

Final Turn

FIVE ABSURDITIES By Rob Whiteley

OK, I know we face many more than five absurdities in our industry. Like racetrack owners not working together sufficiently to stop the bleeding from offshore wagering. Or TVG not being able to show video from every track. Or medication rules and license requirements being different from state to state. Or televised poker beating our butts when we have the most compelling product in all of sports, the Thoroughbred racehorse. Or Breeders' Cup TV ratings dropping to a dismal level because we fail to market our great sport effectively. But this is all that space allows.

What do *you* think about each of them?

"OK to Race...Not OK to Pinhook."

This common sales phrase (and sales reality) is hugely frustrating. If the yearling is OK to race, it should be OK to buy. However, a large number of future stars are knocked off short lists because of minor imperfections. If a complete list of stakes horses who were "not OK to pinhook" could be published, it would be staggering. Until pinhookers, veterinarians, and buyers at 2-year-old sales address this major problem *together*, buyers along the pinhooking chain will continue to miss out on a lot of stakes-winning *racehorses*.

First-Year Sires.

I just don't get the fascination with first-year sires, or how they can be valued above proven stallions. And how about \$200,000 for an (unproven) first-year sire? Absurd? You bet.

Breeder of Record.

The Jockey Club defines the "Breeder of Record" as the mare owner or entity that owns the mare at the time of foaling, rather than as the person or entity who plans the mating, gets the mare in foal, and pays the stud fee. Why do they do this? Presumably because it is easier for them, and because they can. Maybe it's because that's the way they mistakenly did the first one, and they would rather perpetuate a mistake than change it. Think how much better we would be served if The Jockey Club did not have a


monopoly, and competition caused it to raise the bar.

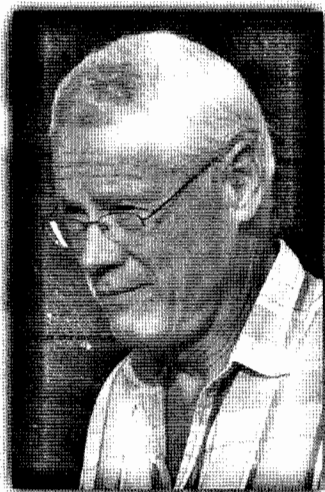
2-Year-Old Sale "Breezes."

"Breezes," of course, is a misnomer. Causing babies to fly as fast as they can around a turn and down the stretch on a given day is at best very risky and at worst damaging and obscene. Instead of intelligently creating a sales practice that allows young prospects to develop according to their individual readiness, we pursue this maniacal and misbegotten infatuation with speed. Whatever happened to bringing our future stars along on their own developmental timetable and letting them gallop through the lane under a strong hold?

Whipping Horses.

Those of us addicted to this sport and watch thousands of races become immune to the violence of this practice. But stop and watch a head-on slow motion replay of a stretch run, and only watch the whipping. The steady flailing and striking looks surreal and punishing, and turns a lot of people off. The issue is important enough that Merv Griffin, on the Breeders' Cup telecast, asked how many times Stevie Wonderboy had been hit, and then exclaimed, "*Don't hurt my horse!*"

The time has come to address the absurdity of whipping and make significant changes. Trevor Denman, Bill Finley, the late John Russell, the current writer, and several others have written Final Turns or other articles on the negative effects of race whipping. Very little has come of it, despite the fact that use or misuse of whips often has the counterproductive effect of *interfering* with performance and can create safety problems when whipped horses sulk, shy, veer, or are pushed to overextend themselves while exhausted. If jockeys only carry and use whips for safety purposes, we will still have winners, the most genuine racehorses will prevail, and a rider's true horsemanship and skill will be fully displayed. At a time when the industry is desperate for new players, we needlessly turn off a significant number of potential fans who are fascinated with horses and might otherwise become regulars, but are uncomfortable with the practice of whipping. We can fix this now, or we can wait for an animal rights group to fix it for us. 



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