

For the love of the Game

I find myself thinking of the game I fell in love with Twenty Five years ago. I ask myself what was the attraction to this sport of Kings. It was clearly the sight of adrenalin pumping thorough Breeds, Trained by seasonal professionals and then being ridden to the best of their ability, by talented and inspiring jockeys. It was an incredible feeling, being able to call out there names, at the parade ring, waiting, hoping, for some kind of response, or acknowledgment, by some of these legends, while watching them ride these incredible animals we so loved.

The process of finding one of these incredible animals, that had the potential to win races, was not easy. They were viewed as yearlings, where we decided on what could possibly be bought. This was not as easy as one thought. One had to take into account what lay ahead for these incredible animals. However, it was done with belief, respect and love, for these wonderful animals that god and good breeders provided us with.

We looked at the game of Kings, with pride. We dressed up on race days, putting on Jackets and Tie's while making our way to the course, with our chest pushed out and heads held high like we owned the world. Those were the days.....

So I ask myself, what has happened in Twenty Five Years.....Are we truly to believe that the game of Kings is like it was Twenty Five Years ago.

It is clearly not. The industry has clearly slumped to an all time low. We are led to believe through tote figures that the industry is stronger than ever. Yet, one must ask, does the totalisator figures define our industry. I don't believe it does. There is more to racing then tote figures.

Am I to believe that no one else can see the blatant problems that racing is facing. We have numerous things that occur. It more recent times, we have had racing abandoned, due to water logged pull up areas, on more than one occasion. Runners have been scratched at the start, because the rails were installed incorrectly, while carding too many runners to fit on the course. Stipes have made ridiculous decisions with objections, getting it so wrong, that the Jockey Club had to acknowledge that they had made a mistake and relocate the Stipes involved. Owners have been verbally abused and assaulted on the race course. Merit ratings are so inconsistent; one is left scratching your head as to where the handicappers received their training. Inconsistent forms of horses. Trainers and owners dressed like they are attending a rugby or soccer game in a local Pub.

Yet this seems to be like water off a ducks back for all concerned. Where is the pride along with the standards that we were so very proud of?

We hear about trainers complaining of owners who don't pay their monthly accounts, yet the trainer didn't seem to be too concerned about how he or she would be paid, when the owner was purchasing the horse at the sale. But in fairness, it is still a major concern. So I ask myself, where are the days that we applied to the Jockey Club for colours. Balance Sheets, Bank Statements and audited financials were the order of the day, when applying for your colours. Furthermore, you were required to have an existing colour holder sponsor you when applying. Based on the information you provided the Jockey Club, you may or may not have been awarded your colours, with emphasis being placed by the Jockey Club, as to how many horses you could own.

The reason for these procedures was to protect and avoid the situation that trainers / Vets find themselves in currently.

Owners have for years, had to carry the brunt of the expenses. Owners have to purchase the horses, from the breeders, and then have to pay, while those horses are prepared over a period, ranging anything from 10 Months, to 18 Months, before they are ready to run. Owners do so, for the love of these incredible animals, and the hope of owning that one special animal, that defines everything they love about racing.

Yet they are expected to do so, without ever having the opportunity to recover their initial outlays. I say this, as one only has to look at the prize money currently on offer. Why don't we compare management salaries and bonuses 25 years ago and see if the increases they have had over the years is anything in comparison to that of the stake money.

Where are the days, that we had seasoned Stipes on Course? Before every race, they would head down to the towers, keeping a keen eye on proceedings during a race. Where are the days, that when the hooter sounded, all parties of racing, sat up straight, wide eyed, waiting for the announcement as this was taken very serious. If Jockeys and Trainers were ever called to the Boardroom, it was not taken lightly. Stipes were not there to be liked, they were there to perform a function, while keeping a firm control on the standard of racing. They may not have been liked, but they were respected for the duties they performed.

Can we honestly say the same today? I am afraid not. All one has to do, is go and look at race meetings around the country, and look at the inconsistency of certain horses and certain trainers nationally, to get your answer. Some of the results are far from disgraceful, they are beyond biblical portions. Yet they all seem to go unscathed. Furthermore there are so many, that use the very system, we implemented, to supposedly better racing, as excuses. The handicap!

Let me say, that as opposed to the handicapping system as I was, I do see the benefits of having this system in place. However, how can a system of handicapping work, when the very people who have been delegated to fulfill this task, are unable to do so consistently. Who appointed the handicappers? What previous experience do they have? Have they been for training internationally, as this is a system we implemented, from international standards? Are they directly or indirectly linked to any racing yards? If they are, this could directly affect the manner in which they perform their duties. These are all questions that pertain to the standard of racing.

We are now seeing independent organizations trying desperately to play a part in making changes, to benefit this wonderful sport. However, one has to ask, why independent parties are required to bring the changes. Is management oblivious to the problems that racing is faced with? Or do they just not care. Or shall we rather just say that as long as it does not affect those individuals financially, they just don't care.

There is an old saying that "The Fish Stinks from the Head First" This is so true. When we look at the standard of racing, and where it has slumped to, one can only blame management. But the question is who is Management? Is it the operators, Phumelela/Gold Circle, or is it the Jockey Club? Unfortunately, this is a debate on its own, and one that definitely needs addressing, as the blame is continuously passed from one to the other, on a regular basis.

So for now.....They are equally responsible. They have sat back for the last 25Years and allowed the standard of racing, to reach and all time low.

What management fails to realize, is that without owners, there will be no need to have breeders. Without owners, there will be no need to have Trainers. Without owners, there will be no need to have jockeys and without owners, there is no need for Management. In the laws of normal business practice, a Director can be personally held accountable for his or her's actions, or lack thereof.

Management, also fail to realize, that they have been entrusted with the well being of racing, until such time that they need to pass the torch on to the next generation. Clearly they have no intention of leaving behind a legacy. They are individuals that have decided to manipulate and abuse their power, for their own personal and financial gain. They will retire fat and wealthy, while never thinking twice, of the ruins they left behind. At the current rate of Knots, there will be nothing left to pass on. It seems that our industry will end on the same level as Zimbabwe and Kenya Racing.

Sometimes in life, one has to take a serious stand, before changes are made. Currently we see this in our own country, where the nation is crying enough. Is this not the time for all to stand up and take cognizance of what is happening around us? Is it not time, for all concerned fellow racing enthusiasts to take a stand.

Would anybody take notice, if all of owners decided to stop racing for thirty days?

Has Racing not cried enough.....

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