



# op/ed

by Dan Liebman

## CHROME RUNS FOR ENTIRE INDUSTRY

It was inevitable. With a--shudder the thought-- Cal-bred going for the Triple Crown, it figured "they" would come out of the woodwork.

"They" are the media, a group of which this writer is obviously a member. But in particular "they" are the members of the media that do not regularly cover Thoroughbred racing and breeding, nor know much about it.

You know the old saying: "Don't believe everything you read." Well, just because you are a reporter doesn't mean you can write intelligently about any subject.

First, a story moved on the Associated Press wire this week that said: "The horse that will line up at the Belmont Stakes Saturday is the product of an unspectacular mare and an equally unheralded stallion, bred in a state not known for producing winners and owned by a couple of racing outsiders who were labeled 'dumb asses' for even pondering such a thing."

Then, the following appeared as the lead to a story in the Wall Street Journal: "California is hardly known as an epicenter of Thoroughbred breeding. But on Saturday, the Belmont Stakes will include the first California-bred Triple Crown contender, leaving the actual industry leader, Kentucky, to pour another bourbon and dream of next year."

We could just shrug them off as minor things and cling to the notion that any publicity about the sport is a good thing and any coverage of racing by mainstream media is a positive.

But not when that publicity is inaccurate or misleading.

Start with the statement in the AP story, co-authored by two of its sports writers because, presumably, one was not enough to show ignorance of horse racing. (In fact, the AP has several reporters quite knowledgeable about racing, though these two sports writers would not be among them.)

It is obviously wrong to say California is not known for producing winners. Horses bred in California win races every day.

A few years ago, this writer was spotted in a box at Del Mar by the manager of a top farm in Florida that races a division each summer at the Southern California track.

"Surprised to see you here," he said.

"The racing may be better at Saratoga but it is hard to beat Del Mar," this writer responded. "The weather, the beach, the food ..."

A few hours later, the farm manager made a beeline for the same box.

"See the feature from Saratoga? The Cal-bred won." Perhaps the AP reporters meant "top" winners or "major" winners, though while those statements are also false on their face, they may have meant not many horses bred in the Golden State have won the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes.

And it is correct that no Cal-bred has won the Triple Crown, but since it has only been accomplished 11 times in the history of the sport, that can be said for most other states as well.

It should be noted, however, that there was a Triple Crown winner bred in Texas (Assault), Virginia (Secretariat) and Florida (Affirmed).

The Wall Street Journal story clearly implies that Kentucky breeders are unhappy that California Chrome, whose owners dared breed him outside the commonwealth, could win the Triple Crown.

Kentucky breeders should be drowning their sorrows with bourbon, a characterization that is insulting and wrong on so many fronts it is hard to know where to start.

History has proven that many, if not most, of the top horses bred and raced were foaled in Kentucky. But the same history clearly shows it is possible to breed a top horse in numerous other locations around the world, California among them.

Kentucky breeders actively recruit mare owners to board in the state but they certainly don't shun those who choose to breed elsewhere.

Check the foaling state or country of stallions and mares residing in Kentucky and while you will find most were bred in the Bluegrass, you will see many bred elsewhere.

Kentucky breeders, like all breeders, want to own and breed to good horses, regardless of where they were foaled.

A former editor of a racing newspaper told this writer years ago that it doesn't take a genius to figure out that the key are the stallions.

"If you took every stallion in Kentucky and moved him to another state, the mares would follow," he would say.

Which isn't going to happen, of course, because the stallions and the farms they reside on are in Kentucky because of the nutrients in the state's rich soil and natural springs.

Thank goodness the Wall Street Journal writer reached Kentucky Thoroughbred president Clifford Barry, who said. "The story behind this horse is good for racing."

Barry is correct. This story is good for everyone involved in racing, regardless of where they call home.

Barry, by the way, was foaled in Ireland and his boss, Pin Oak Farm owner Josephine Abercrombie, while bred in Jamaica, was broken and trained in Texas.

On Saturday, it won't matter where horsemen live or breed.

We imagine even those connected to the other Belmont Stakes entrants won't be completely disappointed if California Chrome wins because a Triple Crown winner would be good for racing - all of racing.

Kentucky horsemen won't get drunk on bourbon, be mad at the world and vow to get even next year.

What's good for racing is good for Kentucky, and vice versa. [👉 CLICK HERE TO SHARE THIS STORY](#)