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Wrapping Up the Cup

By *Ray Paulick*

Things I know now that I didn't know then...

The power of Zenyatta was measurable, particularly on television. The 3.1 overnight rating for the 6-7 p.m. time slot for Saturday's Breeders' Cup Classic was nearly triple the audience during the same period in 2009, and ratings earlier in the day were also up significantly from last year.

Handle hit a new high since the two-day format was instituted in 2007, and fell shy of \$200 million, including separate pools and exchange betting. Saturday's total handle of nearly \$119 million was up significantly from 2009, when about \$103 million was bet, but remains well short of the one-day record of \$140 million, set in 2006, the last year the championships were run on one afternoon program.

ABC/ESPN and the Breeders' Cup were aggressive in promoting the championships and exploiting the popularity of Zenyatta. The big question is whether there will be any trickle down effect for the sport for the other 51 weeks of the year or if Zenyatta created a one-hit wonder for the event.

If Zenyatta retires (and we have happily learned with Jerry and Ann Moss to never assume anything), racing will be without a headliner in 2011. New stars will be made, but the shadow cast by the mighty Z is an imposing one.

AT THE TOP OF THE LIST of those potential stars of the future is Uncle Mo, who ran his unbeaten string to three (OK, that's a far cry from 19...but it's a start!) with a most impressive and dominating triumph in the Juvenile. Uncle Mo beat a very good colt in Boys At Tosconova in his first start around two turns for trainer Todd Pletcher and Mike Repole's Repole Stable and did it in racehorse time on the track where the Kentucky Derby will be run in six months.

Pletcher is to the 21st century racing scene what D. Wayne Lukas was in the 1980s: a CEO-style trainer with a huge operation, one who is well-spoken but can be a polarizing figure. He will be a constant presence on the Triple Crown trail for years to come, and the polarization surrounding Pletcher will only increase as his successes build. And they will.

IF ANYONE LOOKED MORE IMPRESSIVE IN DEFEAT THAN ZENYATTA it was Morning Line, the hard-luck loser of the Dirt Mile for trainer Nick Zito and the Thoroughbred Legends partnership.

Javier Castellano, riding the Tiznow colt for the first time, allowed Morning Line to set or push sizzling fractions of :22.41, :44.94 and 1:09.44 for the first six furlongs (only two-fifths of a second slower than the 1:09.05 final time of the Sprint, run two hours earlier). That cooked the other horses on the front end, but Morning Line wasn't finished, finding a second wind at the top of the stretch and opening up with a furlong to run.

He looked home free until the late-running Dakota Phone, charging from last place on the far outside, got up in the final jump. Morning Line probably never saw him.

Morning Line is just one of several exciting 3-year-olds who will be back in 2011, along with probable champion Lookin At Lucky, who was a good fourth in the Classic, Fly Down (who edged Lookin At Lucky at the wire for third), Paddy O'Prado, First Dude (eighth in the Classic), and others.

GOLDIKOVA VERY WELL COULD BE THE STAR OF NEXT YEAR'S SHOW. Her performance in this year's Breeders' Cup Mile was simply amazing. The 5-year-old daughter of Anabaa trained by Freddie Head for the Wertheimer brothers made an exceptional group of milers look ordinary with her brilliant stretch run and her third consecutive victory in the Mile. She seems to be a gift who keeps on giving, and it is almost "pinch me" good news to hear that she will attempt to come back in 2011 for a four-peat.

Should Goldikova be in the conversation for Horse of the Year? As we have stated before, there are no rules about Horse of the Year, so voters certainly have the right to put her name on the dotted line for that title. She is a cinch to win the female turf Eclipse Award off one American race, so some would argue "why not Horse of the Year?" Goldikova is one for the ages, that's for sure.

I WAS SKEPTICAL AT FIRST ABOUT THE EXPANDED 14-RACE BREEDERS' CUP but now see it as a win-win-win. It gives racing fans and horseplayers opportunities to see horses and divisions that deserve a defining championship race (though not



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necessarily a corresponding Eclipse Award). The two juvenile grass races, for example, were especially interesting, as was the Dirt Mile, the Filly & Mare Sprint, and the Turf Sprint. The Marathon? Not so much. (More about that later.)

The expansion also gives nominators and owners additional chances to run their horses for big purses that were never previously available. The development of a stronger program for 2-year-olds running on turf could have a positive impact on the stallion business, since it is so difficult to "sell" a turf stallion to breeders. These races help.

Finally, the additional races give Breeders' Cup new revenue opportunities both through its share of pari-mutuel handle and sponsorship availability.

If I were to suggest one change to the format it would be to do away with the "boy-girl" arrangement which stacks all the female races on Friday (along with the Marathon) and puts all the male and open races on Saturday. Unless the Breeders' Cup figures out a way to market Friday as "ladies day," it makes no sense to relegate a race as important as the Ladies' Classic to a weekday. The opposing argument—that running the Ladies' Classic on Friday gives the winner a chance to occupy the spotlight for 24 hours—doesn't seem to outweigh the fact that those races just seem less important because they are run on a weekday.

THE FRIDAY NIGHT FIGHT BETWEEN CALVIN BOREL AND JAVIER CASTELLANO was good for the box office and not that bad for the sport. Constant repeats on ESPN's SportsCenter is not necessarily a bad thing, and the fight between the two jockeys after the Marathon only goes to show how competitive and dangerous this sport can be. It's the only game (with the possible exception of pro wrestling) where the combatants all retire to the same dressing room, which is where these dustups usually occur.

What I have a problem with is Castellano only receiving a six-day suspension for making a dangerous move a race that seriously endangered his fellow riders and the horses competing in the Marathon. I took some heat last year for criticizing stewards for being too lenient in cases where jockeys put others at risk by altering course without a clear path. There seems to be a double standard: make that move, causing interference and get slapped with a short suspension. Make that move and cause a spill, however, and the suspension is a lot longer.

Suspensions should be used to prevent accidents—the type that can land jockeys in a wheelchair and horses in the morgue—not just as a reaction to them. Kentucky Horse Racing Commission stewards were far too lenient on Castellano. His dangerous move could have resulted in a horrendous accident involving Martin Garcia and Borel. That they somehow managed to stay up and keep their horses from falling should have no bearing on the penalty by the stewards. I spoke with an international racing official who had a close look at Castellano's interference, and he said the ban would have been months, not days, in his home country.

And for the record, stewards got the fighting fines wrong, too. Borel was in Castellano's face, but Castellano threw the first punch. Castellano's fine should have been higher than Borel's.

CHARTING RACES REMAINS AN INEXACT EXERCISE, BUT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE. Is anyone else curious to know exactly how far back Zenyatta was in the early going of the Breeders' Cup Classic? The official charts, and most of you know, are compiled by having someone high atop the grandstand watching the races with binoculars and calling out estimated margins from horse to horse at different points of a race. Some chartcallers are better than others, and it's safe to assume the charts for the Breeders' Cup get extra scrutiny through video replays and a larger team compiling the information. Still, was Zenyatta really only two lengths behind the 11th-place horse after the opening half-mile as the chart reads? How fast did she run her final quarter mile? No one really know for sure.

There is technology available that gives precise margins and fractional times throughout a race for every horse. Keeneland, Woodbine and Del Mar currently use this technology, called Trakus, but Equibase continues to compile past performance charts using the century-old method of binoculars and estimates. Only the lead horse at different points of a race are timed, and horseplayers are required to come up with their own estimates for the other horses in a race.

It is past time for Churchill Downs and other "major" tracks—along with Equibase—to take advantage of either Trakus or some similar technology and add precision to the charts that are the historical record for our game.

Tags: [ABC](#), [breeders' cup classic](#), [Calvin Borel](#), [Dakota Phone](#), [dirt mile](#), [equibase](#), [espn](#), [handle](#), [Javier Castellano](#), [Morning Line](#), [nick zito](#), [Paulick Report](#), [Ray Paulick](#), [tiznow](#), [todd pletcher](#), [trakus](#), [Uncle Mo](#), [zenyatta](#)

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