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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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BOARD MOVES TO PROTECT RACEHORSES

DEL MAR, CA – The California Horse Racing Board took significant steps in a continuing effort to protect racehorses Thursday by cooperating with jockeys and horse owners to allow for “kinder” whips that do not inflict injury on horses and a voluntary new equine retirement fund that would draw revenue directly from purses.

While the Board’s rules on the use and construction of whips already are designed to prevent abuses, the action Thursday was yet another step to promote the health and safety of racehorses. The new whip differs from traditional ones in that the tip of the whip has softer, padded leather that is narrower and rounder without any hard edges, and the padded leather extends all the way down the shaft to the handle. Darrel Haire, western business manager of the Jockeys’ Guild, described the whip as “equine friendly” and said most jockeys prefer it.

CHRB Chairman Richard B. Shapiro, who displayed the new whip at the Board’s monthly meeting Thursday, described it as a “kinder whip” and recommended that the Board waive the existing whip rule to specifically allow for the immediate use of the new whip without waiting until the conclusion of the months-long regulatory process. Dr. Rick Arthur, the CHRB equine medical director, said the new whip benefits horses and should be permitted without delay. The seven racing commissioners agreed and voted unanimously to waive the existing rule to allow for use of the new whip, while beginning the regulatory process for a formal rule change.

In April the Board began a discussion of equine retirement, and among the many suggestions made by the commissioners was one made by Chairman Shapiro to allow for horse owners to donate a portion of their purses for this purpose. Coincidentally, the Thoroughbred Owners of California (TOC) already was exploring this same proposal, and on Thursday the TOC brought its formal proposal to the Board. It calls for the CHRB to direct paymasters to deduct and deposit 0.3 percent of the net purse earned by any thoroughbred horse at a thoroughbred racing association or fair meeting into a special account, which would be established and managed by the TOC solely for the benefit of California thoroughbred retirement/rehabilitation facilities. Owners would have the option of opting out of this voluntary deduction plan.

All seven of the racing commissioners voiced support for directing new revenue to equine retirement programs, and some even questioned whether the TOC proposal would accomplish enough.

Commissioner John Amerman, for one, suggested “thinking bigger” and perhaps deducting more than 0.3 percent. He also stressed the need to enlist support from other segments of the industry, especially jockeys, trainers, and racing associations. Vice Chairman John Harris voiced similar concerns and described the TOC proposal as a “band aide.” He called for a more complete, industry-wide effort that is “more thought out.”

“We decided on 0.3 percent because we felt it was a number that owners could live with,” explained TOC Director Marsha Naify.

Noting support for a mandatory deduction program from which owners could not opt out, Chairman Shapiro said the deputy attorney general had provided an opinion that the Board could not establish a mandatory program without new legislation specifically authorizing it.

“We’re just laying the foundation for the building we’re going to eventually get to,” said Chairman Shapiro in urging his colleagues to take this first step. “We all have an obligation to protect the animals and provide a better life for them.”

Commissioners Marie Moretti and Jerry Moss agreed this would be just a first step and that the CHRB would do everything in its power to promote increased funding for equine retirement and rehabilitation.

Delving into the finer details of the TOC proposal, Commissioner Jesse Choper asked if there are “clear eligibility requirements” for where the funds go and how they are used. Naify responded, “We are looking at California thoroughbreds who no longer race. As part of our accreditation process for retirement facilities, we will determine how many horses they have and how many of them are California horses.”

The Board voted 6-1 to begin the regulatory process to implement the TOC proposal, including language that the retirement/rehabilitation facilities must be approved by the Board to receive funding. Vice Chairman Harris cast the dissenting vote for the reasons stated. The proposed rule will be noticed to the public for 45 days, and then the Board will conduct a public hearing to consider any comments received during that notice period and at the public hearing.

In other business, the Board approved a regulatory amendment relating to scratched horses in Pick Four wagers. Instead of substituting the favorite for the scratched horse, the wager will be refunded if the scratch occurs before the first leg of the Pick Four. If the scratch occurs after the first leg has been run, the money wagered on the scratched horse will be deducted from the main pool and placed into a consolation pool for those tickets with the scratched horse and the other three winners. This change will not affect wagers that designate an alternate runner for a scratched horse in the Pick Four.

The Board approved license applications for the Bay Meadows Racing Association (August 22 through November 4) and the Los Angeles County Fair at Fairplex (September 7-24).

Representatives of the quarter-horse industry reported on plans for a scientific study relative to the use of toe grabs greater than four millimeters on the front shoes of quarter horses while racing. The Board already has adopted a prohibition on longer toe grabs for thoroughbreds, based on numerous studies. The new study will help the commissioners decide whether to extend the prohibition to quarter horses.

The Board approved the distribution of \$252,873 by the Los Angeles Turf Club to 46 beneficiaries, including \$25,000 to the Winners Foundation and \$27,000 to the Edwin Gregson Foundation.

The Board tabled a proposal to prohibit a surgical procedure to the feet of racehorses in order to provide more time for research and dialogue on the issue.

Under general business, Chairman Shapiro said he intends to ask the entire Board to participate in the discussion of strategic planning and the allocation of 2008 racing dates, beginning with perhaps two meetings in August.

“My hope is that at the September 27 Board meeting we will be in a position to adopt the racing calendar for 2008 and consider a vision for beyond,” he said.

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