

It's About Time...

Medication and Drug Testing in California Horse Racing

by Marsha J. Naify



In August of 2006, I was appointed the chair of TOC's Medication and Integrity Committee, succeeding Marvin Malmuth in a position that is critical in shaping the future of horse racing in California. Those were big shoes to fill. During Malmuth's tenure, TCO₂ testing for California race horses had become a reality, and many goals, such as eliminating the use of dangerously high toe grabs, had been realized. Due to the ongoing efforts of the current CHRB board and other industry groups, including the California Thoroughbred Trainers (yes, Virginia, there are honest trainers in this state), California is on the verge of enacting its toughest regulations yet for therapeutic medications and illegal drugs. And we have only just begun.

Our job at the TOC on these issues of medication, drug testing and penalties is clear: owners have consistently asked us to make sure that stiffer penalties and fines are enacted in the State for those caught cheating or otherwise violating the rules of racing, whether they

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be trainers, owners or veterinarians. The board has fully embraced that challenge, and those on the Medication and Integrity Committee have been hard at work tackling every issue and attending every CHRB board meeting to make sure that California racing is kept honest and clean.

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California is not alone in this endeavor; this is a national issue. Several years ago, the national Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC) was formed to tackle these issues head on. Their focus has been to develop guidelines that individual states can adopt in regulating medication and drugs, as well as adopting penalty guidelines. This is not an easy task. Scientific studies must be done on race horses that will hold up under medical, legal and statistical scrutiny. Withdrawal times and dosages must be calculated for every therapeutic medication used on horses. Testing methods for illegal drugs must be developed and standardized, and finally penalty guidelines must be written and enforced. All of this takes money, time and expertise. The RMTC, composed of a wide array of industry representatives from across the country, has its work cut out for it.

The first part of this huge process is complete: the RMTC published recommendations on penalty guidelines. The CHRB reviewed the recommendations and, with input from the TOC, voted to adopt a new set of guidelines that are out for public comment before implementation. These guidelines are available on the CHRB web site, at www.chrb.ca.gov, under "Rules."

The TOC's input into this process has been extensive, and we are in the process of reviewing the final set of guidelines

and penalties for any further changes needed. A key complaint among owners was the lack of proper penalties and fines for trainers that were suspended. A major component of the new guidelines, made at TOC's suggestion, is that any licensed trainer that is suspended for 60 days or more must be banned from the track, and must forfeit all stall space, including the removal of all their property and equipment. Virtually, their barn is to be completely dismantled and they are to cease doing business. Fines for trainers who are guilty of drug violations are greatly increased, and veterinarians who are found guilty of drug violations are also dealt with harshly.

Additionally, included in the proposed CHRB rule changes is a recommendation that California adopt the ARCI (Association of Racing Commissioners International) guidelines for medications and drugs. The bottom line is that both the CHRB and the TOC are working hard to keep integrity a part of California horse racing.

This is only the beginning. The RMTC is in the process of recommending dosage levels and withdrawal times for eight major widely-used therapeutic drugs. A program is in the works that would provide an ongoing research stable of horses in Kentucky, and there is a plan to eliminate the use of steroids in horses for performance enhancement.

The TOC Medication and Integrity Committee believes that California must be a leader in this arena. We will continue to work with the CHRB, as well as monitor their meetings and activities, to see that the industry is being served. We will continue to work with the California Trainers organization which has shown a lot of leadership and courage in being willing to tackle these issues as well. Only by working as partners can California horse racing and breeding organizations ensure the purity of the sport. Your TOC Medication Committee will continue to pioneer new ideas on issues relating to auctions, medication and drug testing, veterinary records, claiming races, track security and overall industry welfare. For the health of the horse, the safety of the jockeys and the protection of all owners, the TOC board is committed to making sure that integrity remains issue number one for California racing.

If you are interested in getting in touch with the TOC Medication & Integrity Committee, or would like to participate in committee meetings, please contact staff liaison Guy Lamothe at (626) 574-6621, or by email at glamothe@toconline.com.

