

Much Is Being Done

By Dell Hancock

COURTESY OF THE BLOODHORSE

This year's running of the Belmont Stakes (gr. I) did not seem to have the same sizzle. Like every racing fan, I am still reeling from Barbaro's injury, and amazed by the surgery and remarkable progress he has made since then.

As with all accidents, racing's do happen. But we all need to make sure that, while they may never be totally eliminated, we are working hard to rid racing of as many as possible and deal successfully with those that cannot be avoided.

As chairman of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, I am proud of the contributions it has made to the health and soundness of the horse. During the past decade, Grayson has contributed \$8.8 million to research. Included in our recent list are 59 projects addressing musculoskeletal matters directly related to avoiding or healing injuries to equine athletes.

From a project that verified the use of Xylazine to settle a horse that has been injured in the heat of battle, as Barbaro was, to numerous problems in bones and hooves--particularly addressing laminitis--Grayson has tried to focus on specific problems that arise with the individual horse.

In addition, we have looked at risk factors and the interface of hooves and racing surfaces. Presently, we are waiting for the results of a project analyzing stride differences between dirt, grass, and synthetic surfaces we all hope and think will drastically reduce major injuries.

In addition to research that helps deal with injuries, a goal of other projects is to avoid as many as possible. While injuries such as Barbaro's are spontaneous, many others are the end result of developing situations. Present research includes an effort to utilize serum markers to detect changes in the blood, which result from problems developing in the bones or joints. Such an early warning system would give trainers an important protective tool.

Five foundations, including Grayson, are doing such work, along with more than 30 universities where equine research is conducted. Those universities, of course, receive support from alumni and others who care about the horse.

In the past few weeks, we have seen a brilliant equine surgeon and his team at a leading facility bring to bear on a serious emergency some of the knowledge and sophisticated equipment that have resulted from past research.

I cannot imagine anyone in the Thoroughbred business feeling good about themselves unless they provide some sort of support to one or more related causes, whether it be horse safety--through retirement, rescue, or research--or backstretch personnel support, etc.

Personally, I place the horse high on the list. He cannot speak for himself and is subject to a daunting array of diseases, reproductive problems, and injuries.

The horse is noble, beautiful, and effective at many things, but he is not ideally designed to be a medical patient. Research to avoid and research to cure are both vital.

Research takes money, and when it comes to the horse, most dollars must come from the private sector because the government puts its emphasis on research on animals in the food chain.

Membership in Grayson-Jockey Club is open to all who care for horses and is a very effective way to fulfill a personal obligation to the horse. But whether people prefer to support a foundation or a university directly, if everyone in the horse business will step up their own commitment in some form, then progress can be accelerated on many fronts.

We often refer to a great race as horses "looking each other in the eye." It is important we humans look each other in the eye and know we are doing our best for our horses.