

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Business ethics need clean start for the future

The purpose of this letter is not to comment on the existing litigation between Jess Jackson and his former advisers, for the legal system will decide this matter ("Jackson suit raises touchy agent-sealer issue," March 19). My purpose is to explain to the uninformed public that not everyone in the Thoroughbred industry considers "kickbacks," "rebates," "payoffs," or however you want to describe it, an acceptable business practice.

When someone has put their trust in you to provide them the best possible advice and guidance, you serve that person. It is understood that they will pay you for this service and if someone else offers you any payment as enticement or reward for buying their product, you disclose this to your principal.

Most disappointing to me is that various leaders in our industry have defended their position by stating this as an acceptable business practice. It may be acceptable to some, but not everyone. I bought horses last year from some of the individuals mentioned in various articles, and there was not one time that I received a payment afterward from them, nor did I expect payment, nor had I asked for it. My family's farm sold tens of millions of dollars worth of horses last year, including the third-highest-priced yearling in history at \$9.7 million, and there was not one time that we offered payment to buyers, neither after the sale nor before. No one asked for it, nor did they expect it.

Last year, industry leaders united in an effort to define a code of ethics for the industry. A result of this was full disclosure to your client on any payment you might receive from third parties. It is time industry leaders step forward to state that what might have occurred in the past is no longer acceptable for the future. I am certain that many others in the Thoroughbred industry share my feelings that we need to wipe the slate clean and start fresh with principles and practices that cast a positive light on our business rather than constantly dragging it through the muck.

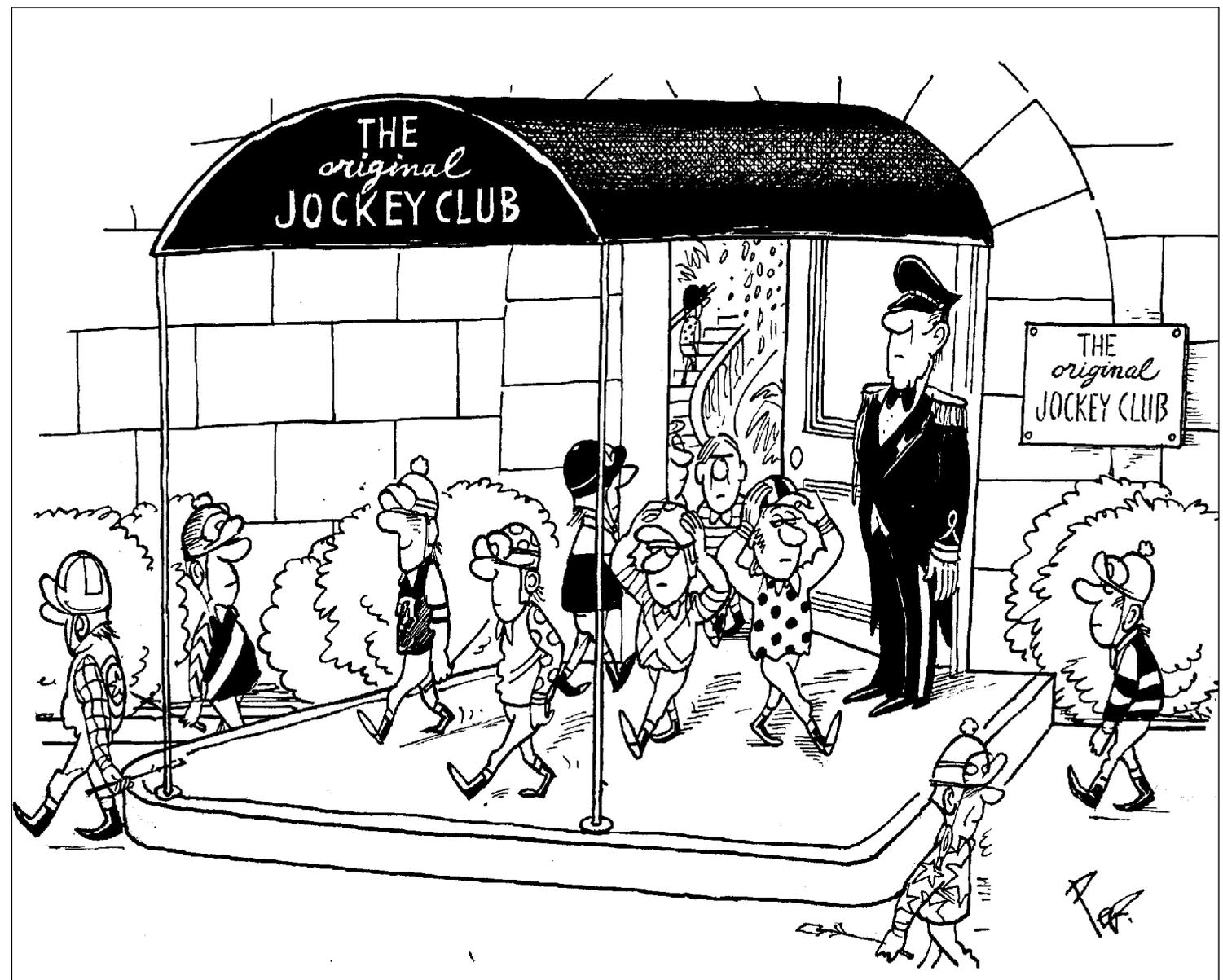
*Headley Bell  
Lexington, Ky.*

### A day long on stakes, but TV came up short

Horse racing took a giant step backward last Saturday, as its national television coverage was reduced by the network the industry entrusted to bring it greater publicity. Desperate for exposure, the racing industry was inadvertently and innocently, but soundly, humiliated by ESPN and its sense of priorities, as racing took a backseat to powerhouses such as exhibition baseball and college wrestling. The National Thoroughbred Racing Association now finds itself in the unenviable position of starting its season playing catch-up like a late-breaking horse out of the gate.

It all started out with such promise. The NTRA issued a press release announcing it had reached an agreement with ESPN, and its parent company, ABC, to televise an eight-show series of Kentucky Derby prep races.

The series began March 18 with four major stakes races, a rarity akin to the planets being



cosmically aligned. Coverage was to begin at 6 p.m. Eastern, and it was at this time when things started to unravel. ESPN's coverage of the World Baseball Classic ran long. The ax mercifully fell when the baseball broadcasters announced that racing would be seen immediately after the conclusion of the ballgame. The missing phrase "in its entirety" sealed the fate of horse racing fans throughout the country. The game droned on, leaving ESPN's racing anchors scrambling to cram 90 minutes of coverage into a half-hour. The show turned into a glorified highlights reel, complete with one-question interviews. Coverage ended abruptly, without sacrificing time for commercials.

NTRA officials should have expected such treatment. Last year, important races were routinely pre-empted for Little League baseball and NHL hockey. Although the NTRA has an agreement with ESPN to broadcast many racing events, particularly important considering racing's need for public interest, the network treats the sport as filler material for other programming. The end result is a mixed message for the NTRA, with the carrot of national exposure dangling just out of reach. Meanwhile, new fans ignore the sport while even the most seasoned racing fans are left disgruntled and wishing they followed college wrestling.

*Michael Souza  
Westerly, R.I.*

### Artificial surface removes handicapping artifice

I hope there will never be a uniform racing surface at all racetracks in California to match Turfway Park's, and let alone that all racing in North America will eventually be over synthetic surfaces ("California board urges Polytrack," Feb. 18).

What is everyone thinking? The beauty and science of this game is the individuality of every racing surface at every track. Uniformity takes all the science of handicapping away.

Was the inside good that day? Was speed good? Was the outside the best place to be? Did the closers have an edge? Was the track drying out? I could go on and on.

This is what separates the serious handicappers from the guys who use numerical sheets inserted into a database for selecting winners.

Please leave this game alone, or we might as well pack it in and all start pulling slot handles.

The constant changing of conditions offers the best way to challenge the game and be able to adjust your handicapping on the fly. Last year's Kentucky Derby favorite, Bellamy Road, in my estimation, had no shot, because the inside speed bias at Aqueduct enhanced

his Wood Memorial performance. The victories in the Derby of Monarchos and Real Quiet both came off losses in efforts compromised by speed-biased surfaces. In the Derby, however, they had a legitimate pace and surface.

Please let the powers that be realize that synthetic tracks will eventually ruin the game, not help it.

*Chuck Seddio  
Long Beach, N.Y.*

### Funny Cide deserves a graceful exit from track

The time has come: Retire Funny Cide.

I find the behavior of Funny Cide's owners to be appalling. How much more evidence does one need that the horse is tired and soured on racing? Funny Cide has given this syndication so many wonderful and exciting moments that it is time to give him something back: the retirement he has earned.

As a horse owner myself, I know that only a few get the thrill Funny Cide's ownership got to experience. People, don't be greedy. Let Funny Cide go out in style, and not in a \$10,000 claiming race.

*Orly Segal  
Santa Ynez, Calif.*

## Let us know what you think

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