

Rust: expect raft of betting-friendly BHA initiatives

By Howard Wright

BRITISH punters can expect a series of innovations emerging from the BHA in the coming months aimed at extending their involvement but with the key intent of creating a more inviting environment for betting operators.

BHA chief executive Nick Rust highlighted what lies ahead when he provided a snapshot of potential initiatives – more Thursday evening meetings, with a superbet; more Sunday fixtures; greater harmonisation of race times with Ireland and fewer clashes with overseas races; more information for punters, and even as yet unspecified rule changes.

“I want British racing to be in tune with betting operators and their customers,” he said. “Gone are the days when we can sit back and demand more from betting operators on moral grounds alone.

“British racing and our betting partners need to be able to create an environment of trust, and be prepared to try bold initiatives, and fail, on the journey to a better place.”

Attention to the evolving needs of online



betting operators was fundamental, Rust (*below*) maintained.

“One of the key issues we face is the fact that British racing is attempting to satisfy levy payers,” he said. “Consequently the focus for shaping races and fixtures has been on betting shops only. However, the shift to digital means this approach is already out of date.

“In many ways racing is the perfect product for the digital age. It’s great for second-screening throughout the day; it has good integrity; it’s a fascinating puzzle for analytical customers and a pure adrenaline rush to others. But our sport is some way off providing the perfect product.

“If we expect digital operators to pay a fair and sustainable amount to British racing, we need to offer them practical improvements to the fixture list.

“There will be more evening and Sunday meetings throughout the year, and thought given to how we can better organise fixtures to provide opportunities within the betting man’s wider world.

“Thursday evenings are very poor for football in the European sphere, and so are interna-

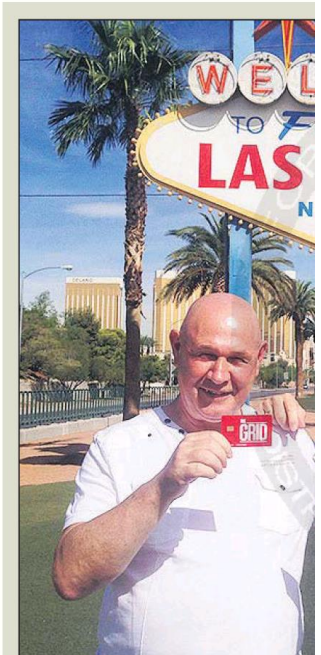
tional football weekends. No thought has been given to how we can showcase our products to the betting community at those times, but that will change.”

Adjusting off times to account for delays at tracks in Britain alone last year had added two per cent to levy returns by maximising betting investment, Rust said, and work on harmonising race times with the Irish authorities is going on.

Rust added: “We have an innovation group at the BHA, which is looking at major opportunities for media coverage and a superbet on Thursday evenings, as well as improvements to the fixture list, a project on sectional timing, and potential new bets.

“We’re also looking to innovate on race information. We don’t tell consumers everything at the moment, on wind operations for example, which undermines consumer confidence and is a thing of the dark ages. We need to reveal more information and the rules of racing are open to change to facilitate improvements in betting.”

Rust was speaking during a racing and betting forum in Paris organised by the European Pari-Mutuel Association in conjunction with the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities and the PMU. He outlined the gap between the value generated by British racing for the off-track betting industry and the value the sport receives in return, and the innovation gap that has resulted in betting on



Viva Las Vegas say

KEITH SKELTON (left) has thanked Ladbrokes after “thoroughly enjoying my visit to Vegas last week”, writes Jim Cremin.

The punter from Egremont, Cumbria, was one of a dozen winners, plus guests, sent there via a national shop promotion on The Grid card. He is pictured with friend

British racing falling behind other sports.

He said: “At a time of significant change in the betting industry, the secret to closing the gap between innovation in betting and consumer activity and funding is not to pine for a system in place in other countries, such as France or Ireland, but rather to embrace the consumer realities, build trust and work with the betting industry and consumers to create conditions for growth in betting on British racing, alongside a fair and sustainable funding mechanism.

“We don’t want to end up as a Kodak or an Agfa, but there’s a real possibility that could happen over the next 20 years if we don’t put our house in order.”

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