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## 36 HOURS WITH THE NTRA SAFETY AND INTEGRITY ALLIANCE



**The NTRA Team: Kilpack, Gates, Durenberger & Koch**

by Lucas Marquardt

Back in 2008, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association (NTRA) launched the Safety and Integrity Alliance. The goal was to promote and implement national standards for racetracks. Through a Code of Standards and an accreditation process, the Alliance addressed myriad issues: injury reporting and prevention; safety equipment and a safer racing environment; medication and testing; health and safety of jockeys; aftercare and second careers for retired equine athletes; and wagering security.

A prominent factor behind the Alliance's formation was that year's much-publicized breakdown of the filly Eight Belles. If it wasn't clear before, it became readily evident that the safety of racing's equine and human stars would be paramount to its future success...or decline.

Six years on, it's fair to say that the Alliance has been a significant positive for the industry. Twenty-three tracks, including nearly every major racecourse in North America, have been accredited. These tracks account for almost 90% of North America's graded stakes races and 70% of pari-mutuel handle. And the Alliance is supported by every major horsemen's group, as well as by the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP).

But what is the Alliance, and what does it do, exactly? Well, it's an A-Team of sorts, a small group of industry experts who visit a track seeking accreditation, and through a series of inspections, grants or rejects accreditation based on how that track adheres to the Code of Standards. Track accreditation lasts two years, so the Alliance visits about half of its accredited tracks on even years, and the other half on odds years. **Cont. p3**

## PEDIGREE INSIGHTS

by Andrew Caulfield



### Eskendereya Progeny Show Spirit

It looks as though we are destined to wonder what might have been whenever we hear Eskendereya's name.

As a racehorse this son of Giant's Causeway appeared to have the 2010 GI Kentucky Derby at his mercy, after he had won all three of his starts earlier in the year. He had been notably impressive in taking the GII Fountain of Youth S. by eight and a half lengths and the GI Wood Memorial by nine and a half. Unfortunately, just a week before the Derby, Eskendereya was found to have a slight filling in his left front leg, from the ankle to the knee. **Cont. p10**

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## 36 Hours with the NTRA Safety and Integrity

### Alliance *(cont. from p1)*

There's only one full-time member of the Alliance, Executive Director Steve Koch, who took over from the original director Mike Ziegler earlier this year. Koch heads up a four-member team that is filled out by a racing operations expert, a security professional, and a veterinarian, each of whom focus on their area of expertise while visiting a track. While Koch may be the lone constant, many of the team members that are called in as needed have been part of the program from the beginning.

"Our people are a huge asset, and their resumes speak for themselves," said Koch. "Mike Kilpack was the chief investigator for the California Horse Racing Board for 25 years, and has seen it all. Jennifer Durenberger is a veterinarian and lawyer, has been a regulator, and she's seen it all. Jim Gates was GM at Churchill for seven years. We're a legitimate source of advice."

On Dec. 3, opening night of Turfway's 2015/16 Winter Meet, the TDN met with the Alliance's four-member team and shadowed them through an accreditation inspection of the Florence, Kentucky oval.

**All horses in the TDN are bred in North America, unless otherwise indicated**

### THE ACTORS

**STEVE KOCH** - Former VP of racing at Woodbine, Koch was named executive director of the Alliance in April of 2015. In addition to his 12 years at Woodbine, seven in the VP role, Koch has an extensive racing background. His father Gus managed Claiborne Farm for three decades, and most of his five brothers and five sisters are involved in racing in some capacity. Koch has recently returned to Lexington with his wife and children.

**JIM GATES** - A certified public accountant, Gates spent 14 years at Churchill Downs Inc., seven as the general manager of Churchill Downs Racetrack (1996-2010). Gates helped oversee Churchill's \$121 million renovation, and led the track's "Safety From Start to Finish" initiative. From 2011-2014 he managed the finances and operations of trainer Dale Romans, and currently acts as a CFO consultant. He lives in Louisville.



**Jim Gates chats with the Turfway jockeys**

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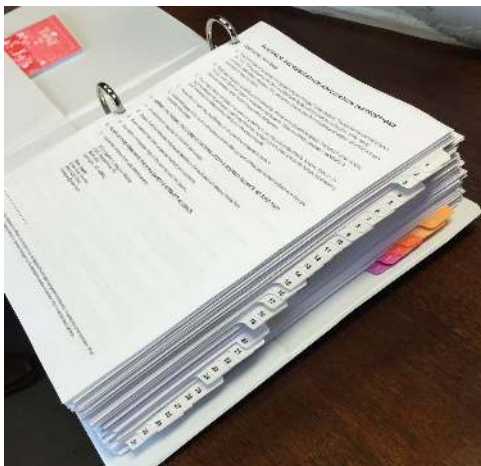
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**MIKE KILPACK** - Retired Supervising Investigator for the California Horse Racing Board. After spending five years working “dope and vice” in Long Beach, Kilpack spent 25 years at the CHRB. Kilpack also leads the Breeders’ Cup security task force, and acts as a consultant for the American Quarter Horse Association. He resides in California.

**DR. JENNIFER DURENBERGER** - A veterinarian and attorney who brings extensive experience in the pari-mutuel industry. Durenberger began as a regulatory vet for the New York Racing Association (2003-2008) and the California Horse Racing Board (2008-2010). Following a term as an association steward at Delta Downs in Louisiana, Durenberger accepted the position of Director of Racing for the Massachusetts Gaming Commission (2012-2015). Durenberger currently operates a consulting business from her base in Saratoga.

**DECEMBER 3rd, 2015**

**9:57 A.M.** - The four-member Alliance team gathers in a small boardroom at Turfway Park that sits adjacent to General Manager Chip Bach’s office. Bach, an imposing figure with an affable countenance, comes in to welcome the team back. This is Turfway’s fourth accreditation inspection. Each accreditation lasts two years, so Turfway got its first badge of approval back in 2009. “This isn’t a rubber-stamp thing, though,” says Koch. “We take each inspection seriously, and the tracks take them seriously. But Chip has been great and a big supporter of the Alliance. Turfway doesn’t have unlimited resources, and this track is an example that effort and enthusiasm can go a long way.”



The Turfway application is a serious tome

member—Koch, Durenberger, Kilpack and Gates. “It took me three weeks to put the thing together,” says Hirsch with a mix of pride and weariness.

**Cont. p5**

**10:03 A.M.** - Chuck Hirsch, Turfway’s director of security, arrives with the track’s application for accreditation. The thing is massive, filling every bit of a three-inch binder. There are 31 individual sections, each tabbed for easy access. Hirsch hands one to each team

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 a year we’ll always remember.*

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**10:10 A.M.** - Talk quickly turns to the San Bernardino shootings, which occurred less than 24 hours earlier. Active-shooting situations are something Hirsch and the Alliance team take seriously, and Hirsch indicates that he's contacted local Homeland Security officials about scenario-based training for tracks' security staff.

**10:30 A.M.** - Kilpack and Hirsch embark upon a tour of the backstretch. Kilpack is a security expert and is assessing fire safety, video surveillance, and Turfway's security protocols. The first stop is the test barn, where the winner of every race, and at least one other horse from the race as declared by the stewards, has urine and blood samples drawn. Kilpack approves of a new video system in the barn, but notes the cameras could have been installed higher than they have been. The cameras act both as a deterrent and as a policing mechanism.

**11:15 A.M.** - Kilpack begins his inspections of the barns proper. "This is good," he says to Hirsch, pointing to the halters hung just outside the stalls in one trainer's shedrow. "If there's a fire and grooms from other barns come running over to help." Some of the barns at Turfway are over 40 years old, and Kilpack stresses vigilance when it comes to checking for loose wires and other fire hazards. Hirsch and city fire officials go through drills at the track annually, and a third-party company also visits annually to conduct their own inspections.

**12:15 P.M.** - As they wrap up an initial tour of the backstretch, which included a visit to some of the dormitories, Hirsch and Kilpack walk down the fenceline of the outer perimeter of Turfway's backstretch. On the other side of the chain-link fence is a sizable plot, maybe 15 or 20 acres, with broad, long lines of manure hauled over from the track. "This was Chip Bach's idea," says Hirsch. "We were spending \$700,000 a year to haul away manure. So we decided to compost it on property we already owned. The EPA monitors it, and it works terrific. After six months or so [of composting], we can sell the resulting soil to local nurseries."

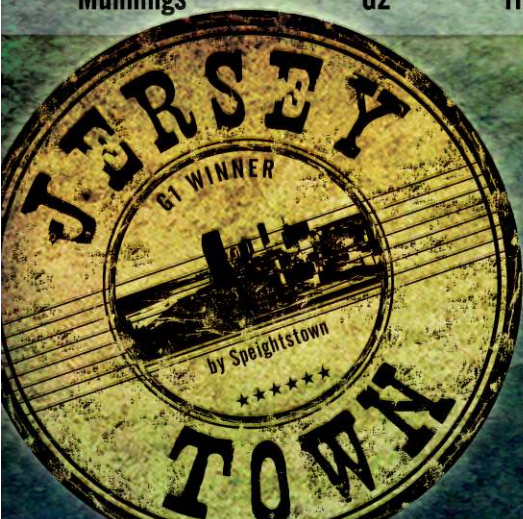
**1:00 P.M.** - Lunch: O'Charley's.


**2:00 P.M.** - Dr. Durenberger heads up to the receiving barn to meet with Dr. William Farmer, the chief racing veterinarian for the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission (KHRC).

Turfway is somewhat unique in that well over half of its runners on any given night—usually somewhere between 60-65%—ship in from other facilities. As it is, Turfway's barns are almost at capacity, with close to 955 horses stabled here. All this presents a unique challenge for Farmer and his team, who must inspect each and every horse before they step onto the track to race at Turfway. On tonight's nine-race card, that means 97 horses. **Cont. p6**

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These days, the vets have another task: Lasix administration. The Alliance fully endorses third-party Lasix, and in 2012, Kentucky mandated that Lasix be given only by a state veterinarian. Kentucky has hired additional vets to help with the additional workload, so now, a team of six KHRC veterinarians works the tracks in Kentucky on racedays. Three tackle vet checks, and three handle Lasix administration, which must be given in a 30-minute window no later than four hours before post-time.




**Pink tags indicate Lasix has been administered**

**2:30 P.M.** - Farmer explains Kentucky’s screening process to Durenberger. It begins with an overview of the past performances—“We call it veterinary handicapping,” says Farmer. “We look for things that might be red flags: significant drops in class, gaps in races or works, frequent jockey changes, things like that.” If something appears out of the ordinary, the vets know to give that horse special attention.

**2:37 P.M.** - Durenberger pokes her head into a stall to watch Dr. Nick Smith, another KHRC vet, conduct a lameness exam. Smith performs a flexion test, pulling the right front leg back and holding it for 30 seconds. He releases it and looks for signs of soreness or inflammation. The horse is then jogged down the shedrow, a protocol that was implemented in Kentucky in 2008, and adopted a year later into the Alliance’s Code of Standards as an industry “best practice.” Smith and two associates will repeat similar exams another 96 times today. Not all states conduct such extensive pre-race inspections. In Ohio, for instance, pre-race exams aren’t even a regulatory requirement.

**2:45 P.M.** - As the KHRC vets make their rounds, they carry a rugged, handheld computer device. These tablets are synced with a national database, and any information that is entered can be accessed by vets in other jurisdictions. Farmer and his team make notes on each horse, and assign a numerical assessment (1-5) to any areas of concern. If a horse has some slight rounding of the ankle joint, for instance, they might assign the condition a 1, which would be normal for a horse who’s racing. The database offers reference points so that any physiological changes can be monitored.

**Cont. p7**




### 2015 Sales Averages For The Top 10 General Sires


	Fee	Yearling Avg.	Weanling Avg.
Tapit	\$300,000	\$615,290	\$595,000
Medaglia d’Oro	\$150,000	\$352,500	\$480,000
<b>MALIBU MOON</b>	<b>\$95,000</b>	<b>\$211,263</b>	<b>\$264,166</b>
Speightstown	\$100,000	\$221,807	\$221,250
Pioneerof the Nile	\$125,000	\$168,196	\$212,142
Giant’s Causeway	\$85,000	\$159,656	\$190,000
Scat Daddy - Deceased	\$100,000	\$195,515	\$185,294
Curlin	\$100,000	\$226,230	\$160,909
Candy Ride (Arg)	\$60,000	\$130,740	\$146,428
Kitten’s Joy	\$100,000	\$125,670	\$69,500

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**3:04 P.M.** - Back in the vets' office, located in the receiving barn, a vet tech mans a walkie talkie. Vets out at the barns radio back who's been treated with Lasix. There are several checks and balances to make sure horses receive the Lasix shots in a timely manner, and to make sure they're not treated twice. In addition to the radio calls, pink tags are hung outside the stall doors of horses that have been treated. "There are now 16 states who operate under the third-party Lasix rule," says Durenberger. Notable exceptions include New Mexico and California, where different factions in the industry are now debating the merits of third-party Lasix administration. Third-party Lasix is one of the four pillars of RMTC's National Uniform Medication Program, the others being lab accreditation, a multiple medication violation penalty system, and a controlled therapeutic substances list.

**3:45 P.M.** - Farmer and Durenberger examine the track's equine ambulance, a mid-1980s era Kimzey van that is refitted every few years to keep up with technology. One recent upgrade included the installation of a 3000-watt inverter, so that on-call vets can take digital X-rays and see the results immediately. "And that's an incredibly useful tool," explains Durenberger. "In the old days, a vet would have to take the horse to the clinic to be X-rayed, and then wait for physical X-rays." Other equipment includes a tank attached to the trailer hitch that, in the summer, is filled with ice water and can be used to hose down horses suffering from heat stroke. There are also several aluminum Kimzey leg splints and an array of first-aid equipment.

**5:24 P.M.** - Jim Gates, the former GM of Churchill Downs, heads down to the jocks' room. He wants to talk about Turfway's safety procedures, and if the jockeys present have any concerns or suggestions.

Chip Bach introduces Gates, then leaves the room, "So you can talk in candor," he says.

Gates asks about Turfway's Polytrack surface, which recently underwent a revamp, whereby oil and material was added to the track. The jocks all give the surface a thumbs up. "It's been in great shape," says jockey John McKee. Gates talks to the jockeys about



**Turfway's Polytrack got a thumbs-up from the jockeys**

their relationship with track management--Turfway again gets high marks from those present--and about insurance. To be accredited by the Alliance, tracks must maintain a minimum standard of \$1 million, per incident, worth of accident medical expense coverage for all jocks.

**6:00 P.M.** - The horses for the first race begin to arrive in the paddock, where the Alliance team and Chip Bach have gathered. The sun has set, and the wind has picked up on a cold December night. "Don't complain about it," says someone walking past. "In a month from now, it'll be 15 degrees and there will be a foot of snow on the ground."



**Signs like these are posted to encourage dialogue**

**6:05 P.M.** - The Alliance team and Bach go over Turfway's policy for fatal breakdowns, which includes a necropsy review for every on-track death, and the vast majority of deaths that occur on the backstretch. Bach explains that each breakdown is

sent to an Injury Review Board. The trainer and jockey are interviewed, as is the veterinarian that treated the horse. Thankfully, and despite racing cards comprised mostly of low-level claimers, fatal breakdowns are rare at Turfway. In 2012, the track saw just four breakdowns from 6,923 starters—a rate of 0.58 per 1,000 starters. Last year's rate was a still-excellent 1.06, which compares favorably to the overall rate of 2.02 for dirt starters and 1.75 for turf starters.

*Cont. p8*

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**6:08 P.M.** - Bach informs the team that Turfway is about to install an early warning system to alert jockeys of any on-track incidents. The systems includes sirens and lights affixed to the furlong markers. If there is an incident—say the starting gate is unable to be moved—several people have access to a button that will trigger the warning system. “It was only \$8,300,” says Bach, “And it was really a no-brainer.” Koch loves the idea. “It’s going to save someone’s life,” he says. “We won’t know it because the incident won’t happen, but it will.” The warning system is scheduled to be installed in January.

**6:15 P.M.** - To chase or not to chase. Picking up on a conversation that began with Gates in the jocks’ room, the Alliance team goes over Turfway’s ambulance protocols with Bach and the track’s full-time paramedic. At some tracks, an ambulance trails the field through a race. Turfway instead has two stationary ambulances, one positioned in the chute at the head of the stretch, and another in the backstretch chute. A few jockeys have told Gates said they prefer to have an ambulance chase them through the race, so in case of an incident, the ambulance would be there in a matter of seconds. Others felt that the time saved by chasing was negligible. The Alliance doesn’t officially favor one method over another; nor does the KHRC. At Keeneland, for instance, the ambulance chases the field. Koch, however, said he isn’t always a fan of chasing. “The ambulances have to speed in front of the grandstand at 30mph, and it would be easy for a groom or loose horse to end up in front of it,” he says. The track’s paramedic agrees, and notes that in bad weather, steering an ambulance around the track on slick curves can pose its own dangers.

**7:37 P.M.** - Durenberger continues her review of Turfway’s veterinary protocols. Before race four, she meets with Nick Smith, the veterinarian who earlier in the day performed the pre-race exams, and the two hop into a John Deere Gator located just next to the paddock. Smith looks at each horse as they come into the paddock, then pilots the Gator to the starting gate to watch the horses again as they warm up. In this case, the race is carded at five furlongs, so the starting gate is located on the backstretch.



**Smith takes one last look at the field as they load.**

The noise of the grandstand fades as Smith steers the Gator around a service road behind the clubhouse turn and, once onto the track, he parks about 50 yards from the starting gate and jumps out. He exchanges a few words with the jockeys as they gallop past, making sure that everyone’s warming up well. The dark Polytrack surface is soft and malleable underfoot, and the horses’ hooves hardly make a sound. It’s a strange, beautiful sight as the field begins to load. It’s 36 degrees, and the visible breath of 12 anxious Thoroughbreds swirls about, backlit by the lights of the grandstand in the distance. Smith jumps behind post three to make sure the gate is latched securely. The bell rings, the horses are off, and in just over 58 seconds they will hit the finish line. Smith walks and then jogs back to a point on the turn so that he’s able to see the horses galloping out after the race. “That’s one of the best times to look at how the horses are going,” says Durenberger.

**8:10 P.M.** - Koch and Gates take advantage of the gate positioning for the fifth race, which at one mile is right on the finish line, to review the gate crew. Is every member of the crew wearing a safety vest? Are the vests zippered up? It’s cold, and the answer to both questions is yes. On muggy August days, however, compliance is less uniform. The gate crew are without helmets, something Koch would like to see changed. “Almost every major racetrack has adopted helmets for the assistant starters and they’ve just started wearing them at Keeneland, which helps us make the case that they should be worn everywhere,” he says. “But gate crews around the world are the same—they’re resistant to new safety equipment. It’s all too common to hear, ‘I’ve been doing this for 25 years and I ain’t dead yet!’”

**9:00 P.M.** - The Alliance team calls it a day. Kilpack is the foodie in the group and is tasked, as is typically the case, with finding a suitable place for dinner. He grimaces at his smart phone. Northern Kentucky has limited options. They wind up at a Logan’s Steakhouse.

**NTRA ACCREDITED RACETRACKS**

Aqueduct Racetrack	Kentucky Downs
Belmont Park	Laurel Park
Canterbury Park	Los Alamitos Race Course
Churchill Downs	Monmouth Park
Del Mar	Pimlico
Fair Grounds	Santa Anita Park
Finger Lakes	Saratoga Race Course
Golden Gate Fields	Suffolk Downs
Gulfstream Park	Sunland Park
Gulfstream Park West	Turfway Park
Indiana Grand	Woodbine
Keeneland	

**DECEMBER 4th, 2015**

**9:00 A.M.** - The Alliance team reconvenes on a sunny December morning. Because the previous day's card was held at night, they had ample time to make it through their checklist, and find themselves in the rare position of having accomplished much of what they've set out to do. Kilpack wants to tour the backstretch again, and will go over some things with Chuck Hirsch, Turfway's head of security.



**Hard at work: Jim Gates and Steve Koch**

Durenberger and Gates have paperwork to catch up on. And of course there's the massive application binder to go through still. But all in all, they're pleased with the progress they've made. The downtime provides Koch a few minutes to answer some questions from the TDN. Much of it focused around the Alliance's Code of Standards, a 70-page document that can be accessed [here](#).

**What do you see as the purpose of the NTRA Safety and Integrity Alliance?**

**KOCH:** We talk about the distribution of national uniform standards, and the Safety and Integrity Alliance is an important mechanism for that. We have an extensive Code of Standards that is updated annually, and that is the real power of the Alliance. The Code of Standards is our ideals for the industry—this is where we should be all operating at. As a team, we go to so many racetracks each year, and we pick up on a lot of "best practices" around the industry. Historically, the best practices have been fed into the model rules process, and ultimately baked into the Code of Standards. This distribution of best practices is extremely valuable.

**Do you feel the Alliance's accomplishments are sometimes overlooked by the industry?**

**KOCH:** To be honest, the real wins for the industry are generally not things we can make headlines out of. If we're working with a track to get them up to standard on say three areas, you can't exactly do a press release afterward. Because then people say, 'Oh, well how were things done *before*?' A lot of the time, they are discreet wins. We're about advancing a track's cause, not embarrassing it. But it is important for the industry to get behind us. The TDN, for instance, let's us run a free ad every now and then, and that's enormously valuable, since we have limited funding and don't have a lot of opportunities to tell our story. I can't say it enough: we are driving successes for the industry, and we have to keep the momentum behind it.

**Can you talk about the Alliance's strategy of setting the bar at a certain level in 2008, and then raising that bar each year?**

**KOCH:** Our goal has been to ratchet up that Code of Standards over time, so that we're driving continuous improvement for the participating racetracks. Coming from Woodbine, I've lived that experience. Mike Ziegler, the Alliance's first executive director, did a fantastic job, and when I was the VP of racing at Woodbine, Mike would send me the updated Code of Standards. As a racetrack operator, you'd say, 'Oh, there's that new thing we have to do.' And we'd go do it.

**Are all accredited tracks at the same level?**

**KOCH:** It's a process of evolution for some tracks, and we have to approach it as, 'How can we best help them reach these certain goals?' I spend an awful lot of time interfacing with our member racetracks—and our non-member racetracks, for that matter—advising them on how to work with their horsemen, or work with their own boards, and how to incorporate certain items into their operations.

A good example is that over the last few weeks in New Mexico, they've been talking about the adoption of third-party Lasix administration. It's a new idea for them, and they're grappling with the regulatory aspects of it. So Sunland Park came and asked us about it. How does it work in other jurisdictions? Can we do this internally, in-house, and how would that work? What can the Safety and Integrity Alliance do to help? In this case, I actually wrote a letter to the [New Mexico] Racing Commission and said, bluntly, that if they can't achieve third-party Lasix in the longterm, then Sunland Park can't be an accredited racetrack.

**What are some long-term goals for the Alliance?**

**KOCH:** That every racetrack should be meaningfully accredited. Currently we have 23 tracks. So that leaves about 40 tracks to go across North America. I'm also looking at the 2-year-old breeze-up sales, which can absolutely benefit from accreditation. And there's some interest in spreading this to South America. That's maybe a lofty ideal right now, but some groups there have expressed interest.

One of my goals every day, however, is to make sure that the tracks that are participating are noticed for having achieved our Code of Standards. Because they deserve to be noticed for it. It's not a simple thing they've done. It takes a large commitment and a lot of resources to do it. And this isn't a rubber-stamp project. We are actually holding them to task, and we should all really favor these tracks that are achieving the code of standards. Because that is horse racing done right.

**Cont. p10**



**Ultimately, what is the Alliance’s role as racing tries to grow and reach new audiences?**

**KOCH:** Horse racing relies on the good will of the public, and you have to be good corporate and social citizens to be successful in any business. On the integrity side, we’d better run a product with some integrity behind it. Otherwise, our product doesn’t deserve to be bought. Or in our case, wagered upon. On the safety side, we’re involving horses and jockeys, and our deserving existence relies on putting forth a safe product. Our horses are a valuable asset, but we also owe them something. They’re running their hearts out for us, and they want to run, and we owe them a safe experience. So the Alliance has everything to do with our long-term existence as a sport.

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**Andrew Caulfield’s Pedigree Insights** *(cont. from p1)*

Trainer Todd Pletcher announced that the colt was “too special of a horse to take any chances.” Pletcher added that “I haven’t felt like his last couple of gallops have been up to what we normally see. I was hoping that maybe it was attributed to the sloppy track, but we’re going to do some more diagnostics later in the week when some of the swelling and filling goes down in his leg. Hopefully it’s nothing that would be career ending.”

Pletcher was to be disappointed. Eskendereya’s retirement was announced only a week after the Kentucky Derby, the cause being cited as a soft-tissue injury. The comments of co-owner Ahmed Zayat make interesting reading, as he described Eskendereya as a “once in a lifetime horse.” That needs a bit of adjustment now, after American Pharoah’s brilliant efforts.

Zayat owned Eskendereya in partnership with the late Jess Jackson, and Zayat anticipated that this partnership had the fire power required to transform the colt into a leading stallion:

“We are excited about the future and are confident that he will continue to thrill the racing world by sireng the best future progeny,” Zayat said. “Mr. Jackson is the perfect partner for such a beloved horse and I look forward to working with him as he has proven to be a true sportsman and a credit to our industry. He has tried to create the best breed and bring back the legacy of American racing. He has over 100 broodmares and I have 50, all top broodmares. Between us we are trying to bring stamina back in racing, not just speed. It’s very important that I’m staying in, both emotionally and financially.”

However, Jess Jackson was to die less than a year later, leaving his widow Barbara Banke to head the Stonestreet Stables operation. Of course Stonestreet also owns 80% of Curlin, of whom Banke said at the start of September that their strategic plan is to ensure that “the world’s highest-rated racehorse becomes amongst the world’s most important stallions.”

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