

1010 Hurley Way, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 263-6000
Fax (916) 263-6042

CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

12235 Beach Blvd., Suite 7
Stanton, CA 90680
(714) 890-7001
Fax (714) 890-7006
Contact:
Mike Marten
(714) 890-7004
Cell: (714) 240-1870

CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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BOARD APPROVES SOUTHERN THOROUGHBRED CALENDAR

SACRAMENTO, CA – The California Horse Racing Board finalized the 2005 dates allocation Tuesday by approving a calendar for the Southern California thoroughbred and fair meets that includes opening Santa Anita the day after Christmas, as usual, and a three-day gap between the Santa Anita and Hollywood Park meets in April, which will allow the tracks to better market their closing and opening days – with the option of two days of full-card simulcasting on the Wednesday and Thursday between those two meets.

As approved by the four racing commissioners who conducted a special meeting at Cal Expo to consider the dates issue, the final calendar has Santa Anita opening on December 26 this year with an 83-day meet that concludes Monday, April 18, 2005. Hollywood Park will open Friday, April 22, with a 64-day meet that concludes Sunday, July 17.

By agreeing to begin his meet on Friday instead of the more traditional Wednesday opening, Hollywood Park President Rick Baedeker predicted, “With a small gap in racing after their meet, Santa Anita should have a big closing Monday, and we will be able to market for a big Friday-night opening. And with no live racing in Southern California on Wednesday and Thursday, we will be able to offer full-card simulcasting programs to our fans.”

In exchange for opening the meet two days later than proposed, Hollywood Park will be allowed to race on Wednesday, June 1, which was originally scheduled to be a dark day following the Memorial Day holiday program on May 30.

As approved by CHRB Chairman John Harris and Commissioners Sheryl Granzella, Marie Moretti, and Jerry Moss, the Southern calendar will continue with a 43-day meet at Del Mar (July 20 through September 7), a 17-day meet at Fairplex Park (September 9 through September 25), a 31-day meet operated by the Oak Tree Racing Association at Santa Anita (September 28 through November 6), and finally another 31-day meet at Hollywood Park (November 9 through December 19).

This calendar will allow a 6-day Christmas break before the traditional December 26 opening of Santa Anita for 2006. It will also ensure an Oak Tree opening that allows time for significant stakes races in which horses bound for the Breeders’ Cup may compete. Sherwood Chillingworth, executive vice president of Oak Tree, noted that more Breeders’ Cup winners have prepped at Oak Tree than at any other race meet.

Santa Anita had proposed running its meet through Sunday, April 24, but the racing commissioners favored the Monday, April 18, closing as approved. Commissioner Moss suggested that Santa Anita might boost its revenue by running additional races on certain days if the horse population was sufficient to fill those races. He said additional races would provide horse owners with more options.

As another possible alternative, Santa Anita President Jack McDaniel said he might request racing on Wednesdays (January 19 and February 24) that are scheduled to be dark following Monday holidays. However, this would create six-day racing weeks. Chairman Harris stated that he was opposed to six-day weeks, and said all of the feedback he had received from fans reflected a concern about too many race dates and small fields.

Additionally, representatives of the Northern California racetracks suggested that their racing calendar – which was previously approved by the Board – might need to be adjusted to be in step with the changes approved for the southern meets. Chairman Harris agreed that the Board would look at the Northern calendar at a future meeting to be sure it maximizes overall California racing potential.

Chairman Harris thanked the industry, the CHRB staff, and his fellow commissioners, particularly the two members of the Dates Committee, Commissioners Granzella and Moretti, for all the work that had gone into the dates discussion.

“It was very difficult to sort out all the various wants and needs,” he said. “I want to see positive growth in attendance and handle regardless of who gets what dates. Racetracks, horsemen, and their allied interests, as well as the Board, all need to work together to revitalize the total racing picture in California.”

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