

EDITORIAL

This editorial is by very nature to the point, no big words or anecdotal stories, well not many big words

On the 7th September 2010 we had our AGM, a transitory date leading to a day in hopefully November 2011 when we can plan for the year ahead, vote on awards for the just finished season and prepare to put in place the changes we feel we need to make for the future. This year there was one Steward's position to consider, Stella Havard, as well as the position of Vice Chairman and Chairman. I have been Chairman for five and a half years (6 seasons) and offered myself for re-appointment. Stella, Barry and myself were re-appointed. We are at a critical time in our history, challenging, not without opportunity but nonetheless somewhat testing. There is a lot to do, a number of issues to address so expect a busy winter.

David Hood formerly of William Hill is now freelance and keen to see Harness Racing move forward. Following lengthy discussions he has agreed to help us and encouragingly has prepared a paper considering how he believes we can move forward by developing a live stream, totalisator based internet gambling website. Gambling is changing, traditional horse racing does not wield the power it once did, the Horse Race Betting Levy contribution has been slashed and in his opinion a non leviable, value for money product which is different has an opportunity in 2011 and beyond.

What should we do, what should I do? More to the point what do you want me to do?

In simple terms do we stop the way we are? Are we a bunch of Luddites reluctant to embrace change? Expressing the sentiments of one Northern owner, breeder, trainer...the Chairman should look after what we have never mind trying to get us into the Betting Shops. If that is what you want, fine I will abide by your wishes, however I need a mandate and if you want to try and improve the sport I need support. Getting external gambling revenue is the only way forward. It is not the only way to survive but the only way to progress. We have tried everything else for the last 50 years and in reality are no better off now than we were then. Only the horses are going a lot faster. A lot of people are both critical and sceptical of the move to get money from Off Track Betting or any external source for that matter. None of you was upset when William Hill pumped £27,000 into their series at Wolverhampton in 2008. Many of you think "we cant do it", but we did it then, we did it at Musselburgh last year and this year. Champions Day was in the Betting Shops, and despite poor marketing within the shops was well received and offered attractive odds. I thought Doonbeg would oblige and he paid out at 9-1. And you all know what is needed to stand a chance of getting into the public arena. Do what we already do a bit better, improve

the transfer of information, improve administration, build on the fledgling Form Guide we have started. It appears difficult or even impossible to convince Betting Shops to take our sport from our tracks. With our own website we do not have that problem. Any track with a high speed broadband internet link can transmit (live stream) pictures. The transmission of pictures is paramount. SIS have the monopoly on this from Thoroughbred courses, a service they pay the track for. Yet they want paying by us! If we can develop this alternative the problem is solved and it can be done. Please consider David Hood's proposals and let's debate this fully.

I think though it is our attitude that holds us back. We must stop falling out, backbiting, being awkward for awkwardness's sake and whingeing at every opportunity. Some (and it is a very few) Licence Holders need to look to their actions in the way they deal with Stewards, Officials and the Office. These last categories are the most difficult to remedy and our single biggest problem. It doesn't need to be.

If we have a go at getting external revenue what role will our hard tracks play? Can they deliver? They have the set ups but do they really want to progress. Certainly York wants to, the esprit de corps that exists at Corbiewood is simply outstanding but the recent announcements from Tir Prince leads me to believe that perhaps they have other aims and aspirations. Should we talk to Arena Leisure? They have Wolverhampton but more interestingly have Worcester as well. Worcester is a very much under utilised Thoroughbred racecourse crying out for more use. It is in a very good position to get horses and people from Wales, the West, the Midlands and North West England. Amman Valley now has a World Record. Doonbeg's 1.53.7 mile shattered Stoneriggs JR's British record on the Wolverhampton 5/8th mile track. It beat Rowleyalla's 1.55 round Harold Park making Amman Valley the fastest less than half mile track in the world. But will the AVTC step up to the plate, seize this opportunity and put on more racing dates especially when the Welsh grass racing shuts down in the autumn?

There is another opportunity out there. On the 24th August, at the suggestion of Heather Hardwick I looked at a site near Presteigne. It is well draining, has good road access and is big enough to host a 5/8th mile track. Being in Wales it stands a very good chance of getting Grant Aid. We had a very long discussion and what I envisage is the formation of a Consortium with 200 shares of £500 each. Anyone can have a share but there is a limit of perhaps 20 shares. This group would agree to a lease for say 25 years with a rent based on turnover (which is the normal method for Racecourses and other licensed

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leisure properties), develop a track and make that available at suitable terms for any body or individual capable of putting on racing.....Tregaron Trotting Club, Wales and the West, Hereford & Borders etc etc. Thus a venue in "middle Britain" is there for use, for the diversion of rain cancelled events to and to take our sport forward. Should the track be grass, hard (there is a quarry with suitable stone 4 miles away) or all weather grass? The latter use is "green" and the World's most raced on track, Sha Tin at Hong Kong has such a surface, which is based on British Technology. A sand base is mixed with nylon filaments, seeded and a near indestructible turf is delivered. There is a lot to do before this project gets off the ground, not least getting a team of "political Champions" (MPs, WAG members and Councillors) on board to influence the planners before they even think of saying no. I have had encouraging initial discussions on this but it is up to you in Wales and the Border counties to take this forward. Lets see what you do.

The office gets a "lot of stick". It is not perfect, but it does do a lot right and can only act on the information it is given. The redevelopment of the Computer system has not gone to plan, it is likely that the re-build will be in September and October as opposed to April. This has caused horrendous problems. It is not the office's fault and the contract will be renegotiated. The clearing of horses is a perennial problem. Information from Ireland is not always complete and hopefully the Irish Harness Racing Club will input their data directly saving us all time, money and problems.

Having regard to specific issues, I think we need to address certain areas:

Stewarding/ Case Management

Needs to be more professional. It is not the decisions that are made but the way they are sometimes arrived at. We have in the main some excellent Stewards who sometimes let themselves down by way of inaccurate, improper process. There have been rare examples of Track Stewards not being licensed! Such incidents are rare but can be costly. I have learned a lot from the Taff case from working with Rory Mac Neice our Solicitor. Rory is a former very successful National Hunt jockey having being attached to the Martin Pipe stable. A top international sports lawyer and no doubt the best racing lawyer in Britain, we are very fortunate to have him as part of our team. We will need to make certain recommendations on how to manage cases (probably a Practice Note appended to the Rule Book) and we have the right man in Rory to guide us.

The Transfer of Racing Information

This has to be better. Both from the Office to tracks and vice versa. It has to be electronic, the days of scruffy handwritten notes faxed through to the office when it suits are over. We have to get better and

whilst there is some cause for concern we do not have to do much to get to where we want to be.

Form Guide

So far as Form Guide information, so vital to our progress, is concerned, a number of us in the BHRC Council and the office think the best way forward is for tracks to send complete results in within the timescale and send a DVD and the office will do the Form Guide.

Race Classification

In terms of Race Classification I would like to see some changes. More Conditioned Racing, selling/claiming races, guidelines on Preferred Free For Alls, and further simplification of the Handicapping System. Lifts based on the number of runs is an administrative nightmare (especially when applying to Irish horses) and I want to suggest substantial widening of bands. Whilst I believe the present system to be better than the one it replaced, simply because our current system is simpler and more logical, it does have it's faults. It is not really the system I originally wanted but a political compromise. Too often a modest horse is back with "the big guns" too soon. Today, informed opinion leads me to think that Grade 12 should begin at earnings over £20,000. That would permit substantial widening of bands and mean horses who win a big race or two are not immediately out of it. You must realise that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Place money is included so as to foster more place money. Almost universally purse money is split 50, 25, 12.5, 6.25% etc way down the field. If we have good place money and it is not included horses can creep up the earnings without a penalty in the handicap. Of course none of our owners/trainers/drivers would try to take account of that loophole would they?

However if you want to see the day when there is always a race offering a horse a chance to win and a horse having a chance to win every time it races we will have to embrace Conditioned Races as well as Selling/Claiming Races. This latter system works very well in the Maritimes in Canada where they have a similar horse population to us, similar racing times and similar purse structures. We though seem hell bent on re-inventing the wheel every few years...not that vested interest ever comes into play by those making the most noise.

However you slice it or dice it, ours is an amateur sport dominated by professionals. Grassroots series are very popular in foreign countries but here a rank amateur can have to race against Team Laidler with little or no chance. We have to address this or loose the small guy.

All these issues can be addressed if we sit round a table and sort it out.

On the subject of Drug Testing it is popular opinion

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that some stables achieve the results they do because of wrongdoing. Maybe they do maybe they don't. Some successful operations undoubtedly win because they are good, pay attention to detail, in short "train like the Yanks do". We have, purposefully developed a varied strategy in drug testing. About 20 pre-competition tests were done before Musselburgh, some TCO2 and some complete spectrum post race tests. All negative. I am asked is there some magical masking agent out there? I am advised, no. Is there some wonder drug which doesn't test? Well there certainly are some "lotions and potions" which don't show up. Whether they are of any benefit or not is debateable. Snake Venom does not test. I am assured that the only beneficiary is the Serpentarium in Florida which "milks" snakes to get the stuff. A lot of drugs are placebos or even fakes. But, the development of medicine is a strange one with an awful lot of well established drugs and treatments being found by chance. Acupuncture originated from the strange but beneficial effects arrow wounds sometimes had on Chinese soldiers. Chemotherapy came from the use of Mustard Gas in World War I. Viagra came from a medicine to treat circulatory problems. EPO and it's derivatives originated as drugs to assist cancer patients. So there has to be a number of substances which do not test because they have not been considered yet. There is however one sobering thought in all of this. If there is a substance in use which contravenes the catch all provisions of Sections Y13, 14, 15 and 16 of the Rule Book and we find it, even retrospectively we will take action and pursue to the bitter end. All samples even the negative ones are stored. We have an awful lot of blood and urine frozen, so if you are using something, in the famous words of Dirty Harry, "do you feel lucky, punk?" The International Racing Community is "joined up" in this area, we talk to the BHA (Jockey Club) regularly. They have helped us and we have helped them. I have recently had extensive discussion with Dr Scot Waterman head of the Testing Body for the United States. I have recently had some very useful advice from Australia's Senior Steward, James Hitchcock and the Chief Executive of Harness Racing in Australia, Andrew Kelly on drug testing and especially TCO2 procedures. We all talk to one another on this. At the World Trotting Conference in August a lot of progress was made on both the dissemination of knowledge and the way we intend to share information. We are already acting on advice given with interesting results. And a piece of advice, the booklet on drugs we issued is not a list of banned substances but guidelines on the likely penalties for those substances. Don't assume if a substance is not in there you are in the clear. Read Section Y in it's completeness and get a scientist to explain it to you. Or like the overwhelming majority don't think about using some "funny stuff". Some of you, like the drug testing aficionados in the governing bodies throughout the world, know of websites offering "export only" substances guaranteed to work and

guaranteed not to test. Come on, do you still believe in the Tooth Fairy? Be careful.

Before I move off "banned substances" I must mention the David Taff case. The initial decision appears in the Calendar along with the decision to dismiss the appeal. A sorry story but one we had no option but to conclude. I trust the matter is finalised, that the fines levied and costs incurred will be paid. There are no doubts the testing campaigns and consequential actions over the last two years have been very costly but we have the certain knowledge that we have a sport as clean as horse racing any where else. In 2009 we spent a lot of effort seeking EPO and other blood enhancing agents. On intelligence advice we switched to TCO2 or milkshaking as it is called. Although we only got one positive we had some very interesting readings with a 36.8 (the threshold is 37) from a husband and wife team you just wouldn't have thought likely to do anything improper. After the Taff decision subsequent tests have shown remarkably normal levels with no cause for concern. We will not however be complacent. I would like to thank all those people and bodies who helped us in the Taff case, Kirsty in the office who did a simply fantastic job all the way through, the panel members, initially Dawn and Robert, later Stella, Jackie and Fred. Our lawyer, Rory Mac Neice, the expert, Doctor McCaffrey in Australia, Cheval Francais, Dr Peter Forsberg of the Swedish Trotting Association, Edward Rennell of Harness Racing New Zealand, Veterinary Surgeon Janice Dixon and especially our friends at the British Horse Racing Authority (Jockey Club) who were extremely helpful.

There is one "given" in all of this. We can do the basic business very well...put on good competitive exciting racing which appeals to the punter. All we need to do and it is at every level is be more professional, in track management, stewarding, administration, promotion, everything...that is if you want to progress. Following a recent visit to the World Trotting Conference in New York I was speaking to Jimmy Takter who had three horses in the Hambletonian, including the eventual winner. He is literally "over the moon" with Kelly Wakefield who looks after one of his top trotters, Hard Livin. Jimmy is looking for more like Kelly to work for him. That might be difficult to find, Miss Wakefield is after all a bit special and such a great ambassador for us at the very pinnacle of the sport.

However to conclude, if you want to stay as we are, simple, just stay as we are. I once saw a "saying" carved on a piece of wood in New Zealand:

"If you want to watch the world go by, it will let you".

Gordon Garnett