBPA).

Breeders Cup: Greg Avioli, Antony Beck, Robert Clay, William S. Farish Jr. (Chairman), Tracy Farmer, Terry Finley, James Friess, R.D. Hubbard, B. Wayne Hughes, G. Watts Humphrey Jr., Robert Manfuso, Ogden Mills Phipps, Satish Sanan, and Joseph Shields Jr.

At the request of some members, the NTWA finances provided by Secretary/Treasurer Jill Williams are listed below. The organizations checking accounts are at \$12,372.37 (NTWA) and \$1,748.35 (NTWA Charitable Foundation). The organizations Van Guard accounts are at \$74,577.37 (NTWA) and \$12,834.46 (NTWA Charitable Foundation) as of early July.

As always, feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at [tlaw@thoroughbredtimes.com](mailto:tlaw@thoroughbredtimes.com) or at my office at 859-260-9800 ext. 125. Thanks again, and best of luck at the races.

Tom Law  
NTWA President  
July 20, 2006

Reprinted from Thoroughbred Times:

### **Racing secretaries support addition of Eclipse Award divisions**

While the Eclipse Award divisions have not changed since 1979, when a category for champion turf female was added, Keeneland Association Director of Racing Rogers Beasley believes the time is right to add divisions.

Beasley, a member of the American Graded Stakes Committee and an Eclipse voter, polled 30 racing secretaries across the country on the subject. He said 28 supported adding three Eclipse Award divisions: female sprinter, three-year-old turf male, and three-year-old turf filly.

Of the flat division categories, only Horse of the Year and champion sprinter do not offer a separate female division, although females are eligible, and have won, the current divisions. Beasley said expanding the turf categories makes sense because of the proliferation and popularity of turf racing in America.

A lot of tracks didn't even have turf courses when these awards were created. Churchill didn't get its course until 1985, and Keeneland didn't get its turf course until 85, Beasley said. I think it's something we really have to explore.

Daily Racing Form Chairman Steven Crist took up the female sprinters cause in a June 25 column. Crist called the lack of a female sprint award an indefensible omission, and he said it is difficult to imagine opposition to the idea. Crist also said the time may have come to honor three-year-old turf champions.

Daily Racing Form writers and editors compose one of three groups that decide the Eclipse Awards, along with the National Turf Writers Association and racing secretaries representing the National Thoroughbred Racing Association. As chairman and publisher, Crist is in a position to push for change through the six-member Eclipse Awards steering committee, comprised of two people from each of the three organizations.

National Turf Writers Association President Tom Law, managing editor of Thoroughbred Times, said an official position on expanding the Eclipse Awards would have to come from the board and would be based on a poll of association members.

I think some people have made some interesting points that should be looked at, Law said. The divisions haven't changed in many, many years, but the horse racing game has changed, so maybe the awards should reflect that.

Pete Denk

Reprinted from Daily Racing Form:

### **Overdue recognition for specialists**

By Steven Crist

The Eclipse Award categories for racing's equine champions have not changed since 1979, when the grass award was first split to honor both a male and female turf champion. Is it time to consider adding some new divisions to acknowledge and reflect changes in the game since the days of Affirmed and Spectacular Bid?

A growing number of racing officials around the country thinks so. Rogers Beasley, the

widely respected director of racing at Keeneland, recently polled 30 racing secretaries around the country about possible new titles. He said that 28 of them supported creating three new Eclipse Award divisions and that most think there are as many as three others that might become Eclipse-worthy.

There was virtual unanimity on recognizing a champion filly sprinter and champion 3-year-old male and female grass horses, with strong interest in perhaps eventually developing additional titles for dirt and grass milers and turf sprinters.

The easiest of these to endorse is a filly sprinter title, an indefensible omission from the current trophy list. There is a fillies-only award for every other flat-racing division, with fillies honored alongside males among the 2-year-olds, 3-year-olds, 4-and-ups, and grass runners. There is no good reason sprinters should not be treated similarly, and it is difficult to imagine any real opposition to this overdue idea.

Honoring 3-year-old grass runners is more a case of recognizing changes to the game than correcting a longstanding error. There are now 17 graded races for grass 3-year-olds, including four Grade 1's for each gender, a list that is likely to grow as rich new races, such as those at Colonial Downs, attain graded status. Proponents of new awards for grass 3-year-olds say that this racing has been transformed from an afterthought for failed dirt horses into a legitimate championship division.

The one drawback to this idea would be if having separate awards for grass 3-year-olds in any way discouraged the 3-year-olds from taking on their elders in the major fall grass races. The sport needs top grass 3-year-olds, such as Kitten's Joy and English Channel in recent years, running in those races instead of trying to wrap up a title in a competing restricted race.

Some may also argue that change is unnecessary, because there is nothing to prevent a 3-year-old grass specialist from being named the overall champion 3-year-old or the overall champion grass horse. In practice, however, this happens so rarely as to be moot. Kitten's Joy was an exception when he won the grass title as a 3-year-old in 2004; with a new division, he would instead have been the champion 3-year-old grass horse, and Better Talk Now probably would have won what would have to be redefined as champion older grass male.

The other categories being discussed could be either problematic or premature, but they merit consideration. For milers, it does seem counterintuitive that success at that distance is a cornerstone of breeding theory and that one of the Breeders' Cup races is the Mile, yet there is no Eclipse Award for this internationally popular division. But would this be a single award or would you have one for dirt and one for grass? Also, with relatively few Grade 1 races at a mile, would races at 7 1/2 furlongs or 1 1/16 miles "count" in picking a champion?

Honoring turf sprinters is even more troublesome, given the lack of any meaningful program of grass races under a mile. It would be odd to crown a champion for a division that does not have a Grade 1 race. While interest in such racing is growing, it is probably

wiser to wait and see if this kind of racing really develops in the years ahead or remains a niche oddity.

Both existing and new championship categories can only benefit from more clearly organized paths to the divisional titles through better-structured series of races. Industry leaders have been talking about this for years as both a promotional and sporting necessity, but little has been done. Some organizers have wrongly focused on trying to automate championships by developing abstruse point systems for such series, but the point instead should be to define circuits of existing races to draw full and competitive fields of Eclipse aspirants.

No one wants to see racing's championships devalued by doubling or tripling the number of precious Eclipse Awards handed out each year, and not every specialization is worthy of the game's highest honor; we don't need an award for champion 2-year-old filly grass sprinter. After 27 years, however, it is more than fair to ask whether a little tinkering is in order. Honoring a filly sprinter is long overdue, the time may have come to recognize 3-year-old grass horses, and the other possibilities are at least provocative points of conversation toward the common goal of recognizing the many forms of excellence in our racehorses.

Reprinted from The Blood-Horse:

### **Eclipse Expansion**

By Ray Paulick

Keeneland's director of racing, W.B. Rogers Beasley, earlier this year made an interesting case for expansion of the Eclipse Awards from 11 to 15 equine categories (including steeplechasers). Suggested additions were 3-year-old males and 3-year-old fillies on turf, filly and mare sprinters, and turf sprinters.

He didn't pull the divisions out of thin air. As a member of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association's American Graded Stakes Committee, Beasley has examined the statistics compiled each year for 14 individual categories, evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses of unrestricted stakes races valued at \$75,000 or higher, and voting to assign a grade I, II, or III classification to the best races. He thinks the Eclipse Awards should mirror the divisions judged by that committee. (Steeplechase races are graded by the National Steeplechase Association.)

Beasley polled 30 racing secretaries and received strong support for adding to the Eclipse Awards, then earlier this year sent a letter to D.G. Van Clief Jr., then commissioner of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and president of the Breeders' Cup. The NTRA, Daily Racing Form, and the National Turf Writers Association oversee the Eclipse Awards program.

Van Clief has since stepped down and the NTRA and Breeders' Cup are being led by

interim chief executive officer Greg Avioli, who took over July 1. Given the challenges of his new duties--keeping the NTRA in business is a primary one--I doubt Avioli has given Beasley's initiative much thought in his first few weeks on the job. At some point in the near future, he or someone involved with the Eclipse Awards should give the proposal serious consideration.

The addition of a championship for filly and mare sprinters seems like a no-brainer. When the Eclipse Awards were created in 1971, there was just one division for turf horses and one division for sprinters, pitting fillies and mares against colts and geldings for championship consideration. Female turf horses were given their own Eclipse Award beginning in 1979, but filly and mare sprinters still must compete against males for a sprint championship. According to Beasley, there are 41 graded stakes for female sprinters, so there is no shortage of opportunities for this division.

Championships for 3-year-old grass horses also seem like a natural extension of the Eclipse Awards. There is a clear delineation between 3-year-old dirt and 3-year-old grass horses, along with a strong calendar of races for the two divisions: 25 graded stakes for colts and geldings and 18 for fillies.

I have a harder time warming up to Beasley's final recommendation for an Eclipse Award in the turf sprint category, where the pickings are slim for graded stakes.