

# Ask The Owners' Circle

## Do you think the Breeders' Cup should be held every year at Santa Anita?

By Larry Stewart

The above question was posed to a number of California horsemen after the Breeders' Cup board of directors voted unanimously at a meeting in Lexington, Ky., on Dec. 11 to authorize its management to explore the feasibility of a single, permanent host site.

After the 2010 Breeders' Cup at Churchill Downs, a permanent-host deal that probably would initially cover five years could be in place as soon as 2011 or 2012. Santa Anita figures as a favorite, particularly since the 2008-2009 back-to-back experiment at the Oak Tree meet at Santa Anita was deemed such a success.

A source told the *Owners' Circle* that a majority of the 14-member Breeders' Cup board favors the Arcadia track as a permanent site.

An attendance of more than 96,000 at the two-day event in 2009 marked an 11% increase over the previous year. And wagering was up 3% in a year of double-digit declines in national handle.

Breeders' Cup president Greg Avioli told the *Thoroughbred Times*: "On every level, Oak Tree and Santa Anita have been tremendous partners."

On Breeders' Cup Saturday, Bill Casner, co-owner of the prestigious Winstar Farm in Lexington, stopped to chat with this reporter about an hour or so before Winstar's Colonel John ran fifth in the Classic.

"Isn't this great," he said. "Look at this crowd. And how to you beat this weather? The Breeders' Cup should be held here every year. It is a marvelous facility."

One might think a vast majority of Californians involved in racing would be equally enthusiastic. But the Owners' Circle poll question brought mixed results.

Here are some of the responses:

**Jockey Garrett Gomez:** "No. I think the world should be able to see different places. And by moving it around it gives more people the opportunity to see these great horses up close."

**Jockey Alex Solis:** "Yes. We have the best weather."

**Trainer Bob Baffert:** "Yes, if Santa Anita switches back to conventional dirt. If the synthetic track remains in place, then I'm not for it."

**Owner/breeder and CHRB chairman John Harris:** "Yes. I feel that the Oak Tree meet at Santa Anita provides a superior venue for the Breeders' Cup. It is a well-run, beautiful track in a nice area that can accommodate a large fan base. The weather in Southern California is much less a risk than in other areas. There may be advantages to moving the Breeders' Cup around to give more areas of the country an opportunity to host it, but overall Southern California is the best place for it."

**Trainer Darrell Vienna:** "No, not unless the local horsemen are compensated for being inconvenienced. They lose their boxes; they lose their parking and get nothing in return."

**Trainer Barry Abrams:** "Yes. We have the facility to handle a large crowd and we have the best weather. Look at how well the Rose Bowl does every year because of the weather."

**Owner/breeder and Bakersfield rancher Donald Valpredo:** "No, not on a permanent basis. But they should set up a permanent schedule that would include Santa Anita every third year. It could be at Santa Anita one year, Churchill Downs the next and a floating venue the third year in New York, Florida or maybe Woodbine (in Toronto), depending on interest and economic factors. I believe that a definitive schedule that includes some rotating would be best."

**Trainer Sean McCarthy:** "I'd love it to be here every year. But on the other hand it's good to see other places as well."

**Jockey David Flores:** "I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be here every year."

**Sherwood "Chilly" Chillingworth, executive director of the Oak Tree Racing Association:** "We have all the ingredients people want. We have the weather, the scenery and an experienced staff. When you get used to doing it, you anticipate problems and prevent them from happening. Your prior experience helps. And the Europeans love Santa Anita."

**Pete Siberell, director of special projects at Santa Anita:** "I'd say yes, but it's a guarded yes. It's a lot of work and there is always the burnout factor to consider. We have 300 volunteers working the event each year and you wonder if the enthusiasm would begin to wane after three years."

**Trainer Jim Cassidy:** "Absolutely. The weather is always better here this time of year and a rare treat for a lot of people. I think the Europeans like it here because of the synthetic main track."

**Trainer Ron McAnally:** "I like it the way it is. It would be unfair to the other tracks to have a permanent site. And you would be making the Europeans travel farther if you had the Breeders' Cup here every year. I think they'd prefer Belmont Park and Churchill Downs because it involves less travel. And Belmont has more of the European-type track."

**Former jockey and current trainer Gary Stevens:** "Yes. The weather is very predictable here and we're coming off two tremendous Breeders' Cups in a row here."

**Trainer Howard Zucker:** "No. I like rotating the tracks. Racing needs to do as much as it can to promote the sport all over the country."

**Jockey Danny Sorenson:** "It's a hard call. Sure, we have good weather but I think variety is important. Santa Anita has many great attributes like the hillside turf course, but would holding the Breeders' Cup here every year be the best thing for racing? Like I said, it's a hard call."