

Betfair opens account as bookies call for access to big boys' internet action

Betfair made a low-key legalised debut matching wagers out of Australia yesterday while bookmaking rivals renewed calls for race-day access to internet betting.

Robbie Waterhouse has no doubt that NSW bookmakers should be allowed to view Betfair's site and those of corporate betting agencies based in the territories while they are operating on racetracks.

„It makes it harder for us bookmakers to compete,“ he said at Canterbury yesterday. „We cannot know what our competitors are doing.“

Australian Bookmakers' Association chief executive Tim Ryan believes it is ludicrous members do not have access to the internet. He confirmed infrastructure was in place to set up a centralised internet bookmaking market.

Ryan has worked closely with the NSW Bookmakers Co-op in developing software enabling punters with accounts to bet in a new „real time“ market which he believes would curb the growth of Betfair and corporate bookmakers, who are turning over more than \$ 2 billion annually.

„We were in a position to offer the service a year ago but we are being frustrated by Racing NSW,“ Ryan said.

The UK-based Betfair kicked off its legalised Australian operation out of Tasmania, with spokesman Andrew Twaits revealing the exchange already had 2000 active customers Down Under. „We expect an influx of new customers over the next couple of weeks,“ Twaits said.

Betfair, which is in a 50-50 joint venture in Australia with Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, has been allowing its punters to match bets on Australian racing since the spring of 2004, despite racing authorities vehemently opposing it. Integrity issues were of major concern, but Twaits said: „As of today, racing stewards around the country will have access to Betfair customer details for the purposes of any inquiry by applying through the Tasmanian Gaming Commission.“

Clinton Payne reports: three-time Melbourne Cup-winning jockey Glen Boss will represent Australia in the Shergar Cup jockeys challenge at Royal Ascot in August.

„With all the success that he’s had, especially over the last couple of years, Glen was the automatic choice,“ Nick Smith, head of public relations for Ascot racecourse, said at Canterbury yesterday. „It’s a true international jockeys series over six races where all the competing jockeys ride in five of the six races and sit one out.“

Boss, who will debut in Europe, said: „I’m looking to get over there in June for the reopening of the Royal Ascot track with a view to getting some rides at the meeting, and I’ll stay until the series in August.“