

Sunday, March 5, 2017

Breath of fresh, Canadian air

By scoring high on a number of common-sense initiatives, new Standardbred Canada CEO Dan Gall is already showing signs he could play a key role in helping racing make positive change in North America.

by Dave Briggs



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It's early days still in the term of Standardbred Canada president and CEO Dan Gall, but, so far, there's been a lot to like about the man, particularly when compared to his predecessor, John Gallinger.

Gall, who officially took the helm of SC last July – filling a position that had been vacant for a year – addressed the board of the United States Trotting Association (USTA) on Monday in Las Vegas, and spoke to a range of issues that were easy to check off under the heading of common sense. You could see some heads nodding in the room.

His call for greater unity between Standardbred Canada and the USTA, in particular, could be a harbinger of good things for the entire industry in North America. Both groups have many strengths and weaknesses and much to learn from the other.

"What it looks like for Standardbred Canada and the USTA, I think is wide open," he said.

The most notable departure between Gall and Gallinger is in the communication department – which makes sense since prior to his 17 years running a number of racetrack slot halls for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming (OLG) corporation, Gall was a radio man.

It is startling how many major U.S industry players have told me they never met Gallinger and couldn't pick him out



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Dave Briggs

Standardbred Canada CEO Dan Gall is already making a positive impression after just six months on the job.

of a lineup. He had a more insular style that I believe is out of step with an industry desperate for strong leadership. When choosing a new CEO, Standardbred Canada's board of directors made a conscious decision to go a drastically different direction.

Considering he's relatively new to the horse racing side of the gaming equation, Gall is also proving to be a quick learner. Since HRU interviewed him last June ([full story here](#)), Gall's increased knowledge of the major issues facing the industry has been impressive.

One of Gall's great first steps has been to consult many and be highly visible. Even more importantly, in a little more than six months on the job, he has been central in a couple of small, but key moves that show that he's more about helping the industry as a whole move forward rather than advancing Standardbred Canada's position in it.

The first was helping orchestrate the unification of the two major yearling sales. Having Standardbred Canada's Canadian Yearling Sale join forces with the Forest City Yearling Sale is long overdue and a major indication SC is now more willing to work with others for the betterment of the whole.

Gall's second common-sense project is working to achieve one set of racing rules for all of Canada. By taking the lead on this file, SC can have some influence on the provincial regulators that will need to sign off on universal rules. If accomplished, it would be great for participants and customers. No more would bettors have to wonder how the pylon and whipping rules differ in Alberta versus Ontario.

Sure, universal rules will likely be easier to achieve in Canada than in the U.S. because there's fewer racing jurisdictions north of the border, but it still is an initiative I would like the USTA to put more energy into trying to achieve.

I'm not naïve, I know it would be difficult, but it would be a huge step forward if all of North America raced under the

same set of rules.

For that reason and more, Gall's call to work better with the USTA is a biggie. I won't go so far as to suggest the two outfits should amalgamate, but a lot could be done to decrease duplication of services – separate computer records high on the list.

"I look forward to developing a strong and healthy relationship with the USTA," Gall said.

"Both the USTA and Standardbred Canada have been fighting for providing a single voice for this industry, and I think it's very important that we have consistency in our messaging as an industry going forward to any of the stakeholders we're addressing – whether they be political or our members."

He also spoke to increasing accountability and key performance indicators, something participants and governments alike have been demanding of the industry.

All of which shows Dan Gall gets it and understands the industry can ill afford the status quo.

We'll know over time if he can help turn that into the change the industry needs, but, for now, he's showing great promise.

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