



# op/ed

by rob whiteley

## **WHY THE BREEDERS' CUP IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO AMERICAN RACING AND BREEDING**

Two reasons define the Breeders' Cup as the American organization with the most leadership potential: (1) Unlike other groups that may bark but have no teeth, the Breeders' Cup can establish rules for participation related to drug use, whipping, and other practices in need of reform, and then actually enforce compliance; and (2) by attracting a greater number of elite international stars to its signature event, the Breeders' Cup may eventually stage a true "World Championship" that will secure an important American presence in the rapidly evolving globalization of top-quality racing.

The Breeders' Cup is poised to lead. Whether they choose to expand their role or not is another matter. Should they decide to pursue a broader leadership agenda, however, the Breeders' Cup has positioned itself to grab the reins and make a difference.

As our industry wallows in dysfunction and self-destructs through in-fighting and inaction, we need a group to rally behind that can provide relative cohesion and targeted direction that is aimed at raising all boats.

It is obvious to all that we need a centralized "league office" and standardization of racing rules, procedures, and penalties. Sadly, it is equally obvious that this will not occur without Congressional action. However, because industry resistance to Federal intervention is so entrenched and widespread, our only hope for some degree of reform and standardization must come from the emergence of one industry group with enough muscle and clout to go beyond simply forming committees and conducting studies.

The Breeders' Cup can never become the "league office" that we need. However, it has uniquely positioned itself to lead on important issues. Furthermore, it is especially qualified and unique in that it has increased its internal cohesion and outward effectiveness by introspectively examining itself, not by studying what others are doing or need to do.

This self-examination has led to increased transparency, accountability, cooperation, and team building among Board members. Changes in governance have also resulted in the assembling of a Board composed of active and experienced horsemen with "skin in the game" who, on a volunteer and un-paid basis, are largely motivated by passion for the sport and a genuine desire to benefit the entire industry.

## **An organization with momentum and global perspective.**

Exciting achievements have been accomplished in a short period of time because of the hard work, common sense, perspective, and cooperative effort by Board members and management who collectively appear to understand the big picture and know how to get things done. Eligibility requirements for foreign horses have been revamped; an extensive "Win-And-You're-In" format has been strategically refined; and travel subsidies for foreign horses have been established to motivate and increase foreign participation. In addition, innovative marketing ideas have been developed to raise event awareness and to bring more people to the track on Breeders' Cup Saturday (e.g., "The Mystery Mutuel Voucher" and the "Classic Ownership Challenge," etc.). The nature and breadth of these accomplishments indicate that this group is functioning very well and also suggests that they are only getting started.

In short, the Breeders' Cup is currently defining itself as one of the foremost "can do-will do" organizations within the industry. As events unfold, its leadership stature and scope will be further defined by its resolve to establish policies and enforce penalties related to important issues such as drug use and whipping. If the Breeders' Cup is inclined to boldly lead by example in this regard, its actions will likely have trickle-down effects that can ripple across the industry to inspire others to also "be the change [they] wish to see in the world."