



op/ed

by kip cornett

GIVE IT A CHANCE

With all apologies to John Lennon...all I am saying is GIVE IT A CHANCE! And what is it? Filly Friday Oct. 24 at Santa Anita. There's been a lot of angst about the repackaging of our female division's championship races, but hey, in less than two weeks--it's going to happen. And the sport will be better off for it. That is, if we care about attracting more attention to our Championship event.

At first, I was totally against the move to expanding the Breeders' Cup to two days. Adding to a product that wasn't even close to reaching its potential seemed like a very bad idea. And last year, Friday was not a day that captivated much attention at all, outside of our current fan base and industry media.

But now, I'm actually excited about this year's Friday race day. Why? Because we're borrowing a page from how other sports energized their fan base and reached beyond their core audience. How about Major League Baseball and interleague play? Or hockey going retro--and holding a game outside? Or remember when the NFL finally got around to playing the AFL...in a game that wasn't so super, but became one of the biggest sporting events on the planet? At one time, all of these were considered blasphemy. By presenting our female division in one day, we've now stepped outside the much clichéd box and created a product that has a chance to get noticed instead of ignored.

I understand those that ridicule this move. I was there yelling and screaming when Personal Ensign somehow, someway caught Winning Colors. And I am far more of a traditionalist than not. But I am also a realist, and the reality is that very few people outside our sport care about the Breeders' Cup. And that can be said for most media and for sponsors as well.

"Filly Friday" is not the magic bullet to cure all our sport's ills or catapult the Breeders' Cup into the same stratosphere as the Super Bowl, but it's a step in the right direction.

Another one of those steps is the partnership the Breeders' Cup has built with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure as one of their charity partners for the week-end. Over 1,500,000 people run in Komen events each year. They have 122 chapter/affiliates across America--and three overseas. You ever see those pink bats at MLB games? Or pink NASCAR-sponsored cars? Yes, that is Komen. And Komen can communicate to their grass-roots network of literally millions of women about their affiliation with the Breeders' Cup. Suddenly, women of all ages have a reason to not only care about our Championship Day, but also watch it on TV or attend one of the many "Pink Days" being held at race-tracks across America. They are arguably one of the strongest charitable organizations in the country. Putting the Breeders' Cup on the minds of their passionate supporters engages an audience that we sorely need--if we are going to ever see the Breeders' Cup reach it's initial vision of being the bookend to the Kentucky Derby.

The Breeders' Cup is now 25 years old. And it is an unquestioned success--inside our industry and inside the minds (and wallets) of our core fan/wagering base. But if we want it to fulfill its potential, we must try new ways to attract media, sponsors and the everyday sports fans of America. We can't guarantee the best of the best meeting on the track (which is better than any promotional activity) on either Championship Day. That's yet another reason why I applaud the Breeders' Cup marketing move to an all-female Championship Day. And, by the way, other great events, like Wimbledon, have gone to a dedicated showcase day for both sexes.

When the "A" list of celebrities come to this year's event (thanks to our Komen and St. Jude Children's Hospital charitable affiliation), when tracks across America can promote Friday as something different, when millions of women will now at least have heard of the Breeders' Cup--and dare I say, maybe even watch--we'll see that this simple, but understandably controversial move, occurring Oct. 24, will be a positive, bold and innovative idea that will start to move us beyond an insider's event. Give it a chance!

Kip Cornett is President of Cornett-IMS, a sports and communications firm based in Lexington, and an avid Thoroughbred owner since 1984. He may be reached at kip@cornett-ims.com.

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