

May 16, 1974

**'Sport of Kings' Glitter
Lacking on the "Backsides'**

By Larry Jerden
For Baptist Press

Life on the "backside" of a horse race track shares none of the glamour of the bright flowers, brilliant silks and high stakes projected by the "sport of kings" public image.

Life where the horses are housed is one of long hours, low pay, dirt, mud and loneliness.

Because of some caring Christians, an organization called Race Track Chaplaincy of America, Inc., is bringing hope to the men and women who work the backside.

About four years ago, Horace "Salty" Roberts, one of the men who worked the backside at Calder race track in the Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., area, called Al Dawson, superintendent of missions for Gulfstream (Southern) Baptist Association, on a Saturday afternoon.

"Are you responsible for Baptist missions in this area?" he asked.

"Yes," Dawson replied, wondering who was on the other end of the line.

"Well," came the sharp retort, "what are you doing to reach my friends on the backside? I'm a Christian, but most of my friends aren't."

Two days later, Dawson was "official" chaplain at Calder, and one phase of the movement that was to become Race Track Chaplaincy of America had begun.

Thanks to the initiative of men like Dawson and Roberts, the movement has grown until today it is nationwide. While some early conflict with anti-gambling crusaders has made denominational support an unlikely prospect, the independent organization has a strong Baptist flavor.

All the chaplains at present are Baptist, including an American Baptist in the North and an Independent Baptist in California. The majority of the board members are Baptist, but includes Methodist, Lutheran and Nazarene members.

The organization sponsors chaplains for three tracks in California, four in Florida, three in New Jersey and so far one, Churchill Downs, in Kentucky.

Chaplain Kelly Blanton of Hialeah, (Fla.) was the pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church for 11 years and lived about 10 blocks from the track.

"Like most people, I only knew that Hialeah had horses, not people. When Cliff Hoolsema was called as chaplain at Calder in 1971, I was curious. I went and saw the man-to-man challenge of the track ministry. Two months later, I was called as a chaplain."

Blanton discovered the hundreds who live and work on the backside. He discovered their day started at 4:30 in the morning, when the horses are fed, run, and groomed.

He found that, except for race days, the men, and an increasing number of women, were idle from about 11 a.m. until about 4, when the horses are fed a last time.

There is, of course, big money in horse racing.

But the large sums do not filter back to the backside. Even so, there is a backside hierarchy, with exercise boys on top, grooms next, and hot walkers on the bottom of the "pecking order."

Among all the backsiders, there are needs. "The avenue to a man is through his hurts," Blanton said, "and these men come to us with their hurts."

"There is a great deal of loneliness on the backside," Blanton explained. "All the chaplains have had the experience of men wanting to identify with them because they have no relatives--at least they claim no next of kin."

"For example, I was named executor of a man's estate because I found his will in his room while he was in the hospital."

Blanton said alcoholism is one of the greatest problems the men on the backside face, as they attempt to fill loneliness with the contents of a bottle.

"I minister a lot through the hospital, and I spend a lot of time ministering man-to-man," he said. "But first of all, I try to be a real friend, meeting real needs. In some ways I am similar to a military chaplain."

Chaplains have also been able to set up medical screening programs, since most of the backside previously received little or no medical attention. A recent result was the discovery of a TB case and one of glaucoma.

Chaplains' duties include services on Thursday (the backsiders work a seven-day week, and the ministry is determined not to "compete" with local churches); operating the "rec" room; maintaining a library; and providing other "chaplain-type" services.

In the latter category, the chaplain at Gulfstream and Churchill Downs last year recorded 26 professions of faith, made 22 jail visits, made bail for his men seven times (all seven repaid), conducted seven weddings and made 70 hospital calls.

In a way, the ministry is doing well. It is growing to a true national organization, and the race track owners themselves are financing the cost of the chaplains. The owners are enthusiastic about the ministry. But there are still unmet needs among "backsiders" and unfilled dreams on the part of Dawson, now president of the organization, and others in the ministry.

One dream is for a full-time coordinator for the program. A track owner is willing to put up money for a chaplain for his track, one supplied by the organization, but owners lose interest in hiring a man to coordinate the work.

The need for chaplains looms large. Dawson estimates a need for 20 full-time and 40 "mobile" chaplains to adequately man just the major thoroughbred tracks. That still would not touch the quarter-horse, harness, or fair-ground racing areas, he said.

No matter how large the organization grows, however, its greatest supporters will continue to be the backsiders--the "hot walkers," groomsmen, and exercise boys. As one said about the ministry, "It's about the greatest thing to happen to the backside." (BP)

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(BP) Photo sent to Baptist state papers.

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Americans United Loses
Case in Supreme Court

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 7-1 decision that Americans United for Separation of Church and State has no legal right to an injunction prohibiting the Internal Revenue Service from revoking its eligibility for tax-deductible contributions.

Associate Justice William O. Douglas took no part in the decision of the case, thereby creating the unusual 7-1 split.

The decision may not mark the end of legal action involving the tax status of the Washington-based organization. In fact, the decision includes a virtual invitation to Americans United to take its case back to court by applying for a refund of an employment taxes paid since April, 1969, when the IRS revoked the organization's privilege to receive tax deductible contributions.

When the IRS first informed Americans United its privilege of receiving tax-deductible gifts would no longer be allowed, the reason given was that the organization was involved in excessive lobbying activities. The action also meant that Americans United must pay the federal unemployment tax.

In oral arguments before the high court last January, Americans United challenged the IRS's authority to revoke its privileged status on constitutional grounds. Larger and more powerful organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, Americans United claimed, were not threatened with adverse IRS action. It further claimed that it was being penalized for activities protected by rights under the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

The IRS argued that the federal courts have no grounds on which to intervene in its procedures in determining the tax-exempt status of organizations. The Supreme Court's action agrees with the IRS position.

Americans United may now decide to renew legal action against the IRS based only on constitutional, and not on procedural grounds. Or, it may decide instead to accept the IRS ruling rather than take the expensive route of further litigation.

As a result of the 1969 IRS revocation of eligibility for tax-deductible contributions, Americans United formed in 1970 a separate organization, Americans United Research Foundation. The IRS promptly granted the new group complete tax exemption, including deductibility for donors.

The foundation, which operates with a separate board of trustees from Americans United itself, engages in research and publication rather than in direct lobbying activities. Although Americans United itself remains free from federal income taxation, gifts to the organization are no longer tax-deductible.

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story dated 5/15/74, titled "A Watermelon Cutter Turned Preacher Turned Educator," in 5th graph from the bottom, 2nd line, "momentos" should be spelled "mementos." Also, note in headline "watermelon" instead of "watermelong."

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Baptist Press