

Breeders Cup Bonanza Expected for Region

SPORT: Wealthy Racing Fans Look for Delights Not Deals
By **MIKE ALLEN**

Friday, June 27, 2014

San Diego may never get another Super Bowl without a new stadium, but as the recently awarded host city for the 2017 Breeders Cup World Championships, it could see economic returns approaching those of football's "big game."

The organization behind the Breeders Cup chose the Del Mar racetrack as the site for the races to be held Nov. 3 and 4, 2017.

Joe Harper, CEO of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, said that while the horse racing championship races are the focal point, the parties and social events surrounding those days will result in an estimated economic impact of \$70 million.

"The people who are attending this are not just going to spend two days at the track. If they're coming from the East Coast or Europe, you're going to spend at least a week here," Harper said.

Harper cited a study of the 2013 Breeders Cup at Santa Anita Park that estimated direct and indirect spending from the event was about \$65 million.

Scott Minto, director of San Diego State University's sports MBA program, said the payoffs in winning the Breeders Cup won't accrue to only the Del Mar track and its nearby hotels and restaurants, but should spill over to many other establishments.

"It'll bring in millions into the local economy," Minto said. "People will be here for an extended period of time, renting homes out, checking into a lot of hotel rooms. And these are the type of people who aren't thrifty."

Del Mar's big win was largely the result of upgrades to its track, promoting the idea to key Breeders Cup decision-makers, and the recognition that Del Mar is both a worthy venue and within San Diego County.

"When you do a Breeders Cup, it's more than just a horse racing business. You have to be in the entertainment business as well, and that's what Del Mar has done for the last 20 years," Harper said.

A Proven Track Record of Attendance

While attendance at many racetracks has fallen as the sport's popularity flagged, Del Mar stands out as the sole track that has consistently increased attendance and its daily handle — or dollars wagered — in the last two decades, Harper said.

Other factors in Del Mar winning the event were the weather and San Diego's reputation as a vacation destination, he said. While November can sometimes bring rain to East Coast venues, which is bad for both horse racing and parties, there's less of a chance of that happening here, Harper noted.

"The Breeders Cup likes the West Coast," he said. "They like it for the time slot on TV, and they like it for the weather."

The two days of races are broadcast nationally over NBC Sports Television.

The announcement June 24 that Del Mar was awarded the vaunted world championships also said the event would be held at Keeneland Race Course in Lexington, Kentucky, in 2015 and again at Santa Anita near Los Angeles in 2016, where it's scheduled this year on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1.

Upgrades Anticipate Wealthy Visitors

Among the key upgrades that Del Mar promised and that helped attract the event is the widening of the track to accommodate 14 horses from the previous 10-horse width.

In addition to spending \$4.5 million on the widening, Del Mar agreed to replace its aging, synthetic Polytrack surface with dirt, which will cost another \$4 million and be done next season.

Other improvements slated in the years leading to the Breeders Cup are adding luxury suites and expanding other seating areas geared toward wealthier fans, he said.

All of this is for the running of the best horses in the world in 13 contests over two days that attract international high rollers.

“You’re showcasing the world’s best horses, and usually the world’s best horses are owned by fairly significant people,” Harper said. “You’re going to see Saudi princes, a lot of wealthy folks from the Continent. ... You’re going to be getting people from all over the world descending on this place.”