

Belmont Adds Three Marathon Stakes for 2016

By Blood-Horse Staff

Courtesy BloodHorse.com



Photo: Coglianese Photos

Innovation Economy won the two-mile Belmont Gold Cup Invitational in 2015.

A trio of new marathons, two for fillies and mares, will offer horsemen and fans at **Belmont Park** an opportunity to experience some of the longest stakes races available in American racing. The stakes include the \$200,000 Belmont Coronation Invitational at 1 15/16 miles (turf) for fillies and mares June 9; the \$150,000 Rags to Riches Invitational at 1 1/2 miles (dirt) for fillies and mares June 10, and the \$100,000 Flat Out, a 1 3/8-mile dirt race May 15 that will serve as a prep for the 1 1/2-mile Brooklyn Invitational (gr. II) June 11, Belmont Stakes Day.

"The additions of these staying races are very important to American racing, in general," said Martin Panza, NYRA's senior vice president of racing operations. "In the early days of American racing, stamina meant a great deal, and we want to give owners, breeders, and trainers these special opportunities in a small effort to bring back the importance of stamina in the breed. We anticipate that these races will also provide distinctive entertainment options for fans and horseplayers as well."

The Rags to Riches represents the only dirt race in the U.S. beyond 1 1/4 miles strictly for fillies and mares, said Panza, while the Belmont Coronation was created as a sister race to the two-mile Belmont Gold Cup Invitational, which will be run June 10.

"We had good field sizes for the first two runnings of the Belmont Gold Cup, and certainly there are fillies and mares out there that want to run the longer distances," Panza said. "We are fortunate in that we do have the purse money to offer these races, and it seems only logical with the size of our tracksô the main track at 1 1/2 miles and the turf courses at 1 5/16 miles and 1 3/16 milesô to offer these unique opportunities."

Panza also pointed out that as part of the three-day Belmont Stakes Racing Festival, invitees to the Rags to Riches and the Belmont Coronation are eligible for shipping subsidies, and that as invitationals, there are no fees for either race.

"We believe there are horses that may excel or prosper, if given the opportunity at these longer distances," Panza said. "We are pleased to be able to help the industry in offering these races."