

To: Ontario Racing Commission  
Rules Committee  
Whipping Bylaw  
Ontario Standardbred Racing

To begin with, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to vent my comments on whipping in Ontario harness racing.

Who am I?

Involved for over 55 years in the breeding, training and some racing of standardbreds, although I personally never drove in serious competitions.

I journal a weekly article called "Horse Chatter" for the Ingersoll Times (10,000 circulation) for well over fifty years.

I am also an avid observer of nightly harness racing on the HPI Horseplayer Interactive watching races from around the continent.

Included in this submission is an article I wrote on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999 just following your updated bylaw on whipping in standardbred racing in Ontario.

As a keen observer of the use of whips in the continents' harness racing, may I comment on my personal observations?

Whips cannot be banned as some advocates have demanded!

Used discretionary, whips are a vital piece of equipment in the disciplinary and steering of a race horse. It would be unthinkable and totally uncontrollable to use the reins although they do serve a purpose in the stretch drive in concert with the whip.

During my nightly observations, excessive whipping is more prevalent in racing jurisdictions outside of Ontario.

For instance, some (not all) reinsmen at the Medowlands are rather brutal in their lengthy stretch drives. But let us focus on Ontario.

We all should appreciate that the use of whips is a personal trait with the driver. Some cannot refrain from over use, particularly when the animal is giving all it has with nothing left in the "tank".

What disturbs me more than the close finishes, is those reinsmen who are whacking their mounts when they are hopelessly out of it or those drivers who are unjustifiably whipping when they are handy winners by several lengths. Going for a new career speed mark or just keeping the 'cheaters' awake are the normal excuses.

For close finishes, again it is the personal ambitions of the driver. The use of the reins with a little whip tap are appropriate when challenging for a cheque.

As for being in contention at the wire for a win, it remains the judgement of the driver for the use of the whip on their mount.

Don McElroy is a neighbour of ours in Ingersoll.

Don has captured many driving championships on the "B" circuit in Southwestern Ontario with frugal reining of harness horses. His trait is striking the wheel hub rather than whipping the horse in close finishes.

A recent discussion with Mr. McElroy conveying his thoughts.

"It is my desire to moderately hit my horse once when making a move past the half. For some horses, it gets them going and reduces the urging late in the mile"!

McElroy says that there is too much whipping in the stretch when a horse is out of the money but "for those drivers close to winning, the discretionary use of whips is necessary".

"It is only fair to the trainer and the people paying the bills!" concluded McElroy.

As a fan, I don't think there are many complaining of excessive whipping. But for the Bettor, there isn't enough whipping! Whips are not weapons!

For the O.R.C. judges, I appreciate monitoring the many infractions is more vital in the outcome of a race than the whipping rules.

However, there are obvious misuse of whips that could be enforced.

Thank you again for this opportunity to have something to say and wishing you all good judgement as enforcers!

Would appreciate a refresher on the "Whipping Rule" harness horses and any updates and enforcing to further recommendations.

Don McNiven  
Harness Racing Fraternity

McGill Times Feb. 24, 1999

# Fans "whup" the perception

Who said that people were staying away from horse racing because of too much whipping?

When the contentious whipping controversy came to a head late last year, many of those proponents who supported a crackdown on excessive whipping on Ontario harness race tracks proclaimed that people were not attending live horse races because of what they termed "abusive whipping."

However, many others within the industry disputed the claim and felt it was just a front in order to precipitate some action against excessive swats from the drivers.

According to Jean Major, Director of the Ontario Racing Commission, action had to be implemented because of certain facets of ongoing concerns that whipping had to be curtailed for whatever reason.

"It was the folks within the industry who were complaining about the whipping," said Major. "We (commission) weren't receiving anything here from the public, but it was from, for example, the

marketing manager at Elmira Raceway who heard or witnessed people who were shocked and dismayed at the whipping and vowed to him that they would never come back. It was those kind of anecdotal scenarios that we were dealing with."

Woodbine speaks out Pursuing the perception of upset fans over whipping, this corner visited Canada's mecca of horse racing, Woodbine in Toronto.

Undoubtedly, there is no other place to ask but the Ontario Jockey Club and its fans where they be almost two-thirds of this country's total annual wagering. To date in 1999, Woodbine's harness handle is almost \$1.3 billion per program.

"In all of my years here, I've never had a complaint of abusive whipping at our tracks," claimed Bruce Murray, manager of media communications for the OJC. "Obviously, it's not a concern with our fans."

In fact, a stroll through the general grandstand area at the spacious Woodbine substantiated management's claim.

"Is there too much whipping out there?" and "Would you or have you ever considered staying away because of too much whipping?" were questions asked of nearly 100 fans.

The responses were unanimous, including declarations like "Whipping is an important part of this game."

"No way, there isn't enough whipping at times. Another swat in that last race and I would have cashed in a \$3,000 triactor. My horse lost by an inch."

The replies were affirmative in support of whipping. Be mindful that most of those questioned are the diehard core of the betting public. They are the "life blood" of the industry.

Admittedly, there were a couple of occasional fans who felt drivers whipped too much, but they would never stay away.

There was a number of fans who noticed a little less whipping since the recent crackdown. But the results are still the same. You lose some and you win some.

When the Ontario-based reinsmen rebelled against proposed rule changes on whipping last month, cooler heads prevailed.

The racing commission and drivers got together and hammered out a 90 day trial period for some changes.

Major has seen some positive results for which drivers are adjusting to less whipping.

"Within the 90 day period, it is important that we keep the line of communication open and do any tinkering that needs to be done," said Major. "In fact, we're all getting together next month to go over things and most importantly, get feedback from all those involved. Right now, the drivers are just receiving "warnings" from the judges reviewing videos and sitting down. We're not enforcing fines or suspensions to anyone for the rest of the month."

Are droves of people staying away because of too much whipping?

Those millions who attend horse races every year will dispute such nonsense. And so will we.