

KINGSLEY KICKBACK

Racing at the crossroads

In 2017 the Levy was confirmed as state aid by the government, an important moment for the British Racing Authority (BHA) and racing's constituent bodies. I don't think, in their complacency, they have thought through the implications. State aid brings responsibilities to the recipients.

Racing is an industry, not a corporate body, although its constituents understand they need a ruling authority. They each, to some degree, have vested interests which have more often than not prevented progress that would be to the benefit of all.

A current example of that is Martin Cruddace, chief executive of the Arena Racing Company (ARC), stating he will never allow trainers to tell him how to run his business. If by that he means that ARC will never disclose its income from picture rights, then that is not acceptable while it is receiving state aid in the form of the Levy. Trainers simply wanting transparency cannot be accused of telling him how to run his business.

The media rights income racecourses receive emanates from pictures; they do not own the data which is included in those transmissions. The BHA, the latest manifestation of a ruling body for racing, shows in a recent email to owners that it is dealing with a multitude of initiatives while seemingly ignoring the elephant in the room. Does it really have authority over racing? If it does, why is it ignoring the total lack of transparency from racecourses as to how much their annual income from pictures is, and how much of that finds its way into prize-money? And why is it ignoring the crucial question – who owns the data?

The BHA must establish that those rights belong to the racing industry as a whole and, as racing's authority, exercise control by licensing their use freely to all its individual constituents, and on a case-by-case basis claim suitable payment from those who profit from their onward selling.

That would include ARC and RMG

(Racecourse Media Group) who are using racing data in the pictures product they sell. It is clear to me that the product they sell not only relies on racing data but benefits from being a part of the industry as well. And on that basis, they don't have exclusive ownership of the picture rights, although they claim them by default because they have never yet been challenged over them.

Notwithstanding all that, if RMG and ARC continue to withhold information about their income from picture rights while other racing interests are seeking an increase in state aid, then I believe the relevant Minister and the Levy Board should demand transparent and complete disclosure of the gross income they receive from those rights; of how it is spent; and of how much ends up as prize-money.

Without this information the Minister cannot possibly satisfy himself that an increase is worthy of consideration. In the absence of such transparency, both the Minister and the Levy Board will need confirmation that the Levy is not being used by racecourse owners in a roundabout way to subsidise their profits. If that were the case, it would be a misuse of state aid.

I fear that, unless the BHA acts quickly and decisively, racing will find itself the subject of a ministerial review as to whether, in the current circumstances, there is any case for racing to continue to receive state aid.

It is also not beyond the realms of possibility that the Treasury, in their search for more tax, will see this lack of transparency as the perfect opportunity to call for the abolition of the Levy and increase betting duty accordingly.

The BHA needs to establish it has the authority (as in its name) to protect the whole of racing from self-interest groups. It must grasp the nettle and get this dealt with by agreement and consent if it can, or through the courts as a last resort.

If it does nothing, fails to get an agreement, or loses in court, it would beg the question: What's the point of the

BHA? It would just confirm that as a whole the racing industry is ungovernable and that its supposed authority is being fettered by self-interest groups.

The Levy will eventually be abolished, racing's chance of maximising its prize-money from pictures and data will be lost, and the BHA will be added to a long list of ruling bodies that have ruled in name only.

*John Brown
South Milford, Leeds*

A championship farce

In the January edition of the Klarion, Mark asked to be reminded of how it has come to be that the British Flat Jockeys' Championship has been reduced to less to six months, and who benefits from that?

I cannot give definitive answers to either request, but I can say that when it was apparent all-weather racing was here to stay, I rather tentatively suggested in a column I was writing at the time that there was no earthly reason why all-weather winners should not count in the jockeys' championship and that it should run from January 1 to December 31.

I was told by the officials of the day that such an idea was entirely preposterous as it would put the top jockeys at a serious disadvantage given that they spend their winters overseas. My reply was that if that was the case, then it was their own choice and they should live with the handicap. Needless to say, that argument cut no ice.

Worse was to follow when the sages at Great British Racing thought it would be a good thing to be able to announce the champion jockey on the newly established Champions Day at Ascot in October. Of course, the season hasn't finished at Ascot in October, but that didn't deter GBR and, to their everlasting shame, the BHA sanctioned this stupidity.

How it came to pass that even the early Turf races were then excluded from the Flat jockeys' championship is still a mystery to me. It does, of course, mean that long-established big races such as the Lincoln Handicap and the November Handicap no longer count in the championship while tin-pot sellers on the all-weather in July do, but, hey-ho, so what?

Well, at a time when the BHA is embarking on its Premierisation idea (which, as Ged Shields pointed out so clearly in last month's Klarion, has kicked off without any clear plan but on a wing and a prayer even though it risks alienating many regular racegoers in the hope of attracting a new audience), it does matter.

These newcomers who are expected to flood through the gates to watch and presumably place bets on the Premier racing offerings are likely to ask questions, such as which jockey rode most winners last year?

The answer is Rossa Ryan with 202 winners. So, is he champion jockey? Well, no. He may have joined that small club of jockeys to have ridden more than 200 winners in Britain in the year, but William Buick is champion. Try explaining to a newcomer to the sport why that is.

One other thought on Premier Racing. As Ged put it: 'Premier racing has set sail. Let's hope there are no icebergs.' I hope so too, but in my lifetime every major decision made by the powers that be in racing whether it was Jockey Club, BHB or BHA has gone hopelessly wrong.

From their failure to insist on Tote-only betting off-course when betting shops were legalised in 1961, an error that seriously affects racing's funding to this day, through to tinkering with the Grand National, switching the Derby from Wednesday to Saturday, and introducing draconian punishments for jockeys falling foul of the whip count and thereby reinforcing the ignorant view that the sport is cruel. And, of course, the shambles that is the Flat Jockeys'

Championship.

With that form in the book, I am not holding my breath for a good outcome to Premier racing.

*John S Sexton
Warter, East
Yorkshire*

Let's welcome this trial

I went to Wolverhampton on January 7 for the first of the Sunday night trial meetings and it was interesting to gauge the mood, which as has been widely reported was rather mixed. Great prize-money and full fields overall, albeit with betting revenues yet to be seen at this early stage. Of course, the initial points flagged regarding jockey and staff concerns are very valid and should form a key part of the overall review after the six meetings in the experiment.

I always feel aggrieved when those in the industry regularly opine about the parlous state of things, but never volunteer solutions. And when presented with initiatives and ideas, the hackles are instantly raised, with some snarling from many quarters too. Surely a trial should be welcomed as it is at least a positive action rather than just passive and repetitive negativity. It can also be binned if it doesn't work.

Rather than making comparisons with when Good Friday racing was first introduced, previously, perhaps those who can remember it should reflect on the reaction when the new upstart Sky TV first came along.

'Who?' 'How dare they ask us to pay to watch footie?' 'Football is a 3 o'clock on a Saturday game.' 'I can watch Match of the Day and the Cup Final on the Beeb', etc, etc.

Who would have predicted that we

The Klarion welcomes your letters

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**Please include your name, postal address and
a telephone contact number.**

Letters may be edited

would now see football played on every day of the week? With fixtures chopped and changed at late notice, it's not great for most of us . . . thank you Sky! We now have a fixture list which on many occasions means that a lot of fans can't even plan transport home after night games. These concerns have existed since day one and have even got worse! Nonetheless, in spite of all this, just look at the behemoth created by Sky – the richest league in the world with untold wealth (and even a job for Matt Chapman!).

Look, too, at BBC Sport, a very traditional institution and once the place to go to for our sport. It has quite simply lost it all, due to an over-cautious and unimaginative approach to the changing world.

If the racing fraternity really want the next 'big step' then it has to start somewhere, as happened with football and other sports. It may be that we do not end up with some of the current initiatives, but whatever we end up with, it will have begun, as happened in football, with uproar and opposition as is normal when most new ideas are put forward.

We could, of course, maintain the status quo, ban all creativity and risk and just watch as this great sport of ours continues to decline . . .

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C'mon, there's no harm in trying, surely?

Alan Park,
Grantham
(partner in KPs 36 and 40)

Sky, what about the horses?

I am always perplexed when I watch the Sky TV Chanel by the way they spend so little or no time showing and talking about the horses in the parade ring.

For example, one evening I was watching racing from Yarmouth. Matt Chapman was talking to an older trainer about some horse he had years ago, and then he told another trainer how he had been picked to captain a team in the new, as it was then, Racing League.

You could see the horses parading in the background, but he never mentioned one horse. He was too busy fooling around talking to the trainers, and then they switched to the adverts. It made me think 'what is the point of a parade ring?' If I had a horse running and I couldn't attend the meeting, I would want to hear what the TV had to say about my horse. They seem to forget that without our horses, there would be no racing.

I was spurred into writing to you about this by a message I had recently from a friend. He wrote:

'Earlier this morning I put the TV on while I was having a cup of tea and watched Sky Sports racing covering the last race from Hong Kong. They were taking the feed from Hong Kong, so it was not a Sky production.'

'I had it on for 30-40 minutes and there was not one advert. Every horse was shown in the paddock, with info on every one of them, as well as infor trial races, form, the way the horses looked,

everything. And each commentator gave you their predictions on who they thought would be the first four in the race. We could learn a lot from that sort of coverage here! It was superb'.

Trevor Milner
Ipswich, Suffolk

Charlie to go jumping?

I was wondering if Charlie might in the future be tempted into becoming a dual-purpose trainer?

I only raise the matter because it is so sad to see some nice horses leaving the yard to join National Hunt trainers. I can remember that a long time ago his father Mark used to train a few horses over the jumps and had some winners.

There also seem to be a lot more Flat trainers having runners in National Hunt bumpers these days, too .

I will be watching with great interest to see how Evaluation, Fairmac and Man Of Monaco do in their new careers.

Best wishes to all for the season ahead.

Andrew Morris
Telford

Charlie replies: *I have a combined licence so the opportunity is there, but it would require a horse with the right credentials and an owner who was keen to go down that route. It isn't something we are actively pursuing but we are always open-minded.*

A super source for sires' data

Like your letter-writer Tom Sheehan in the January edition of the Klarion, I also find James Willoughby's columns always interesting, even if sometimes the details can go over my head.

Mr Sheehan asks if there are data sources that may be easily available. My 'Go to' source for statistics on sires is stallionguide.com. This site has a simple search for any sire on its Home page and provides a wealth of information such as winner/runner ratios, black type percentages, Nicks etc.

Murari Kaushik
Hampshire

SUBJECTIVIST

ALNE PARK STUD (GB)
2017 by Teofilo



Bay 2017, 16.1hh (1.64m) **TEOFILO- RECKONING (DANEHILL DANCER)**

SUBJECTIVIST requires no introduction, the winner of the Ascot Gold Cup in 2021, as well as the Dubai Gold Cup in 2021 and the Prix Royal Oak in 2020. He is an exceptional specimen, and a truly exciting addition to the roster.

Stud Director Grace Skelton said, 'The addition of SUBJECTIVIST to our Stallion Roster is a huge leap forward for Alne Park Stud. To stand a stallion of this calibre is an immense honour. He will stand at an introductory fee of £4000. We firmly believe that keeping this exceptional stallion in the UK is a real boost to British breeders and we hope that he will see plenty of support in his debut season.'

Mark Johnston said, 'I always say that, when placing horses, the opposition trumps all other factors. But, very rarely, you come across a horse where the opposition isn't a factor at all. Subjectivist was such a horse. In 2021, I truly believed that there wasn't a horse in the world that could beat him at two miles or more, in any ground. There is less and less need for British NH Breeders to travel to Ireland and, with the incentives on offer in the UK perhaps the Irish breeders will be thinking of coming over here!'

- NH Elite Mares' Scheme Eligible

STUD FEE: £4,000

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