

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

CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

Los Alamitos Race Course
4961 E. Katella Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720

Contact: Mike Marten
(714) 820-2748
Cell: (714) 240-1870
Fax (714) 821-6232

CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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AMERMAN BRINGS STRONG CREDENTIALS TO CHRB

EL SEGUNDO, CA – John Amerman has made the transition from “boards” to the “Board” look easy.

By “boards” we mean the Board of Directors for Mattel Inc, which he chaired for 10 years, as well as various boards in horse racing, including the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA), Breeders’ Cup, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA), and Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC).

And now he serves on the California Horse Racing Board following his recent appointment by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to the seven-member panel that regulates the horse-racing industry in California.

At his first Board meeting last month, Amerman demonstrated a firm command of complex issues under discussion. He asked pointed questions about synthetic surfaces, which the Board has mandated by 2008 for all California racetracks that offer four or more weeks of continuous thoroughbred racing. And when representatives of Fairplex Park boasted about their successful 2005 meet, he asked them how they were going to keep the momentum going this year and the next.

Then when representatives of Golden Gate Fields estimated their business projections for the upcoming August 24 through October 15 meet, he challenged them to exceed those expectations. “You can do better than that!” he stated. “Golden Gate will be racing in the late summer this year, which is the best time of year in Northern California. You should view the dates as being an opportunity.”

Recognizing Amerman’s strengths and all that he has to offer, CHRB Chairman Richard B. Shapiro has tabbed Amerman to serve on the Board’s new Strategic Planning Committee. Shapiro created this important committee this year to develop long-range plans for horse racing in California, given the possibility that any of the privately owned racetracks could be converted to alternative non-racing uses, so the industry needs to develop contingency plans in case that occurs.

“John Amerman joining the CHRB brings an added level of depth and understanding to the Board, which is critically important,” said Shapiro. “His business background coupled with his keen understanding and past participation in the racing industry is invaluable. I feel we are very fortunate that he was appointed to this position, and look forward to working closely with him to improve racing in California.”

Amerman says he’s up to the challenge: “I’ll roll up my sleeves and get involved. Hopefully, I can help.”

Since retiring from Mattel in 1997, Amerman and his wife, Jerry, have committed to developing one of the top horse-racing operations in the country with extensive racing, breeding, and farm interests.

Their Amerman Racing Stable office is located in El Segundo, not far from Mattel headquarters. Entering Amerman’s office, signs of his former career are evident. The life-sized Barbie doll in the lobby is a dead giveaway. Inside his private office there are many more toys and photographs of his retirement dinner, two of which are with Tony Bennett, who performed that night for 1,200 guests. Then there are the winners’ circle photos, which keep mounting up.

“We’ve enjoyed over 50 stakes wins – 21 in Grade I races,” he said with pride. “That’s nice, but we haven’t had one in a while. We will be excited when it comes.”

Amerman recalled how years ago, he and Jerry would visit Monmouth Park, and driving home they thought it would be exciting to own a horse some day. A business associate owned a couple of good stakes horses and said, “Racing is easy.” The stage was set for them to respond to an advertisement in 1987 from Team Valor that encouraged one and all, “You too can be a thoroughbred owner!”

“We became partners in some Team Valor horses,” he explained. “The problem with partnerships is that even though they do listen to your opinions, the managing director makes all the decisions. In 1995 we decided to go out on our own. We have no regrets about initially going with Team Valor. It was a great way to learn the business. You come in when you’ve never owned a horse and you gain so much knowledge. It helped us get off and running with our own operation.

“In 1995 we purchased four yearlings and I guess we haven’t looked back. We purchase horses every year at Keeneland and privately from many countries, for example, the U.K., France, Chile and New Zealand. We were very fortunate to purchase two horses in Chile – the colt Lido Palace and the filly Printemps – who went on to win their respective Triple Crowns in Chile in the same year. Now Lido Palace is standing in Florida.

“We won the Breeders’ Cup with Adoration. I knew she was training well but the Distaff is such a tough race. In racing, however, you never know how the race will turn out. When Adoration started pulling away on the far turn, I said out loud, ‘We are going to win.’ It was a tremendous thrill!”

“We have about 75 horses now, including more than 20 mares, and we are supporting Lido Palace with our mares. His first crop are yearlings. We’re very hopeful Lido Palace will produce good runners with his speed and stamina.”

The Amermans have other racing interests. They are especially devoted to animal welfare. He is a director for Tranquility Farm, a retirement facility in Tehachapi. They have given good support to CERF and have donated land to the Pegasus Foundation, two other retirement facilities. Jerry serves on the board of the University of Kentucky Gluck Equine Foundation.

They purchased a farm in Temecula to use as a rehabilitation and lay-up facility, operated by their daughter, Anne. “I’m prejudiced but I believe Peacefield Farm is the nicest lay-up farm in Southern California,” said Amerman. “We just expanded to accommodate additional horses.”

Discussing the recent Board meeting and his willingness to tackle tough issues from the onset, Amerman commented, “When you’ve been on the boards of TOBA, TOC, and NTRA, you have a sense of what’s going on, so yes, I’m very comfortable serving on the Horse Racing Board. I feel that I can ask reasonable questions and provide strategies that will promote growth for California horse racing.”

His dialogue with Fairplex executives about their marketing plans seemed to reflect his business background.

“I was in marketing for 30 years, so I know a lot about advertising and promotion,” he said. “What is happening in California racing is not what I like to see. We need to get more people to the track. If we don’t, we will continue to decline. We can’t run our races from an empty studio, catering to a distant audience. Go to Keeneland, Saratoga, Del Mar, Longchamp, Goodwood or Santiago, Chile, and you’ll see how good racing can be. At certain places in California, on-track attendance is very poor and declining. It’s a situation we can’t tolerate any longer.

“In my opinion, there are many ways to improve horse racing, but whether we can accomplish our growth goal remains to be seen. I don’t know where the money will come from to increase our marketing budgets. Maybe slots . . . but I don’t necessarily think the answer for horse racing is slots. The best they can be is a Band-Aid that will change long-term momentum for racing in California.

“On a national basis, racing needs to have a central office. As it is now, there are too many groups, and too many organizations trying to do the same thing, with too much duplication. That is not an effective way to spend money. We need to spend our precious resources wisely.”

Amerman's encouragement of Golden Gate executives to set higher goals and exceed their business projections conjured up images of Amerman's philosophy that we can do more and do it better.

"I think positively. I always aim higher," he acknowledged. "I don't settle for just okay in business. When you look at yourself in the mirror and when you look at any organization, you can always find ways to improve performance. To increase handle, for example, by 2% is 'nice' but the real question is how an organization or track can increase handle by 5% and be in a position to gain momentum for further increases.

"Marketing strategies and execution? A lot of water has gone over the dam in racing. When you make suggestions, it can be human nature for people to respond that they have already tried that."

Asked about other specific areas and issues he might address as a racing commissioner, Amerman responded, "I'm particularly interested in safety. I'm pleased that we're going to synthetic tracks, and I liked the presentation at the last Board meeting on safety reins. We owe it to the horses and the riders to do everything we can to make racing as safe as possible for them.

"Beyond that, I'll just wait to see how the issues emerge. We must have positive change in this industry to be successful . . . then racing will be fun!"

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