

Bank of America



Challenge

CHANGES

Several key changes to the Bank of America Racing Challenge program go into effect this year.

By Michael Cusortelli

AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE RACING'S RICHEST PROGRAM, THE Bank of America Racing Challenge, will have a few changes as it heads into its 16th season in 2008.

For starters, all \$200 nomination, \$600 sustaining and \$2,500 late payments for regional races will be due on either the first or 15th of the month, depending on the date of the time trials and final. There will no longer be any grace periods for nomination, sustaining or late payments.

In past years, the regional race nomination payment was due on varied dates, usually 54 days or so before the date of the trials, and the sustaining payment was due about five weeks after that.

"This change will make it easier for people to keep track of deadline dates," said Kelvin Childers, an AQHA Racing Committee member and chairman of the Racing Challenge Task Force.

And gone is the day when host tracks will need to card short fields for trials for regional Challenge finals drawing a limited number of entries. In such cases, tracks will have an option to run trials. If they don't, 4-year-olds and older entered will have preference over 3-year-olds, and the track will have the option to assign preference to entered horses by using a six-person panel (selected by the AQHA Racing Council), which will use a point system to assign preference.

"We thought about making it a 'high-weights' preferred policy, but we didn't want the responsibility to fall on the racing secretaries at the host track to weight each horse and determine which horses got into the race," Childers said. "We thought it was best to make the decision on a national level."

Another change involves the \$300,000 Bank of America Challenge Championship (G1), one of the sport's richest races for aged horses and a Champion of Champions (G1) qualifier.

Starting this year, if the winner or runner-up of any regional Challenge Championship stakes declines the invitation to run in the Bank of America Challenge Championship, then an additional qualifying race at the Championship-host track will be run two or three weeks prior to the Challenge Championship final.

In previous years, the third-place horse in the region would get the invitation if the connections of the first- and second-place horses declined. The change is intended to improve the quality of the Bank of America Challenge Championship.

"This is a modified version of the Z. Wayne Griffin Director's Stakes (G3) format, which provides horses for the Champion of Champions at Los Alamitos," said Racing Challenge director Darrell Hare. "The only time this would kick in is if the first- or second-place horse in the regional final declines their invitations."

Claiming Modifications

BEGINNING THIS YEAR, THE FORT DODGE CLAIMING CHALLENGE races will be known as Fort Dodge Starter Allowance Challenge races. The distance of the races will remain at 350 yards, but the conditions have been changed to read: "for 3-year-olds and up which have started for a claiming price of \$5,000 or less during the 12 months prior to the sustaining and/or late payment deadline."

The Bank of America Racing Challenge is a \$5-million purse and bonus awards program, of which more than 60 percent is added money from AQHA corporate partners and host tracks. For more information on all of the 2008 changes, which include purse distribution changes and the elimination of stallion owner awards, visit www.aqharacing.com and click on the "Bank of America Racing Challenge" link on the left side of the page. 