

## **BOB ELLISTON, COO, BREEDERS' CUP**

Earlier this month, Breeders' Cup Ltd. announced Bob Elliston as its new chief operating officer. Elliston, 48, spent the past 13 years as the president and CEO of



*breederscup.com photo*

Turfway Park, and is an active participant in industry matters. He currently serves as executive chair of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association Board of Directors and is treasurer of the Kentucky Equine Education Project (KEEP) Board. He also serves on the Thoroughbred Racing Association Board and the University of Louisville Equine Program Advisory Board. Elliston took some time out of his busy

schedule this week to talk to the *TDN's* Lucas Marquardt, and here's what he had to say...

### **It seems to be a particularly challenging time for racing. What do you see as the main challenges that lie ahead for the Breeders' Cup?**

"Economic challenges abound for many industries domestically and internationally. Fortunately, the leadership of the Breeders' Cup have ensured the financial stability of this organization for many years to come. The product continues to be in high demand, as evidenced by the sustained history of an expanded racing program, increased international participation and the overall popularity of the Championships with our fans. Already, we have received very strong initial presale ticket purchase requests for this year's event at Santa Anita. Going forward, our challenge is to be judicious in the use of our capital to ensure we not only continue to fund financial results for the Breeders' Cup, while also utilizing those resources to introduce new audiences to the grandeur of horse racing."

### **You spent 13 years at Turfway. How will your background there help you in your current position?**

"The Breeders' Cup experience is very reliant on our Track partners. As a track operator, I have an understanding of the practical implications of delivering on the expectations of the fan, the horsemen, the owners, and the community, and can work hands on with the track partner to exceed those expectations. Further, having worked within the complex regulatory environment for 13 years, I have a familiarity with the rules of racing that can be an asset to our participants."

Recent articles in the *New York Times* and other sources have cast racing in a particularly bad light. As an industry, in what area do you think we need to focus on most? Elimination of raceday medication? Uniform medication rules? Track surfaces? Something else?

"Clearly, there are smart, well-intentioned people in our industry who have divergent opinions about each of these subjects. My sense is that regardless of your position on a specific opinion, everyone of these people are trying to solve the same problem: how do we bring new fans, and new capital, to our industry? Horse owners want higher purses and a better chance at a return on investment. Breeders want more buyers with larger capital sources to compete for their stock at public or private auction. Racetracks want more horses, more fans at their venues, and more money in their betting pools. Having said that, how we conduct our business from an integrity and compassion for the participants, both human and equine, should always be at the center of those conversations."

### **What are some things the Breeders' Cup has done well in recent years? What are some things you think could have been done better?**

"If you look at the participation from foreign connections, both in terms of BCWC starters, simulcast handle, and nominated stallions/horses, the Breeders' Cup has grown the international complexion of its organization tremendously. Moving forward, we understand the desire for a more defined plan of where the World Championships will be held in upcoming years, and we are actively working toward that."

### **What do you see as the biggest growth opportunities for the Breeders' Cup?**

"Unequivocally, I believe we can drive new fan creation for the entire sport centered around an incredible event experience that transcends just the two days of racing. The Enhanced Experience Committee, created by the Breeders' Cup Board, has already made tremendous improvements that were implemented at Churchill Downs in 2011, and are actively considering additional improvements for Santa Anita this fall, and future events, as well. As great as these two racing days have become, the goal is to create a transcendent entertainment and sporting event worthy of mention in the same breath as the Masters, Super Bowl, or the Final Four.

"Additionally, we are expanding and upgrading our digital media program, which will include the creation of social games to reach a potential new audience of fans, allowing them to become more familiar with the Breeders' Cup and Thoroughbred racing.

“Finally, we're very excited about our new relationship with the NBC Sports Network, our broadcaster for this year's World Championships. We are especially looking forward to the Breeders' Cup Classic being shown, for the first time ever, live in prime time on NBC from 8-9 p.m. ET. We feel this is a great opportunity to expose new viewers to our Championships and introduce them to the climactic event of the racing season.”

**Do you have any specific plans that you're bringing to the Breeders' Cup? Any goals?**

“Day 5, and I feel like I am drinking out of a fire hydrant! At some point, the acclimation period will be over, and we will move into providing value-added ideas, strategies, operating ideas. Having said that, on Day 5, I couldn't be more impressed with the caliber of my colleagues, and the passion that the Breeders' Cup Board has for not resting on the laurels of nearly 30 years of excellence.”