

Belmont Park Re-Accredited By Safety Alliance

By Blood-Horse Staff



Photo: Coglianesse Photos/Lauren King
Belmont Park

The National Thoroughbred Racing Association announced that **Belmont Park** has earned re-accreditation from the NTRA Safety and Integrity Alliance. The track kicks off its spring/summer meet April 29.

The 59-day season runs through July 17 and is highlighted by one of America's premier racing days June 11 with the \$1.5 million Belmont Stakes (gr. I) headlining a stakes extravaganza that includes six grade I events.

The re-accreditation of Belmont Park— owned and operated by the New York Racing Association— was the culmination of a lengthy process that began with the track's completion of an extensive written application and continued as the track hosted several meetings with Alliance officials. An on-site review included inspections of all facets of the racing operations. Interviews were conducted with track executives, racetrack personnel, jockeys, owners, trainers, veterinarians, stewards and regulators.

The inspection team was comprised of veterinary and regulatory consultant Dr. Ron Jensen, security and integrity consultant Mike Kilpack, NTRA Safety and Integrity Alliance executive director Steve Koch, and racetrack operations consultant Richard Lewis.

Alliance certification standards address an extensive list of safety and integrity concerns within six broad areas: injury reporting and prevention; creating a safer racing environment; aftercare and transition of retired racehorses; uniform medication and testing; safety research; and wagering security.

"The New York Racing Association is continuously striving to create a safe environment for our equine and human athletes," NYRA senior vice president of racing operations Martin Panza said. "We greatly appreciate the help that the NTRA provides in making us aware of best practices allowing NYRA to excel in this arena. Integrity is the foundation of our sport and NYRA couldn't find a better partner in this than the NTRA through the accreditation program."

Belmont is one of three racetracks that make up the NYRA franchise along with **Aqueduct Racetrack** and **Saratoga Race Course**. All three NYRA racetracks have been accredited since 2009, the alliance's first year. Accreditations and re-accreditations carry an effective period of two years.

The NTRA's Koch, who coordinated the inspections, gave special recognition to Panza. Koch also praised steward Braulio Baeza Jr., safety steward Hugh Gallagher, and vice president of facilities and racing services Glen Kozak. He noted they all helped create a culture of safety.

"Martin, Glen, Braulio, Hugh and the entire team that makes New York racing great bring tremendous results to the all-important safety and integrity mission," Koch said. "The alliance benefits and the entire industry benefits from their best practice mode of operations."

Belmont is one of 23 racing facilities fully accredited by the alliance— including all three of the NYRA tracks— that together host 94 percent of grade I stakes and attract more than 70% of North American pari-mutuel handle.