

## **LASIX: ENOUGH OF THE DOG-AND-PONY SHOWS**

by Ray Paulick | 01.29.2013 | 9:47am

"I'm trying to find out what the other side of the argument is to the people that may not like the use of this medication," Thoroughbred Owners of California chairman Mike Pegram said during a recent equine health forum that endorsed the continued use of furosemide to treat exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage.

Well, Mike, you came to the wrong place.

This was a dog-and-pony show, albeit one that came with lots of knowledge and a pretty hefty cost. Seattle heart surgeon Mark Dedomenico, a member of the TOC board and a man who at the 2011 Eclipse Awards referred to himself as a "visionary" (something more modest visionaries allow others to say about them), paid for the conference, including travel expenses of participants. He got the desired echo chamber he wanted.

In much the same way, some members of Congress put on a biased anti-furosemide hearing in Pennsylvania last spring, calling only on those people whose point of view they agreed with in support of federal legislation to ban all drugs in racing. In that instance, at least, the meeting was open to the public and the press. That wasn't the case here.

There was one reporter invited to attend the forum, and Dedomenico seemed so pleased with the story written (it had a Donald Trump-like reference to the doctor having played a "major role" in developing coronary bypass surgery and writing "many major landmark papers" on heart surgery) that a summarized version became the TOC's press release.

That one story failed to point out that no one was invited from the "opposition party" – those owners, breeders, trainers and veterinarians from the United States and around the world who believe that top-class Thoroughbred racing can be conducted without treating 95%-plus of the horses with a diuretic on the day they race. The Jockey Club, Breeders' Cup or Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association had no representation, nor was the California Horse Racing Board's equine medical director invited to listen to the presentations.

There were just preachers and a choir. We've had enough of these one-sided dog-and-pony shows. All they've accomplished is to polarize everyone on medication issues. What is needed is serious dialogue, give and take, and a better understanding of why North America has isolated itself from the rest of the racing world.

At one point during the proceedings, Dedomenico was quoted as saying research needed to be funded by "breeders and sales organizations, after all they created the product, and the product appears to have some defects."

I'm not aware of any breeders or sales organizations being there, either. Most of the executives with Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton were 3,000 miles away that weekend, attending the Eclipse Awards in South Florida.

There were some strong comments reported, the most significant by owner Gary West, who said, "If raceday Lasix is banned, I will quit buying horses of all ages and systematically begin liquidating all of my Thoroughbred holdings."

West then managed to insult horsemen in England, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and other racing countries that don't allow race-day furosemide by saying it is "cruel and inhumane" not to give the drug to horses before they race. "He described drug-free racing akin to "waterboarding your horse in their own blood."

He wasn't quite finished, either, according to the published report.

"There's going to be \$100-\$200 million a year leave this business if they ban Lasix (furosemide) in November," West said.

Ah, yes, November. While this forum took place in January, it really was all about November, and the Breeders' Cup that will take place at Santa Anita Park on Nov. 1-2 under rules that, for the first time, would ban the use of furosemide in all races. At the 2012 Breeders' Cup, furosemide was banned in the five of the 14 races restricted to 2-year-olds.

I expect owners like Gary West and one of his trainers, Bob Baffert, who believe it is wrong to ban furosemide on Breeders' Cup, will work to overturn the race-day medication rule between now and November. They feel so strongly about the need for this medication that they are not willing to give it up for just one or two days a year.

Unless, of course, that one day happens to take place in the United Arab Emirates, home of the Dubai World Cup. West-owned and Baffert-trained horses are nominated to participate in World Cup races, where the rules will be like those at the Breeders' Cup: namely, no furosemide.

Wouldn't it be ironic if West won the \$10 million Dubai World Cup, racing furosemide-free, with a horse he's just nominated to the big race in hopes of getting that fabulous, all-expenses paid trip to the desert?

The horse's name: Guilt Trip.

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