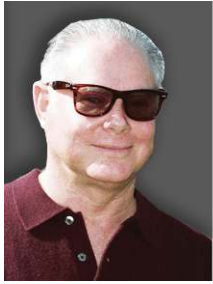


## THE QUAD



# op/ed

by barry irwin

## THE QUAD

Last week I challenged Kentucky Thoroughbred interests not to pursue alternative gaming (VTLs). I promised to show how a positive change to the racing environment through the introduction of a new bet would serve to get racing's fan base pumped up on a regular basis.

My concept is far from original, yet proven in popularity. With a twist here and there, it can, I believe, jump-start our sagging game.

Currently, the only proven magnet to get fans involved is a Pick 6 carryover. The chance to use one's skill to bet a small amount and cash in big-time brings out people and money to an otherwise stale enterprise. Racing's dilemma is that carryovers are unpredictable and difficult to imitate. Some tracks offer an occasional guaranteed pool, but the artificial carryovers do not work nearly as well as the real deal.

So what can racing do on a regular basis to create pools large enough to excite patron participation?

I introduce you to The Quad. No, not that four-sided plot of land on campus where you set a date to meet your girl, but a new wager that borrows heavily from the Tierce, a bet that fueled the racing industry in France for decades.

The Quad is a superfecta in which a player must select the first four horses across the line in the correct order.

That's it? That is what Irwin thinks will save the game?

Yes, that be it, baby!

And, with the enhancement of bells and whistles, I believe The Quad can generate enough enthusiasm to re-energize our base and, just as importantly, introduce many times more people to the sport than currently play our game.

The Quad, as I envision it, would be a bet that has a minimal betting unit. The Quad would be a game that is played once a week on a weekday. A good time might be Thursday in the last race of the day.

Bets on The Quad, most importantly, would be handled through the state lottery. Entries would drawn five or six days in advance, as part of the build-up would consist of a weekly publication promoting the race. Print and on-line magazines would include features on the horses and the human participants in that week's race. *Daily Racing Form* could do an insert well in advance of the race with features, analysis and past performances.

The Quad could be vigorously promoted on television, with one show early in the week to get people geared up for the race, and another program that would include the running of the race itself. Additionally, The Quad could be shown during the dinner-time news on local stations.

What promises to make the race a spectacle for the neophyte and a lure for the hard-core player lies in the details: a very large field of runners with a weight spread of 40 pounds competing for substantial prize money and generating a ton of cash for players to win because of the inclusion of betting dollars that normally would not be available. And all to be had for a minimal betting amount. Small bet, chance for big payout. Greed!

Initially, in order for the race to gain as much exposure as possible, The Quad should be limited to a few venues that have a large population and racetracks big enough to accommodate as many runners as possible. Belmont could run more than 20 horses, as could Churchill Downs and Arlington Park. The more horses, the more betting combinations, and the bigger the pool because of the greater possibilities.

A race in which the weight spread is 40 pounds can bring a graded stakes winner and a \$25,000 claimer together at the finish line.

Depending on how well the horse industry does with its political connections, betting on the race could cross state lines. Every state that conducts racing would not have to be involved in producing The Quad in its own locale, but certainly each state could benefit from its share of the handle.

I don't think it is necessary to explain why horseplayers would embrace this bet, but Kentucky Derby Day has a huge handle, in part because people that do not attend the races on a regular basis pump a lot of cash into the pools and skilled handicappers love to bet into them.

As far as a regular lottery player or an uninitiated racetrack bettor is concerned, it seems that people interested in gambling would be more prone to having a flutter if a) it was a socially acceptable activity (let's face it, buying a lottery ticket on a daily basis is an embarrassing activity to most adults) and b) bettors could rationalize their gamble based on it being a test of skill on an actual sporting event. Buying a ticket at the corner convenience store is not exactly like betting on the Super Bowl.

The addition of toreador-like jockeys, horses with clever names and a package of entertainment should make The Quad a tad more interesting than watching some washed-up announcer-type dressed in a rented tux anxiously waiting for a ping-pong ball with a number to be plucked from some carnival contraption by a Vanna White wannabe.

The Quad could offer a large purse to horse owners to encourage participation of their horses.

op/ed cont.

In addition to the obvious prize money available for the race, there are myriad ways in which our sport could benefit from The Quad, including a bonanza for state-bred programs, which in turn would make it easier for the racing industry to sell it to state legislators.

State-bred horses especially could benefit greatly from The Quad, as they will be needed to fill the races. Imagine two races a month for New York-breds at Belmont Park with purses that rival their championship-day pots. Imagine 20 state-breds lining up to run for that big payday in a race that receives a ton of publicity and is shown on television. Do you think the New York breeders would have something to promote to encourage new breeders to join their ranks? Do you think that breeders would get a better reception at public auction for New York-bred yearlings? Do you think that state legislators will pay more attention to benefits for state-breds that are generated by gambling? You betcha!

The Quad would generate job opportunities for turf writers, television analysts, jockeys (we'll need 20 or more per race!), publicists and several others. It could be a back-to-work program for a lot of racing's recently disenfranchised. Obama might even throw some stimulus money at the The Quad!

But seriously, ladies and gentlemen. . .

As with any new idea, there will be things to be worked out and detractors to pooh-pooh the concept. Twenty horses in a race--are you freaking crazy--think of the danger! And where are you going to find a rider that can do 100 pounds, on Mars? What will PETA say! No state legislature is going to touch this thing! The lottery does not like racing.

Yadda, yadda, yadda. It is 2009, the game is dying before our very eyes, and racetracks, state governments and short-sighted horsemen are trying to make us get in bed with a cold-steel body that has AIDS! Let's take advantage of the current climate and tap into the spirit for change. Racing can develop bets to win back our players. Sure, there will be hurdles, but certainly none greater than pro-casino types are facing on this very day in getting VTLs into Kentucky racetracks.

I am not ego driven to a point where I think The Quad is the only innovation that can get people involved. I know that if the right people put their heads together, other concepts can be developed to take advantage of what racing has to offer its patrons. But it is time to toss out the old model and think outside of the bun.

You remember how exciting it was to know you would be meeting your girl at The Quad? Well, let's try to engender this game of ours with a little of that anticipation and passion.

*The Quad is the second in a three-part Op/Ed series by Barry Irwin. Next up: Plan to Restore Bettor Confidence.*