END GAME

A few days ago the Franco Mancunian Trotting man Bill Green asked me what my "endgame" is, that's posh business speak for what am I trying to achieve, as Chairman. My reply was to the point: My end game is my start game, to get finance for Harness Racing in Britain from external sources, off track betting, either through a Totalisator or Betting shops. I have not succeeded, we nearly got there after the William Hill Championship, having an agreement with Racecourses to put a harness race on every Friday night after Thoroughbred racing and the Bookmakers William Hill and Ladbrokes agreeing to put money up and put the races in their betting shops. If after 20 events there was a demand for our product we were on our way. That initiative was thwarted by the British Horse Racing Authority who decreed that it was OK to have Harness Racing on Thoroughbred courses but unless there was very good reason not on the same card as Thoroughbreds. We nearly got our own online Totalisator but that failed because Tracks either did not come to the meetings to discuss (Tir Prince) or walked away (Amman Valley).

Every idea known to man has been tried to take our sport forward: Sponsorship, Celebrity Races, Newspaper and Magazine articles, Radio and TV Coverage, Online promotion, and many more. None has succeeded. They won't, Off Track Betting is the only way forward. Those of you impressed at the money the French put up for their third rate horses to race here (and 25 other countries) need to realise that the money comes from the French Totalisator the PMU and it is France's unashamed desire that French horses racing under PMU systems dominate European if not world trotting.

Early into my tenure as Chairman in 2005 I saw a letter to Tir Prince from the Levy Board stating that money should not come to us because we have "integrity issues". I have never really chased Levy Board Finance because I am formally advised that we are more attractive to Bookmakers if we are not part of the Levy Board Scheme, but I was really upset at the slur. So I decided to do every thing I could to ensure that unjustified criticism was not levelled against us again. The issues I addressed are as follows:

1) Drug Testing - We do this well, there is room for improvement, but not much needs to be done. As founder members of IRIIS and with me Chairing the World Trotting Council Committee for Drug Testing we have wonderful access to what is going on globally in this area, we have influenced policy and decisions internationally. The main thing we need is a machine to test for levels of TCO2, immediately at the track. We will also have a threshold in place for Cobalt in the near future.

2) Stewarding - We have some good standards of Stewarding and we have some not so good standards. We are an amateur sport and the Courts would not expect us to Steward to the same level as true professionals. We do however try our best, operate to strict codes of jurisprudence best practice, part of which involves me, as Chairman presenting the case not deciding it. Something we are urged to do by Lawyers and other Governing bodies. That practice must remain in place. All in all we do well here.

3) Information - We have completely overhauled how we collect and disseminate information on races and racing. Our IT systems are world class. We found when doing the William Hill series we were rank amateurs in this respect. We are not amateurs now. We could get better, for sure. The comments we need of how horses performed during the race are sadly missing but that could be resolved. Ireland needs to get it's act together, they have our database system but do not appear to be using it. The race cards the office can produce but are not used universally are again world class. The office should and can, assist in setting up races for a promoter, take entries, allow the computer to frame the races, publish the start sheet, take declarations and produce the race card. The offer to do all that has been there a long time. Response? Zero.

4) Handicapping - The "H" subject is a nightmare. All we need is a simple monies won grading system and then when horses become uncompetitive they opt for Conditioned Racing, Selling Races or retire. That simple menu of race opportunity would work, but we complicate it. I can't make it happen because too many people have too much vested interest.

We have achieved a lot but fall short in one major area, the various factions in the sport will not work together.

But I need to address my own endgame. I retired on the 31st August 2014 not needing to work again. But I was "made an offer I couldn't refuse" and have joined one of the world's leading property companies. The job is interesting, challenging, enjoyable and rewarding. It is also time consuming. Anyone wanting to be Chairman and do it properly has to devote ten hours a week, week in week out, be prepared to travel and grow a skin as thick as Rhino hide!

In simple terms, I do not have the time to commit to being Chairman of the BHRC and to that end I will not be offering myself for election as Chairman. That does not mean I am departing the scene, far from it, I am always on the lookout for good bred horses and will always be willing to assist the new administration should they need my help.

Have fun!

Gordon Garnett