

TDN *Q&A*

TIM RITVO

The Stronach Group, which came to an agreement with Churchill Downs Inc. to take over racing operations at the former Calder Race Course in July, recently concluded a highly successful inaugural meeting at the new Gulfstream Park West. The company continues to seek ways to invigorate the racing industry in Florida and turned its attention to the breeding side of the business with this week's announcement that Frank Stronach's Adena Springs South would be reopening its stallion barn. The star of the farm's 2015 roster will be Fort Larned (E Dubai) and, to show its commitment to the state's breeding industry, Gulfstream Park will be offering incentives to breed to the GI Breeders' Cup Classic winner.

Gulfstream's Chief Operating Officer Tim Ritvo, who says that his mandate from The Stronach Group is, "not just that racing is successful, but that it continues to flourish for years to come," thinks a strong Florida breeding industry is a key component to the long-term success of the state's racing industry. Ritvo sat down with *TDN's* Jessica Martini to discuss how the two halves of the industry can come together to thrive.

TDN: After the success of the recently concluded Gulfstream Park West meeting, what are your next goals for racing in Florida?

TR: Florida is a vibrant racing community. We are happy about the success of the Gulfstream Park West meet. We want to continue to grow the brand and to continue to show our commitment to racing in Florida.

When we worked out the agreement with CDI, it wasn't about The Stronach Group getting fat, it was about trying to make a whole industry healthy. When you try to fix something, it can't just be about fixing your own private interest. It has to be about fixing the entire model. And we're hoping that we contribute to that. We're hoping that we continue to find answers to fixing the entire industry, obviously in the state of Florida first, and then all our other racing entities.



**GPW has given Tim Ritvo
reason to smile**

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TDN: How does the state's breeding industry fit into those goals?

TR: I think that Gulfstream Park has helped, in a way, convince Adena Stallions to start reinventing themselves in Florida.

We know that a good, healthy industry really means a good, healthy industry across the board--meaning from the breeding, to the final product which races at the track, to the customer's on-track experience, which is the economic engine of the sport. And all of the funding comes from the customer.

TDN: What does the re-opening of the Adena South stallion barn mean for the industry in Florida?

TR: For the industry, it means a healthier product, more quality. Gulfstream really pushed for Adena Springs to send Fort Larned to Florida because we felt that to have a stallion of his status, a Breeders' Cup Classic winner, standing in the state would really show our commitment to the program. On top of that, to show our commitment, Gulfstream Park is going to offer an enticement for breeders to breed, a rebate policy, to Fort Larned. We've agreed to give a \$5,000 rebate to breeders that breed to Fort Larned. Whatever the advertised stud fee is, they will get a refund or a credit from Gulfstream Park for their next breeding season.

We know how the whole ecosystem works. And we know it starts from breeding horses who become racing product later on. You have to look at the big picture. It's all about trying to keep a healthy ecosystem with a good bunch of horses being bred with decent quality, running for decent purses. And that will create a full field size, which will create a good economic engine of bettors to continue to bet on the product.

TDN: Will having a Breeders' Cup Classic winner at stud in Florida attract more stallions of his stature?

TR: We hope so. We think that having a stallion of that quality will bring in more mares to breed to those stallions rather than going through the expense of having to ship to Kentucky and then coming back. We're hoping that this catches on. We're hoping more people will bring more quality stallions here, more quality stallions will keep more quality broodmares here and we'll be doing our little piece of what we believe is needed to truly stand behind what we've said the whole time when we worked out this Churchill deal: that we believe in a true dedication to the entire Thoroughbred business in Florida.

TDN: Will Gulfstream be expanding its state-bred program?

TR: We have already started that. We launched that this year with an agreement with the breeders. You will see the Florida Stallion Series will be enhanced next year, we are about to do an announcement on that. The first two races, the sprint races, were normally \$100,000, and they will be \$200,000. The two seven-furlong races that were normally \$150,000 will be \$300,000 and then the last leg, which was normally \$350,000, will be \$500,000. Plus, we are about to launch a 3-year-old program to coincide with the 2-year-olds. So people who nominate their stallions for the 2-year-old program will also be able to participate in the 3-year-old stakes program, which will be six races of \$100,000 apiece.

There is a lot going on in Florida. We really appreciate and we know it is very important that we work with the breeders and we work with the horsemen and how we all understand how important the ecosystem is to work together to produce the most amount of revenue to put into purses that will create large field sizes and a good betting platform for the customer.

We understand that it is not fair for someone to do the heavy lifting and then one entity take all the money for it. For anything to last for a long period of time, there has to be a balance.

TDN: Do you see The Stronach Group using the template it has created in Florida in other racing jurisdictions, such as Maryland?

TR: We are going to try to use the template that we've used in Florida--we may have some knockers out there--but Florida is definitely moving in the right direction from every aspect, and the growth has been exceptional. Obviously every state has different nuances and different protocols, but we will try to take that model and move it on into Maryland. We are excited about Maryland. We think that Florida and California are moving in the right direction. We have good management teams who continue to progress and grow the sport. And Maryland is on The Stronach Group's radar now. We are going to lay a lot of our manpower behind trying to fix the Maryland model.

TDN: What are the long-term goals for racing in Florida?

TR: We want to continue to have a healthy ecosystem. Eventually, we would like to bring the Breeders' Cup back to Gulfstream Park. Obviously, we need to build on a little bit to do that. But we want to do our share. It is a very important vision of The Stronach Group not just that racing is successful, but that it continues to flourish for years to come.

That's my mandate. That's what I was tapped on the shoulder to do. It's very exciting and it's great to go to work every day.

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