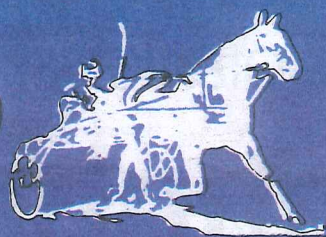


NATIONAL Trotguide



Thursday, 19th August, 2010

Harness Racing's leading journal

Vol. 62 No. 33 Registered by Australia Post - Publication No. NBF0588 ISSN 08118 - 4127 Editorial Phone: (02) 9660 3688, Advertising: (07) 3875 1333 Recommended and maximum price only \$4.30 incl. GST



Farewell to Harold Park

120 YEARS OF HARNESS RACING

Last race to be held Friday 17th December 2010

THE END IS NEAR

By **ANDREW GEORGIU**

HAROLD PARK, the spiritual home of New South Wales harness racing for 120 years, will host its final meeting on December 17 this year.

NSW Harness Racing Club Chairman Rex Horne (right) delivered the news to members of the club last Sunday at an information meeting held at Harold Park, in which more than 100 people attended.

"To some this announcement will be accepted with regret as harness racing has been conducted at the site of Harold Park since the late 1800s - more than 120 years," Mr Horne said.

"Harold Park has attracted the champion horses and drivers of every decade from throughout Australasia, and even the United States of America, who have competed in lifetimes of fierce competition and we will commemorate those achievements and events at the final meeting.

"We will welcome everyone to the track for one last time to be swept up in the nostalgia of the halcyon days of Harold Park.

"The records reveal that the aptly-named King Harold

won the first race run under the auspices of our Club on November 19, 1902 and will now eagerly await the final winner on December 17, 2010.

"We are in the planning stage of some very special promotions for the last meeting and these will be released soon."

Plans had been afoot to move the club's racing operations to their new state-of-the-art track at Tabcorp Park Menangle since it was refurbished and reopened since mid-2008.

With the 1400-metre track in use at least once a week, and regularly twice a week at the moment with the Bulli club hosting their meetings there on a Monday afternoon, Tabcorp Park Menangle is set to become a near full-time racing facility once metropolitan racing moves there permanently, with as many as three meetings every week.

With the cessation of the iconic Harold Park site as a racing facility, it also signals an end to Sydney metropolitan racing on a Friday night. The club has been granted the majority of their fixtures from 2011 to be held on Saturday nights.

One important factor in determining whether or not a move to a Saturday night

timeslot will be a success, largely depends on the start time of the meeting itself.

Horne also revealed, among other issues, at the meeting that Tabcorp Park meetings may commence within minutes of the conclusion of the main galloping meetings for the day - a turnover bonanza!

Results indicate that Albion Park's harness meeting on a Saturday night, which commences around 5pm during winter, benefits greatly from the flow-on of those people betting on the gallops. In fact, their first two races hold double and sometimes triple the amount of money they do later on in the program.

In another bonus for the NSWHR, after lengthy negotiations with Racing NSW, Tabcorp Park Menangle will now be considered a 'Category 1' track - the same status afforded to Harold Park.

"After speaking with Racingcorp and the TAB, we are hopeful of changing our contract to allow us to hold 736 races a season, instead of 92 meetings per year," Horne revealed.

"It is time that we began to look outside the square.

"By changing our contract to 736 races, it allows us to host

10 to 12 race programs and during summer, this could be a big coup for the club.

"By commencing these particular meetings as early as 4:30pm, just minutes after the main thoroughbred meetings have ceased, it will allow the club to cash in on the flow-on punter.

"Research tells us that those who have been betting on the gallops all day, will continue to do so for a certain period after those meetings are finished. With Tabcorp Park meetings commencing at that time, it will give the club a big turnover spike, for the first few races at least.

"This move will lead to the release of the Friday night meetings held by the club, which will be released to other clubs.

"Those clubs will benefit by additional meetings on a prime night but the industry will benefit with a greater number of opportunities to increase TAB turnover.

"These are exciting times for the industry at large."

Arguably one of the main issues spoken about at the meeting was the current situation with the rezoning and potential sale of Harold Park's 10-hectare site.

Horne addressed members and gave them an up-to-the-minute description of the current state of play with all facets regarding a sale, and also future plans for the Tabcorp Park Menangle facility.

Club officials have been busily meeting with Members of Parliament, the Planning Minister Tony Kelly, the Racing Minister Kevin Greene and the City of Sydney in recent weeks in order to finalise the rezoning of the site.

It hasn't been smooth sailing for the club in that respect, according to Horne, with the ball firmly in their court pending a signing of the Planning Agreement.

"As a matter of due diligence the Board has had the Council's rezoning proposal valued by a registered valuer, and it is pleasing to know the proposed rezoning has a value in excess of the \$150 million, which is the minimum required by the members," Horne said.

"We must eventually sign the Planning Agreement with either the Council or the Government, in order for the next stage of the process to begin.

"At this stage, however, we aren't totally satisfied with the deal and the rezoning as it stands, hence the reason the



agreement hasn't been signed.

"Importantly, this isn't a process that needs to be rushed - we only have one Harold Park, we only have one chance to sell it so we have to get it right.

"On the other hand, the sale can't be delayed for too long if the industry is to be rejuvenated in the near future."

The Club Directors will meet at the end of the month at which time it is expected a position will be reached on the Planning Agreement and the marketing for the sale of Harold Park through Colliers International will be signed-off.

The Council's proposed rezoning of the Harold Park site will go on public exhibition for 28 days once a Planning Agreement is registered between the parties. The Agreement must also go on public exhibition alongside the rezoning proposal for the statutory period.

JET LAAG

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