

# T D N O A

*NYRA's Senior Vice President of Racing Operations  
Martin Panza didn't take long to leave his mark on New  
York racing. He loaded*



**Martin Panza**  
*A. Coglianese/NYRA*

*the Belmont Stakes card  
with rich and important  
races, creating a  
Breeders' Cup-like event  
in the late spring. He also  
created the Stars &  
Stripes Weekend over  
July 4, another big event  
that included two races  
with seven-figure purses  
and was by all accounts a  
success. What else does  
Panza have in store for  
New York racing and, in  
particular, Saratoga?*

*Those were among the  
questions put to him by Bill Finley and Dave Johnson  
on Sirius/XM's Down the Stretch this weekend, and  
reprinted here with their permission.*

**Q: It's clear that you like "event days." Can you create something along those lines at Saratoga or is every day at Saratoga already an event?**

**MP:** This is obviously my first meet working up here and it is a really special place and we need to use that to our advantage. Travers Day is already a huge day up here. I'd like to try to grow Whitney Day into the same type of day as Travers Day. Going through my first opening day up here (Friday) and being from California, where I saw the power of opening day at Del Mar, I think we can do lot more on opening day here. I'd like people to start thinking 'This is the start of the Saratoga meet and we ought to come out.' It's a great place up here but I think we can grow it. We will have some ideas for next year to enhance what's going on at Saratoga.

**Q: At Saratoga, there's always the question of how to properly mix quality and quantity. You have said you'd like to cut back some on the number of races. Can you elaborate?**

**MP:** I think we're trying to be consistent. Mondays, nine races. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10, but the first race will be a steeplechase at 12:25, so we'll have nine flat races starting at 1. Fridays, 10. On Saturdays, you might see 11 or 12 races. On Sundays we'll try to stick to 10.

I think there are three Sundays where we will run 11 because we'll be on national television. Obviously, the foal crop, since 2008, has seen a tremendous decline and at some point it becomes a numbers game. I want to make sure we protect the product up here and that NYRA racing stands for the best racing in the country. At the same time, you want the customer to have an enjoyable experience at the races and sometimes when you run too many races, it becomes a little overwhelming, a little bit too much. On top of that, it's a great town and the nightlife up here is pretty incredible and we want people to enjoy the town as well. We are a racetrack and I have a responsibility to help NYRA make more money, but I also like to think we have a responsibility to the neighborhoods and communities we're in to be an economic driver for them as well.

**Q: Your thoughts on the most recent effort to changes the spacing of the Triple Crown races?**

**MP:** We're more than willing to sit down with Churchill and Pimlico and at least discuss things. I am a fan of leaving it the way it is, but it never hurts to have discussions and talk.

**Q: When might we finally see the Breeders' Cup return to New York?**

**MP:** As NYRA reorganizes, and we should get that resolved next year, we'll be ready as a management team to sit down with the Breeders' Cup people and say we'd like to have it back in New York. I think the Breeders' Cup is open to that. They realize New York needs to be in the rotation. It's a matter of our getting our house in order in New York and telling them we're now prepared to host this. It will happen. I'm not quite sure how quickly, but it's going to happen. New York will be back in the rotation. On top of that, we want to build our four or five big days on our own and make those sort of mini-Breeders' Cup days in the summer time. That's what we're going to move toward over the next three, four years.

**Q: We haven't heard much yet about your plans for the fall meet at Belmont. What do you have in store for us?**

**MP:** The fall stakes schedule should be out in another week or two. I just need to go before our racing committee and get it approved. There won't be a lot of changes in the fall. The fall is a difficult time for all of us because you've got college football and professional football going and at the end of the day, Americans love football and it's hard to compete against that. On top of that, most people's fall schedules are feeding into the Breeders' Cup. That's fine, but when we spend purse money or create days, we want to make it where NYRA is the focal point and we're not a prep for somebody else. In the fall, you're basically getting horses ready for the Breeders' Cup.

That's fine and it's necessary to help feed one of American racing's biggest days. But right now I am trying to concentrate on the Belmont summer meet and to some extent, Saratoga. Obviously, we made a huge purse increase for the Whitney for this year. I want to use this Saratoga meet as a learning experience for myself and then next year I think you'll see some more changes at Saratoga. I think Belmont fall will pretty much stay the same.

**Q: You like to think outside the box. What other plans or ideas might you have to move racing forward?**

**MP:** I am looking at creating an American Turf Triple Crown. I need to sit down with the guys at Arlington Park because the Secretariat makes a lot of sense as part of something like that. You'd have the Belmont Derby in early July, the Secretariat in mid-August and some race in mid-September and combine them to make a 3-year-old turf Triple Crown. Belmont could host the final leg or it could be some other track. I think the creation of this would be something positive for American racing. [CLICK HERE TO SHARE THIS STORY](#)