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## SYNTHETIC DIRT TAKES 'STARS' AWAY FROM BREEDERS' CUP

We are a little more than two weeks before racing's biggest weekend the Breeders' Cup World Thoroughbred Championships, hosted by Santa Anita in California for the 2nd consecutive year.

For those of you that don't know, Santa Anita uses a synthetic surface rather than a conventional dirt surface. When it was first installed, the synthetic turf was hailed as the savior for the sport of kings. But over the last 3 years, we have seen some chinks in the armor when it comes to the surface at Santa Anita.

Recently the track hosting the upcoming Breeders' Cup hosted their equivalent to Champions Day for Cal-Bred horses and what happened in their showcase race raises concerns as we head into the Breeders' Cup.

Three horses broke down in the Cal Cup Classic, and two were euthanized. The big names of the sport are not running on the showcase day for racing. Rachel Alexandra and Sea The Stars are the ones not offered up to risk injury why the fans suffer on what is supposed to be the best of the best.

We who follow and cover this great sport have known it to be a foregone conclusion that Rachel Alexandra was going to set foot in California. The question you have to ask is simply this. Do you blame Jess Jackson who owns Alexandra for not running?

There are 2 ways to look at it. We flashback to 2008 when we had this same debate regarding the great Curlin you remember the agonizing sleepless nights that their connections had until they reluctantly committed to run last year's Classic. The result wasn't pretty as Curlin ran like a mid-level claimer and not the superstar we had love. He finished 4th but you might as well say he ran poorly as his earlier results dictate much better.

Do you blame it on that surface? Jackson, who also owned Curlin, sure did; he was adamant about never running on the synthetic surface if given the chance.

The 2nd way is to look at the welfare of the horse. Jackson is simply protecting his prized. Does Rachel Alexandra need to run? Think about it - she has had an unprecedented season winning all 9 starts including 3 against the Find me a filly that had the year that Rachel had, and I will sell you some land on the bayou. When the 2010 Preakness Awards are handed out, Rachel Alexandra will definitely be horse of the year.

Now for the other big name that has decided to pass on this year's Breeders' Cup. That would be the sensation European Sea The Stars, who has amassed 6 Group-1 victories this year and has all of Europe abuzz. His most effort in which he dominated the Arc De Triomphe in France set him up perfectly for the Breeders' Cup. But his connections have abruptly decided to retire him.

My line of thinking is that Sea The Stars has never run on a synthetic surface and with how meticulous the European conditioners are I would be willing to bet they saw the recent Cal Cup race that I mentioned earlier in this piece and believe they are protecting the welfare of their star, but again the fans lose out.



All in all we look to have a solid group of horses that will encompass this year's festivities, but I am eagerly looking forward to 2010 when the Breeders' Cup goes back to basics and runs on a conventional dirt surface.

Does that mean that this year is awash? Not necessarily, but I am not quite as enthused considering the 2 big that aren't going to be in California.

I will have divisional breakdowns coming soon to I try to help you have success on Breeders' Cup weekend. Al Fair Grounds 138th season begins on Friday, November 6 which coincidentally is also the 1st day of the 2 day Cup thoroughbred championships. I will have an extensive preview of the upcoming season, so stay tuned.

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