



How to fix the 'Handle' my two cents worth



By Bruno De Julio

On track handle at Oak Tree is down. Well, that may be my fault. I have played sparingly at the meet. I do admit being part of the problem, but I have a solution. At the moment, however, the affable Oak Tree executive vice-president Sherwood Chillingsworth was quoted in Steve Andersen Thursday column "[Oaktree Handle at Oak Tree takes big hit](#)" in the DRF Thursday print edition, "I just don't think people have the money now," Chillingsworth said, referring to the recession that has hit the nation.

Well, maybe, I like Sherwood Chillingsworth and Ron Charles, and the rest of the Oak Tree and Santa Anita management. Seriously, I can work with them, we have the same common goals, and that is what is best for their product, the horsemen, fans and handicappers.

So, how do I become part of the solution instead of the problem. I have been very vocal, at Del Mar, and so far at Oak Tree on my thoughts on the polytrack and Pro-Ride.

At Del Mar I didn't think anyone cared about the player's bankroll (no, I don't believe in stats I believe in customer service), and I think in many ways it is being really felt now. In my mind, you have to keep things consistent, which is not to confuse issues with predictability.

I have seen very little difference in the track from the standpoint, inside to outside, but I did see a difference from opening week and the second week. Seemed like the second week the track was heavier, in morning and afternoon. (I think that may have been the knee jerk reaction of the break downs on opening week)

I did have a filly run over it, Dancing Jeannie, her second lifetime start as she is a speedball, who was adding blinkers. She broke right on top (Friday, October 9 - 3rd race), was wrestled back and kept four wide, made a move under a hold on the turn and then stopped. On the dirt, she would have drawn the comment "gone" from the gate, but because of the pro-ride's lack of resiliency and pace friendly-less as we have seen speed horses make winning moves into the three/eighths pole and then really struggle all meet, she floundered.

Thus, some of the comments made caught my eyes from this weekend Stakes fallout:

Calvin Borel, Mine That Bird that finished sixth in the Goodwood Handicap:
"He had a perfect trip, but he got to struggling a little. When I asked him to go get them, he was struggling over the track a little bit. Maybe a little bit firmer ground

where I can just let him break, and pick him up easy - Instead of this quick- will be better for him.....He's a lot better horse on the dirt. When you ask him here, he goes to struggling instead of just running."

Did Calvin say quicksand and was it edited out? or did he stop himself? It's OK to say 'Quicksand' Calvin, it is OK, or about Marco Botti, trainer of Gitano Hernando winner of Goodwood Stakes, who commented on the Pro-Ride main track being ***"turf friendly"***. Yes, ***"turf friendly"*** meaning that Europeans will once again reign this year on this surface judging by the Goodwood Stakes result.

Brad Free the venerable daily Handicapper and Analyst for the DRF had a tremendous column in Saturday's October 10th edition shedding a light on this discussion even before the stakes results were even warm:

His objective view of the Del Mar Debutante and the immediate reaction and analysis of the bunched field at the wire may have been premature as Blind Luck and La Nez have both come back to validate the results. ***"Synthetic surfaces lend themselves to bunched finishes. Displays of pure brilliance do not occur, and a bunched field doesn't necessarily mean a bad race"*** Free wrote. Baffert chimed in with ***"you can't separate yourself,"*** as he added his two cents to Free's discussion.

Free concluded that ***'finish margins and final times might be less important than the fact they showed up and hit the board'***.

Free also chimed in on the track trends in his Analysis on October 10. ***"...if you were on the lead in a sprint or a route, you were not winning the race,"*** he wrote. ***"Pacesetters went 2 for 28 on the main track and only 1 for 20 in sprints,"*** but Free wasn't done as he also identified that pressing types who were positioned on top of the pacesetters, or who had first run on the pace, had the advantage.

The whole notion that front running speed is to be completely scrubbed from winning equation is quite disturbing since we buy horses that have speed and are trained for speed. We breed, break, train horses for speed, and yet we have to shelter ourselves from selecting or sending speed horses to the lead on these synthetics, especially pro-ride. So, as a handicapper, you may correctly identify the speed, the lone speed and then throw it out. You own a speed horse and speed is your best asset, then re-train and teach your speed horse to rate. Don't train horses for this pro-ride for speed. Harder said than done. Might as well re-invent the wheel!

So, let's be the solution and not the problem! OK, you got me. I have no idea.

Don't bet would be one, but come on! That's not an option, even though, maybe others have gone to such drastic manners. There are other tracks with good dirt main tracks, but none other than Los Alamitos are in my back yard.

So, it comes back to the same argument, Yes, 'Chilly' the economy has been an

issue, but in the racing industry we can specifically point to the performance of the Pro-ride and Polytrack. They are the source and reason players are not playing.

So having promised to be part of the solution and not the problem I have a plan:

Let's have everyone bring the dirt back they gave away in 2007, plus if you bring up a pound extra you get a friend in gratis. You show up with your John Deere tractor or bulldozer with dirt and you park for free. Two free Tickets for the Breeders Cup on Friday and Saturday for anyone that takes the pro-ride with them in a bag or in their John Deere after the races. In the fine print you will read that anyone with the last name of Wood will be subject to an intense background investigation.

**We can call this solution or promotion: Got dirt?
What about it ?**

