



Martin Panza has been hired by NYRA to the newly created position of Senior Vice President of Racing Operations. Making the move from Hollywood Park, where he was the Vice President of Racing and the racing secretary, Panza will be responsible for guiding the New York racing product into the future. Panza was a highly regarded racing official in California, where he invented the concept of guaranteed pools, created the American Oaks and was considered one of the more innovative minds in the sport. We sat down with Panza to get his thoughts on his new role at NYRA.

TDN: The creation of the American Oaks was an example of outside-the-box thinking. Will you look to create similar events in New York?

MP: You always look at what opportunities you have and what your resources are and NYRA has the resources moving forward to create races like the American Oaks. You look around the world and you try to find spots where the timing works and you can create a race. I am a racing fan, too, and I want to see great racing and I want to create days that are exciting and fun. To get horses from Japan, England, Germany, from around the world, and see how they match up against our horses, to me that's what makes going to the track much more interesting and enjoyable. Hopefully, down the road we can bring some of that to New York.

TDN: Understanding that it's early in the game, what changes might you look to make when it comes to New York racing, be it stakes schedules, racing dates, etc.?

MP: First of all, I have only been here for about a week so it's hard for me to get into specifics. We're going to look at our stakes schedule and see if we can't enhance things a bit and build some bigger days and take some days that already exist and try to make them a little stronger. We'll look at the overnight races and just see if we can tweak things a little bit here and there and try to make condition book races go.

Obviously, there is a great deal of purse money here and we have the resources to create some more events. Over the next month or two we'll sit down and look where we want to go. Probably, you won't see any drastic changes but when Belmont and Saratoga come around I think things will be a little bit different. It's going to take a little while for me to understand New York racing and how things work. Can a few things we did in California work in New York? I think so. There is room for creativity here. From a racing standpoint, we'll try to build up the quality some and will try to work on attracting some stables to New York.

TDN: Former racing secretary P.J. Campo has left to work for the Stronach tracks and you were racing secretary at Hollywood Park. Will you assume the duties of racing secretary at NYRA or will you look to hire someone for that role?

MP: My job is primarily one of oversight and down the road I will not be responsible for writing the condition book on a daily basis. I have an idea of what I want New York racing to look like and I need to sit down and discuss those things with our board. We're going to have to hire a racing secretary or two racing secretaries to handle these meets. Certainly I will be involved in what the books look like and what direction we go, but I'll also be focusing on other areas like safety, working with the equine medical director, integrity and how we can improve the racing program.

The latter is an important area. How can we improve the racing program? How do you get more horsemen to want to run in the state of New York? How do we get more owners into the game? And at same time, how do we make racing more interesting for the fans and the gamblers?

TDN: With the advent of the guaranteed wagers in California you showed an interest in improving things for the fans and bettors. Do you have any thoughts on how you can make the NYRA product better for the fans?

MP: Right now, I am just trying to meet as many people as possible and learn about the inner workings of NYRA. As we build our stakes program, we will try to build more events and start to look toward guaranteed wagers. Now everyone does guaranteed wagers, so they probably have lost some of their effect. The pools are big enough here that the gamblers can wager quite a bit of money without hurting their price. I think that's what most gamblers are looking for--value. Anything we do moving forward we'll ask how can we bring value to our customers? Anything we do we will analyze from not only a racing standpoint but from the standpoint of the fans and gamblers. We will say, 'is this the best we can do for all the groups involved?'

TDN: In California, over time, the tracks greatly reduced the number of races offered each week. Are you a fan of the less-is-more way of doing things and do you think we will see any sort of reduction in the NYRA racing schedule?

MP: Our CEO Chris Kay is looking at that. You have to look at the number and, in some situations, less can be more. You look at a meet like Del Mar. Del Mar probably has more success over its seven weeks than Hollywood and Santa Anita combined. That's not a knock on Santa Anita and Hollywood, it's just that Del Mar has a small meet that can be very successful, just like at Saratoga and Keeneland. As you shift to more quality racing, maybe you don't run quite as many races and the higher-quality races should handle more.

That way, you can have fewer races and maybe get a push in handle. If you're just going to grind it out, it gets very difficult. When you have lots of races you sometimes get more cheap races. This puts more stress on the racing office and the horse population and the trainers. It's something we're definitely going to be looking at. It is a balancing act where you look at revenue for the horsemen, for the company and at how many races you should be running. I am a fan, too, and if I go to a track and if there are 13 races, after the seventh or eighth, I sometimes feel tired and want to go home. I am going to get a better understanding of what we do, how many races we run and if it is too many. I'll be in a much better position a year from now to make those assessments. The short answer is, we are looking at it and in the next couple of weeks or month you'll see a schedule for NYRA. We have looked a little bit to have a reduction somewhere in the year.

TDN: You come from Hollywood Park, which is about to meet a wrecking ball. Though you are probably focused on NYRA and the future, this must be a sad time of sorts for you.



New NYRA Sr. VP of Racing Operations Martin Panza. *Horsephotos.com*

MP: It's very tough. I was fortunate to be there for over 20 years and the track has been there for 75, 76 years. For 20 years in row, Hollywood led the country in attendance, handle, purses. It's not a good thing for American racing when you start to lose racetracks, especially one of that stature. I was very fortunate to land at NYRA, but a lot of people there haven't been that fortunate. It will be a sad day. December 22 is the last day for Hollywood Park. I plan to be there and am sure it will be a very emotional event.