



ADVOCACY • INTEGRITY • LEADERSHIP

May 23, 2019

Joe Perskie
Executive Producer
HBO Real Sports
HBO Building
1100 Avenue of the Americas
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Mr. Perskie,

Once again, HBO's Real Sports presents a slanted, sensational and inaccurate view of horse racing by failing to learn about or acknowledge the important progress our entire industry is making with respect to safety, welfare and aftercare. While we understand the media's right to cover a significant story, we will not tolerate the painting of our sport and our participants with inaccurate broad brush strokes.

When discussing equine drug testing protocols, you chose to focus on France. Of course, you chose not to acknowledge that U.S. horse racing has one of the most stringent post-race drug-testing programs in any professional sport. In the U.S., we test multiple horses from every race, every day. In 2018, a total of 258,920 tests were conducted in the U.S., according to the Association of Racing Commissioners International. Also, all but one racing jurisdiction now tests their samples using nationally and internationally accredited laboratories that are subjected to a stringent external quality assurance program. And we have recently developed an expansive out of competition testing program including a corresponding prohibited substances list and several states are now using the program.

The fact is, in all U.S. racing jurisdictions, painkillers, stimulants and performance-enhancing substances are strictly prohibited and the medication known as Lasix is the only medication that can legally be administered to a horse on race day. You also failed to mention that anabolic steroids have been eliminated from U.S. racing competition since 2009. The industry is also considering how best to limit the use and structure of the riding crop to protect both horse and rider.

In discussing horse slaughter, while replaying disgusting video used from a decade-old story, you failed to mention that most anyone in horse racing who leads a race horse to slaughter these days is leading himself right out of the business and the sport of horse racing as many racetracks now ban such a person from further racing at that track. Conveniently left out of your report was the fact that the industry has a national Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance (TAA) that has accredited more than 70 Thoroughbred retirement facilities around the country.

Today, possibly the strongest push for a higher degree of safety and integrity in racing is actually coming from within the racing industry. As much as HBO wanted to ignore any facts that countered its negative narrative, the industry is working every day to provide a safer environment for our equine and human athletes.

The fact is The Jockey Club's Equine Injury Database (EID) proves undeniably that equine fatalities are on the decline. There has been a 16% reduction in fatalities nationwide since the inception of the EID and we are now in a position to mine the valuable data compiled by the EID over many years to identify risk factors. How HBO allowed a single individual to state that the industry is responsible for 2,000 equine fatalities annually without presenting any credible supporting data is in need of further examination and explanation.

The fact is since its inception a decade ago, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association's (NTRA) Safety and Integrity Alliance has led to a safer racing environment at racetracks across the country. The Alliance was at the forefront of the aftercare movement through the institution of programs at racetracks across the country, a fact ignored by HBO as it reverted to old footage to cast our sport in a negative light. Through the Alliance, there are racing surfaces standards as well as training and continuing education programs for all racetrack employees having direct contact with the horse. The latest figures from the Equine Injury Database also show that Alliance-accredited racetracks that disclose their fatality rates achieved the lowest average rate for equine fatalities per 1,000 starts—1.45. Thus, Alliance accreditation is moving the needle in the right direction for our industry.

Also, the industry has created the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC) that now provides critical support to regulatory authorities across the U.S. Consisting of 23 industry stakeholder organizations, the RMTC ensures racehorse safety and welfare by developing science-based uniform medications regulations, establishing high quality drug testing standards and coordinating illicit substance research. The RMTC has developed a national uniform medication program that is in the process of adoption across the country and has created a tactical research program to help rid the industry of persistent cheaters.

In addition, steps are being taken in jurisdictions across the nation to enhance the safety and welfare protocols already in place at many tracks. In March, the entire Mid-Atlantic region's Thoroughbred racing industry voted unanimously to formally adopt and fully implement a long-term and forward-thinking Strategic Plan to Reduce Equine Fatalities. Many phases of the plan are already in practice stemming from the 2012 New York Task Force Report on Race Horse Health and Safety, which initially served as the model for regional and national industry reform. Since regional implementation of the task force's recommendations, the incidence of equine racing fatalities in the Mid-Atlantic region has declined 29% based on Equine Injury Database statistics. At New York Racing Association (NYRA) tracks alone, the incidence of equine racing fatalities in 2018 was 1.20 per 1,000 starts, the lowest fatality rate in the state in decades.

In April, The Stronach Group, owners of Santa Anita Park, Golden Gate Fields, Gulfstream Park, and the Maryland Jockey Club, and Thoroughbred Owners of California adopted safety and welfare protocols that are among the most stringent in the world. Major racing organizations like Churchill Downs, the New York Racing Association, Del Mar, Keeneland, Oaklawn Park and the Breeders' Cup, among others, followed with safety and integrity reforms that will bring their racing more in line with international standards.

In April, the NTRA announced a \$100,000 gift to the University of Kentucky (UK) to go toward the establishment of an Equine Surfaces and Safety Laboratory. The laboratory will allow UK to further scientifically examine racing surfaces with the express purpose of enhancing racing safety. Within weeks, a number of other major racing organizations contributed more than \$1.5 million toward safety research.

The fact is those questioning the devotion of horse people to their equine athletes need only to spend a morning walking barns to have such concerns alleviated. When the destruction of the Lilac Fire descended onto San Luis Rey Downs last year, the world watched as our California horse people bravely put their lives at risk by running into burning barns to save the animals that are their world - and then worked tirelessly in the aftermath to collectively heal emotional and physical wounds. And if ever there was an image which embodied the beauty of this sport and the powerful hold these horses have over us, it is the now viral video of the young groom dropping to her knees, awash in tears and overcome with euphoria as she watched her charge War of Will capture the 144th Preakness Stakes.

The fact is we will continue to work every day to do right by the athletes who make our sport so unique. And we readily acknowledge that we must do even more to reduce equine fatalities and work harder to find new homes and second careers for our retired horses. But to suggest we're not actively pursuing meaningful change is to short-change those who have tirelessly devoted their lives to these magnificent animals.

We in horse racing are accountable to our equine and human athletes and our customers who participate with their dollars in one of America's oldest and greatest sports. HBO is accountable to its viewers and the sports it decides to cover. In this instance, your Real Sports segment on horse racing was profoundly distorted and intentionally vague. Horse racing and your viewers deserve better.

Sincerely,

Alexander Waldrop
President and Chief Executive Officer,
National Thoroughbred Racing Association

CC: John Stankey, CEO, WarnerMedia
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