



# op/ed

by barry irwin

## ATTENTION PRO LASIX ADVOCATES

California has become the battleground in the national debate among horsemen, vets and owners over Lasix.

Thanks to funding, energy and passion from the Thoroughbred Owners of California (which also has trainers on its board of directors) and Dr. Mark Dedomenico, the debate about whether to continue to use Lasix or ban it is reaching a fever pitch.

Last week, in my opinion, at what can best be described as the illegitimate offspring of a political convention and an infomercial, an invitation-only gathering created by the TOC and Dr. D pressed on with their pro-Lasix posturing.

It is nothing if not ironic that ground zero is California, because it has been eight years since the former administrative head of the California Horse Racing Board "retired" and left a once-proud industry in a shambles, where an environment in which cheating with illegal drugs thrived because of some highly questionable tactics.

New York has its drug cheats, but California has them too and, in all likelihood, more of them at the top of the standings. Dr. Rick Arthur has valiantly tried to rehabilitate the image of the CHRB and has made significant inroads in righting the ship. But California has a drug problem.

The drug problem in California is not Lasix.

The drug problem in California is any drug that is used on race day.

If Bute were allowed and not Lasix, then Bute would be the problem.

The problem is not Lasix per se, but that it is a drug.

When the public perceives that the industry in California or anywhere else in the nation has a drug problem, any drug that is used becomes the focal point and the problem.

Let's just say for the sake of argument that the TOC and Dr. D are 100 percent correct in every statement and claim they make about Lasix and that Lasix works in doing whatever they say it does.

The problem remains that Lasix is still a drug and racing has a drug problem.

Until we stop giving any drug to a horse on race day, we will not win the battle for the hearts and minds of our fan base and gain the number of new fans required to continue to play the game.

If we need to sacrifice 2% or 4% or 5% of the breed from every crop by retiring them early because they are chronic bleeders, this is the price we will have to pay in order to keep the game afloat.

We have a choice of continuing down the same path toward isolation in the world of racing and the world of sport, or biting the bullet, putting the syringes away and embracing a new drug policy in order to win over our fans.

So TOC and Dr. D, stop wasting your resources and energy trying to win a battle that in the end will sink our ship. I urge you to stop pouting and throwing tantrums because somebody is trying to take away your horse candy. It's time for you to get with the program embraced by the rest of the racing world.

People, racing has a drug problem. Too many of us are in denial. Let's kick the habit and move in lock step with other racing jurisdictions.

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