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Breeding | Posted 12/29/2006, 1:38 pm

Still fighting the good fight in Georgia

By DAVE GOLDMAN

The people of Georgia are in the main politically and socially conservative. There is no overwhelming consensus, though, when it comes to the pros and cons of Thoroughbred racing, which along with parimutuel wagering is not allowed in the state. There are many scattered throughout the urban cities and farm lands of Georgia who would welcome Thoroughbred racing if given the opportunity.

"Governor Sonny Purdue succeeded Zell Miller," said Bob Meier, a board member of the Georgia Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, "and he is no supporter of horse racing. So, it looks like we'll have to wait until we get a new governor before anything can happen."

What makes Georgians' task so difficult is that Miller convinced the legislature to make horse racing and parimutuels a constitutional matter. It now takes approval by three-quarters of the Georgia legislature followed by two-thirds of the voters to make horse racing constitutionally possible in Georgia.

Because of the apparent antipathy of Georgia citizenry, as expressed by their politicians, there has been a decline in the state's Thoroughbred population. The Jockey Club's latest count shows the Georgia annual foal crop dropping to less than 100, or half of what it was 10 years ago.

Meier and his colleagues remain undaunted. They are convinced that should South Carolina welcome horse racing, Georgia will reconsider.

"In a heartbeat," said Meier.

"The best hope to get horse racing in our area," Meier continued, "is to promote it as a Southeastern enterprise. That is, promoting racing in North and South Carolina, and revitalize it in Alabama. We could possibly have the clout if we can unite, and I would hope that Florida will join us in a proposed Southeast association."

Stallion seasons for a good cause

A check of industry stallion listings shows that a dozen or so stallions stand in Georgia and they service fewer than 100 mares. The highest listed fee is \$4,000 for Slew the Slewor, who stands at Premier Thoroughbreds.

Lacking a venue to race, the GTOBA employs money raised from the auction of stallion seasons to endow stakes races. These stakes races are restricted to the get of those

stallions who had seasons auctioned at the annual GTOBA sports banquet, which is scheduled for next Saturday at Atlanta National Country Club from 6-10 p.m.

As of last count, close to 100 stallion seasons have been donated to be auctioned. Fifty of these are Florida stallions, 20 are New York-based stallions, and 15 are Kentucky stallions. There are additional nominations from stallions in Alabama, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Ontario. Meier is optimistic that several Kentucky blockbuster nominations will be in house before the auction gets under way.

Florida stallions dominate the auction, and in recognition the GTOBA sponsors four turf stakes in Florida for the get of nominated stallions. The stakes scheduled for '07 all carry a \$75,000 purse and will be run at Calder Race Course. The first of them is the Stonewall Stallion Stakes, for 3-year-olds at a mile, on May 7. The Georgia Juvenile Stakes, for 2-year-olds at five furlongs, is scheduled for July 7, and it is followed by the Georgia Peach Stakes for 3-year-olds and older at a mile on Aug. 7. The four-stakes program concludes on Dec. 7 with the Live Oak Plantation Georgia Debutante Stakes at one mile for 2-year-old fillies.

Meier says that GTOBA is in the process of broadening its stakes programs to include additional racing venues.

Cocktail attire is the dress code for Saturday's GTOBA dinner and stallion auction. Tickets may be purchased at the door for \$25 each, but reservations are in order. Those who wish to bid on stallion seasons may do so either through the Internet or by phone: (866) 664-8622. Credit and method of payment should be cleared ahead of time through the GTOBA office.

For information on both the auction and the ways and means to bid, e-mail [gtoba@bellsouth.net](mailto:gtoba@bellsouth.net).

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