





The sight of Barbaro's dangling right hind ankle, just strides into the 2006 Preakness Stakes, gripped the viewing nation in horror.

But in the mass of confusion that came from watching the initial injury and treatment of the stricken champion, and the crowning of Preakness champion Bernardini, there was a visage of calm, a voice of matter-of-fact confidence, and an explanation that might not have been welcome, but was at least informative and accurate.

On Call

Veterinary program keeps the television public informed after an on-track injury

by Nicole Kraft

Dr. Larry Bramlage of the Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital did not just attend the race as a fan or a stable vet. He was the face of the American Association of Equine Practitioners as part of its On Call Program, which brings expert vets to premier, televised equine events so that they may provide an authoritative explanation to the public in the event of catastrophe.

The Hambletonian is the only harness race that is part of the program, but other featured events include all the Thoroughbred Triple Crown races, the World Thoroughbred Championships (Breeders' Cup) and the American Quarter



some funding from the Oak Tree Racing Association—gathered in 1991 more than two dozen vets around North America who were willing to become the public face of racing. Each member then underwent four to six hours of media training from Pedersen and McGrath in Chicago, undergoing the same instruction as those who serve as spokespersons for corporations. The goal: to learn what to say, what not to say, and how to say it.

“They make you aware of the fact that reporters have a job, and what they are looking for in terms of short, concise descriptions,” he said. “They train you as

EXPERT WITNESS: *Left: When 2006 Kentucky Derby winner Barbaro broke down in the Preakness Stakes, veterinarian Larry Bramlage was there to provide a concise explanation for the viewing audience. Below: Bramlage (right) speaks with NBC’s Kenny Rice during a live broadcast.*

Horse Association World Championships.

“I think our On Call Program worked great that day,” Bramlage said of the Preakness. “The worst thing for viewers is not to have any information. I think we were accurate, gave the best information we had, and made people as comfortable as possible.”

Televised Thoroughbred races allowed the public to become familiar with some significant and catastrophic injuries. The great Ruffian broke her foreleg in a well-publicized 1975 match race with Kentucky Derby winner Foolish Pleasure. In 1990, Go For Wand graphically and catastrophically broke down on national television in the Breeders’ Cup Distaff at Belmont Park, as did Mr. Nickerson in the Breeders’ Cup Sprint.

When, in the subsequent dead air time, Go For Wand’s moment of injury was replayed five times for the viewing public—and again with Mr. Nickerson—the AAEP knew it had to act.

“Both times there was no filler—no one to talk to,” said Bramlage. “It was those two incidents that stimulated the need to have someone knowledgeable



on all the kinds of possible injuries, who could speak on what happened and what would be happening. We needed someone who could get some updated information and projected implications.”

To accomplish that goal, AAEP—with

to how you deal with reporters, how to prevent them from making you look bad, and what kinds of things to look for.”

And it didn’t take long for the program to go into play. In 1992 sprinter Mr Brooks broke down in the Breeders’

Cup at Gulfstream Park—and Bramlage was on the scene to provide insights and comments.

Bramlage was last year called into service in another Triple Crown race when Eight Belles broke down just strides after finishing second in the Kentucky Derby. His news was not good—the filly was euthanized on the track after fracturing both front ankles—but Bramlage provided valuable and appreciated information to the viewing public. He even appeared on NBC's "Today Show" with trainer Larry Jones.

Bramlage admitted that the news

spokesperson for every race, but confusion over who was on call for what event led to the single-vet system, featuring a doctor from the home area available for the entire racing card.

Dr. Patricia Hogan has been the "On Call" face for the Hambletonian telecast during its years on CBS and more recently on NBC.

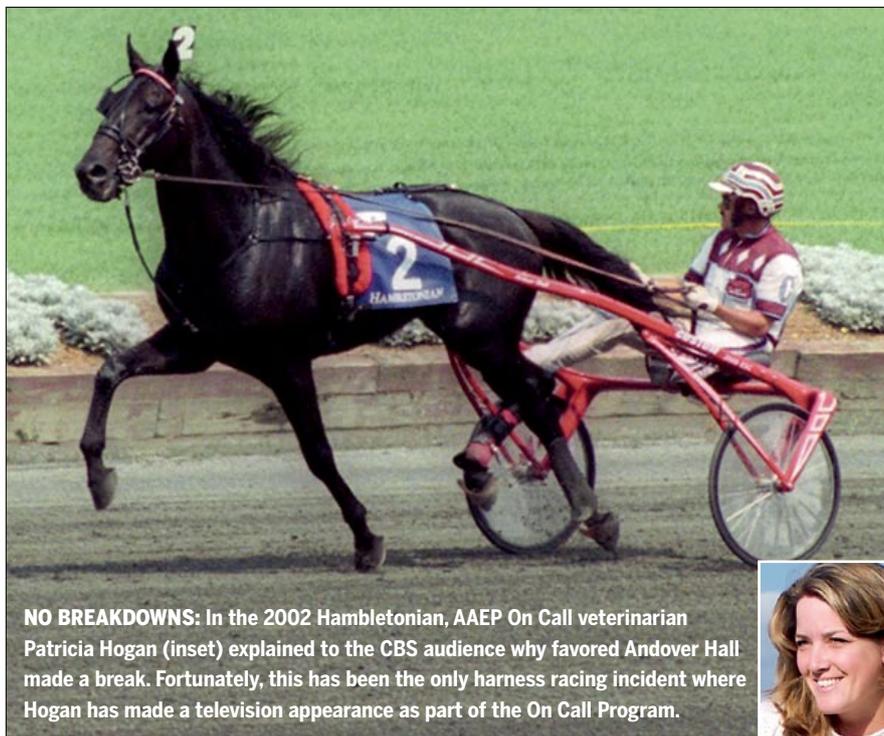
Hogan, who is married to noted Standardbred trainer Ed Lohmeyer, and has appeared in *Glamour* magazine, became one of racing's most well-known vets for her work with 2004 Kentucky Derby and Preakness champion Smarty

until you hear what it sounds like from the other side of the fence," said Hogan. "You have to know how to put in plain language a complicated injury to someone with limited knowledge—and do it in two or three sentences."

Hogan, unlike Bramlage, has never been faced with a catastrophic injury, but did explain what might have made favored Andover Hall break in the 2002 Hambletonian.

The On Call Program now serves more than 100 televised equine events annually, and the efforts from the 30 AAEP vets are completely voluntary.

"You have to know how to **put in plain language** a complicated injury to someone with limited knowledge—and do it in **two or three sentences,**" said Dr. Patricia Hogan.



NO BREAKDOWNS: In the 2002 Hambletonian, AAEP On Call veterinarian Patricia Hogan (inset) explained to the CBS audience why favored Andover Hall made a break. Fortunately, this has been the only harness racing incident where Hogan has made a television appearance as part of the On Call Program.

media was initially less than enthusiastic with these visiting vets stepping into the media environment, but after Tom Dawson of ESPN and Curt Gowdy Jr. jumped on board, others soon followed.

The early On Call Program offered a

Jones, and 2005 Preakness and Belmont winner Afleet Alex. She considers the On Call Program most beneficial for putting high-tech words into layman's language for the viewing public.

"The terminology can be confusing,

Hogan is happy to give her time, believing the program's worth cannot be underestimated when it comes to making the public comfortable with some of racing's harsher realities.

"Previously there would be tremendous speculation from people with no knowledge of what was happening," she said. "The broadcaster would give their take with no real information, and that led to falsities and speculations and inaccuracies. We want to be more factual and helpful at the same time. We want people to know the horse is being taken care of."

"It's very important for horse racing and vet medicine," added Bramlage. "Our goal is to come across as informed and competent, so uninformed fans get some degree of comfort that the people taking care of this injured horse know what they are doing. You don't want to hide any information. Put it in terms they can digest and deal with. If it's bad, tell them it's bad. If there is some degree of hope, make sure you let them know that, too."

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