

BACKSTRETCH SECURITY

BY KIMBERLY FRENCH



ON A PERFECT SUNNY MORNING IN AUGUST OF 2007, A FLEDGING WRITER PULLED UP TO THE BACKSTRETCH GUARDHOUSE AT DELAWARE PARK. SHE HAD AN APPOINTMENT TO INTERVIEW A TRAINER AT 11:00 A.M., AND IT WAS FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THE APPOINTED TIME.

“GOOD MORNING YOUNG LADY” ASKED THE SECURITY GUARD. “HOW CAN I HELP YOU?”

She explained the reason for her presence, while handing him her driver’s license. He then handed her a pink piece of paper and requested that she fill it out thoroughly so he could record it in a log.

“I’m sure you are who you say you are,” he said with a smile. “But we can’t just let anyone go back there.”

With the sport coming under intense scrutiny during the last several years due to medication infractions by high profile trainers and the deaths of such outstanding horses as Barbaro and Eight Belles, the changes racing has implemented to improve security measures on the backstretch have not received much publicity, but must be given their due.

Backstretch security measures include detention barns, where a horse is held a certain amount of time prior to the race in which it is entered, as well as

checking horses in and out at the gate, a tattoo check to verify identification in the paddock before a race, and the oversight of pre- and post-race medication testing.

With a detention barn, the contact to the horse is limited to only a state veterinarian that is qualified to administer Lasix. Unlike Standardbred tracks, prior to 2005, many Thoroughbred tracks did not have detention barns. Now many of the states with more high profile facilities, such as New York, Kentucky and California, use these holding areas regularly.

Smaller facilities such as Finger Lakes and Tampa Bay Downs, have a Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau (TRPB) official on-site during their entire live racing meet to oversee their security team and pre- and post-race testing procedures.

“We don’t use detention barns,” explained Margo Flynn, who is the Vice President of Marketing and Public Relations at Tampa Bay Downs. “The horses are escorted back to the test barn after the race, which is a secure site. Our

Identifier checking a lip tattoo.



“ALL SPORTS

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pre- and post-race testing is done in conjunction with the Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau.”

When horses travel to and from tracks, they are checked off a list by name since most security personnel are not authorized to identify horses by their lip tattoos.

On October 15, 2008, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA) issued a press release announcing the formation of a Safety and Integrity Alliance that would institute safety reforms for both horses and jockeys that are “the broadest and most comprehensive in the sport’s history.” This group is comprised of racetracks, owners, breeders, horsemen, jockeys, sales companies, veterinarians, racing fans, regulators and breed registries and intends to address medication and testing procedures, injury reporting and prevention, safety research, and an overall safer racing environment.

The Alliance has also created an accreditation program for its members, which includes a backstretch inspection team organized by the TRPB. To date, Churchill Downs and Keeneland Race Course are the only two facilities to qualify for accreditation, while Delaware Park and Belmont Park will be reviewed in the coming months.

The security assessment criteria, according to the Alliance’s accreditation forms are: “a physical review of the facility’s perimeter, backstretch accessibility review, licensee authentication review, a review of security personnel procedures such as hiring, training, and supervision of general security practices, and how the security department relates with outside law enforcement or industry security regulatory bodies.”

The racetrack member will be subject to random on-site inspections, and they must submit a plan to implement recommendations of the Alliance. Their security employees must participate in security programs approved by the Alliance.

“It’s a definitely a positive to see how much these tracks learn from the inspections,” said Mike Ziegler, who is the executive director of the Alliance. “We look forward to more members undergoing the accreditation process, and I think there is an impetus for them to do so.”

Another entity that aids racetracks in bulking up their security on important race days is also synchronized through the TRPB.

“In 2005, the first year I came on board as the president of the TRPB, we organized what is called the Big Event Team,” said Frank Fabian. “This group consists of a team of experienced racetrack investigators who go to the big events at the host track and help augment, as well as supervise, their security operations on the backstretch.

“The Big Event Team received its name only because we like to send it to our big events because obviously there is a lot more media focus on these events,” Fabian continued. “We want to make sure the public sees that our industry places a great deal of emphasis on putting on a very safe event and that we have addressed every integrity concern that we can on the backstretch.”

The Thoroughbred Racing Protective Bureau (TRPB) is a subsidiary of the Thoroughbred Racing Associations of North America (TRA), which is comprised of 44 member tracks. It was created in January of 1946 to explore and attend

to the veracity of Thoroughbred racing and has since expanded to also include Standardbred racing.

“Racing was in jeopardy of losing its patronage,” explained Henry Parr III, who was president of the TRA at the time and was also the president of Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Maryland. “All sports were being held suspect because of prevalent scandals of bribery and game fixing.”

According to its website, the TRPB also, “provides member tracks of the TRA with a wide variety of investigative services along with an information data bank ... The results of TRPB investigations are promptly reported to authorized racing commissions, stewards, and track management officials so appropriate administrative action can be taken based on a thorough knowledge of the facts. TRPB information resources are accessed and applied daily as an effective screening mechanism when evaluating new applicants, employees, vendors and business partners. Taken together, the TRPB’s total services create an ongoing self-policing effort.”

The Big Event Team was originally instituted from a security subcommittee, of which Fabian was a member, of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC) and was merely coordinated through the TRPB. In 2008, however, the RMTC decided to focus its funds on other issues, such as medication rules, and elected to eradicate several of its subcommittees, including the one responsible for security and the Big Event Team.

“The TRPB assumed total responsibility for the Big Event Team,” Fabian said. “Before that, the RMTC would pay the team to go to the various tracks that requested it, and when it was no longer associated with the RMTC, the TRPB took over and still provides this service for our TRA member racetracks.”

The team, which is available upon request of the host track, is composed of a varying number of experienced racetrack investigators from assorted racing commissions and TRPB employees. They arrive 72 hours before the event, meet with the stewards, judges, racetrack officials, state racing regulators and heads of security to learn the different rules each track has in place for security and to do whatever the track deems necessary to bolster its security measures.

“The most important lesson learned (from the Big Event Team) is that the bigger the presence of ‘feet on the ground’ in the backstretch area, the greater the deterrent for unethical activity,” explained Dr. Scot Waterman, who is the executive director of the RMTC.

Fabian acknowledges the lack of a central unifying body in racing can make backstretch security measures a bit of a challenge.

“As you know, there are 38 racing jurisdictions and 38 different sets of rules,” Fabian noted. “For example, I was surprised to learn that in New Jersey, you can use different salves and things on Standardbreds right up until race time, where in other jurisdictions, you can’t even be in the stall with a horse on race day unless it’s in duress.

“There are a series of meetings to insure the whole team has a thorough understanding of what unique house rules may be effect at a particular racetrack and what the state rules are in respect to medications,” he continued. “You would be surprised by the number of horsemen that ask questions of the Big Event Team members because many times they are shipping in from different jurisdictions and an investigator may be the first person they see because they haven’t had time to get over to the racing office or ask the state vet. We want to make sure we are sufficiently educated so we can answer questions correctly.”

TYPICAL RACE DAY SECURITY MEASURES/ PROCEDURES



RACE DAY SECURITY MEASURES AND PROCEDURES VARY FROM TRACK TO TRACK AND RACING JURISDICTION TO JURISDICTION. BELOW ARE SOME TYPICAL RACE DAY SECURITY MEASURES AND PROCEDURES HORSEMEN AND WOMEN WILL EXPERIENCE AT MANY RACETRACKS:

- A security-manned stable gate where licenses are checked and visitors are signed in and out
- Monitored barn space set aside for stakes horses
- A receiving barn for horses racing that day which are not normally housed on the racetrack’s grounds
- A pre-race holding area for horses racing that has only one entrance that is locked and guarded
- All paddock entrances are locked and guarded
- The identity of all horses racing are verified in the pre-race holding area or paddock using papers on file at the track and lip tattoos
- A state veterinarian performs a pre-race exam on all horses racing on race day
- A test barn where horse are subjected to post-race testing. The test barn area should have only one entrance which is locked and guarded, and security should restrict access into the area to racing commission personnel, test technicians, veterinarians, authorized licensees escorting horses for testing, and racing commission-escorted guests. A log should be kept of all horses and people entering and leaving the test area.



In the background, the entrance to the Keeneland paddock area is guarded.



A guard at the entrance to the Keeneland winner's circle.

In 2008, the Big Event Team worked 11 events. However, since 2005 the team has been present at 53 events at 18 different venues in North America, including Woodbine Race Course.

"We do this by invitation, so the host track has to reach out to me and ask if there is a team and funding is available," Fabian said. "I have a limited amount of money I can spend on my members that they apportion me in my budget, so it is first come, first serve. Some tracks are willing to absorb some of the cost, and if it is a non-member requesting our services, typically they will fund the whole event."

"We kicked off our 2009 season at Charles Town, and I know we are scheduled to do the Del 'Cap at Delaware Park later this year and at least two of the Triple Crown events," he continued. "We receive those requests probably about a month out from the event, and if we can do 12 to 15 a year, I'm satisfied we are doing the best that we can do with the resources we have."

Jim Gates, the general manager of Churchill Downs, acknowledged backstretch security is perennially a top concern, but when the first weekend in May rolls around, it is of utmost importance.

"The purpose of our horse security program is really two-fold," Gates explained. "We want to make sure that either media or the general public are not going to places they shouldn't be and bothering the horses or the horsemen. That's an important component of this, because you've got a huge crowd of folks back there that aren't on the backside very often, so they don't know what they can and cannot do. Also, we want to ensure the medication rules established by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission are also being followed."

"Now we do this in conjunction with the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission, to get their input and to make sure we are meeting or exceeding their expectations, and with the Big Event Team," Gates continued. "The Big Event Team sends out a group of experienced racetrack security folks who supplement or augment our security and really add some value to our security leading up to Derby Day because they know what they are looking for. They go from barn-to-barn on golf carts and just keep an eye on what's happening."

Although the team concentrates on larger events, Fabian wants to stress the TRPB's main goal is to promote fairly run races, no matter what the purse size or graded status is, at all the industry's venues.

"People bet on all our races every day," he said. "Now they may bet more heavily on May 2, on one particular race, but on May 3 and 4, they are still betting other kinds of races. In my view, the wagering public has a right to expect the same degree of integrity in backstretch security on a non-big event day as they do on the big ones. It is still their \$2 going across the window."

"We encourage our members to invite us out to do inspections of their backstretch and how they handle the movement of horses from the stall to the paddock and the paddock to the test barn," Fabian continued. "When it begins to become routine, sometimes people tend to miss things and drop the ball, so it's a good for us to come out on any normal, live racing day to review their operations and conduct inspections of the backstretch area, tack rooms, veterinarians, and inspections of their vehicles just to keep everybody cognizant of the fact that we are there, and just because it's not a big event does not mean that the racetrack is not interested in maintaining that level of security and integrity on the backstretch." 