



September 9, 2008

To: Ontario Racing Commission

In regard to the whipping rule discussion, I would like to voice my opinion.

As a person that have been heavily involved in the harness racing industry, in North America and in Europe for over four decades, I have seen both sides of the story, close up. Something has to be done about this, since it is definitively a problem for our sport.

Europe have a variation of rules. As Klaus Koch has described, Norway has a no whip allowed rule and that is not the way to go, since people get very inventive in other ways, and it is worse for the horse. In addition, they don't have the possibility to correct the horse in a proper way, when a situation occur. In Sweden, the rule is that the driver can not hold both lines in one hand. In addition, each hand has to stay in it's handhold! Which I see as very important. This way the driver can hold full control of the horse down the stretch and drive the horse in a controlled and straight manner. They also have a limited number of taps on the horse allowed.

New people to our business and people from parts of Europe really are shocked when they see a horse race over here, due to the excess whipping. This is very important for different reasons. Attracting new people to our sport is of course a necessity for survival and we need these people to help us promote what they see on their first visits to the track. If it is hard whipping of animals, that will be what they will tell their friends, in many cases. The European market is invaluable to the existence of our owners, trainers and breeders, as we all are aware of. We want them to love our sport and our horses, so they want to own horses that are racing over here and so that they want to buy our horses with hopes to bring them to Europe for a continuation of their careers.

As it is, many people are turned off by the whipping and talks about drugs in our sport. We need to change our image and to me, it is unbelievable that this kind of whipping is still allowed. To suggest that, the same treatment of an animal would be ok outside of the racetrack, would be horrific. Why is it allowed on the racetrack?

My suggestion would be to enforce a rule that the driver has to hold each hand in it's intended handhold at all time, restrict the length of the whip and only allowed limited whipping to encourage the horse and to control the horse. It has of course to be enforced and a driver has to get fined or days, accordingly. I already know, that this works, since it is being done already. The image of the sport in Sweden has made harness racing to one of that countries most successful sports overall, with a high attendance and shown on public television each and every day. They also have the worlds most successful betting, in form of the V75, which is played by a large number of that countries whole population and the support of the corporate world, who is heavily involved in sponsoring harness racing, since they have no problem to be associated with the sport!

I commend Pompano Park to have taken the first step to a more public friendly harness racing, and hope that all other jurisdictions will follow, in Canada and the US.

Regards

Perry Soderberg