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Wendy Hoogeveen  
Director of Industry Development and Support

Subject: Use of the Whip;

The use of the whip has been a controversial subject both here in Ontario and in racing jurisdictions worldwide. Recently the Ontario Racing Commission has asked for submissions regarding the use of the whip in an effort to meet this subject head on.

I feel I am qualified to offer a viewpoint on the subject. First I have been a judge with the Ontario Racing Commission for approximately 8 years primarily with the Standardbred side but I have also worked as a Steward for the Thoroughbreds and Quarterhorses so I have the unique privilege of observing the use of the whip and the differences as to how rules are perceived and applied. I also have the benefit of being a lifelong horseman. My family and myself have participated in horse sports ranging from barrel racing and rodeo to hunter/jumper and competitive driving. I have also been a thoroughbred exercise boy and a trainer/driver of Standardbred racehorses. I am very familiar with the whip and its intended usage.

The whip is a tool. In fact it is the only tool available to a rider or driver while contesting a race. The advocates of barring the use of the whip are ignoring the necessity of a whip both for safety reasons i.e. a rider using it at the correct moment to straighten a horse, and as a means of propelling a horse forward. I was present at the Rules Committee several years ago when the whipping issue was brought forward and subsequently led to creation of the current ORC whipping rules. I believe strongly that since that time in the late nineties that enforcement of the whip has increased and successfully reduced the incorrect use of the whip. I believe that continued diligence on the part of Judges and Stewards is the most effective manner to control improper whip usage.

The whip itself could use some modifications. Currently the Thoroughbreds are experimenting with new "soft whips" I applaud those that are taking the initiative to promote their use. On the Standardbred side the rawhide whip was banned several years ago. However I do believe that the snapper or lash that is allowed on current Standardbred whips should be removed totally or at the very least reduced to a length of 2 and ½ inches. Its sole purpose is to sting a horse. It is the snapper that cuts a horse particularly if the whip gets low in the stifle area. The rules call for a 6-inch snapper. Whips are commonly sold with a longer snapper and it is not uncommon for some to try and replace the snapper with one from a training whip, which could be 8 to 10 inches long. Paddock judges are on a never ending policing of this when they are aware that it is an issue. The current penalties for misuse of this aspect are not strict enough.

Can horse racing be contested without whips? Absolutely it can. But lets be fair to the riders and drivers whose job it is to win races. Moderate use of the whip in a non-abusive manner can be a useful tool. Abusive use of whip cannot and should not be

tolerated. Clear and concise interpretations of the whipping rules are required. I believe that most of the judges and stewards are rising to the challenge of increased enforcement of the whipping rules. I believe that we have made great progress in reducing improper whip usage as well as educating the riders and drivers as to what is expected from them.

I do question the contradiction that appears to exist, when we allow racetracks to simulcast product from jurisdictions where it seems there is little enforcement of the whipping rules. It's hard to tell the difference on a bank of televisions if the race is from Ontario or some other place. If perception of whipping is of such great concern why do we not ban product from racing jurisdictions that are not reciprocal with their whipping rules.

I also believe that the industry needs to educate the public in a better fashion about what we are doing to deal with the whipping issue. Promoting through print and video about what violations we are dealing with, changes to whip styles and the diligence used to oversee the use of the whip in racing would be useful in changing the public perception of the whip.

The ORC should be commended for bringing the issue to the forefront and for asking for submissions. It is mandatory that the Commission get feedback from all aspects of the industry as well as the general public. I hope that my perspective will be of some value to the decision makers.

Neil McCoag

