

HORSE RACING IN JAPAN 2014



Tokyo Yushun (Japanese Derby) at Tokyo Racecourse

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Preface

Modern horse racing in Japan had its beginnings in racing events that were organized by foreign residents of Yokohama in 1862. In 1861, when Japan was about to move from the feudal system into the Meiji Restoration, foreign residents living in Yokohama, predominantly British, introduced the first Western-style horse racing by establishing the Yokohama Race Club to Japan. Western style horse racing was held in foreign enclaves, and hence, unfortunately, very little is known or recorded about initial era in Japan's modern horse racing history.

At about the same time that the name of the Japanese central city was changed from Edo to Tokyo, Western-style horse racing began to be found in the major metropolitan cities across the country. In 1906, the government embarked on a policy which tacitly allowed to bet. This led to the introduction of modern horse racing featuring sales of betting tickets in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and other metropolitan cities, from which most racing operations benefited.

However, this profitable system was short lived; two years later, the government prohibited betting and instituted a system of paying direct subsidies for prize money and other horse racing expenses.

During this subsequent period of government-subsidized horse racing, prominent legislators, businessmen, as well as breeders, began active efforts to introduce a horse racing law. Eventually the government began to take proactive position to promote horse racing in order to expand breeding in Japan and to improve quality of the Japanese horses. In 1923, horse racing legislation, so greatly desired by the horse racing industry, was enacted and led to the formation of 11 racing clubs. Horse racing accompanied by the legal sale of betting tickets was thus established. Shortly thereafter, the Imperial Racing Society was established as a horse racing authority of 11 racing clubs, and was responsible for the rules of racing, which served as a model for the rules of the individual racing clubs. The Imperial Racing Society defined the registration of racing colors, the education of trainers, and the licensing of jockeys, among other horse racing functions. The Horse racing Law underwent a major revision in 1936, which saw the formation of the Japan Racing Society which legally merged the 11 racing clubs and the Imperial Racing Society in their entirety, including their facilities and horse racing functions.

This reform brought favorable account on horse racing in Japan, constituting the Japanese Derby as well as other classic races, along with a complete change and improvement in racing itself. There were also dramatic increases in the turnover as well as attendance, marking the birth of modern horse racing in Japan as it exists today. In 1941, Saint Lite became the first Triple Crown winner in Japan.

However, during the latter part of World War II, the racecourses were forced to suspend operations and the most historic of the modern racecourses, Yokohama, was commanded by the government for military use.

The termination of hostilities saw an immediate resumption of horse racing, when in 1946, Tokyo and Kyoto began holding race meetings. Also, 1947 brought a new type of betting "quinella" for the first time in Japan. In 1948, a new Horse racing Law was introduced, whereby the Japan Racing Society was abolished and under the new law, the government (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) took total control of horse racing. Although this "government horse racing" continued much the same as before, the turnover did not increase throughout this extremely difficult period. In 1954, the Horse racing Law was amended again, to enact the Japan Racing Association Law. This established the Japan Racing Association, or as it is now known as JRA, which took over the entire horse racing functions and operations of government horse racing. These laws not only provided for "national racing" in Japan, but also for the legalization and operation of "regional public racing" as a separate system to that of national racing.