

Racing shutdown looms

A shutdown of racing at Caymanas Park looms this Saturday and beyond with disgruntled trainers taking a decision not to nominate horses.

This move by the trainers from both associations, along with other industry stakeholders representing by owners and grooms associations, as well as the Jockeys' Guild, is in response to a 4.8 per cent purse cut proposed by Caymanas Track Limited (CTL), effective May 1. At a press conference at Caymanas Park on March 19, CTL chairman Joseph A. Matalon announced the purse cuts along with a 12-month suspension of breeder's bonus in order to effect savings of \$74 million by the cash-strapped promoting company for the next 12 months. Matalon had said the alternative was "to close down Caymanas Park until it is divested". Addressing a large turnout in the Trainers' Room at Caymanas Park yesterday, Vin Edwards, president of the Jamaica Trainers' Association, said the stakeholders are asked to make sacrifices, while the waste continues at CTL against the background of indifference by the government, which owns the racetrack. "I do not agree with the cuts, because it can't work," declared Edwards. "We are the means of production and I am asking you not to nominate any horses now that the purse cuts are to be enforced ... "We are not only seeking dialogue, but asking for a waiver, as there are other areas that CTL could effect cuts in its operations to put its financial affairs in order," added Edwards. Edwards disclosed that the position of the trainers and the impending disruption in racing was put to Caymanas Track Limited's CEO Cedric Stewart and a director at a recent meeting, but despite this, the cuts were confirmed in the condition booklet for May. Edwards proposed a number of measures to defuse the situation.

They include: (a) the removal of Matalon as chairman of CTL; (b) the collection of revenues owed to CTL by the OTB's amounting to \$76 million; (c) staff restructuring at CTL in line with its dire financial position; (d) tackling property corruption; (e) resumption of Sunday racing now that Supreme Ventures Limited has been given approval to sell the lotto on Sundays; and (f) renewed calls for Finance Minister Dr Peter Phillips to meet with stakeholders despite failing to respond to their recent letter calling for his intervention. When contacted yesterday, Stewart, CEO of CTL, said he was made aware of the recent development and will be doing everything in his power to avert a shutdown. "The dialogue will continue and in this respect a meeting has been scheduled with the stakeholders for this morning at Caymanas Park," he disclosed. "We will be seeking a compromise to save the race meet, and even at this stage I feel optimistic that racing will be held on Saturday," added Stewart, a prominent owner. Also addressing the stakeholders was Bernard Vincent, first vice-president of the United Racehorse Trainers' Association.