

TDN & A

BILL FARISH, BREEDERS' CUP BOARD CHAIRMAN

Serving as the chairman of the Breeders' Cup board of directors can be a tough, contentious, sometimes thankless job. No one knows this better than Lane's



Bill Farish is back at the Breeders' Cup helm

Horsephotos

End's Bill Farish, who spent five years in the position between 2006-11. Before stepping down, Farish oversaw some of the biggest changes in Breeders' Cup history, including the shift to a two-day format in 2007. Farish was succeeded by Tom Ludt, who held the chairmanship until this past April, when he was named senior

vice president of the Stronach Group and announced he wouldn't seek reappointment.

In August, Farish, who had remained as a Breeders' Cup director, was once again elected as chairman, and has begun a two-year term that puts him back in one of the most visible positions in Thoroughbred racing.

It also puts him right in the middle of some of racing's biggest battles, namely the fight between pro- and anti-Lasix advocates. The Breeders' Cup took criticism earlier this year when it announced that, in a rollback from a plan to ban Lasix in all 2013 Breeders' Cup races, it would once again extend the ban only to juvenile races--the policy in place in 2012. Oliver Tait, Darley's chief operating officer, resigned from the Breeders' Cup board in protest.

The issue arose again in August when the Breeders' Cup, in response to heavy pressure from horsemen's groups, announced that all horses running in the 2014 Breeders' Cup races, to be held for the third-straight year at Santa Anita, will be allowed to run on the anti-bleeding medication. That was after California horsemen threatened to withhold approval for the simulcasting of the event. An op-ed in the British newspaper *The Guardian* called the decision "spineless."

That Santa Anita will host the Breeders' Cup for three straight years, and five times in seven years, has also drawn criticism, particularly from East Coast-based owners and trainers who fear it gives California horsemen too much a home-field advantage.

All isn't gloom and doom, however. The Breeders' Cup drew near-universal praise when, in March, it decided to award travel allowances to all participants shipping from outside of California for this year's Breeders' Cup World Championships at Santa Anita Nov. 1-2. Owners of horses shipping from outside of North America to the Championships will receive a \$40,000 travel allowance, and owners of domestic horses shipping to California will receive a \$10,000 travel allowance. In addition, the Breeders' Cup reduced entry fees for its Championships races from 3% to 2% of the purse.

With all this on the table, Farish has a challenging job ahead of him. Earlier this week, he sat down with the *TDN's* Lucas Marquardt to talk about those challenges, and said he's ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work.

TDN: Congratulations on being named chairman of the Breeders' Cup once again. The board has had a tumultuous year, with several resignations, a delayed site announcement and controversy over the Lasix reversal. Tell us why you decided to take on this responsibility again, at this particular time.

BF: When Tom [Ludt] took over two years ago, he said, 'Bill! Why didn't you warn me about this?' And so I'm really the crazy one going back in, knowing what I'm getting myself into. But it's a very exciting time. We're well-positioned to do some very exciting things for the sport. Any time an organization takes on big issues, there are going to be differing opinions, and the Breeders' Cup is certainly an area that attracts different views. The key for us, for me, is to build consensus, and I think that's what I did best the first time around, and I hope I can do it again.

TDN: There have been a lot of changes to this year's event, but let's first talk about the similarities. We're back at Santa Anita. Why was that decision reached?

BF: Obviously, it's drawn a fair amount of interest from people. Site selection is a big decision we have to make, and there are a lot of things that go into that--weather, amenities, hotel availability, competing events locally and nationally, television windows, actual date availability in that market, and the economic viability of the tracks in the markets we're looking at.

One of the positives about Santa Anita is that there have been a lot of capital improvements there; they continue to upgrade their facilities. Being in California, we can also have the [GI Breeders' Cup] Classic in prime time, and our network partner [NBC] is quite happy to be running the Classic in prime time on national television. There are a lot of things that came together to make Santa Anita the obvious choice for *those* years. But we'll continue to look at different venues in 2015 and beyond.

TDN: The Breeders' Cup has found itself a flashpoint of criticism due to its Lasix reversal, much of it coming from overseas. Looking back, would you do anything differently? And what's your opinion on the decision?

BF: Right now there are some people thinking long-term, and some people thinking short-term.

We need to get those two together, and it's a great time for the Breeders' Cup to tackle these issues. It's too bad we have them, but I think we're in a unique position of leadership in the industry to address them. We have an outstanding management team and staff, and they're going to help lead us through that. We would like nothing more than to achieve medication uniformity, both nationally and internationally. Ideally, we would like to hold our event under the same rules as other major international events, but in this country, horsemen's organizations have an effective veto, given by the Interstate Horseracing Act.

We were in a very difficult spot. Everyone likes to call it a reversal, but the writing was on the wall. There are some things we can do by house rules, and others we can't. It's easy for people to say we were 'spineless,' but you have to look at the facts. We've always taken a leadership role in issues of safety and integrity, and we will continue to advocate those views in the hopes of convincing horsemen of the long-term vision of running medication-free.

TDN: Recently, Ireland announced it would join Britain in staging a fall Champions Day. International festivals are growing in strength and number. How do you feel about the Breeders' Cup's position in the marketplace, and what are you doing to make sure you remain competitive?

BF: I think the more opportunities for owners who have top horses to run for big purses at big events the better, both internationally and in this country. We're happy there are more big events out there. We think we're well-positioned with 14 races worth \$27 million in purses and awards this year. We think we have a good spot on the calendar, late in the year. But we have to do things to compete with those events, and that's why we have some new things in 2013.

We have the across-the-board travel awards, and that's something the people I've talked to, both nationally and internationally, are very happy about. Having a \$40,000 stipend to come from Europe and a \$10,000 stipend to come from the U.S. is attractive.



Bill Farish at the Keeneland September sale this week

Lucas Marquardt photo

I haven't talked to anyone specifically who has said 'I won't come without it,' but I have talked to a number of people who have said it sure makes the decision easier. We also have reduced entry fees this year; we cut 33% off, from 3% to 2% of the purses. So those are two big steps I think are responses to the international competition, and I think it's good for horsemen all around.

TDN: One of the things you seem to be focusing on is a better owner experience. What is on tap for this year, and how will those aspects of enhanced experience continue to grow?

BF: No question. It really is one of the things I wanted to address seven years ago. It wasn't a bad participant experience, but we had issues like jockeys not getting a parking space--things that should be well down the list of 'taken care of.' Addressing the overall experience of everybody was a top priority. In 2010, we put together the Enhanced Experience Committee. Roy Jackson, with his baseball experience, and [TDN publisher Barry Weisbord], with his experience and energy, led that effort for us, and I think we've seen a lot of good things come from that. The Breakfast Marquee was very popular, and it will be back this year. The Taste of the World event has been popular. And the winner's enclosure afterwards is really drastically improved. We want the owners of all the horses, including the also-rans, to feel like, 'Hey, we've got to get back there with a horse. That's where we want to be.' And I think we're getting very close to that.

TDN: While all racing events like to focus on the celebrities who attend them, the Breeders' Cup seems to take it one step further, working to get those celebrities to help introduce the sport to the public in a broader fashion. Tell us about the Ambassador Program, which was launched last year.

BF: The Ambassador Program has really harnessed the excitement you see from people in this sport. When you have a celebrity that has a much greater reach than you or I do, and they have success in the way that Bobby Flay has, or Jim Rome has, it can be a great benefit. I don't know how many people heard the show where [Jim and Bobby talked](#) about the thrill of winning a Breeders' Cup race, but it was just infectious. There's no way it can't get people's attention. Or when Joe Torre won the Pacific Classic [as a co-owner of Game On Dude]. His comments after the race were phenomenal. That's what we're trying to harness, those celebrities that already have the passion. And those guys seem very willing to do that, and have been a tremendous help so far.

TDN: Do you expect Breeders' Cup sponsors to embrace a more integrated role in the event in the future?

BF: It's a key program our new chief marketing and revenue officer Drew Sheinman is focusing on. It's not just getting sponsors, but building a comprehensive global marketing platform for the Breeders' Cup, which incorporates, in addition to world class racing, highly developed elements of broadcast, social media, fashion, luxury and lifestyle, which enhance our event into a captivating international brand. In regards to sponsors, specifically, we want to engage 'best in class' sponsors that will really help with our overall mission, and leveraging their marketing expertise with our sport, choosing partners based on quality over quantity. We want partners who will not only be there the week of the event, but year-round to help promote the sport as well as their product. We think Drew, and his team, are doing a great job of executing this plan, we are excited about our future.

TDN: At The Round Table this summer, The Jockey Club announced the Fox Sports initiative to get more racing on TV. What are your plans to deliver those viewers through those fall preps and into the Breeders' Cup programming?

BF: The Jockey Club has done a lot of great work trying to promote the sport in the last few years, and we're working with them all the time. We'll continue to do that and try to get more racing on television. We've got some news that will come out in the next couple weeks that we're excited about that will continue that. We certainly want to get as many Breeders' Cup preps on television as possible. We've seen how effective the 'Win and You're In' program is--it's exciting-- and promoting that through television and through digital media is definitely something we'll continue.

TDN: The Breeders' Cup is an event built on fees from foals and stallions. The foal crop is half of what it was just a few years ago, and there are fewer stallions creating those foals. What does this mean to revenue? How do you replace those fees?

BF: It's a great question. It's had a tremendous effect on revenue. In 1995, we had close to \$20 million in stallion and foal nominations, and we paid \$10 million out in purses. This year, we'll have roughly \$12 million in stallion and foal nominations, and we'll pay \$27 million in purses. So from a nominator's standpoint, you're certainly getting more bang for the buck. We continue to have 95% of stallions that stand for \$5,000 or more nominate to the program. Foal nominations have stayed pretty constant--about 50% of foals in any given year are nominated. We dropped the foal nomination to \$400 if you nominate online, which 85% of people do now. So really, they're paying a little less, and we're performing a lot better in terms of nominations fees to purses and awards.

TDN: Under your last tenure, you took the Breeders' Cup from one to two days and from eight to 15 races with \$25 million in purses. What do you want to try to accomplish as chairman this time around, and do you have any similarly bold ideas?

BF: I don't know if there's anything that bold in the works [laughs]. That expansion was a response to creating more opportunities for owners and breeders, and I think it's been successful. We think maybe we overstepped with the 15 races, and we dropped back to 14 [eliminating the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Sprint]. It's a small change, but we don't want to cannibalize our races. We'll continue to look at the races we have. We'll also continue to put more emphasis on marketing partners, and on how we're putting the product out. Technology is still developing, and we'll continue to look at how we can use it. We're very excited about being on prime time and network TV.

TDN: What is so special about this event?

BF: That's an easy one--it represents the best of the best. The best breeding, the best racing, the best customer experience. It can be tough to move around because of all the people, but if you take the time and go around the racetrack at the Breeders' Cup, to see what is happening is pretty amazing. But there's always room for improvement, and we have some exciting new things coming. We'll continue to try and make it the best of the best.