

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

Good afternoon, a warm hello to all you hard-working and dedicated Turf writers around the country and best wishes that you are in the midst of some decompression time after the hectic Triple Crown season and prior to the busy summer racing seasons either on the East Coast, West Coast, or anywhere in between.

The Triple Crown is complete and that means it is time for a little housekeeping before we start looking toward the Breeders' Cup World Championships on October 27 at Monmouth Park. Judging by the feedback I've received either written or verbally, this year's Triple Crown was undoubtedly a trying and difficult period for a racing journalist.

We were faced with many challenges, from a variety of events I will detail below that occurred at Churchill Downs for the Kentucky Derby to even more questionable actions at Belmont Park for the Belmont Stakes. Many of the incidents that occurred have been or will be addressed either by me or by other members of the NTWA

The primary areas of concern at Churchill related to management's decision not to include the complete charts in the bio book—an issue that was addressed in a return letter to me from CDI President and CEO Bob Evans (complete letter is below)—along with issues related to the media shuttle buses and access to the press box viewing area by non credentialed individuals.

Former NTWA President Jay Privman raised a number of concerns with Churchill's media department on Kentucky Oaks day. A slightly paraphrased summary of his points is listed here:

"1) Prior to the Kentucky Oaks, the viewing area was filled with [non credentialed individuals]. Apparently, people in the adjacent public room, noticing that their outside area was crowded and ours less so, were walking through the press box and out to the viewing area. It is imperative that this area be policed on Derby day for credentialed press. At the start of the Oaks today, one of the individuals who ran down to a spot adjacent to me leaned over, with her camera and huge hat, and completely blocked my view of the start of the race. How do they even get into the press box in the first place?

"2) The bus situation was a joke. At 6:30, colleagues and I went down to catch a media shuttle. The line was enormous. It seems our assigned bus is a general bus going back to Papa John's, so we had to wait with everyone else in a line that, I'm not kidding, had to be one-hour in length. It also was raining quite hard, and since we can't carry umbrellas, I didn't feel like standing in line for an hour, getting rained upon. ... Perhaps we can have a dedicated media-only shuttle provided for us that goes to a different gate, such as Gate 10.

“3) It took more than one hour for the media department to come up with the Oaks-Derby double payoffs. This should be available almost as soon as the Oaks is official.”

I received a lot of feedback on the charts issue, and I’m passing on suggestions (some humorous) from longtime NTWA member Bill Christine on how Churchill might be able to once again include them in a future media guide:

“As though I should be in the business of telling moneybags Churchill how to muster funds for a decent media guide, but here goes:

- Charge the public an extra dime for the mint juleps
- Charge each Turf writer a nickel for a beer in the press box (that alone ought to be enough)
- Sell more ads for the media guide
- Charge every non-credentialed person on the backside a quarter
- Mail out the media credentials with postage due
- Make Buck Wheat walk instead of using his golf cart
- Use staples in the executive offices instead of paper clips
- Take five roses off the winning horse’s victory blanket
- Talk Keeneland into a low-interest loan
- Tell the winning owners to engrave their own trophy
- Eliminate the shrimp at the press party
- Sell the media guide to the general public.”

In all seriousness, Bill’s last suggestion is a good idea that has been suggested by many other members and is one I hope Churchill might consider. Countless college and university athletic teams sell media guides on newsstands in and around their cities, and it is hoped CDI might explore that as an option.

Belmont Park, saddled with its own myriad of issues related to the uncertainty over the franchise and ongoing bankruptcy restrictions, created other logistical problems for working members of the media. Judging by feedback I received from members and other journalists that actually showed up to cover the race, two major areas of concern were access to the winner’s circle for post-race interviews on the undercard and access to the paddock for the undercard races and Belmont Stakes.

Security is always an issue at any of the major races, but on the days of big events at New York Racing Association tracks things always seem to take on a life of their own. Access was restricted to members of the press—not including certain photographers and representatives of ESPN and Television Games Network—in the winner’s circle.

Individuals covering the undercard races were forced to wait at the end of the path leading to the racetrack with blind faith that the winning connections would be brought out following lengthy post-race ceremonies and interviews on television. In general horsemen and jockeys obliged and conducted interviews on the horse path and in the tunnel, but I can personally attest to other incidents where a trainer instead walked into the box seat area and had to be chased down by reporters.

Thanks to NTWA member Jeff Lowe for writing a letter to NYRA President Charles Hayward explaining some of the obstacles he faced in attempting to do his assigned job on Belmont Stakes day. The text of his letter is also listed below.

Jeff also said Hayward responded and apologized, saying he was not aware that press was restricted at the end of the tunnel and did not believe that such a policy was reasonable for reporters covering the races. He said he planned to meet with writers early in the Saratoga Race Course meeting to address media access and that he wants to make sure we're able to properly do our jobs.

Looking ahead, plans for the NTWA's Annual Awards Dinner are underway and one of the first items of business is nominating for our three individual awards. Please start thinking about the NTWA's three annual awards and submit your nominations by Friday, July 13.

A separate e-mail with information on the awards and how to nominate will follow this newsletter.

Until next time, I hope everyone has a great summer and has the best of luck at the races.

Tom Law  
NTWA President  
July 5, 2007

Letter from Churchill Downs President Robert Evans:

April 26, 2007

Dear Tom:

Thanks for your letter of April 24, 2007, regarding the 2007 Kentucky Derby Media Guide. While I can appreciate your observations regarding our decision not to include the complete charts of past Kentucky Derbys in the Guide, I would point out that they are available via the Internet at [www.kentuckyderby.com](http://www.kentuckyderby.com). Since our Press Box, and the grandstand and clubhouse areas now have wireless Internet connections available (and I can't imagine reporters not having Internet access in their offices), we felt we could not only reduce the costs of

printing the Media Guides, but make the Media Guide (in an online form) more useful, and make one small step in the direction of trying to minimize the environmental impact of everything we do by eliminating a significant amount of paper.

As a breeder, I regularly use the Thoroughbred Times' Stallion Directory. At this point, I don't recall if I even receive a printed version any more, and, if I do, I certainly don't know where it is. But, especially with this time of year being the prime breeding season, I refer to your Interactive Stallion Director regularly where I can not only get the most up-to-date information (granted, historical race charts theoretically don't change ... your comments about Mr. Harrell's contribution to making corrections to past charts notwithstanding!), but I can access (i.e., search) the information in ways relevant to me, and I have access to information that can't be included in the printed version (such as the stallion videos). We hope to take the Media Guide increasingly online in future years and include such features not available in a printed format.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Evans

President and Chief Executive Officer

Letter from Thoroughbred Times staff writer Jeff Lowe to NYRA President Charles Hayward:

Dear Mr. Hayward:

I wanted to inform you of an experience I had with Ken Cook on Belmont Stakes day that was very inappropriate. I went to the winner's circle early in the card to cover the Birdstone Stakes, joining a handful of other turf writers.

Cook informed us quite brusquely that we had to leave the winner's circle. I gave him an easy chance to be cordial—I said that I didn't know there was a policy change. He replied tersely that "this is Belmont Stakes day" and told me again to leave. I assume this change in access was related to television coverage, but I don't know for sure—there was no advance notice from the press office, and Cook didn't give an explanation. I understand the decision. The manner it was executed was confrontational and unprofessional.

I stopped on my way out to warn a couple reporters Cook had not yet reached. As we were talking, Cook came over and said that if I didn't leave in 30 seconds, he would strip my credential and eject me from the track.

I'm writing because I can't imagine that this is how the New York Racing Association would like to be represented.

Jeff Lowe

Thoroughbred Times