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# Husky Times

## *Iowa horsemen hope to solidify long-term dates schedule*

BY LENNY SHULMAN

**N**o matter what the industry, trends in America are often said to start in California and move east. But for the horse industry, Iowa, smack in the middle of the nation's breadbasket, represents a microcosm of what is going on in so many areas, as breeders and owners battle for survival in the face of strained relationships with the local racetrack and government entities.

It was 20 years ago when Iowa horsemen celebrated the opening of Prairie Meadows racetrack in the Des Moines suburb of Altoona. Seven-thousand fans turned out for the opening card, but in just two years the track declared bankruptcy in an effort to lower its debt. Eventually, the facility passed into the hands of Polk County, where it is located, and received good news in 1994 when the state government narrowly approved slot machines at Prairie Meadows, which were operational a year later.

As part of the law, the licensee was charged with paying off the debt, growing and nurturing the horse industry, and providing for community betterment. The debt, which many believed would take 10 years to pay off, was actually done in just 18 months. It is the nurturing and growing of the industry that is a point of contention today between horsemen of the Iowa Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association and the racetrack, which is the only horse racing facility in the state.

In the immediate aftermath of the installation of slots, Thoroughbred breeding numbers shot straight up. According to ITBOA president Sharon Vail, foal crops from 1997-2003 numbered between 550 and 650, and the number of racing dates was solidified at around 90 each year.

"Since 2004, we've been on one-year contracts where we don't know until the last minute how many racing dates we're going to get the following year," said Vail. "As breeders, it's very hard to function that way, not knowing if we're going to have 90 days of racing or 80 or 45. Last year we were around 350-360 foals in the state, our lowest number since the early 1990s, and we don't want to stay at those numbers. The situation is reaching a head, and we need to be stable and have a long-term contract."

To that end, there is a public-comment period in April about the future of the sport, and the state's Racing and Gaming Commission has ordered the 13-member board of Prairie Meadows to develop a long-range plan by the first week of June.

"We complain to the Racing and Gaming Commission about the poor treatment we get



Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino in Altoona, Iowa, opened in 1989

COURTESY OF PRAIRIE MEADOWS

# 2009 Leading Sires in Indiana

State sire lists updated daily online.  
Go to <http://breeding.bloodhorse.com/sirelists.asp>

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in Indiana (exported stallions are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available statistics for the Northern Hemisphere through April 15, 2009. As supplied to The Blood-Horse by The Jockey Club Information Systems Inc., earnings exclude monies from Japan and Hong Kong. \*Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners includes all countries. (A 1 indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).

Rank	Stallion (Foaling Year, Sire), Farm Standing	2009 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	Stakes Wnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2009 Earnings	Cumulative			
								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	INDY KING (99, A.P. Indy), Indiana Stallion Station	\$1,500	28/10	0/0	0/0	(Indycency, \$44,380)	\$168,885	82	1	0.91	0.93
2	CENTURY CITY (IRE) (99, Danzig), Breakway Farm	\$2,500	28/6	0/0	0/0	(Zegarra, \$26,800)	\$132,337	*109	0	0.55	1.53
3	WILD ZONE (90, Wild Again), Breakway Farm	\$3,000	33/4	0/0	0/0	(Double Touch, \$12,220)	\$72,331	*444	12	0.83	1.13
4	WILD DEPUTY (93, Wild Again), WinRich Farms	\$900	24/4	0/0	0/0	(Wild Alaska, \$12,500)	\$62,254	149	3	0.67	0.84
5	HAP (96, Theatrical), Still Creek Farm	\$1,000	15/4	0/0	0/0	(Hapaheart, \$20,375)	\$54,905	67	0	0.56	0.89

\*A-E and COMPARABLE INDEX: The Lifetime Average-Earnings Index indicates how much purse money the progeny of one sire has earned, on the average, in relation to the average earnings of all runners in the same years; average earnings of all runners in any year is represented by an index of 1.00. The Comparable Index indicates the average earnings of progeny produced from mares bred to one sire, when these same mares were bred to other sires. Only 32% of all sires have a lifetime AEI higher than their mares Comparable Index.

when we negotiate with track management,” noted Scott Pope, a director of the ITBOA. “So this hopefully will be a positive that we’ll get some stability moving forward so everyone knows what we’re going to have, and that there is no more erosion of racing dates. Our purse structure is protected under state law, but the local government has been slowly eroding our racing dates. We’re down in the low 80s now. The number of live racing dates dictates how big your breeding program can be, so this is crucial for us.”

In 2002, horsemen took a 25% cut in purses because the county said it needed more money. The purse cut adversely affected breeding numbers, which began to decline. That, said Pope, marked the beginning of a downward spiral in relations among horsemen, the county, and local business leaders about whether the horse industry should be allowed to keep its subsidy from gaming revenue.

However, in 2004 when the county wanted to expand the slots parlor to include table games such as blackjack and craps, horsemen were able to write into the bill, which eventually passed and became law, that the industry would receive 11% of the first \$200 million in gross receipts from the casino, and 6% of everything above \$200 million to fund purses for Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses, and Standardbreds in the state, with Thoroughbreds getting the lion’s share of the money.

Because of the decrease in racing dates, purses are up. At the Prairie Meadows meeting that begins April 24, maiden special weight races for Iowa-breds boast a purse of more than \$31,000, while open maidens run for \$24,000. However, the relatively strong purse structure is another factor in causing the foal crop to decrease.

“You can’t breed a \$500 mare to a \$500 stallion and run for a \$30,000 pot,” said Pope. “So our breeders have increased the quality of the stock they’re producing. People who had seven or eight modest mares sold them off and now have two or three better mares they breed to better stallions. So quality has improved while quantity has gone down. That, plus the instability of the bad press we get, the fights with the downtown business leaders and the county, and their questioning of whether we should be subsidized ends up scaring breeders.”


“When you’re deciding your breeding plans, the fruition of those decisions isn’t for three or four more years when the horses make it to the track, and with people not knowing what the racing program is going to look like, they tend to back off the pedal a bit. We’ve had a lot of out-of-state people who came here and bred horses, but now they’re moving their stock to more friendly and certain states like Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Indiana.”

Iowa’s state-bred program has been a success by all measures. Twenty percent of the total available purse money is allocated for supplements to horses bred in the state, and Iowa-breds run for a 30% supplement in restricted races. In open company, Iowa-breds that finish in the top four get a 40% supplement. Breeder and stallion awards are allocated at year’s end. Local horses have been so successful at various venues, however, that there is now a debate over whether supplements should exist for them.

“We agree that these horses should be able to stand on their own,” said Pope. “Over the years the number of Iowa-breds that win open races has continually gone up, and we’ve had to reduce the supplements because we were paying too much.”

Vail also took pride in how Iowa horses were competing both in

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# 2009 Leading Sires in Michigan

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								Foals	Stks Wnrs	*A-E Index	*Comp Index
1	<b>SERVICE STRIPE</b> (91, Deputy Minister), Belair Farm	\$2,000	46/19	0/0	0/0	(Sergeant Keith, \$39,270)	\$337,560	307	14	1.33	1.14
2	<b>THE DEPUTY</b> (IRE) (97, Petardia), Hubel Farms	\$2,000	37/10	0/0	0/0	(She's the Cure, \$34,150)	\$119,026	188	4	0.61	1.01
3	<b>SYNCLINE</b> (97, Danzig), McMaster Farm	\$1,500	17/9	0/0	0/0	(Wedding Diamond, \$21,000)	\$100,515	79	1	1.04	0.99
4	<b>DEMALOOT DEMASHOOT</b> (90, Bold Ruckus), McMaster Farm	\$2,500	17/5	0/0	0/0	(Demaliat, \$13,000)	\$57,365	297	9	0.97	1.09
5	<b>MEADOW PRAYER</b> (95, Meadowlake), Arnold Farms	\$1,500	4/1	0/0	0/0	(Bucky's Prayer, \$28,680)	\$31,252	84	6	1.25	0.77

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and outside the state.

"In 2008 Iowa-breds ran at 73 different racetracks; in 2007 it was 80; in 2006 it was 66," she said. "And we've done pretty well. We've had successful Iowa-breds in Nebraska and at Turf Paradise in Arizona. What you hope for is better horses running at the better tracks, and we've accomplished that. Years ago we only ran in Iowa. Now we have a viable product that is utilized in many places. I feel, at this time, our breeding program is strong.

"The thing is, if we can get 750 races a year, it's a viable opportunity for our horses to perform and earn as we continue to nurture and grow the program. If we're down at 500 races, we are cutting it close; our 2-year-olds aren't going to be able to run because the meet won't be long enough. We have to wait for the weather here; it's not like places that have year-round racing. We have to work with the fact that the great majority of our foals are born in March, April, and May."

The state boasts quality racing, including two graded stakes,

the Iowa Oaks (gr. III), and the Prairie Meadows Cornhusker Breeders' Cup Handicap (gr. II), which will be run June 26 and 27, respectively. Horses such as Roses In May, Captain Steve, Benny the Bull, and Unbridled Elaine have competed in the state in recent years, and horsemen would like to see the sport promoted much more enthusiastically than has been the case in the past.

"This is a major league sport in a minor league town," said Pope, a former local television anchorman. "Some of the best horses in the world come through here, and we try to get the track to promote this as a sport that people will come out and see.

"One of our biggest gripes is that the track looks at us like a red-headed stepchild it can't get rid of, because the law says that in order to have a casino, we must have horse racing. And from day one we've had a problem with the slot players not having any interest in racing. People who come for the racing go back into the casino to play between and after the races. We draw good crowds Fridays and Saturdays. Our other days, Monday and Tuesday afternoons, you can hunt buffalo on the apron, but we'll still do \$1.5 million in handle, almost all simulcast."

Vail pointed with pride to a special state-bred card that is run in August each year.

"We get one of our biggest crowds of the year for our state-bred classic night," she said. "People like to see good horses run, and this is very good racing for the Midwest. Our program is good; we just need to know that it's going to be here, and we don't want it to be less than what we have had. That is what we are having to fight for." □

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#1 Leading Sire of MI Breds by 2009 Earnings

With lifetime earnings of \$1.1M+ and 22 SWS, including leading owner and IX S&F TRIPLE THREAT (\$2,374,224), plus 2007-2008 Michigan Horse of the Year WALLEY LOFT (\$620,240, 11 wins in 17 career starts) and 2nd SP Stakes list (2nd \$50,000 Stakes' Image S). Fax: 925-611-1338

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