

Horse racing industry in trouble

By Mallory Haigh

On March 28, the Ontario government will introduce the 2012 provincial budget. Part of its budget deliberations could include controversial recommendations by economist Don Drummond to eliminate profit sharing agreements between the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation and the horse racing industry.

When the Drummond Report was originally introduced at Queen's Park, it highlighted, among other recommendations, that the Government of Ontario "re-evaluate, on a value-for-money basis, the practice of providing a portion of net slot revenues to the horse racing and breeding industry and municipalities in order to substantially reduce and better target that support."

Local area horsemen say that if the Drummond recommendations are approved, they are greatly concerned about the potential fallout. Since the industry is very family-based, with many businesses spanning generations, the local equine economy is at risk.

According to the Value4Money website published by the Ontario Horse Racing Industry Association, an estimated 60,000 Ontarians are employed in this agricultural sector.

Within the Quinte region, there are an estimated 25 independent breeding and/or training operations for both thoroughbred and standardbred racehorses.

Dan Gassien is a local third generation horseman who bases his training operation out of Stirling.

Gassien, who dropped out of high school at age 15 to join in the family business of breeding, raising and training standardbred racehorses, said he is unsure of his future if cuts to the industry proposed in the budget is passed.

"I don't have any other education or training in any other trade, like many of the people in the business," Gassien said, "I don't know what anyone is going to do."

Forty-seven-year-old Gassien trailers his horses to Kawartha Downs for each race from his Stirling farm, between one to three times per week.

Originally, Gassien moved to Belleville from Lindsay, because of the proposed track construction on rezoned Bell Boulevard land.

Now, however, he said he is forced to transport his horses to other tracks to compete, because of the continual stalling of development.

With the Drummond Report recommendations, Gassien feels it is likely the track will never be brought back to Belleville, and that smaller tracks like



Photo by Mallory Haigh

Stirling-based standardbred owner and trainer Dan Gassien completes warming up his 9-year-old mare, The Shebaron, before the 8th race at Kawartha Downs on Monday night. Gassien, whose primary job is the training and racing of his horses, will be greatly affected by any cuts made to the industry by the Ontario government.

Kawartha Downs are likely to suffer exponentially.

"It is liable to wipe me right out. The quality of horses that will be left over are going to have to be of such a high calibre that your average current trainer is just not going to be able to compete," he said, also noting that it is the small-time trainers like himself who make up the body of the industry.

Many horsemen note that it won't just be them affected by a depleted racing industry. Other industries, including additional subsets of agriculture such as

hay farmers, blacksmiths and veterinarians as well as industries such as the automotive, insurance and entertainment industries will suffer, horesmen say.

The Progressive Conservative government, under Mike Harris, introduced a no-tax bill in 1998 on the horse racing industry to grow the sport.

In the late 1990s, the OLG entered into a two per cent profit-sharing agreement with the racetracks in order to increase race purses and assist horsemen.

Now, with this profit-sharing agreement at risk and the livelihood of many

on the chopping block, local politicians and MPP's are working to protect their constituents.

Northumberland-Quinte West MPP Rob Milligan is one of the Ontario politicians looking to come to bat for the horse racing industry.

"This politics of urban and rural divide, we have to overcome that," said Milligan.

"It is just about educating all parties on the industry itself, and how it benefits not just rural Ontario, but urban Ontario as well."



VIDEO LINK

Move to concussion prevention in Ontario schools

Legislation will require schools to institute management policies

By Sarah O. Swenson

In a move introduced last week, Ontario is set to become the first province to require schools to institute concussion prevention and management policies.

This new legislation will require that schools train and educate staff and parents on the seriousness and management of concussions, as well as form committees to advise on concussion prevention, identification, and management.

"Concussions don't discriminate," said Laurel Broten, Ontario's Minister of Education, as she introduced the bill to the Ontario legislature. "They can derail the professional career of the best hockey player in the world just as easily as they can derail the academic career of one of our youngest learners."

Concussions have been an issue in sport for quite some time, but only since Canada's Olympic hockey hero, Sidney Crosby was sidelined, did people begin to really take notice.

From 2010 to 2011, nearly 20,000 Ontarians were treated in emergency rooms for concussions, with children making up 38 per cent of those visits.

"Like anything this serious, we don't take

it lightly," said Jim Buck, Loyalist College's director of athletics. "We're doing the best we can, trying to address any concerns."

The Ontario Colleges Athletics Association is currently forming a committee to address the concussion issue and form a universal protocol.

"But the hard part will be implementing these recommendations," said Buck.

Loyalist itself is currently investigating the possibility of implementing concussion baseline testing, something the Belleville Minor Hockey Association has made mandatory since last year. These tests, completed online, provide detailed clinical reports which will be used later by doctors as a comparison point when

trying to assess if an athlete has recovered from an injury.

Although Ontario may be the first province to place the onus on schools, in November 2011, British Columbia proposed similar legislation, the Concussions in Youth Safety Act. This private member's bill requires all youth sports organizations to develop awareness and management policies, have athletes maintain a concussion and head injury information sheet, and demands clearance from a health care professional before a return to play.

The B.C. bill is more broad in its scope, not limiting itself to students, but does not address the need for young ath-

letes to return to their studies, not just their athletics.

"If head injuries like concussions are identified early and enough time is given for kids to recover, we can make sure that our students succeed in school athletics and, most importantly, succeed in the classroom," said Broten to the legislative assembly.

While these measures are fairly new to Canada, the majority of the United States has already tackled the issue head on. The earliest adopter was Washington, passing its legislation in April 2009. By the end of 2011, more than 36 states had passed some form of concussion law and there are currently 10 more states with legislation pending.

Bulls win close one in overtime thriller

By Rebecca Rempel

A hockey game is what fans walked into the Yardmen Arena Wednesday night to watch, and a hockey game is what they got.

The Belleville Bulls faced off against the Oshawa Generals to the applause of 2,503 fans.

Both the Bulls and the Generals have already cinched their playoff berths and are currently ranked eighth and seventh respectively, in the eastern conference.

After a fast-paced start of the game, the Generals were the first to put a point up on the board with Christian Thomas putting the puck in the back of the net in the seventeenth minute of the first period.

At the end of the first period, the Generals were leading the Bulls in shots on goal 16-10.

With Branden Morris in the sin bin for delay of game 13 minutes into the second period, Brendan Gaunce brought the Bulls back into the game with a short-handed goal to bring the crowd to their feet. John Wilson, better known as the 'cymbal man' at Bulls games, appeared dressed as Spiderman and banged happily away with his cymbals to celebrate the goal.

Quick to put a damper on the excitement, Generals' Geoffrey Schemitsch scored in the remaining seconds of Morris' penalty to pull the General's ahead once again.

Belleville netminder Malcolm Subban stopped 12 shots in the second period,



Photo by Rebecca Rempel

Oshawa Generals' goalie Kevin Bailie stops a wrap-around from Belleville Bull Brendan Gaunce Wednesday night at the Yardmen Arena in Belleville. Gaunce was named first star of the game in the 3-2 overtime win, with one goal and an assist.

while Kevin Bailie stopped 10.

Five and a half minutes into the third period, Belleville defenceman Brady Austin earned his fourth goal of the season, and gave Spiderman another chance to

celebrate, bringing the game to a draw.

With the game still tied 2-2 at the final regulation time buzzer, the teams entered sudden-death overtime.

Going into the game, the Bulls have lost

only once this season in overtime, while the Generals have been defeated three times.

The puck bounced from end to end, with most shots going wide. With a min-

ute and 12 seconds left on the clock, Jake Worrada netted his fifth goal of the season, to bring the Bulls out on top for the night.

Of Worrada's five goals, three have been game-winners.

Bull's centre Gaunce was named first star of the night with two points in the game.

Generals Christian Thomas was second star, and Bull Austin as the third.

"We needed those two points and it's good to get those two points," said Carter Sandlak, a second-year leftwinger for the Bulls. "We battled hard out there and it felt good."

"I feel like we got down a little bit, but after the Generals scored we picked it up and played our game plan," said Sandlak.

"Hopefully we can use the win and take into playoffs and build on it," said second-year Bulls defenceman Adam Bignell.

"We're trying not to worry about who we're going to play too much, but we definitely want to win these next two games," said Bignell.

"We're obviously looking ahead, but not too far," said Sandlak.

Wednesday night's game not only put an end to the Generals four-game winning streak, but also allowed the Bulls to bounce back from three losses in the past four games.

The Bulls have two regular season games left in the season. This Friday they will travel up the road to play against the Kingston Frontenacs, the last place team in the conference. Saturday the Bulls will face off against fifth place team, the Sudbury Wolves, for their last regular season home game.