

NTWA Newsletter from Tom Law

Greetings fellow Turf writers, I hope this note finds you all well, settled in, or preparing to travel to Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. To those that won't be in Louisville, I hope to see you in either Baltimore or New York, or perhaps down the road.

Just a quick note to remind everyone that the NTWA's semi-annual meeting will be on Thursday in the auxiliary press box at Churchill Downs. The general membership meeting will be at 11 a.m., with board members asked to gather at 10:30 a.m.

As I mentioned in a newsletter earlier this month, this meeting is important because we will need to elect three new board members with two-year terms expiring for Kevin Modesti, Jay Privman, and Brad Telias. I've gotten some feedback from a small number of members about possibilities for board member candidates, but I'd like some more. Please let me know if you are interested in serving on the board, or if you'd like to suggest someone to serve.

Speaking of the Kentucky Derby, I wanted to let the membership know that I wrote a letter on behalf of the NTWA to the executives and management at Churchill Downs to express both my own and other members' dissatisfaction with the media guide produced for the 2007 Derby.

As you know, or will soon find out when you arrive at Churchill, the media guide does not include the historical charts of all of each of the past editions of the Kentucky Derby. The entire letter—sent to Bob Evans and cc'd to Steve Sexton, Julie Koenig-Loignon, John Asher, and Tony Terry—is printed below. Julie Koenig-Loignon responded to my note and outlined Churchill's reasons for not including the charts. A copy of her note is also printed below.

Please feel free to discuss this and any other issues with me at any time. I'll be in Louisville at various points during the week and am always available via email at tlaw@thoroughbredtimes.com, my office at 859-260-9800 ext. 125, or on my cell phone at 859-396-9407. Thanks for your time, enjoy the Triple Crown.

Tom Law
NTWA President
April 29, 2007

Tom Law's letter

April 24, 2007

Dear Mr. Evans,

I am writing behalf of several members of the National Turf Writers Association who have asked me to express our organization's disappointment with the decision by the Churchill Downs Publicity Department to publish the Kentucky Derby Media Guide without complete charts of each Kentucky Derby.

I've gathered some feedback from the members of my organization, and from others here in Lexington in my role as Managing Editor at THOROUGHBRED TIMES, and essentially the response is that many of the writers and editors found the information contained in previous media guides to be extremely helpful in writing stories and gathering information on the historic Kentucky Derby.

One member went so far to tell me that the thoroughness of the media guide was the right fit for the magnitude of the race, but that the version for 2007 was sorely lacking because the historical charts were not included. Another said it would be the equivalent of the University of Notre Dame omitting key historical information from its football media guide. I should also note that the media guides provided by Magna Entertainment Corp. and the Maryland Jockey Club for the Preakness Stakes and by the New York Racing Association for the Belmont Stakes, do include the historical charts.

I certainly do not need to remind you that racing is already fighting an uphill battle to gain appropriate, meaningful, and far-reaching coverage from national and international media outlets. We feel that it is imperative for the host of not only one of the country's, but the world's, most important races to provide the media with adequate information to put each edition of the race into its proper historical context.

Speaking from a personal standpoint, I know that the late John Harrell, a former co-worker who was a winner of the Red Smith Kentucky Derby Writing Award and one of the foremost historians on the Kentucky Derby, spent countless hours researching those very same charts to find inaccuracies that were corrected. John, and the late fellow Derby historian Jim Bolus before him, did this solely for the benefit of his fellow colleagues and those with an interest in the great race, and I for one would hate to see that hard work go to waste.

I hope that Churchill Downs will reconsider its decision not to include the Kentucky Derby charts in future media guides, not only for the benefit of hard-working members of the racing press, but also for the benefit of the dedicated fans of the historic sport of Thoroughbred racing.

Please feel free to contact me at my office at THOROUGHBRED TIMES to discuss this matter further, or perhaps we can discuss it when I am in Louisville for the great spectacle that is Kentucky Derby week. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tom Law

President, National Turf Writers Association

Managing Editor, Thoroughbred Times

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(859) 260-9800 ext. 125

CC: Steve Sexton

Julie Koenig-Loignon

John Asher

Tony Terry

Jill Williams

Julie Koenig-Loignon's letter

April 27, 2007

Tom,

I received a copy of the letter you sent to Bob Evans and wanted to thank you personally for your feedback -- as well as any comments you were relaying on behalf of your membership.

Our original budget for the Media Guide was eliminated for 2007. Beyond salaries, it's the biggest single expense our department has each year. Tony Terry had explained in the past that the majority of the Media Guides given out to Derby media are discarded. But we do realize that a number of turf writers and sports writers in our homestate use that material regularly. Consequently, we went back to the management team and asked for as much as they could give us to print a smaller book this year. Since Tony Terry has produced the book for so many years, we sought his guidance on what material was duplicative and could be removed -- as long as that material was already online. Tony suggested removing the charts, since much of that data is recorded through other tables and data spreads in the book. As you know, there are a number of ways to find out who won the race.

That said, we should have communicated to the media as we were distributing the books this year that the charts were available online. Since our four-person crew is handling both corporate and racetrack projects now, we are still working through who handles what -- and that notification slipped through the cracks.

We are working to move all of the Media Guide content online -- much is there already at www.kentuckyderby.com. It just needs to be organized in a way that seems more like the printed Guide itself. We also would like to create a search function so that you can simply type in a key word like "Secretariat" and have every reference pop up. The Web designers that could have helped us with that transition have been busy working to get our TwinSpires ADW ready, so we weren't able to transition as much Media Guide content online as we had hoped. We're going to work on that throughout the summer so we're ready by Derby 2008.

I do think it's important to have the entire Media Guide available online. That way, we can update stats right after every stakes race, and the Guide itself will always be up to date. Given how large our Guides have gotten over 133 years -- and how cumbersome they are to travel with -- we also hope that the fact you can literally carry the Guide in your laptop will help journalists transition from the print product and help us avoid printing hundreds more books than are actually needed by the media who follow the sport year round.

Please know that you and your membership can always come to me directly with concerns or complaints. We appreciate your coverage of the Kentucky Derby and Churchill Downs racing, and want to do everything possible to help make your job easier.

Feel free to forward this information to members of the NTWA who will find it useful.

Julie Koenig Loignon

Vice President of Communications

Churchill Downs/Churchill Downs Incorporated