
OUR VOICES

Comment

HORSES DESERVE OUR BEST EFFORTS

ALGEBRA WAS NOT ONE OF my strengths at Quanah High School in Texas, as Mrs. Stanley Jagers will verify. Despite this lack of prowess, I do know that the more variables there are in an equation, the more difficult it is to solve. Such is the case with the crisis at Santa Anita. The anguish, frustration, and helplessness felt by all underscore this point.

More questions than answers have emerged, and, 90-plus days in, there isn't a clear path to solutions. This failure is not due to a lack of effort, caring, or ingenuity. The loss of any horse—Pioneer of the Nile comes to mind—is heartbreaking to those of us who have fallen under the spell of these remarkable creatures.

The best talents in our industry are on the case to address these problems. Of course, the actual diagnosis remains elusive, for the very reason stated in my algebra reference. As we know, this problem is not isolated to any one particular racetrack. It is the most horrific aspect of racing, regardless of where a race is carded.

Often tragedies force an uncomfortable but necessary conversation within the racing industry. My hope is that once we get past the spring, it will continue. Tough times demand

tough solutions, sometimes even previously unthinkable ones.

These discussions seem to coalesce around measures to reform the sport. We know that reforms are needed, and many of these have been hashed out before. Ruffian didn't bring them about, nor did Go for Wand, or even Eight Belles.

Publicity garnered by these events resulted in Congressional hearings and genuine expressions of concern. Go for Wand's tragedy, in particular, brought about the American Association of Equine Practitioners' On Call program and led equine medical directors to become integral parts of the race scene in several jurisdictions, as well as other improvements made around racing.

These reforms haven't been nearly enough, and I believe one key component, in particular, has been left on the sidelines. What is still missing, what is fundamental to the needs of the industry—especially given the complex nature of our horses—is an abiding commitment to equine research. I do not hear that in this conversation.

Truth be told, the Grayson-Jockey Club Foundation, the American Quarter Horse Foundation, and the Morris Animal Foundation—combined—fund less than \$2 million in equine research annually. The veteri-



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narians, scientists, and researchers who select and manage the expenditure of these funds obsess over every blessed nickel because they know how scarce the resources are and how great is the need.

Mind you, this \$2 million is not solely dedicated to musculoskeletal issues. And, yes, our land grant universities and veterinary schools fund equine research, too. All of these institutions need and deserve our support.

As the American Horse Council has documented, our industry has an economic impact of \$122 billion. For an industry of our size, surely we can do better in terms of funding research. Some racing jurisdictions do this directly, and it helps; it all helps. It isn't enough.

Research of any kind is a long-term endeavor that doesn't always pan out. It is no 1-9 sure thing, and the bets don't come in \$2 at a time. It is painstaking, gut-wrenching, confounding work—much like everything else we do with horses. Yet, it might be the only addition we can make to tilt the equation in favor of the horse.

We can't undo the heartbreak of this spring at Santa Anita. Yet there is actually something each of us can do about catastrophic injuries in racehorses. We can fund greatly enhanced and additional equine research and encourage others to do the same. These studies, indeed any equine research, helps all horses, regardless of breed or discipline.

Our horses deserve our best effort. **BH**

Gary Carpenter is Commissioner of the National Reining Horse Association and has held executive positions with AAEP, The Jockey Club, and AQHA. He also held a groom's license from New Mexico.