

Fan, track sites aim to welcome pari-mutuel bettors

Handicapper Dana Byerly remembers being a bit overwhelmed when she began to wager on Thoroughbred racing about four years ago.

Fascinated by the sport and the wagering puzzle, she began to research handicapping ideas. In that time, the idea to put together a website that helps new handicappers get started was born.

“You could find a lot of information out there but you had to really look for it,” Byerly said.

With the idea of putting a lot of the basic, introductory information in one place, Byerly and Adam Wiener launched the fan education website HelloRaceFans.com at the end of March. Track sites like Keeneland Race Course’s Keeneland.com also have increased the amount of free information available for new players interested in cracking the handicapping puzzle.

Byerly, who also writes a racing blog, said her friends always seemed interested when she told them she was planning a trip to the track.

“They always thought it was cool, but one of the things I’ve noticed in the blogosphere is that it’s hard to get people to understand it,” Byerly said. “The good news is, when you boil it down, it’s a race. It’s easy to understand that the first to the finish is the race winner. We’re trying to make it easy for people to get started in picking that winner.”

With some racetracks shifting more attention to their lucrative slot machine operations, educat-

HelloRaceFans.com launched in April

ing fans on pari-mutuel wagering may be taking a back seat. But Keeneland has put an emphasis on providing information to new players. At this year’s spring meeting, the track passed out a detailed, introductory pamphlet. The track also provides a beginner’s guide on its website.

For more advanced players, Keeneland provides a wealth of information on its site about previous races, including distance-traveled statistics to allow players to determine horses who may have had bad trips, as well as information on maintenance of its Polytrack for players interested in tracking any possible surface biases.

Conformation expert Joe Riddell patrols the paddock and provides

information to on-track and off-track bettors through Twitter. The Keeneland website features live analysis from other handicappers such as Jeremy Plonk.

“They call this the information age, and no doubt horseplayers are among the most ravenous consumers of information. Keeneland strives to offer information to horse racing’s core audience while still reaching out to potential new fans,” Plonk said. “Whether dissecting your own Excel spreadsheet download of the free Polycapping database, or joining in on the daily live racing chats throughout each day’s entire card, the opportunities to learn the game at any level are almost endless during this Keeneland spring meeting.”—*Frank Angst*