

Ask The Owners' Circle

What is the outlook for California racing television going HD?

By Alison LaDuke

Anyone who has watched the Kentucky Derby live on NBC or the Breeders' Cup on ESPN can tell you just how much better the broadcast is in high definition (HD). The silks are brighter, the horses are more beautiful, and the races are more dramatic. So, it's natural to wonder when California horsemen will be able to flip on HRTV or TVG and see their own silks in that crisp, clear style.

Horse racing has a reputation for being slow out of the gate when it comes to technology, and it is probably true in the case of high definition broadcasting. Most major sports have been broadcast in HD for years, and many believe it is time for our great game to do the same.

TOC's ADW Committee is addressing the issue, and TOC director Billy Koch expressed optimism that California's racing will be broadcast in high definition as soon as it's economically feasible.

"We are hopeful that TOC can bring tracks together and find a solution that is cost effective for everyone," said Koch. "We're currently in talks with various companies and our industry partners to determine the feasibility and costs of such a venture."

Owners' Circle spoke with Josh Rubinstein of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club about Del Mar's plans to go HD. Rubinstein said Del Mar has been in contact with various industry organizations, including TOC, about forming an HD co-op in order to reduce individual costs.

"The biggest hurdle is financing," Rubinstein said. "In addition to HD equipment (cameras, lenses, production facilities, etc.) a separate uplink feed must be provided for simulcast sites to



receive an HD signal. These sites must also have a specific HD decoder to display the signal." Unfortunately, the process of broadcasting in high definition is considerably more complicated than buying new cameras.

Keeneland's Director of Broadcasting, G.D. Hieronymus, offered some insight into the process the Lexington, KY track went through to become the only fully HD track in North America.

"It's very expensive to do, so we did it in stages," Hieronymus said. "We formed a strategic alliance with Grass Valley for all our equip-

ment purchases," he explained, adding that the track saved money by using the existing triaxial cable instead of rewiring the entire plant. In addition, Keeneland used the installation of its Polytrack surface in 2006 as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for their HD system, although they did not go "fully HD" until their Fall 2009 racing season. Hieronymus explained that they're currently still in Phase 2 of a three-step process, and there are still more changes to come in Keeneland's broadcasting future.

As for California, the general consensus is that high definition is necessary to stay competitive in the future. As Rubinstein explained, "Del Mar believes HD is extremely important for the very near future presentation of our broadcast product." He is hopeful that Del Mar will be broadcasting in HD no later than its 2011 season.

Koch concluded, "The HD revolution is here, and the California horse racing community and its fans should be able partake in that revolution."

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