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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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**BOARD MOVES TO REQUIRE POLYTRACK-LIKE SURFACES**

ARCADIA, CA – The California Horse Racing Board approved a proposed rule Thursday to require the installation of a Polytrack-like surface at the major thoroughbred tracks in California by the end of next year.

The rule proposed by CHRB Chairman Richard B. Shapiro and approved unanimously by all seven racing commissioners states: “As a condition to license, any track that operates four weeks (or more) of continuous thoroughbred racing in any calendar year must install a polymer, synthetic-type racing surface by no later than December 31, 2007.”

The proposed rule must go through the required process of a 45-day public notice for input from the industry and the public, followed by a public hearing, before the Board can consider the proposal for final adoption.

The commissioners took the action after hearing testimony Thursday and at earlier proceedings indicating that horses have been suffering serious injuries at an alarming rate and that Polytrack is proven to be much safer than traditional organic-based racing surfaces.

Trainer Richard Mandella cautioned the commissioners that during the lengthy process, they will hear from critics and skeptics, but he urged them to remain resolved and “get it done.”

Craig Fravel, vice president of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, which already has taken the initial steps of a lengthy process to have Polytrack installed at Del Mar, noted that the number of serious injuries to horses at Turfway Park dropped dramatically after Polytrack was installed at that Kentucky racetrack. He also quoted experts at the University of California and the University of Maine indicating Polytrack reduces injuries to horses.

Fravel explained that Polytrack is a mixture of sand, synthetic fibers, and recycled rubber, all coated with a wax substance, that forms the top six inches of a racing surface over an elaborate drainage system. The wax coating reduces the absorption of water, which results in more consistent racing surfaces, which are kinder to horses.

“Given the benefits to be derived, we can’t afford not to move forward on this,” said Shapiro.

The chairman acknowledged the expense of installing the new surfaces – estimated to cost from \$6 million to \$9 million per track – and offered the Board’s assistance in finding ways to reduce the burden on individual racing associations.

“We must look at funds now being used by the industry for other purposes, and we might require legislation to seek financial assistance,” said Shapiro. “Whatever is needed, we should start now. By working together, we will put California back in the leadership role for racetrack surfaces in this country.”

Shapiro later added, “While there may be fine tuning necessary with the installation and maintenance of any new surface, we have the time now to determine the best mixture. We can seek out the best advisors. But we must move forward in all respects now. We cannot afford to delay moving forward immediately.”

The five racetracks in California that conduct four weeks or more of continuous thoroughbred racing in a calendar year are Del Mar, Hollywood Park, Santa Anita Park, Golden Gate Fields, and Bay Meadows.

In other business, the Board considered the matter of offshore wagering operations and the revenue being diverted from legitimate California interests. Some of the offshore operations accept illegal wagers from bettors in California, which produce no revenue for California racing associations and fairs, horsemen, or the State of California.

“We need to publicize the fact that when bettors make those wagers, they are hurting California and the horse-racing industry,” said Commissioner Jerry Moss, who chairs the CHRB Pari-Mutuel Operations Committee that will be looking further into this issue. The Committee will review the applicable laws and consider possible courses of action, including ways to further curtail the publication, broadcast, and display of advertisements for the offshore wagering operations.

An agenda item pertaining to Advance Deposit Wagering was put off until March or April after Senator Dean Florez, who chairs the California Senate Governmental Organization Committee, and representatives of the Thoroughbred Owners of California and TVG agreed on a process for trying to resolve differences over hub-fee rates and the horsemen’s participation in the setting of those rates.

“Senator Florez and I will be co-chairing a meeting on February 24 to discuss meaningful ways to shape and improve Advance Deposit Wagering,” announced Chairman Shapiro.

Kevin Bolling, executive director of the California Thoroughbred Horsemen’s Foundation, advised the Board that the Foundation, which provides medical and dental care and other services to 5,000 backstretch workers and their families, is facing a fiscal crisis brought on by declining revenue and the rising cost of providing health care.

State law authorizes 50 percent of the revenue from uncashed winning pari-mutuel tickets to be used for the welfare of racetrack workers. In 1994, this source of revenue for CTHF peaked at \$2.1 million. But with the decline of on-track wagering and the growth of out-of-state wagering, the amount of uncashed tickets in California has been steadily declining, so that last year CTHF received less than \$1.5 million from this source. CTHF made up the difference through donations from individuals and organizations and increased co-payments from the workers served.

Bolling said the CTHF will be actively seeking increased donations and other sources of revenue. He asked the Board to support the CTHF by supporting legislation to increase the percentage of uncashed ticket revenue that can be used for this purpose.

Commissioner John Harris suggested the possibility of redirecting money from other industry funds, and he said it is common for employers, in this case trainers, to contribute to health benefits for workers.

Chairman Shapiro pledged the Board's support for the CTHF effort to find alternative sources of revenue while continuing to provide a full level of health and welfare services to racetrack workers.

Commissioner Harris gave the report of the Stewards Committee, which met for six hours Tuesday with all of the California stewards. In the morning session, Darrell Vienna, a thoroughbred trainer who also practices law and has represented numerous other licensees in matters before the Board, participated in the continuing education program for stewards by reviewing the laws of evidence and their application to administrative hearings. Harris said the discussion pointed to the need to revise some CHRB rules relating to the laws of evidence.

The afternoon session was devoted to reviewing the videotapes of 11 inquiries conducted by the stewards at California racetracks over the last few months. Harris said the session was productive, and the Committee intends to "analyze ways to get better consistency in the outcomes of inquiries and objections."

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