

Testimony of Marty Irby
Executive Director
Animal Wellness Action
before the
U.S. House Subcommittee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
H.R. 1754, "The Horseracing Integrity Act"
January 28, 2020

On behalf of Animal Wellness Action, one of the nation's leading animal protection organizations on Capitol Hill, I submit this testimony in support of H.R. 1754, the Horseracing Integrity Act. I express my sincere thanks to Chair Jan Schakowsky and Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers for conducting this hearing and offer special thanks to Representatives Paul Tonko, and, Andy Barr for introducing this reform effort. I also express thanks to Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Frank Pallone and Ranking Member Greg Walden for their participation in this process. This hearing builds on the testimony and other information gathered during the 2018 hearing conducted before the Subcommittee on H.R. 2651 in the 115th Congress.

I first want to underscore that Animal Wellness Action does not oppose horseracing. We join with many horse owners, breeders, trainers, and racing enthusiasts in speaking out on the broader topic of the protection of horses within the American horseracing industry and across the greater equine world. We seek to promote the proper stewardship of horses at every stage of their lives, including during their racing careers. We are deeply concerned about on- and off-track risks to the horses, including catastrophic injuries sustained during racing.

America was built on the backs of horses, and they have always played a central role in the economy and culture of the United States. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and the very least we must do is ensure their safety, welfare, and protection.

Horses are dying at alarming rates on racetracks across the country, posing a serious animal wellness problem. 2019 was a tumultuous and tragic year in American horseracing, and 2020 has begun in quite the same vein. This epidemic has gained nationwide attention and concern – 42 horses have died at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, California since December of 2018. There have been countless deaths on U.S. racetracks that continue year after year, decade after decade.

While there are a number of issues at play concerning fatal injuries to horses in American racing, the overuse of therapeutic drugs - such as powerful pain-masking agents – is one area where change is desperately needed. The rampant doping and abuse of medication within

American horseracing, along with the absence of a national regulatory body, pose unacceptable health risks to horses. Any gaming industry that takes shortcuts on animal protection and that cheats or misleads the betting public will see an erosion in public support and consequently in the future viability of the sport. Horses that need to be trained or raced under the influence of any performance-enhancing or pain-masking drugs should not be doing so and should be resting instead.

As a lifelong horseman who began riding unassisted at the age of three, I have spent the vast majority of my life in the presence of horses, and most of the past decade working to protect them. I understand their biology, their social characteristics, behaviors, and instincts, and I believe that horses are born to run.

Equine behavior is best understood from the view that as prey animals, horses are uniquely sensitive, and their first reaction to a threat is often to flee. But humans domesticated horses thousands of years ago, and they have served us in the establishment and construction of our modern-day society. Through selective breeding, some breeds of horses have been bred to be quite docile, particularly certain large draft horses. On the other hand, more athletic breeds were selected for traits such as speed, agility, alertness, and endurance; building on natural qualities that extended from their wild ancestors. These are the same traits carried today by the breeds of horses we see in racing competition, traits that predispose them to inherent vulnerabilities when overworked, resulting in painful and often permanent injuries. Simply masking pain or injury for the benefit of human exploitation and capital gain has created an equine welfare crisis within the racing community and public domain alike.

For the past five years, I have worked in concert with the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity to advance the Horseracing Integrity Act in order to bring a higher standard of care and safety for the horses, save equine lives, and bring integrity back to the sport. This goal is achievable for the horseracing industry, and it's a great hope of mine that Congress will ensure these results by passing the Horseracing Integrity Act so the measure can set a new standard and become the law of the land.

Today horseracing operates under an outdated, state-based, balkanized patchwork of medication rules that creates confusion and risk for owners and trainers and contains gaps in rules and enforcement. The Horseracing Integrity Act would greatly improve regulatory standards, ban the use of all medications on race day, and level the playing field for everyone invested in horse racing — horses, jockeys, trainers, owners and fans alike.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind — not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players within the industry are simply opposed to fundamentally altering the status quo, which has led to the multitude of equine deaths each year.

This isn't the first time Congress has taken a look into horse racing. In fact, in 2008, after Eight Belles was euthanized on the track at Churchill Downs following her second-place finish in The

Kentucky Derby, the House convened a series of hearings, wherein the industry promised to unite and modernize its regulations. Today, very few states are compliant with the minimum standards the industry has set for itself. The inability of the industry to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of fans, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress before the end of this year. If Congress passes the Act, it will provide an opportunity to help protect animals and bring a greater level of safety to U.S. horseracing once again.

The Horseracing Integrity Act designates the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) as the independent anti-doping organization that would oversee and administer all drug testing in U.S. horseracing. USADA, a non-profit, non-governmental agency, is recognized by Congress as the official anti-doping agency for Olympic, Pan American, and Paralympic sports in the United States. Delegating the authority for testing, oversight, and rulemaking to USADA is the cornerstone of this landmark legislation and a provision that we believe to be the most critical component for the protection of racehorses along with the legislation's specific ban on the use of race-day medication.

With limited oversight from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), H.R. 1754 would provide USADA with the ability to impose penalties for cheating that apply nationwide: a lifetime ban for the most severe types of doping, and a range of penalties for other serious medication violations, and suspensions for rules violations. Currently, each state's racing commission sets its own rules, allowing trainers to escape oversight by simply moving to another state. The bill's ban on race-day medication of horses would ideally be phased in over several years to allow for the industry to make a more comfortable transition. Horses who need drugs to race should not be entered into competition with a cocktail of legal or illegal drugs that could put their safety and health in jeopardy.

Imagine if all 32 professional football stadiums in the U.S. had its own set of rules, with variations from stadium to stadium, that's the scenario that American horseracing currently operates within. The states have varying rules and penalties on medicating horses, and that patchwork has proved dangerous to horses and unfair to racing fans and to responsible owners and trainers. And if NFL players choose to take the risk of drugging themselves, they are the ones who have made that decision. Unlike human athletes, horses have no voice, and they have no choice. That is why we are here today, and why we must ensure they are properly protected.

California Governor Gavin Newsom may have said it best in a September 2019 interview with The New York Times when he put California horse racing on notice: "I'll tell you, talk about a sport whose time is up unless they reform. That's horse racing. Incredible abuses to these precious animals and the willingness to just spit these animals out and literally take their lives is a disgrace." That's a pretty strong statement from the leader of a state with an enormous horseracing industry.

In addition to the deaths, Newsom pointed out a second disturbing point: Justify, the winner of the 2018 Triple Crown (only the second horse to attain the title in the past 40 years) failed a drug test after winning the Santa Anita Derby. The Santa Anita victory was a qualifier that preceded the superstar's sweep of The Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes, and Belmont.

Unfortunately, the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) disposed of the review behind closed doors while its chairman maintained a horse with Justify's trainer — perhaps the most well-known figure in modern American horseracing: Bob Baffert. It's a serious conflict of interest, and when the CHRB doubled down last year, denying an effort to reopen the inquiry, more and more animal activists began to take notice and started contacting us expressing a desire to bring horseracing to an end.

The public sentiment is very rapidly shifting from a desire to end doping to concerns about the very existence of the sport itself. It is past time for the racing industry to realize it isn't business as usual and big changes are being demanded by concerned citizens who won't put up with business-as-usual when it comes to equine welfare.

But passing the Horseracing Integrity Act is not the only thing that's needed to ensure the protection of these majestic animals. The slaughter of American equines for human consumption claimed around 70,000 horses in 2018. We don't eat horse meat in America just as we don't eat dogs and cats (Congress banned the slaughter of Dogs and Cats for human consumption in the Farm Bill signed into law in December of 2018). Horse slaughter is a cruel and terrifying end for the horses, and these intelligent creatures have done nothing to warrant this kind of mistreatment and crass exploitation.

In 2012, a [Wild for Life Foundation study](#) showed that approximately 19% of horses sent to slaughter were Thoroughbreds, but there does not appear to be much data on the numbers since then. Due to the efforts of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance and increasing anti-horse slaughter policies at many of America's racetracks, the numbers have most certainly declined, and we applaud their work, but again more must be done.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture documented serious cruelty violations in plants previously operated in the United States before closure in 2007. Millions of taxpayer funds were being wasted to "oversee" operations involving horses with broken bones and terrifying eye injuries in foreign-owned facilities on an annual basis before their closure.

Most Americans want no part of this enterprise of supplying foreign diners with slabs of horse meat. Even Ferdinand, the winner of the 1986 Kentucky Derby held at Churchill Downs, fell victim to this predatory industry, reminding us that this unethical enterprise has been consuming horses for decades. If one of the nation's most popular horses is prodded into a kill chute, then no horse is safe. In addition to advancing H.R. 1754, it is vitally important for the protection of American racehorses that the full House Energy and Commerce Committee also advance H.R. 961, the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act, led by Chair Schakowsky,

and Representative Vern Buchanan, that is set to be heard tomorrow morning by the Health Subcommittee.

And there are still more issues that must be addressed as well. Eliminating whipping is one important reform that the industry must make to put the welfare of horses at the center of the enterprise. Make no mistake, the use of a whip to force horses to run faster is archaic and should be eliminated on a global scale. Our modern-day society will not tolerate these types of abuses and will not tolerate horse deaths for the purposes of entertainment – this isn't ancient Rome, it's 2020.

The inability of the industry to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of the betting public, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress. If Congress fails to pass the Act, and obstructionists within the industry continue to hinder the legislation, then we may very well see those who demand horseracing be brought to an end prevail. Those who oppose H.R. 1754 must take a serious look in the mirror and ask themselves if they want to be remembered for animal abuse, countless horse deaths, and bringing an end to horseracing, or for saving lives and bringing integrity back to the sport.

I am grateful for the honor and privilege of speaking before you today and ask that the Horseracing Integrity Act be advanced through this Subcommittee and the full Committee to the House floor for a vote, and I thank Chair Schakowsky, and Members of the Committee for their continued work and support to protect our iconic American equines from the abuses they face. The way in which we treat the most vulnerable among us is a reflection of our character as a nation and a society.

Relevant Published Works on American Horseracing authored by witness Marty Irby:

timesunion

[Anti-doping rules will protect racehorses — and racing](#)

By Marty Irby

Published 9:41 pm EDT, Wednesday, August 29, 2018

For more than 150 years, Americans have enjoyed the sport of horse racing in the beautiful upstate New York enclave of Saratoga Springs. The organizers adhere to long-standing traditions, and when you're there, it feels almost as if you've stepped back to the 19th century, when the horses first galloped down the track during the Civil War.

A future congressman named John Morrissey, often referred to as "Old Smoke," led the effort to create Saratoga Race Course and establish horse racing in the area. At the time, Saratoga was known for its "healing" mineral springs and was a retreat for many who sought refuge from New York and Boston's sweltering summers.

It's said Morrissey was frequently seen with very influential visitors at the track, such as presidents Chester A. Arthur, Rutherford B. Hayes, and Ulysses S. Grant; Cornelius Vanderbilt; John D. Rockefeller; and even Mark Twain.

One of the more important graded stakes races at the meet is "The Alabama," named for a Confederate soldier named Captain William Cottrell from my hometown of Mobile (Cottrell asked that the race instead bear the name of his state). According to the local tales, Cottrell worked across the lines of the Civil War with Morrissey and other Yankee counterparts to help establish the sport in Saratoga for the betterment of horse racing. That must have been a rare example of an issue transcending the divide that transfixed America in 1863.

In 2018, American horse racing is faced with many challenges, but also many great opportunities. One opportunity is to drive reform by creating a national drug-testing and enforcement regulatory authority.

Currently, regulation of drug testing and enforcement is left to the states, which leaves an uneven and porous regulatory landscape. The differences in rule-making procedures, changes in state government officials during normal election cycles, and influences from local groups ultimately result in a fragmented drug monitoring system.

Without a single set of rules enforced by a single regulatory authority as we see in all other major sports, horse trainers may take advantage of the athletes and give them performance-enhancing drugs prior to competition. Subjecting horses to varying medication rules as they move in interstate commerce puts the horses at risk, which jeopardizes the riders and the sport.

On this issue, unlikely allies are coalescing to back the Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 2651, authored by Reps. Paul Tonko, D-Amsterdam, and Andy Barr, a Kentucky Republican, and to finally bring a long-needed anti-doping program to horse racing, including meaningful penalties that deter cheating.

The Jockey Club, Breeders' Cup, Keeneland, New York Racing Association, Water Hay Oats Alliance, The Stronach Group, and numerous animal welfare groups back the bill, which has 127 cosponsors in the House.

The bill would create a private, independent anti-doping authority, the Horseracing Anti-Doping and Medication Control Authority, responsible for developing and administering a nationwide anti-doping program for horse racing under the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, at no cost to the taxpayer.

As both a lifelong horseman and a leader in the animal protection movement, I applaud those who've stepped up to become a part of the solution by working together and choosing to cooperate.

As we approach the final stretch of the 115th Congress following the August recess, I hope that the small number of detractors of reform in the horse racing industry take a step back, look at the bigger picture, and put the horses and the future of the horse racing industry first by supporting the Horseracing Integrity Act. If Cottrell, Morrissey, and others could do so in 1863, then there is no reason the same can't be done today.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.



[Congress should take action so President Trump can protect horses and the save the U.S. horse racing economy](#)

By Marty Irby, Opinion Contributor — 03/08/19 12:55 PM EST 110

The views expressed by contributors are their own and not the view of The Hill



Hailing from two of the most important Thoroughbred breeding districts in the country, U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.) and Andy Barr R-Ky.) are again making a push to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act, which, when enacted, would take a tangible stride toward protecting American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing. It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization overseen by the [United States Anti-Doping Agency \(USADA\)](#) – the governing body that administers the Olympic anti-doping program.

This landmark legislation is supported by a broad base of industry players, including members of the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity, which range from The Jockey Club, The Preakness, The Belmont, The Breeders' Cup, racetracks and animal protection agencies. Today horse racing operates under an outdated, state-based, balkanized patchwork of medication rules that creates confusion and risk for owners and trainers and contains gaps in rules and enforcement. The Horseracing Integrity Act would greatly improve regulatory standards, ban the use of all medications on race day, and level the playing field for everyone invested in horse racing — our horses, jockeys, trainers, owners and fans alike.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind — not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players are simply satisfied with the status quo, which has led to a multitude of equine deaths each year.

Horse racing is a big American sport, employing 400,000 in this country, and surveys have shown that medication regulation is a top priority for the industry. In 2015, [a survey by Penn Schoen Berland](#) showed that 90 percent of U.S. adults and 98 percent of sports bettors supported uniform medication rules across all racing states. [Another survey that year](#) found 83 percent of members of the Horseplayers Association of North America believe they should lend support to the [Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity](#) in its quest to reform drug use and enforcement in horse racing.

This isn't the first time Congress has taken a look into horse racing. In fact, in 2008, after Eight Belles was euthanized on the track at Churchill Downs following her second-place finish in The Kentucky Derby, a House committee convened a series of hearings, wherein the industry promised to unite and modernize its regulations. Today, very few states are compliant with the minimum standards the industry has set for itself. And with the upcoming Triple Crown season only two months away, when millions of casual sports fans will follow horseracing, the need for improved standards is greater than ever.

The inability of the industry to act to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of fans, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress and be signed into law by President Trump— reported to be a former owner of Thoroughbred racehorses himself. If Congress passes the Act, they will give President Trump an opportunity to help protect animals and add value, jobs, and bring prosperity to U.S. horse racing once again – surely that would fit within the campaign to help Make America Great Again. The

president may not want a dog in the White House, but [he's shown himself to have an interest in horses.](#)

Last fall, I happened to be at Keeneland racetrack in Lexington, Ky. with horse industry professionals on the afternoon President Trump flew in to campaign for Rep. Barr, who was in a horse race for his congressional seat. The crowds and traffic were unbelievable that day and the good people of Barr's home district proved faithful to the congressman, just as they've been faithful to the world of horse racing for nearly two centuries. Lexington is widely known as the Horse Capitol of the World, and one of the U.S. House District's most affected by the Horseracing Integrity Act, along with Saratoga Springs — a beautiful enclave in upstate New York that Rep. Tonko represents in the president's home state.

I'm placing my bet that the president will easily understand the economics of this issue combined with our society's ever-growing desire to protect animals, and Congress should move the legislation swiftly to give the president the opportunity to ink the bill into law.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an 8-time world champion equestrian rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

Pennsylvania Capital-Star

[Penn National, Pa.'s congressional delegation need to get behind this horseracing industry reform | Opinion](#)

By Capital-Star Op-Ed Contributor, Marty Irby

March 29, 2019



A horse at Penn National Race Course in Grantham, Pa. Photo by LillianG, via [Flickr Commons](#).

In 1969, Bill Hartack, the famed jockey, and son of Pennsylvania born in Clover, saddled up to win an eight-length victory at the Santa Anita Derby on Majestic Prince.

That win propelled the team to go on and win the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness Stakes that year – the first legs of the Triple Crown. But the team fell short of clinching the Crown, finishing second in the Belmont Stakes.

As the 50th anniversary of Hartack's win approaches at the upcoming Santa Anita Derby in a few weeks, there is something of a pall over the sport. Since the end of December, 22 horses have died on the track this year. One might ask if horse racing itself has fallen short in protecting both the horses, and the jockeys in our modern-day society.

In an attempt to prevent any recurrence of this spate of horse deaths, The Stronach Group, owners of Santa Anita Park and other top tracks in America, **made a forward-looking announcement** to end the use of drugs and whips at the track.

It's a move certain to spark a reaction from unscrupulous trainers and veterinarians who profit from widespread doping, but it's actually an attempt not only to help the horses, but to save the sport.

The new policy to ban drugs and whipping came on the heels of the introduction of the **Horseracing Integrity Act, (H.R. 1754)**, by U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., and Andy Barr, R-Ky., who represent two of the meccas of horse racing: Saratoga Springs, New York, and Lexington, Kentucky.

The Horseracing Integrity Act would protect American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing.

It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization overseen by the **United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA)** – the governing body that administers the Olympic anti-doping program, and it's **supported by a raft of industry allies** including The Jockey Club, the Stronach Group, the New York Racing Association, the Breeders' Cup, and Water, Hay, Oats Alliance, along with numerous other tracks, and animal protection groups from across the nation.

But one of the few major tracks that hasn't come on board to end doping and support the legislation is **Penn National**, and the need for this legislation in Pennsylvania is all too obvious.

In 2016, Murray Rojas, two-time Penn National leading trainer, was **convicted for misbranding medications and of criminal conspiracy.**

During the trial, rival trainer Stephanie Beattie cooperated with authorities and made some stunning admissions. Under oath, Beattie stated that “almost everybody” illegally treated horses on race day at Penn National, placing the percentage at “95 to 98 percent.”

In 2013, **Pennsylvania trainer David Wells** was indicted on multiple felony counts of fraud, related to his routine administration of prohibited substances to horses on race day during a four-year period from 2008-2012. Wells pleaded guilty to the charge of rigging a publicly exhibited contest in 2014.

Given the gravity of these criminal violations and their impact on the perception of racing at Penn National, one must wonder why has **Penn National Gaming** (PNG) has failed to support a bill that would correct most of these problems, when attempt after attempt from industry groups, and animal protection organizations have been made to garner PNG's support.

In addition to Penn National, PNG's other four Thoroughbred racetrack properties represent a significant part of the Thoroughbred racing landscape, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the nearly 300,000 Thoroughbred starts logged each year.

Additionally, PNG recently purchased **Pinnacle Entertainment Inc.**, a casino operator that also manages Thoroughbred racetracks, thus further expanding PNG's investment in the racing industry.

In a business built on consumer confidence that the sport is clean, and the games are fair, PNG should certainly appreciate the importance of embracing integrity initiatives like H.R. 1754 to attract and retain customers.

The gaming giant's silence has had a chilling effect on Pennsylvania lawmakers signing on to this important, pro-animal, pro-horse racing legislation.

Penn National Gaming should finally get on board, but regardless of where the track stands, Pennsylvania's usually ardently pro-animal Congressional delegation should saddle up and cosponsor the legislation.

Penn National Gaming should recognize that the future health of horse racing is linked to the integrity and consumer confidence in the sport.

In a sport with no national commissioner, racetracks must take a leadership role, and now is the time for PNG to step up and endorse The Horseracing Integrity Act, and to urge the Pennsylvania delegation to get behind this life-saving and industry-saving legislation.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, and an 8-time world champion equestrian rider



[Horse Racing Enthusiasts Should Support the SAFE Act to End Horse Slaughter](#)

Monday, February 18, 2019 at 12:39 pm

By Marty Irby, Animal Wellness Action

America was built on the backs of horses, and this month, U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL) introduced the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act, [H.R. 961](#), to end the slaughter of our iconic American equines. The measure prohibits the transport and export of U.S. horses to slaughter for human consumption. Horses have played an unmeasurable role in our culture and in building our modern-day society, and they don't deserve this end.

The bipartisan SAFE Act garnered 219 cosponsors in the House in the previous Congress. An even larger majority of the newly elected House undoubtedly supports this legislation, perhaps as many as two-thirds of them. More than a decade ago, a similar measure passed the House, and even Vice-President Mike Pence, then a U.S. Congressman from Indiana, was among the super-majority supporting the bill.

The Senate also has shown a willingness to end horse slaughter, with U.S. Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and Tom Udall (D-NM) leading the charge in the Upper Chamber. In fact, last year, the Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by my home state Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), included language in their Agriculture Appropriations to defund horse slaughter inspections in the U.S., making it impossible to slaughter horses here.

The slaughter of American equines for human consumption claimed around 70,000 horses in 2018—most of them perfectly healthy, and fit to be utilized for recreation, or competition. We don't eat horse meat in America just as we don't eat dogs and cats (Congress banned the slaughter of Dogs and Cats for human consumption in the Farm Bill and President Trump signed that measure into law in December). Horse slaughter is a cruel and terrifying end for the horses, and these creatures have done nothing to warrant this kind of mistreatment and crass exploitation.

In 2012, [a report showed](#) that approximately 19% of horses sent to slaughter were Thoroughbreds, but there does not appear to be much data on the numbers since then. Due to the efforts of the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance and increasing anti-horse slaughter policies at many of America's racetracks, the numbers

have most certainly declined, and we applaud their work. But there's still room for work to prevent slaughter by supporting the SAFE Act.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture [documented serious cruelty violations](#) in plants previously operated in the United States prior to closure in 2007. Millions of taxpayer funds were being wasted to "oversee" operations involving horses with broken bones and terrifying eye injuries in foreign-owned facilities on an annual basis prior to their closure.

As our national debt continues to rise, and the taxpayer continues to foot the bill, Congress should be more mindful of our fiscal responsibility and prevent millions of tax dollars from funding the slaughter of horses and propping up an egregious foreign-driven enterprise.

Most Americans want no part of this enterprise of supplying foreign diners with horse slabs. Even Ferdinand, the winner of the 1986 Kentucky Derby, fell victim to this predatory industry, and that's just not acceptable. If one of the nation's most popular horses is prodded into a kill chute, then no horse is safe.

In this time of political division, the SAFE Act is a bill both parties can get behind. Hundreds of thousands of advocates are calling on the House Agriculture and Energy and Commerce Committees—that have joint jurisdiction over the issue—led by Chairmen Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Frank Pallone (D-NJ), and Ranking Members Greg Walden (R-OR) and Mike Conaway (R-TX) to work together to advance the bill to vote. The measure would surely pass and fulfill the will of the people—something that poll after poll have proven more than 80% of Americans support.

The U.S. House of Representatives can take first action on this bill. We hope you'll support this effort and call your legislators at 202-224-3121 to ask them to cosponsor the SAFE Act, H.R. 961, or take action immediately by [clicking here](#).

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an eight-time world champion rider, and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

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The Political Animal



Breeders' Cup Set to Run Today Amidst Cloud of 36 Horse Deaths Over the Past Year

November 2, 2019

By Marty Irby

2019 has been a tumultuous and tragic year in American horseracing, and as today brings the season to an end, The Breeders' Cup will crown its 36th World Champion of Thoroughbred Horseracing at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, California.

The average American might recognize the track from the award-winning movie Seabiscuit – a legend who won the Santa Anita Handicap in 1940 – but the vast majority of Americans and even Californians may never see or attend a horse race at the historic venue established in 1934.

California Governor Gavin Newsom may have said it best in a September interview with The New York Times when he put California horse racing on notice: “I’ll tell you, talk about a sport whose time is up unless they reform. That’s horse racing. Incredible abuses to

these precious animals and the willingness to just spit these animals out and literally take their lives is a disgrace.”

That’s a pretty strong statement from the leader who represents the 5th largest economy in the world, and the state that has been known as one of the more forward-thinking horseracing states in the country with pretty tight rules – until this year.

Year to date we’ve seen 36 horses die on the track at Santa Anita. In addition to the deaths, Newsom pointed out a second disturbing point: Justify, the winner of the 2018 Triple Crown – only the third horse to attain the title in the past 40 years – failed a drug test after winning the Santa Anita Derby. The Santa Anita victory was a qualifier that preceded the horseracing star’s sweep of The Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes, and Belmont.

Unfortunately, the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) disposed of the review behind closed doors while its own chairman maintained a horse with Justify’s trainer – perhaps the most well-known figure in modern American horseracing: Bob Baffert. It’s a serious conflict of interest, and when the CHRB doubled down last month, denying an effort to reopen the inquiry, more and more animal activists began to take notice, and started contacting us about holding protests. But that’s not what we’ve set out to do – we’re working with the industry to create reform.

I was there that day Justify won the Santa Anita Derby in early 2018 with other colleagues in equine protection, and members of the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity – a group that includes Animal Wellness Action, The Jockey Club, The Preakness, The Belmont, The Breeders’ Cup, Water, Hay, Oats Alliance (that includes veterinarians and more than a hundred trainers), and The Stronach Group that owns Santa Anita Park. The coalition’s come together to advance landmark legislation known as the Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 1754/S. 1820 led by U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko (D-NY), and Andy Barr (R-KY) in the U.S. House and U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Martha McSally (R-AZ) in the Upper Chamber, and the bill’s just hit a new milestone – garnering its 200th Member of Congress in support this week.

The bill seeks to protect American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing. It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization managed by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) – the governing body that runs the Olympic anti-doping program.

Today horseracing operates under an outdated, state-based, balkanized patchwork of medication rules that creates confusion and risk for owners and trainers and contains gaps in rules and enforcement. The Horseracing Integrity Act would greatly improve regulatory standards, ban the use of all medications on race day, and level the playing field for everyone invested in horse racing — our horses, jockeys, trainers, owners and fans alike.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind. There are simply too many stakeholders like Churchill Downs – who owns and operates The Kentucky Derby – that refuse to support the

legislation. They appear to be satisfied with the status quo, which has led to the multitude of equine deaths this year.

The inability of the industry to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of the betting public, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress before the end of 2020. If Congress passes the Act, it will provide an opportunity to help protect animals and the sport, but if there is no legislative fix, and groups like Churchill Downs and The Kentucky Derby continue to hinder the legislation, then we'll see more mainstream groups take up the issue and more grassroots groups emerge to take on the problem. Then the debate will shift away from eliminating doping in horseracing to eliminating horseracing itself.

We applaud our partners in the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity, Reps. Tonko, and Barr, and Senators Gillibrand and McSally for working to end doping in horseracing, and hope that our society's ever-growing desire to protect animals will move the legislation through the Congress, and onto President Trump's desk for the bill to be inked into law. Take action today by [clicking here to send a direct message to your Members of Congress asking them to join in supporting the legislation](#) – the horses are counting on you.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.

animal wellness action

The Political Animal



[Horse Deaths Underscore Wisdom of Horseracing Integrity Act](#)

June 28, 2019

By Marty Irby

As deaths mount at Santa Anita Racetrack and at other tracks throughout the United States, it is clear that Congress must act to address fundamental problems with the sport. Democratic presidential candidate and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and high-profile Republican Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ), have signaled that they want to lead the charge to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act. They've introduced S. 1820, which seeks to protect American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing. It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization managed by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) – the governing body that runs the Olympic anti-doping program.

The House companion, H.R. 1754, led by Reps. Paul Tonko (D-NY), and Andy Barr (R-KY), from two of the top horse racing districts in the U.S., (Saratoga Springs and Lexington, respectively) now with more than 125 cosponsors, has steadily attracted more support since its

original introduction several years ago. But this is the first time there has been a parallel bill in the Senate, and that circumstance has obviously been fueled by the headlines about horse deaths from across the nation.

This landmark legislation is supported by a broad base of industry players, including members of the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity, which range from The Jockey Club, The Preakness, The Belmont, The Breeders' Cup, Water, Hay, Oats Alliance (that includes veterinarians, and more than a hundred trainers), racetracks and Animal Wellness Action. The measure is endorsed by numerous jockeys including Chris McCarron, who has won The Kentucky Derby, The Preakness Stakes, and The Belmont Stakes all three – twice, and Julie Krone, the first woman to win a Triple Crown race and be inducted into the National Horse Racing Museum and Hall of Fame.

Today horse racing operates under an outdated, state-based, balkanized patchwork of medication rules that creates confusion and risk for owners and trainers and contains gaps in rules and enforcement. The Horseracing Integrity Act would greatly improve regulatory standards, ban the use of all medications on race day, and level the playing field for everyone invested in horse racing — our horses, jockeys, trainers, owners and fans alike.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind — not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players are simply satisfied with the status quo, which has led to a multitude of equine deaths each year.

Horse racing is a big American sport, employing 400,000 in this country, with a big impact across the nation. The Jockey Club's own independent polling in May of this year revealed that 95 percent of likely voters said they would be "much more" or "somewhat more" favorable to horse racing if an independent group, such as USADA (which regulates Olympic athletes), created and enforced medication rules at least as stringent as for other professional sports.

This isn't the first time Congress has taken a look into horse racing. In fact, in 2008, after Eight Belles was euthanized on the track at Churchill Downs following her second-place finish in The Kentucky Derby, a House committee convened a series of hearings, wherein the industry promised to unite and modernize its regulations. Today, very few states are compliant with the minimum standards the industry has set for itself. The inability of the industry to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of fans, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress before the end of 2020. If Congress passes the Act, it will provide an opportunity to help protect animals and add value, jobs, and bring safety to U.S. horse racing once again.

We applaud Senator Gillibrand and Senator McSally's work to end doping in horse racing, and hope that our society's ever-growing desire to protect animals will move the legislation through the Congress, and onto President Trump's desk for the bill to be inked into law. Take action today by [clicking here to send a direct message to your Members of Congress](#) – the horses are counting on you.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.

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The Political Animal



[144th Preakness Overshadowed by Santa Anita Horse Deaths, Kentucky Derby Controversy](#)

May 17, 2019

By Marty Irby

Tomorrow marks the running of the 144th Preakness Stakes at the fraying Pimlico Racetrack in Baltimore, with ominous clouds of controversy hanging over the race and the entire sport of horse racing. This year, more than 23 horses have perished at a single track — Santa Anita Park in California. And the stewards' decision at the Kentucky Derby to disqualify Maximum Security, the horse that first crossed the finish line at Churchill Downs two weeks ago, threw a different ingredient of controversy into the brew.

Following the disqualification, Maximum Security's owner announced the horse would not run in the Preakness Stakes, and Country House, the horse that was ultimately awarded the title at the Derby, has developed health complications and also won't be running. That takes so much of the drama — which horse racing desperately needs — out of the race.

There's no Triple Crown that'll be achieved in 2019, and the Preakness is looking like just another horse race, with a little bit of pomp and circumstance thrown in.

Racehorses are incredible athletes, and for centuries, humans have been impressed by their beauty and athleticism. But they have always survived at our mercy. Or through our manipulations, including by doping the horses to get a leg up on the competition.

Human athletes who take performance-enhancing substances, in most cases, make a conscious choice to dope, cheat, and win at all costs. Racehorses are the conduits for the cheating instincts of trainers and owners who are looking to game the system. That's why it makes it so critical for the government to set up rules to protect horses and jockeys who are put at risk by the whims of the people involved in the industry.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind—not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players want to maintain the status quo. These obstructionists want to continue to take advantage of regulatory inadequacies and inconsistencies. The widespread use of both legal and illegal drugs is killing an industry that employs 400,000 Americans. It's also hurting and killing our horses and jockeys at alarming rates as well.

Under the current system, there are 38 state racing jurisdictions throughout the U.S., each with its own set of regulations. Each state racing commission allows different medications and varying levels of permissible medications, imposes different penalties for violations, and has different rules on which horses are tested for drugs. Without one single regulating body or uniform set of rules, owners and trainers who are barred from racing in one jurisdiction can simply move their business elsewhere, seeking out jurisdictions where state regulations are weaker.

To stop these players from hopscotching their way through racing jurisdictions, oversight and regulations are needed at the federal level. Unlike other sports that have regulatory bodies to provide oversight and sanction those who flout industry rules, horse racing has no governing body that can regulate the industry. Imagine the confusion if the NFL had no national standards or consistency, with different rules in each of the 32 professional football stadiums. The horse racing industry needs national uniform standards to stop unethical trainers and veterinarians from doping horses to improve their chances of winning.

Performance enhancers are used to mask injuries and force horses to run beyond their natural ability. Some commonly used drugs have a detrimental long-term impact on joints and bones and makes them significantly more vulnerable to breakdowns than they were even 10 or 20 years ago, especially among young horses with already delicate skeletons. Racetracks are turning into crash sites, and it is time for Congress to take action – and the fix is a federal bill known as The Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 1754.

This bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Paul Tonko, D-NY, and Andy Barr, R-KY. It will establish a uniform set of rules, testing procedures, and penalties created by the non-profit U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (the same agency that monitors Olympic sports in the United States) to rid racing of unethical drugging of horses. Such legislation is crucial to protect the animals and jockeys in an industry that has proven it will not regulate itself.

Animal Wellness Action supports this reform, and support for reform is also rapidly growing throughout the racing industry with leading track owners, horse owners, trainers, and other industry insiders coming together to call for this bill's passage as a part of the [Coalition for Horseracing Integrity](#). Members include AWA, along with the New York Racing Association, which operates Belmont Park and Saratoga Racetrack; The Stronach Group, owner of several tracks including Pimlico Racecourse; The Jockey Club; The Breeders Cup; Keeneland; and the Water Hay Oats Alliance. And just last week, The Jockey Club released the [results of an independently conducted poll](#) that revealed an astounding 91 percent of respondents said they would view horse racing "much more" or "somewhat more" favorably if the industry adopted the national regulations and strict anti-doping rules embodied in the Horseracing Integrity Act.

Horse racing is a \$40 billion a year industry that Congress allows to profit from interstate gambling. It's not too much to ask an industry that benefits from Congressional authority to have a set of rules to prevent cheating, inhumane treatment of horses, and dangerous work by jockeys. Legitimate sports don't include a syringe loaded with performance enhancing drugs, and [you can help us stamp out doping by contacting your Members of Congress here](#) or calling 202-225-3121 and asking them to cosponsor H.R. 1754 today.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an 8-time world champion equestrian rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association

animal wellness action

The Political Animal



[Dangerous Race Day for Horses at the Opening of the 145th Kentucky Derby](#)

May 3, 2019

By Marty Irby

Tomorrow marks the running of the 145th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, and the weather is calling for rain and storms at the track that's been deemed one of the deadliest for horses. There's been a black cloud over the horse racing industry this year amidst the crisis that began with 23 deaths at Santa Anita Racetrack in California, where the Santa Anita Derby was held last month.

The overwhelming number of negative articles in every major media outlet in the country on the Santa Anita deaths this year have expressed the voices of animal protection advocates, horse racing industry leaders, and the betting public calling for reform. And

while many times it takes a crisis to bring federal legislation to passage, it shouldn't have come to this point.

Hailing from two of the most important Thoroughbred breeding districts in the country, U.S. Reps. [Paul Tonko](#) (D-NY) and [Andy Barr](#) (R-KY) are again making a push to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 1754, – a bill they've been pushing for the past four years – which, if enacted, would take a tangible stride toward protecting American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing. It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization overseen by the [United States Anti-Doping Agency \(USADA\)](#) – the governing body that administers the Olympic anti-doping program.

This landmark legislation is supported by a broad base of industry players, which includes members of the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity, such as The Jockey Club, The Preakness, The Belmont, The Breeders' Cup, Keeneland, Animal Wellness Action, and the Water, Hay, Oats Alliance along with other numerous racetracks and animal protection agencies. Today horse racing operates under an outdated, state-based, balkanized patchwork of medication rules that creates confusion and risk for owners and trainers and contains inconsistencies in enforcement. The Horseracing Integrity Act would greatly improve regulatory standards, ban the use of all medications on race day, and level the playing field for everyone invested in horse racing — our horses, jockeys, trainers, owners and fans alike.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind — not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players are simply satisfied with the status quo, which has led to a multitude of equine deaths each year.

Horse racing is a big American sport, employing 400,000 in this country, and surveys have shown that medication regulation is a top priority for the industry. In 2015, [a survey by Penn Schoen Berland showed](#) that 90 percent of U.S. adults and 98 percent of sports bettors supported uniform medication rules across all racing states. [Another survey that year](#) found 83 percent of members of the Horseplayers Association of North America believe they should lend support to the [Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity](#) in its quest to reform drug use and enforcement in horse racing.

This isn't the first time Congress has taken a look into horse racing. In fact, in 2008, after Eight Belles was euthanized on the track at Churchill Downs following her second-place finish in The Kentucky Derby, a House committee convened a series of hearings, wherein the industry promised to unite and modernize its regulations. Today, very few states are compliant with the minimum standards the industry has set for itself. And with the upcoming Triple Crown season only two months away, when millions of casual sports fans will follow horseracing, the need for improved standards is greater than ever.

The inability of the industry to act to better protect its equine and human athletes, as well as the interests of fans, underscores the need for the Horseracing Integrity Act to pass during the 116th Congress and be signed into law. The legislation will benefit horses and the industry alike.

Rep. Barr's hometown of Lexington – just a stone's throw from the Derby – is widely known as the Horse Capitol of the World, and one of the U.S. House districts most affected by the Horseracing Integrity Act, along with Saratoga Springs — a beautiful enclave in upstate New York represented by Rep. Tonko. They've garnered 70 cosponsorships from their colleagues in the U.S. House from a variety of districts effected by the bill and continue to build steam on Capitol Hill.

But we need your help to get the bill over the finish line before racing season ends – and the abuse in horseracing is forgotten until the next year – [by contacting your Members of the House here](#), and asking them to cosponsor H.R. 1754 to help bring real and meaningful reform. In a sport with no national commissioner, Congress must take action by passing this life-saving and industry-saving legislation.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an 8-time world champion equestrian rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

Protect racehorses: A bipartisan effort in Congress

by [Marty Irby](#) | April 06, 2018 12:00 AM



Human athletes who take performance enhancing substances do so, in most cases, by making a conscious choice to dope, to cheat, and to win at all costs. Racehorses cannot make that choice.

(iStock)

Racehorses are incredible athletes, and for centuries, humans have been impressed by their brawn, beauty, and lightning speed. Unfortunately, there's an important power they cannot exhibit: control over the substances that go into their bodies.

Human athletes who take performance enhancing substances do so, in most cases, by making a conscious choice to dope, to cheat, and to win at all costs. Racehorses cannot make that choice. Instead, they are at the mercy of their owners and trainers. The industry should therefore protect these athletes from those who place winning above the lives and wellbeing of both horses and the jockeys who ride them.

While many professional sports have taken crucial steps to rid their games of illegal doping, the racing industry continues to lag behind—not because of a lack of leadership, but because too many players want to maintain the status quo, which allows them to circumvent regulatory oversight. The widespread use of both legal and illegal drugs is killing an industry that employs 400,000 Americans. It's also hurting and killing our horses and jockeys at alarming rates. An analysis of data from the Jockey Club's Equine Injury Database, or EID, released on March 19, 2018 shows an increase in the rate of fatal injury in 2017 (1.61 per 1,000 starts) compared to 2016 (1.54 per 1,000 starts).

Under the current system, there are 38 state racing jurisdictions throughout the U.S., each with its own set of regulations. This hodgepodge of rules allows unscrupulous owners and trainers to simply move racehorses from one jurisdiction to another. Weak restrictions and consequences allow people to continue to dope horses and avoid penalties. Each state racing commission allows different medications and varying levels of permissible medications, imposes different penalties for violations, and has different rules on which horses are tested for drugs. Different laboratories test samples for evidence of doping. Without one single regulating body or uniform set of rules, owners and trainers who are barred from racing in one jurisdiction can simply move their business elsewhere, seeking out jurisdictions where state regulators who value profit above all else endorse weak penalties for doping.

To stop these players from hopscotching their way through racing jurisdictions, oversight and regulations are needed at the federal level. Unlike other sports that have regulatory bodies to provide oversight and that can sanction those who flout industry rules, horse racing has no governing body that can regulate the industry. Imagine the confusion if the NFL had no national standards or consistency, with different rules in each of the 32 professional football stadiums. The horse racing industry needs national uniform standards to stop unethical trainers and veterinarians from doping horses to improve their chances of winning.

Doping horses for racing is more dangerous today because some drugs weaken the already delicate bones of young horses, making them more vulnerable to breakdowns than they were even 10 or 20 years ago. Race tracks are turning into crash sites and it is time for Congress to take action – and the fix is a federal bill known as The Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 2651.

This bipartisan legislation has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Andy Barr, R-Ky., and Paul Tonko, D-N.Y. It will establish a uniform set of rules, testing procedures and penalties, created by the non-profit U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, the same agency that monitors Olympic sports in the United States, to rid racing of unethical drugging of horses. Such legislation is crucial to protect the animals and jockeys in an industry that has proven it will not regulate itself.

Animal welfare groups such as The HSUS and Humane Society Legislative Fund support this reform, and support for reform is also rapidly growing throughout the racing industry with leading track owners, horse owners, trainers and other industry insiders coming together to call for this bill's passage. Supporters include the New York Racing Association, which operates Belmont Park and Saratoga Racetrack; Frank Stronach, owner of several tracks including Pimlico Race Course; The Jockey Club; The Breeders Cup; Keeneland; and the Water Hay Oats Alliance, which includes 65 racehorse trainers.

Horse racing is \$40 billion a year industry that fuels our economy. Without reform, including the passage of the Horse racing Integrity Act, horses and jockeys will continue to die, and support from fans will decrease, as they will increasingly reject sports where champions are determined by anything other than athletic prowess. Legitimate sports don't include a syringe loaded with performance enhancing drugs.

A bipartisan approach to protecting racehorses

BY MARTY IRBY, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 05/31/18 01:40 PM EDT

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL



© Getty Images

For centuries, we have respected and admired professional athletes for their agility, speed and endurance. We rightly view athletic competitions as tests of players' natural abilities—talents that have been refined through years of training, experience and intelligence. The same would be true for the animal athletes of horse racing, in a different era. However, according to a [2015 poll conducted by Penn Schoen Berland](#), 90 percent of bettors and 44 percent of the broader public associate horse racing with performance-enhancing drugs.

This means that the horse racing industry lags behind numerous esteemed professional sports programs that have all taken the steps needed to rid their competitions of illegal drugs and other forms of cheating.

Part of the problem for horse racing, unlike, say, the National Football League, is that no unifying regulatory system exists. Imagine if all 32 professional football teams had different sets of rules in each stadium. That is exactly the situation in each of the 38 state racing jurisdictions throughout the United States. Each one offers a unique set of regulations, allowing corrupt owners and trainers to move racehorses from one jurisdiction to another to avoid penalties or to enjoy more lenient oversight. State racing commissions allow various medications and differing levels of permissible medications. They also impose varying penalties for violations and use numerous, incongruous laboratories to test for the presence of drugs.

Uniform oversight and regulation of the industry are needed to stop unethical trainers and veterinarians from doping horses to improve their chances of winning. The Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 2651, can achieve this goal. This bipartisan legislation, introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Andy Barr (R-Ky.), and Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), will establish a uniform set of rules, testing procedures and penalties.

H.R. 2651 would create a private, independent horse racing anti-doping authority, the Horseracing Anti-Doping and Medication Control Authority (HADA), responsible for developing and administering a nationwide anti-doping program for horse racing.

The authority would be governed by a board composed of the chief executive officer of the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), which is the agency that monitors Olympic sports in the United States. It would also include six individuals from the USADA board, and six individuals selected by USADA who have demonstrated expertise in a variety of horse-racing areas. This new agency would be funded by the industry with no taxpayer funds or taxes on bettors.

According to the 2015 poll, 96 percent of horse racing fans and 83 percent of the public support USADA-led oversight of Thoroughbred racing.

This legislation is crucial to protect the animals and jockeys of an industry that history has shown will not regulate itself.

Overwhelming support for this measure exists among animal welfare groups such as the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund. Backing for the reform is also growing throughout the racing industry where industry insiders are uniting in support of the bill's passage.

Supporters include the New York Racing Association, which operates Belmont Park and Saratoga Racetrack; Frank Stronach, founder of The Stronach Group, which owns several tracks including Pimlico Race Course, where the Preakness Stakes was just won by the Kentucky Derby winner, Justify; The Jockey Club; The Breeders' Cup; Keeneland; and the Water Hay Oats Alliance, which includes 65 racehorse trainers.

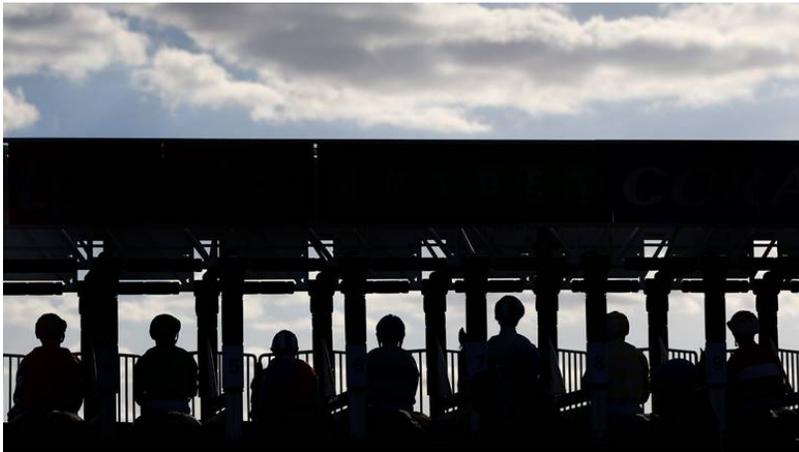
As we approach the Belmont Stakes, the last leg of the Triple Crown in Thoroughbred racing, with Justify seeking to become the second horse to win the title in 40 years, let's ask our members of Congress to step up and keep this sport alive by passing the Horseracing Integrity Act. The stakes are highest not for the owners, the trainers, the spectators, or the economy, but for the athletes themselves. We should see that, understand our obligations, and act upon them.

Relevant articles on American Horseracing related to witness Marty Irby:



[4 racehorse deaths at New Orleans track spark concern](#)

Associated Press Jan 22, 2020, 1:24 PM EST



Getty Images

NEW ORLEANS (AP) Four thoroughbred racehorses were euthanized after competing at a New Orleans track in a 10 -day span, prompting criticism from an animal advocacy group based in Washington D.C.

Officials at the New Orleans Fair Grounds Race Course didn't specify the circumstances surrounding the euthanasia but said the track's equine medical director was investigating each individual case, news outlets reported.

The deaths started on Jan. 9 with “J Rob”, a 3-year-old colt that had just won a \$15,000 maiden claiming race. Two days later “Big Shanty” was killed after pulling up lame, a dysfunction in the locomotor system which is a common problem in sport horses. “Jim’s Silverbullet” was killed on the Jan. 16 and “Take Charge Cece” a day later.

Fair Grounds Director of Marketing Trent Dang called the deaths “unfortunate and most unusual.”

Advocacy group Animal Wellness Action said the number of deaths in such a short time frame is why the group supports a bill that would regulate widespread “doping” in the horse racing industry.

The group has been pressing for passage of a reform bill that would set national standards for drugging racehorses and place oversight with an independent body under the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby said the bill has more than 200 co-sponsors in the House, but none from Louisiana.

Dang calls the legislation “controversial” and said it lacks consensus on funding and mechanics. But Dang also said the concept of the law is “seeking fairness of competition through medication reform” which the company supports.

Irby called Louisiana a “stumbling block for reform,” citing “obstructionists” who don’t support the proposed law.

“American horseracing is addicted to drugs, and it’s time for an intervention,” Irby said in a statement. “Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the deaths of these iconic American equines for entertainment — this isn’t ancient Rome, it’s 2020.



Group slams four horse deaths at New Orleans race track

Four horses at Fair Grounds Race Course dies in a ten day span
by: [Peter Albrecht](#)

Posted: Jan 22, 2020 / 03:57 PM CST / Updated: Jan 22, 2020 / 03:57 PM CST

Four thoroughbred racehorses were euthanized after competing at the New Orleans Fair Grounds Race Course in a 10 -day span, prompting criticism from an animal advocacy group.

Washington D.C. based Animal Wellness Action said the deaths started on Jan. 9 with “J Rob”, a 3-year-old colt that had just won a \$15,000 maiden claiming race. Two days later “Big Shanty” was killed after pulling up lame. “Jim’s Silverbullet” was killed on the Jan. 16 and “Take Charge Cece” a day later.

Track officials did not specify the circumstances surrounding the deaths said the tracks equine medical director was investigating.

Animal Wellness Action is backing a bill now before Congress that would set national standards for drugging racehorses and place oversight with an independent body under the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. The bill has found momentum in Congress after race horse deaths spiked last year at Santa Anita Park in California.

“American horseracing is addicted to drugs, and it’s time for an intervention,” Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby said in a statement. “Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the deaths of these iconic American equines for entertainment — this isn’t ancient Rome, it’s 2020.”

The thoroughbred racing season at Fair Grounds runs through March 29, with the Louisiana Derby on March 21.

The Times-Picayune



THE NEW ORLEANS
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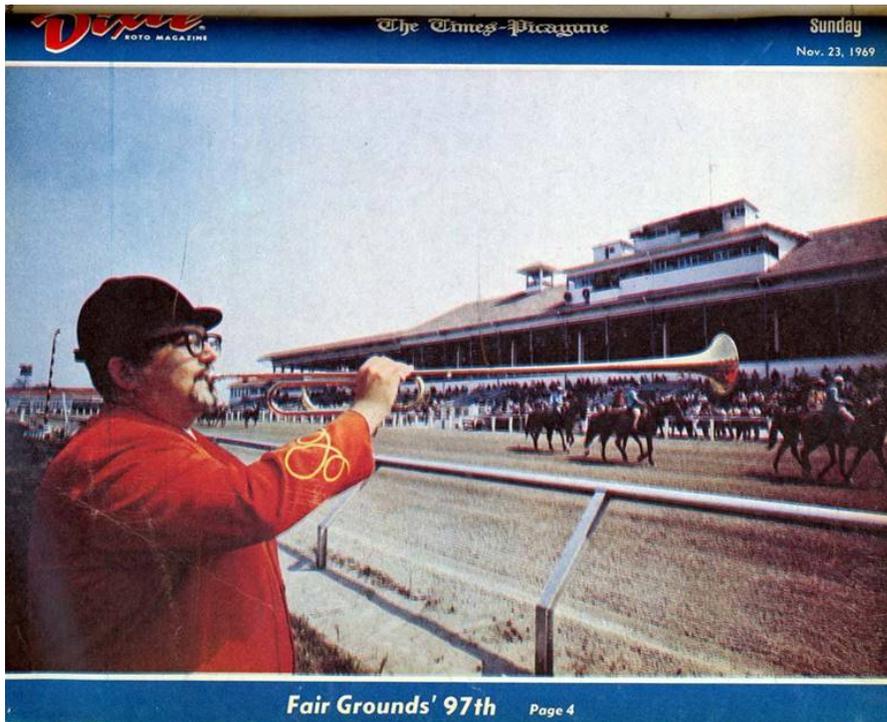
[Surge in racehorse deaths at Fair Grounds prompts concern, internal review](#)

BY JOHN SIMERMAN | STAFF WRITER

PUBLISHED JAN 20, 2020 AT 5:09 PM | UPDATED JAN 20, 2020 AT 6:39 PM



Race fans watch as horses parade past them from the paddock and to the racetrack for the Louisiana Derby on Saturday, March 29, 2014 at the Fair Grounds Race Course & Slots in New Orleans. (Photo by Chris Granger, Nola.com | The Times-Picayune)



When Charlie Young, photographed Nov. 23, 1969, blows his bugle Thursday in the infield announcing the first race, the New Orleans Fair Grounds will open its 97th season. This year, the season will run from Thanksgiving through March 30, offering fans 101 days of racing thrills. The famous old racetrack has a new addition, the luxurious Turf Room, which will

offer 700 reserved seats and 300 box seats. The track itself has been resurfaced. (Photo by G.E. Arnold, The Times-Picayune archive)

Four thoroughbred racehorses have reportedly been euthanized over a span of six racing days at the Fair Grounds Race Course in New Orleans, pushing the number of deaths at Louisiana tracks to at least six just this year.

The recent spate of horse deaths at the New Orleans track began Jan. 9, when J Rob, a 3-year-old colt, won a \$15,000 maiden claiming race, only to be “vanned off” and euthanized, according to an advocacy group, Animal Wellness Action.

Two days later, Big Shanty pulled up lame running down the home stretch on a muddy track, which the 5-year-old gelding also left by van to be euthanized, the group said. Five days after that, Jim’s Silverbullet fell in the gelding’s second – and last -- career race. Then on Friday, Take Charge Cece also fell on the track and was killed.

Their deaths followed the euthanasia of two quarter horses who had raced Jan. 4 at Harrah’s Louisiana Downs on the track’s opening day. Officials with the Louisiana Racing Commission, which oversees horseracing in the state, did not return messages seeking information on the recent deaths.

A spokesman for Churchill Downs Inc., which operates the New Orleans track, declined to confirm the number of recent horse deaths, which the advocacy group culled from the Equibase racing data service.

But an e-mailed statement from the company acknowledged the matter generally, saying that the “recent incidents have been unfortunate and most unusual.”

The spokesman, Trent Dang, said the track's equine medical director was conducting an "in-depth review of each situation individually." An outside expert was at the Fair Grounds on Monday to look at the track's surface, the company said.

Bone fractures appear to be the most common reason given for euthanizing racehorses, particularly those that are unlikely to return to the track or make a profit for their owners in breeding fees.

The uptick in horse deaths at the Fair Grounds prompted criticism from the Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group, which is pressing for passage of a reform bill now before Congress that would set national standards for drugging racehorses and place oversight with an independent body under the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

The bill has found momentum in Congress in the wake of a swell in racehorse deaths at storied Santa Anita Park early last year that drew huge protests to the Los Angeles-area racetrack and a national spotlight on the treatment of the sport's star athletes.

Marty Irby, Animal Wellness Action's executive director, said Monday that the bill has more than 200 co-sponsors in the House. But none is from Louisiana, a state he called a "stumbling block" to reform.

"American horseracing is addicted to drugs, and it's time for an intervention," Irby said in a statement. "Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the deaths of these iconic American equines for entertainment -- this isn't ancient Rome, it's 2020."

The statement from Churchill Downs suggested the company was cool on the federal bill, which it said “lacks broad consensus on how it will work, how it will be funded and what agency has the expertise and willingness to provide the necessary oversight.”

While the recent deaths at the Fair Grounds may seem like an alarming spike, it's not a terribly surprising one, Patrick Battuello said.

Battuello, founder of the nonprofit Horseracing Wrongs, began collecting public data five years ago on racehorse deaths in America, where horses run over about 100 racetracks in 35 states. He said he's confirmed about 1,000 racehorse deaths annually in the U.S. but pegs the actual number at perhaps twice as much, including training and stall deaths.

“I wouldn't call it an anomaly. This is what will happen, there will be clusters,” Battuello said of the recent Fair Grounds casualties. “Look, this is business as usual. They've been killing horses forever. The killing is built into the system.”

By his count, 49 racehorses were killed in 2018 after running at one of Louisiana's four racetracks. That was down from 67 horse deaths in 2017 and 52 in 2016. Data from 2019 is incomplete, he said.

Shreveport Times

[Two horses die on Harrah's Louisiana Downs' quarter horse opening day](#)

From Staff Reports Published 2:00 p.m. CT Jan. 6, 2020

Harrah's Louisiana Downs opened its quarterhorse meet on Saturday with a pair of horses falling and having to be euthanized.

Two-year-old racehorses "Lrh Fast as Oak" and "Perry Train" both fell and were euthanized according to Equibase.

Horse deaths have become more common at tracks in recent years. According to the Jockey Club's Equine Injury Database, nearly 10 horses a week on average died at American racetracks in 2018.

Thirty-seven horses died at Santa Anita in Arcadia, California, in 2019. That track [already has its first death of 2020](#).

"The horrific deaths at Harrah's Louisiana Downs on Saturday, and at racetracks across America will not stop until Congress passes the Horseracing Integrity Act that will end doping and provide greater safety for our iconic American equines," said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action.

"But Louisiana has been a stumbling block for the bill, and the public outcry to end American horse racing is rapidly growing. Obstructionists in the industry who've failed to support the Horseracing Integrity Act should take a serious look in the mirror, and ask themselves if they want to be remembered for the cruel mistreatment of horses and bringing an end to horse racing; or for saving lives, and bringing integrity back to the sport."



Two horses euthanized after fall on Opening Day in Louisiana



Posted: Jan 6, 2020 / 11:32 AM CST / Updated: Jan 6, 2020 / 11:32 AM CST

Race for the prize of the “Derby” in Pyatigorsk, Northern Caucasus, Russia.

BOSSIER CITY, La. (KTAL/KMSS) – Harrah’s Louisiana Downs confirmed Monday that two racehorses had to be euthanized over the weekend.

“All of us at Harrah’s Louisiana Downs were deeply saddened that two racehorses had to be humanely euthanized this past weekend,” said a statement released by Harrah’s Monday.

“We pride ourselves on providing excellent racing conditions and proper veterinary care for the horses who race at Louisiana Downs. For this reason, we will continue to work closely with the Louisiana Racing Commission and veterinary staff to ensure the health and safety of our equine families.”

It happened on opening day of the Quarter Horse season. Harrah's did not specify the circumstances surrounding the animal's deaths.

According to online records published by [Equibase](#), an industry-owned database of racing information and statistics, two-year-old racehorses "Lrh Fast as Oak" and "Perry Train" both fell and were euthanized.

The animals' deaths prompted a statement from [Animal Wellness Action](#), a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit that describes itself as dedicated to helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty.

"The horrific deaths at Harrah's Louisiana Downs on Saturday, and at racetracks across America will not stop until Congress passes the Horseracing Integrity Act that will end doping and provide greater safety for our iconic American equines," Executive Director Marty Irby said in a statement released Sunday.

"But Louisiana has been a stumbling block for the bill, and the public outcry to end American horseracing is rapidly growing. Obstructionists in the industry who've failed to support the Horseracing Integrity Act should take a serious look in the mirror, and ask themselves if they want to be remembered for the cruel mistreatment of horses and bringing an end to horseracing; or for saving lives, and bringing integrity back to the sport."

Irby says his organization is the leading animal protection group advocating for Horseracing Integrity Act during the 116th Congress.

According to Irby, the bill "would take a tangible stride toward protecting American racehorses through the establishment of a national, uniform standard for drugs and medication in horse racing. It would also grant drug rulemaking, testing, and enforcement oversight to a private, non-profit, self-regulatory independent organization overseen by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) – the governing body that administers the Olympic anti-doping program, at no cost to the taxpayer, but not a single member of the Louisiana Congressional Delegation has cosponsored the measure."

Horse racing anti-doping bill attains majority support in U.S. House of Representatives

[Tim Sullivan](#), Louisville Courier Journal

Published 8:01 p.m. ET Dec. 18, 2019

Distances can be deceiving in politics, but the Horseracing Integrity Act is now, ostensibly, halfway home.

Though the U.S. House of Representatives was preoccupied with its impeachment vote Wednesday, racing's reform advocates celebrated a milestone in reaching a majority with the 218th cosponsor for a bill that would create a national anti-doping authority independent of existing industry regulators.

"Bi-partisan support from more than 218 members is a critical milestone because it demonstrates to House leadership that the bill will pass on the House floor," said Shawn Smeallie, executive director of the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity. "Clearly, Congress recognizes that the current patchwork quilt of state regulations that govern the industry is failing and an effective anti-doping program with a national set of drug standards is needed to bring equine safety and integrity back to the sport."

Introduced in March by Kentucky Republican Andy Barr and New York Democrat Paul Tonko, House Resolution 1754 seeks to streamline a sport currently governed by 38 different jurisdictions, eliminating race-day medication and creating a Horseracing Anti-Doping and Medication Control Authority to be overseen by the United States Anti-Doping Agency.

After the legislation attained majority support in the House, Barr said, "This noteworthy milestone further recognizes the need for uniform racing standards to ensure the safety and integrity of the sport. In the new year, I will continue to fight to bring this legislation to the House floor for a vote."

Despite his support in the House, Barr's fight still appears to be uphill. Though the bill is of keen interest in horse country, Barr is the only one of Kentucky's six House members on board. Because advocates fear Kentucky's Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell may block the bill in the absence of an endorsement by Churchill Downs, the path to a new law remains long.

Advocates count 177 Democratic and 43 Republicans cosponsors in the House and 17 cosponsors of a similar bill in the Senate.

"We're thrilled to see the Horseracing Integrity Act ... hit this mile marker," said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action. "American horse racing has dealt itself a self-inflicted wound, and Congress must pass this legislation quickly, or the debate will shift away from eliminating abuses in horseracing to eliminating horse racing itself."

Recognizing a need to act aggressively in the face of mounting safety concerns, six of racing's most prominent entities last month announced the formation of the Thoroughbred Safety Coalition, a move widely seen as an effort to affect change internally before more drastic changes could be imposed from Washington. Members include the Breeders' Cup, Churchill Downs, the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club, Keeneland, the New York Racing Association and the Stronach Group.

Last week, the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission voted to begin a gradual phase-out of race-day Lasix in stakes races, beginning next year with 2-year-olds and extending to all stakes in 2021.

"Momentum is building to reform the horse racing industry and establish a meaningful and effective drug control program," Smeallie said. "This past year highlighted many of the challenges facing the horse racing industry, and the Horseracing Integrity Act will go a long way to improving the health of our equine athletes."

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Steve Bittenbender - January 02, 2020

[Santa Anita Suffers Two Deaths in First Week of Meet; Opening Day Handle, Attendance Drop](#)

Santa Anita will resume horse racing on Friday, but it entered 2020 under the same shadow that fell over the Southern California track all last year.



Omaha Beach dominated in Saturday's Grade I Runhappy Malbu Stakes at Santa Anita, but the California track has still been dealing with the aftermath of the deaths that plagued it last year. Attendance for Saturday's meet-opening card was off by 15 percent from last year. The on-track handle dropped by 20 percent. (Image: Santa Anita)

On the last race of its New Year's Day card, the track suffered its first racing fatality of the year when Golden Birthday pulled up with an injury. Track officials took the horse off the turf track in a can and euthanized it.

According to the Equibase racing chart, the 4-year-old gelding led the 1-1/8-mile allowance optional claiming race through the first three-quarters of a mile. In trying to maintain the lead, Golden Birthday “inched away again on the second turn, took a bad step then drifted out while being pulled up into the stretch.”

It was the second death at Santa Anita since racing resumed last week. On Dec. 26, Truest Reward, a 3-year-old gelding broke his left front leg on the training track.

Racing was supposed to resume on that day, the traditional opening day for Santa Anita’s winter and spring meets. However, officials announced on Dec. 21 that [forecasts for rain](#) in the Los Angeles area prompted them to push the first day of racing to Dec. 28.

From December 2018 to November’s Breeders’ Cup, 37 horses died at Santa Anita. The deaths spurred a three-week closure of the track in March and fueled a yearlong national debate about the future of the sport.

Opening Day Attendance, Handle Down from Last Year

Numbers from the opening day of Santa Anita’s 2019-20 meet fell compared to the prior year’s record-breaking opener.

The postponements allowed Santa Anita to set up an 11-race card last Saturday with seven stakes races. The card included Omaha Beach, a top 3-year-old colt who cruised to victory in the Grade I Runhappy Malibu Stakes.

Despite the stacked card, on-track attendance fell more than 15 percent from 41,373 on Dec. 26, 2018 to the 35,085 who came out on Saturday. The on-track handle dropped 20 percent from \$3.5 million to \$2.8 million.

Attendance at the California off-track betting parlors rose more than 6 percent from the previous year, to 7,048. That helped spur an 8 percent increase in handle to \$2.5 million.

Despite the jump from the OTBs, the total in-state handle still fell more than 8 percent to \$5.5 million.

Out-of-state handle also fell nearly 7 percent from \$14.5 million last year to Saturday’s \$13.5 million.

Deaths Again Spark Calls for Changes

The latest deaths at Santa Anita spurred more calls from animal welfare organizations pushing for additional changes to the sport.

Marty Irby, executive director for Animal Wellness Action, said in a statement that deaths like the one that Truest Reward suffered would continue until Congress passes the Horseracing Integrity Act. He credited The Stronach Group, which owns Santa Anita, for its support of the bill that would nationalize drug standards for racing and establish a private regulatory body to oversee drug testing in the sport.

“But the public outcry to end American horseracing is rapidly growing, and obstructionists in the industry who’ve failed to support the Horseracing Integrity Act should take a serious look in the mirror, and ask themselves if they want to be remembered for the cruel mistreatment of horses and bringing an end to horseracing; or for saving lives, and bringing integrity back to the sport,” Irby said.

PETA, though, reiterated in its statement that racing at Santa Anita should stop until officials can prevent deaths like Golden Birthday’s.

Kathy Guillermo, the group’s senior vice president, assailed what she called a “weak investigation” by the [Los Angeles County District Attorney’s office](#) that failed to issue any animal cruelty charges. She said it’s now up to Gov. Gavin Newsom and the California Horse Racing Board to act.

“2020 should be the year that either the deaths stop, or horse racing does. Right now, racing must be suspended,” she said. “California officials have made substantial improvements to protect horses, but they’re not done yet.”



LEX18
LEXINGTON

Prosecutor finds no crime in Santa Anita horse racing deaths

Posted: 4:44 PM, Dec 19, 2019

By: By BRIAN MELLEY

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California prosecutors found no evidence of animal cruelty or other crimes during an investigation into a spike in horse deaths at Santa Anita Park racetrack over the past year, according to a report issued Thursday.

A task force formed by the Los Angeles district attorney found the 49 deaths at the track during a 12-month period ending in June occurred at a rate higher than the national average, but lower than some years in the past decade and lower than Churchill Downs in Kentucky.

The investigation was one of several actions taken after 23 horse deaths at the California track during the winter-spring season from Dec. 30 to March 31 caused an outcry that included calls to shut down horse racing in the state and led to regulatory changes and proposed legislation.

A total of 56 horses have died at the track since July 2018. The most notable death came in November after Mongolian Groom, a 4-year-old gelding, faltered in the final turn of the \$6 million Breeder's Cup Classic in front of nearly 70,000 fans and a prime-time television audience and was later euthanized.

District Attorney Jackie Lacey made two dozen recommendations for improving safety at racetracks and said she would sponsor legislation to make veterinary records more transparent for horses racing in California.

"Horse racing has inherent risks but is a legally sanctioned sport in California," Lacey said in a statement. "Greater precautions are needed to enhance safety and protect both horses and their riders."

The report found no evidence that owners, trainers or jockeys intentionally made an injured horse race or that the track had pressured jockeys or trainers to race when there were concerns about weather or the track condition. While eight drugs were found in several of the horses that died, none was illegal and quantities didn't exceed legal limits.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which is demanding racing be suspended nationwide until safety measures are introduced, such as installation of CT scan equipment to evaluate the legs of horses, was critical of the report.

"It's beyond credible that the district attorney doesn't see that trainers who medicate horses obviously know that they are injured and sore, so they should be criminally culpable if they then force them to race to their

deaths,” Senior Vice President Kathy Guillermo said. “No sane person can find it acceptable for horses to suffer and die in a sport.”

Political action committee Animal Wellness Action, which is urging Congress to pass legislation to establish a national, uniform standard for drugs in the industry and create an independent organization to oversee medication rules, testing and enforcement, said it was encouraged no criminal wrongdoing was found and applauded Lacey's recommendations.

“But doping remains legal in California, and across the U.S., and American horse racing is addicted to drugs,” said executive director Marty Irby. “It’s time for an intervention, and Congress must soon pass the Horseracing Integrity Act to reform the industry or the public sentiment will continue to shift away from merely eliminating doping in horse racing to eliminating horse racing itself.”

The bills is being supported by the Breeders' Cup, The Jockey Club and The Stronach Group, which owns Santa Anita.

The Stronach Group welcomed Lacey's report and said it was happy she found no evidence of misconduct.

The investigation found an average of 2.04 deaths per 1,000 racing starts last year at Santa Anita, compared to 1.68 nationally, the report said, citing Jockey Club statistics. Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby, averaged 2.73 deaths.

The number of deaths at the track have fluctuated over the past decade from a low of 37 in the 2010-11 season and a high of 71 the following

year, the report said. There were five more deaths last year than in 2017-18.

The national average for catastrophic racing breakdowns has declined almost 20% in the past decade, the report said,

The California Horse Racing Board, which is due next month to issue its own report on the fatalities, voted last week to impose the nation's strictest limits on the use of riding crops, which are commonly called whips.



MARYLAND

2 horses die in 1 week at Laurel Park race track

The second horse died after a "catastrophic injury" during a Thanksgiving Day race.

Author: Madisson Haynes, Jonathan Franklin
Published: 2:10 PM EST December 3, 2019
Updated: 4:14 PM EST December 3, 2019

LAUREL, Md. —

Two horses have died within a week while racing at Laurel Park. This brings the horse death total on Maryland tracks to around 14 this year.

Bo Vuk, a six-year-old gelding, suffered a 'catastrophic injury' during a Thanksgiving Day race, the Baltimore Sun reports. The horse was euthanized.

Bo Vuk is around the fourteenth horse to die on a Maryland race track this year. Bo Vuk's death comes a week after Aikenetta, a five-year-old mare, died at Laurel Park. The sport continues to fight concerns over equine health.

Animal welfare groups are now lobbying Congress to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act, which would create a guide of standards for how racehorses are treated across the nation. Maryland's Chris Van Hollen is one of 10 U.S. Senators who sponsored the legislation.

Additionally, it has over 200 sponsors in the House of Representatives, including some members from Maryland.

Marty Irby, the executive director of Animal Wellness Action, said consistent deaths in American horseracing is inexcusable.

"There's no excuse for the continued deaths in American horseracing," Irby said in a statement. "Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the death of these iconic American equines for entertainment – this isn't Ancient Rome, it's 2019. The Stronach Group that owns Laurel Park supports the Horseracing Integrity Act that would prevent many deaths, and we applaud them, but they should also implement reforms to end doping and whipping at both Laurel Park and Pimlico."

"American horseracing is very rapidly shifting from being known as a sport, to being known as animal cruelty in the public eye," Irby said.

The Maryland Jockey club provided a statement, stating it's committed to the safety of its horses.

"The Stronach Group, owner of the Maryland Jockey Club, is committed to implementing standards consistent with, or better than, those of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities at all of our facilities," the club said in a statement. "We appreciate that each jurisdiction in which we operate is uniquely governed but our goal is to work with our industry partners in each of those jurisdictions to bring about critical reforms and improved horse and rider safety standards. We will accept nothing less."

Back in February, the owners of both the Pimlico and Laurel race tracks spent nearly 90% of the \$22.5 million in state money they received to support Maryland racing on improvements at Laurel, as The Preakness Stakes were in jeopardy of being moved from Baltimore to Laurel.



Santa Anita Track Owners Agree To New Safety Measures

posted by Tim Lantz, iHeart Media - Jun 12, 2019



The owners of the Santa Anita racetrack where at least 29 horses have died in recent months say they are implementing new safety rules. Less than a day after California Governor Gavin Newsom called for more oversight, the owners of the Arcadia track say a five-member safety team will be given the power to remove horses if they do not appear physically capable of competing. State racing officials call the decision "unprecedented." Critics countered by saying the state and the horse racing industry have watched hundreds of horses die over the years without taking much action.

Meantime, U.S. Democratic Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Republican Senator Martha McSally from Arizona, who represent two of the top horseracing states in America, have introduced a bill in Congress called [The Horseracing Integrity Act](#). Their goal is to end the doping of American race horses by establishing a uniform national standard for drug testing with oversight by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency.

"Horses should run on hay, oats, and water, not on a cocktail of performance enhancers and medications," said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. "We applaud Senators Gillibrand and McSally and are pleased to join together to end a shameful period where unscrupulous trainers have put horses and jockeys at risk."

The Jockey Club is also expressing gratitude for the bill.

"The Horseracing Integrity Act is the only solution to improving the welfare of horses across all racing jurisdictions and achieving comprehensive reform in the sport of Thoroughbred racing," said Jim Gagliano, who is the organization's president and chief operating officer.

Gillibrand and McSally said there is no unified regulatory system in the horse racing industry, unlike the National Football League and other major sports. The industry is instead governed by different rules regarding doping and other horseracing issues in each of the 38 state racing jurisdictions in the U.S.

[Note: Some of the video here is graphic and not suitable for all viewers.](#)



2019/12/05

[Bisphosphonates Use in Racehorses](#)

Compiled by Nancy Brannon, Ph.D.

Finding the cause of horseracing deaths at Santa Anita, and other racetracks, often focuses on the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Joe Drape wrote in The New York Times, June 26, 2019: "Experts have long considered drugs a leading cause of horse deaths. Not only do they dull pain and mask injuries, letting at-risk horses run when they should not, but they make horses unnaturally stronger and faster, increasing stress on their limbs."

The Jockey Club collects fatality data from participating racetracks in its Equine Injury Database, but doesn't include the cause or nature of the injury.

<http://jockeyclub.com/default.asp?section=Advocacy&area=11>. [Note that the two tracks in the mid-south, Kentucky Downs and Oaklawn, do not report to the EID.]

Daniel Ross, of Thoroughbred Racing Commentary (TRC), explored the use of bisphosphonates in racehorses, drugs that are used to treat degenerative bone disease in humans. "The potential consequences from misuse of these drugs in racehorses is causing concern among respected veterinarians and regulators in the industry," Ross writes. "There is much that is still unknown about the way that bisphosphonates affect the physiology of the racehorse, with the bulk of the research done on humans and animals other than horses."

"It's a big concern industry wide," Ross quoted Jeff Blea, a Santa Anita-based veterinarian, one of a number of prominent veterinarians in recent years to have dug into the effects of bisphosphonates in racehorses.

In 2014 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved two bisphosphonates — Tiludronate (Tildren) and Clodronate (Osphos) — for use in horses over the age of four. Sue Stover, a professor of veterinary anatomy at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, explained it in an email to TRC, "Bones are continually renewing themselves throughout life to prevent fatigue failure [bone fracture]."

Ross explains further: "In order for bones to keep remodeling and generating new bone cells, they need to shed the old dead bone tissue, which is where osteoclasts and osteoblasts come in. Osteoclasts are cells that help dissolve, break down and absorb damaged or weakened bone tissue. This process is called resorption. Osteoblasts are cells integral to the growth of new bone. They help to fill the tiny little holes left when cells have died, and where resorption has occurred. Bisphosphonates inhibit the work that osteoclasts do, thereby preventing the breakdown of bone tissue (hence why they're used to treat navicular disease)."

However, since bisphosphonates inhibit the functions of osteoclasts, old dead bone cells aren't destroyed, but stay where they are. The dead tissue has lost all its former elasticity, but has the effect of making the diagnosis of bone conditions difficult with x-rays, since the dead bone material can give the impression of everything appearing okay, explained Rick Arthur California Horse Racing Board equine medical director. "The concern is bisphosphonates make bone look good on radiographs," he said, "when in fact, the bone is weakened."

"Bone has to undergo resorption before it gets stronger," said Arthur. "It's a normal process, and, if you inhibit that process, you're inhibiting the ability of the bone to strengthen and to become strong enough to withstand the rigors of racing and training."

Natalie Voss reported that in 2018, surgeon Dr. Larry Bramlage issued a warning at Rood and Riddle's annual Client Education Seminar about misuse of bisphosphonates, "putting racehorses at serious, long-term risk of injury or delayed healing from injury."

Voss explains use of the drugs: "Bisphosphonates (sold commercially as Osphos and Tildren) are FDA-approved in horses four years old and up, and are not approved for use in mares who are pregnant or lactating. The reason for those restrictions is unanswered questions about potential side effects."

Bisphosphonates do their work by reducing the action of cells called osteoclasts, which clear away damaged bone and make way for osteoblasts to lay down new bone. In a young equine skeleton, this could disrupt the growth cycle.”

“A forum discussion at the 2018 American Association of Equine Practitioners annual convention yielded mixed opinions on the drugs.” ...However, “one Florida practitioner ...told the Paulick Report that a well-known vet group had seen a ten-fold increase in catastrophic breakdown and long bone stress fractures in 2-year-olds in training since the approval of bisphosphonates for use in horses.”

Voss continued: “Many have questioned whether bisphosphonates could play a role in the recent spike in equine fatalities at Santa Anita. Bramlage told the Paulick Report he doubts this, since there would be no reason to expect Santa Anita's population would have been more exposed to the drugs than any other.” However, “the problem is lack of information about how many veterinarians are actually using bisphosphonates off-label in young horses, when they're using it, or how many doses horses are getting,” Voss wrote.

The primary approved use for the drug is in navicular syndrome and Bramlage said he has found them useful in retiring horses who are older and can have arthritic fetlock joints.

Dr. Jonathan McLellan, researcher and practitioner with Florida Equine Veterinary Associates, “wants to see veterinarians take bisphosphonates out of trainers’ hands,” Voss wrote.

In the Lexington Herald Leader, Janet Patton looked into the deaths of horses at Santa Anita, and horse fatalities at Kentucky’s tracks that nearly doubled in 2018. “At the February meeting of the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission, equine medical director Dr. Mary Scollay outlined the problem. She had no clear answer as to why there were more horse deaths, but she noted one shift: the horses that died were younger – 2 and 3-year-olds rather than 3 to 4-year-olds. “Scollay wondered if a relatively new class of drugs could be masking vulnerability in bones (and the deaths in Kentucky and in California are almost all musculoskeletal) that is contributing to the wave of deaths.

“Bisphosphonates are osteoporosis medications approved for use in horses 4 or older to treat a bone disease called navicular disease. They work not by building new bone but by killing off the cells, called osteoclasts, that clear away bone with microdamage. In people with serious disorders such as osteoporosis, this helps because it prevents the hollowing of bones.

“Last April, two vets presented concerns to the ARCI annual meeting about widespread off-label usage of these drugs in racehorses and young horses. Dr. Sue Stover of the University of California-Davis veterinary college said that bisphosphonates had been regarded as ‘a silver bullet’ for myriad bone issues.

“Instead that might have created what has been called a ticking time bomb in some racehorses. The drugs are suspected of creating bones that look sound on X-rays but aren’t capable of normal healing.”

Patton also turns to “equine orthopedic surgeon Dr. Larry Bramlage of Rood & Riddle, who said that when the drugs, sold under the name Tildren and Osphos, first became available, he was concerned they would create the potential for catastrophic breakdowns. Instead, what he began to see was horses taking months longer to heal from routine injuries. He thinks that a ban on the use of bisphosphonates

in young horses is a smart move, but is skeptical the drugs are responsible for the rash of breakdowns that racing has seen.”

Marty Irby told us, “The Senate version [of the Horseracing Integrity Act of 2019], led by Sens. Gillibrand and McSally, addresses the bisphosphonates, whereas the House bill doesn’t. [Bisphosphonates are covered in Sec. 7, Unfair or deceptive acts or practices.] The Senators wanted to make sure to cover that issue.” Read the full Senate bill here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1820/text>

Read a summary of the House bill here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1754>

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THE BALTIMORE SUN

[Horse’s death at Laurel Park renews calls for racing industry reform](#)

By [Jean Marbella](#)

Nov 22, 2019 | 8:40 PM

The death of a horse after a race Thursday at Laurel Park has added to concerns about a sport that has been under scrutiny across the country for a staggering number of equine fatalities.

The horse, Aikenetta, a 5-year-old mare, died after finishing last in a seven-horse race. She had been in the lead at the half-mile mark, according to reported race results, before slipping to third in the stretch.

Mike Hopkins, executive director of the Maryland Racing Commission, said the horse was taken to the New Bolton Center in Pennsylvania, a veterinary facility, for a necropsy to determine her cause of death. He said the process likely would take a week to 10 days.

"We're assuming it's a heart issue," Hopkins said, because Aikenetta had no broken bones.

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Hopkins said it's standard protocol for veterinarians to check all the horses before races, listening to their hearts and lungs, palpating their legs and flexing their joints.

Aikenetta is at least the 13th horse to die on a Maryland track this year. On June 16, another 5-year-old mare, [Follow the Petals](#), died after initially leading her race at Laurel. And [Congrats Gal](#), a 3-year-old filly, died after pulling up and finishing last in a race on Black-Eyed Susan Day in May.

The deaths come in the wake of heightened concerns about equine safety, particularly [after more than 30 fatalities in less than a year's time at Santa Anita Park](#) in Southern California. Why so many horses have died there remains unclear, although everything from weather and track conditions to more frequent racing schedules and use of performance enhancing drugs have been suggested.

The deaths prompted Santa Anita's owners, The Stronach Group, which also owns Laurel and Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, to ban the use of drugs and whips on racing days at the California park.

The Stronach Group previously said it wanted to extend such a ban to all its tracks, but Hopkins said such a proposal has not been brought to the commission.

On Friday, The Stronach Group said in a statement to The Baltimore Sun that it remains committed to safety.

"The Stronach Group is fully committed to implementing standards consistent with, or better than, those of the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities at all of our facilities," according to the statement, attributed to Belinda Stronach, the chairman and president.

"We appreciate that each jurisdiction in which we operate is uniquely governed but our goal is to work with our industry partners in each of those jurisdictions to bring about

critical reforms and improved horse and rider safety standards,” the group said. “We will accept nothing less.”

The bans have drawn pushback from many horse trainers and owners. Alan Foreman, general counsel for the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen’s Association, dismissed the Stronach ban on race day drugs as an attempt to “look like reformers.”

The only drug allowed on race days is Lasix, a commonly injected diuretic used to prevent bleeding, and there is no evidence that it contributes to higher fatalities. Foreman did say the industry is looking at the subject of whipping.

He said a coalition of industry stakeholders in the area have been working to develop strategies to reduce equine deaths. A full “mortality review” of deaths such as Aikenetta’s, looking at the pre-race exam, blood tests and any pre-existing conditions, will help in finding ways to improve horse safety.

“We will try to reconstruct what happened,” Foreman said. “Did we miss something?”

Animal rights groups have long sought reforms if not outright bans of horse racing. The Washington-based anti-cruelty group Animal Wellness Action said Aikenetta’s death demonstrates the need for greater regulation of the sport.

The group is among those that have been lobbying for the Horseracing Integrity Act, which would create a national anti-doping authority for race horses similar to that for Olympic athletes. It has more than 200 sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives and could receive a hearing next year, said Marty Irby, executive director of the animal wellness group. He called The Stronach Group’s drug ban “a really good start.”

“We’d like to see it expanded across the country,” Irby said.

“As the death toll rises, the public view of American horse racing is swiftly deteriorating,” he said. “Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the deaths of these iconic American equines for entertainment.”

People

Breeders' Cup Ends With 37th Horse Death Since December at Santa Anita Race Track

"The death of Mongolian Groom is a loss to the entire horse racing community," the Breeders' Cup officials said in a statement

By [Claudia Harmata](#)

November 04, 2019 03:41 PM



Another horse has [died at the Santa Anita horse racing track](#).

On Saturday, Mongolian Groom was euthanized after severely breaking his leg while running during the \$6 million Classic of the Breeders' Cup at the California track, according to several reports.

According to [ESPN](#), Mongolian Groom was competing in the 1 1/4 mile contest when his jockey, Abel Cedillo, suddenly pulled-up the horse near the eighth pole — after which spectators could see the 4-year-old hobbling on just three legs.

A screen was quickly set-up to shield the horse from viewers while an equine ambulance drove up to take him to a hospital. Upon examination by four veterinarians, it was recommended that the horse be euthanized, given the severity of his injury. Cup officials described it as “a serious fracture” in his left hind leg.



Mongolian Groom
Mark J Terrill/AP/Shutterstock

“The death of Mongolian Groom is a loss to the entire horse racing community,” a statement from Breeders’ Cup Ltd. read, ESPN reported. “Our equine and human athletes’ safety is the Breeders’ Cup’s top priority.”

“We have worked closely with Santa Anita leading up to the World Championships to promote enhanced equine safety,” they added. “Santa Anita has implemented numerous industry-leading reforms to enhance the existing health and safety measures with the intent of providing a safe racing environment.”

Mongolian Groom is the 37th horse to die at Santa Anita since December 2018. These mounting deaths have pressured the track’s owner, The Stronach Group, to enforce new rules surrounding training and medication for the horses — including stricter pre-race exams.



Mongolian Groom

“Everything had been going so great,” Bob Baffert, a horse trainer, said before Mongolian Groom’s death was announced. “You just don’t know when it is going to happen. We try to keep them as safe as we can.”

After the closing races on Sunday, Santa Anita will not be open again until its winter-spring meet on Dec. 26, according to the [Associated Press](#).

The Stronach Group told the outlet it’s looking into replacing the main dirt track with a new, synthetic one during the down-time as a way to increase the safety of the horses and riders. The California Thoroughbred Trainers organization has also volunteered to raise money for an equine MRI for Santa Anita.

In addition to this, the political action committee, Animal Wellness Action, is pressuring Congress to pass a bill that will establish a national standard for medication in the industry: the Horseracing Integrity Act. The Breeders’ Cup, The Jockey Club and The Stronach Group have all expressed their support of the bill.

“American horseracing is at its greatest crossroads in history, and the death of Mongolian Groom underscores the need for Congress to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act. The Breeders’ Cup, and the Stronach Group that owns Santa Anita Park have been pushing to end doping, and end deaths by passing the bill, and we are

grateful for their support as a partner in the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity,” Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, said in a statement.

“But it is organizations like Churchill Downs and The Kentucky Derby that continue to hinder the legislation, and if they don’t step up in support of the bill then we’ll see more groups take up the issue and the debate will shift away from eliminating doping in horseracing to eliminating horseracing itself,” Irby added.

By [Claudia Harmata @claudiaharmata](#)



Another horse dies in Del Mar

POSTED 9:53 AM, NOVEMBER 18, 2019, BY [DANIELLE RADIN](#), UPDATED AT 10:40AM, NOVEMBER 18, 2019



DEL MAR, Calif. – A horse died over the weekend, the [San Diego-Union Tribune](#) reported, bringing more scrutiny to horseracing after a series of injuries and deaths since the summer.

Slewgoodtobetruer, a 3-year-old horse, collapsed and died in the barn area after a workout on Sunday morning.

Animal rights activists and members of the Coalition for Horseracing Integrity are outraged at the news.

2 horses die, another is injured on third day of Del Mar's fall meet.

"As the body count continues to climb, the American public's view of the sport continues to decline," said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. "Our modern-day society will no longer tolerate the deaths of our iconic American horses for entertainment – this isn't Ancient Rome, it's 2019. American horseracing is addicted to drugs, and it's time for an intervention."

Two other horses were euthanized and another horse was injured in November during three different races at the [Del Mar Racetrack](#).

In August, a [horse was euthanized](#) after training in Del Mar. The 3-year-old filly, Bri Bri, suffered a serious pelvis injury, officials said.

"Del Mar has implemented a series of safety and welfare reforms over the last several racing seasons, including the creation of an independent five-member panel to review all entries," the club said in a statement released at the time of the death. The organization said they would be meeting with the horse's trainer, Jim Cassidy, to discuss the incident.

"We are deeply sorry for her and her human connections," the Thoroughbred Club statement read.

Two other horses, Charge A Bunch and Carson Valley, died in what trainers called a "freak accident" after [colliding on the track](#) during a July 19 training.

Santa Anita is under unprecedented scrutiny over safety concerns after more than [30 fatalities](#) in the track's winter-spring meeting. The track has implemented several measures to try to solve the mystery of why so many horses have died.



[Advocates step up efforts for horse racing reform bill after more deaths](#)

BY [ALEX GANGITANO](#) - 11/07/19 11:22 AM EST

[by](#)



© Getty Images

An advocacy group to prevent cruelty to animals is headed to Capitol Hill to urge lawmakers to pass legislation to protect racehorses.

Animal Wellness Action is pressing Congress on the Horseracing Integrity Act, which would establish a national standard for medication use on racehorses and create a committee, managed by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, to enforce it and test the horses. It would be the same model the Olympics have for athletes and the first of its kind for non-humans.

The new push comes after the death of a horse, Mongolian Groom, at the Breeders' Cup in California on Saturday. The horse, which injured his leg and was euthanized, was the seventh to die on that track since September.

"It's definitely something that is much more on the radar today than it was a week ago. I think everybody has expressed that," Animal Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby told The Hill after his meetings on Capitol Hill on Wednesday.

"People were far more focused on the recent incident and what they've seen from the public and the outcry."

The bill is sponsored by Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) and by Reps. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), and Andy Barr (R-Ky.). It currently has 196 co-sponsors in the House.

Animal Wellness Action got 2020 hopeful Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Sen. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) to sign on as well, bringing it to six co-sponsors in the Senate.

"Good to have a current presidential candidate. Hopefully the rest of the candidates will fall in line and come on and co-sponsor," Irby said.

Irby's group is part of the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity, which will return to Capitol Hill next week to lobby the House when it returns from recess.

"A dozen or more I think will come on board pretty quickly," Irby said. "I think we'll get to 218 pretty quickly, maybe by the end of next week."

Irby predicted there will be a hearing in the House early next year, but the bill faces an uphill battle this Congress in the Senate.

The Breeders' Cup, The Jockey Club and The Stronach Group are supporting the bill through the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity. But, Churchill Downs, which hosts the Kentucky Derby, is not in the coalition.

That's a significant obstacle for supporters of the bill. Churchill Downs is in the home state of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who is essential to getting the bill through the upper chamber. McConnell has not taken a position on the bill.

Irby said a couple of members brought up the McConnell hurdle, adding it was "not near as many" as he expected.

"We'll still keep pressing along in both chambers," Irby said.



[SPORTS NEWS](#)

NOVEMBER 3, 2019 / 7:04 PM / UPDATED AN HOUR AGO

Activists call for halt to U.S. horse racing

[Rory Carroll](#)

5 MIN READ

:

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Animal rights groups on Sunday called for an immediate halt to horse racing following the high-profile death of a gelding in Saturday's Breeders' Cup Classic at Southern California's Santa Anita Park.



FILE PHOTO: Nov 2, 2019; Arcadia, CA, USA; Abel Cedillo aboard Mongolian Groom (9) races in the Longines Breeders' Cup Classic in the 36th Breeders Cup world championships at Santa Anita Park. Mongolian Groom was euthanized after the race. Mandatory Credit: Richard Mackson-USA TODAY Sports

Four-year-old Mongolian Groom injured his left hind leg going into the final turn of the nationally televised \$6 million race, was taken away from the track in an ambulance and later euthanised.

Thirty-seven horses, including three in the last nine days, have died at the famed race track since late December, shining a spotlight on a sport that lacks national regulation pertaining to the misuse of drugs, a leading culprit in horse fatalities.

In April, Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey announced an investigation into why at that time 23 horses had died at Santa Anita over a three month period.

The results of the investigation have yet to be released, leading to frustration on the part of activists, who protested outside her office demanding answers on Thursday.

The Breeders' Cup, the sports richest event with some \$30 million up for grabs over its two days, changes venues every year and its board had considered moving it from Santa Anita in light of the fatalities.

But in June it voted to keep it at Santa Anita as planned after track owners the Stronach Group implemented new rules governing the use of race day medications and hired a record number of veterinarians to examine the horses prior to their starts.

“The decision to hold the Breeders' Cup at Santa Anita before the results of investigations into the spate of recent deaths was ill advised,” Kitty Block, CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, said in a statement.

“We believe that a suspension of racing at this track is warranted until the investigations of those deaths, and now the death of Mongolian Groom, are completed and released.”

Animal rights group PETA went further, calling for a halt to horse racing nationwide.

“If the racing industry and state officials truly want to save horses' lives, they will suspend trainers and veterinarians of horses who die pending full investigations, install safer synthetic surfaces and CT scan equipment at all tracks, and

ban all drugs in the two weeks before a race,” said PETA senior vice president Kathy Guillermo.

“All racing nationwide must be suspended until these measures are put in place,” she added.

“Any reluctance to do so will lead to more deaths and the self-destruction of horse racing.”

WHIPPING BAN

A video of the race released by PETA shows jockey Abel Cedillo whipping Mongolian Groom as he came around the final turn on the fast dirt surface before stopping and raising his left hind leg off the ground.

“So even if he was in pain and wanted to slow down, he could not have done so,” Guillermo said.

“Striking horses during racing must be banned now.”

The California Horse Racing Board has proposed a measure that would greatly limit the use of the whip. The measure is currently open for public comment.

Backers of the Horse Racing Integrity Act, federal legislation that would curtail the use of drugs and establish national oversight, said they hoped Saturday’s tragedy would prompt Congress to act.

“American horse racing is at its greatest crossroads in history, and the death of Mongolian Groom underscores the need for Congress to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act,” said Marty Irby of Animal Wellness Action.

The Breeders’ Cup and the Stronach Group support the bill but is opposed by Churchill Downs, home to the Kentucky Derby, a state represented by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

McConnell has yet to announce his position on it.

California Senator Dianne Feinstein had said the Breeders’ Cup would be “critical test” for the future of horse racing in the state prior to the event.

On Saturday the Breeders’ Cup said measures had been put in place to ensure its athletes were racing under the “safest and most transparent conditions possible.”

“The death of Mongolian Groom is a loss to the entire horse racing community,” the Breeders’ Cup said in a statement.

“Our equine and human athletes’ safety is the Breeders’ Cup’s top priority. We have worked closely with Santa Anita leading up to the World Championships to promote enhanced equine safety.”

The race track concludes its autumn meet on Sunday.

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[Health & Science](#)

[Tragedy strikes Breeders' Cup at Santa Anita despite reform](#)



Track workers treat Mongolian Groom after the Breeders' Cup Classic horse race at Santa Anita Park, Saturday, Nov. 2, 2019, in Arcadia, Calif. The jockey eased him up near the eighth pole in the stretch. The on-call vet says he has "serious" injury to leg. Was taken to equine hospital on the grounds. (Mark J. Terrill/Associated Press)

By **Beth Harris | AP**

November 3, 2019 at 7:12 p.m. EST

ARCADIA, Calif. — The Breeders' Cup and Santa Anita came within 220 yards of staging a safe weekend of championship racing.

It all came down to the \$6 million Classic in front of nearly 70,000 fans and a prime-time television audience. The 11-horse field thundered out of the final turn, with favorite McKinzie in the lead and Vino Rosso bearing down on him.

Behind them along the rail, Mongolian Groom suddenly faltered. Jockey Abel Cedillo jerked on the reins to ease the 4-year-old gelding, who hopped on three legs. His injured left hind leg dangled distressingly.

Vino Rosso charged past McKinzie to claim victory, triggering cheers and a celebration by his human connections. Up the track, a screen was set up to shield Mongolian Groom and an equine ambulance drove to his rescue.

But there was nothing to be done after the gelding sustained what Cup officials described as “a serious fracture” of his leg. Given the extent of the injury, four veterinarians recommended that he be euthanized.

Mongolian Groom became the 37th horse to die at Santa Anita since last December, and the seventh since the fall meet began Sept. 27.

It was a final blow in a strife-filled season for a sport struggling to protect the lives of horses and jockeys amid a steady drumbeat of public criticism by everyone from Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to animal rights activists demanding an end to horse racing in California.

The deaths had prompted track owner The Stronach Group to change rules involving medication and training. The Breeders’ Cup beefed up its own pre-race exams and observations of runners.

But no one can eliminate the unpredictability of sports or injury.

“You just don’t know when it is going to happen,” two-time Triple Crown-winning trainer Bob Baffert said. “We try to keep them as safe as we can.”

A day after the Breeders’ Cup ended its record 10th running at Santa Anita, all was quiet at the track.

All nine races went off without incident Sunday on closing day of the fall meet. A horse in the last race was pulled up but was uninjured.

Racing moves to Del Mar starting Friday through Dec. 1 at the seaside track north of San Diego.

Santa Anita opens its winter-spring meet on Dec. 26.

By then, more changes could be in place. The Stronach Group has said it’s looking into the feasibility of replacing Santa Anita’s main dirt track with a synthetic surface, something tried before in California and cast aside.

Craig Fravel has now left his post as CEO of the Breeders’ Cup to join The Stronach Group, where he’ll be in charge of executing and enforcing effective procedures and integrity standards for horses and riders.

The California Thoroughbred Trainers organization has agreed to help raise money for the purchase of an equine MRI (to scan horses while standing) for the equine imaging center on the Santa Anita backstretch. A Nov. 15 deadline is looming to contract for the equipment so it would be installed before the winter-spring meet opens.

The imaging center already has nuclear scan technology and will add an equine PET scan, with The Stronach Group kicking in \$500,000 for it and another \$200,000 coming from a private foundation dedicated to research on equine health issues. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is demanding all racing nationwide be suspended until specific measures are put in place, including the installation of CT scan equipment at all tracks.

“Any reluctance to do so will lead to more deaths and the self-destruction of horse racing,” PETA senior vice president Kathy Guillermo said.

Political action committee Animal Wellness Action is urging Congress to pass the Horseracing Integrity Act, which seeks to establish a national, uniform standard for medication in the industry. It would also create an independent organization managed by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency to oversee medication rules, testing and enforcement.

The Breeders’ Cup, The Jockey Club and The Stronach Group are supporting the bill through the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity.

Churchill Downs, home of the Kentucky Derby, isn’t part of that group and instead wants to create a new coalition that would advocate with state regulators for fair and uniform regulation in the 38 racing jurisdictions nationwide.

“If they don’t step up in support of the bill, then we’ll see more groups take up the issue and the debate will shift away from eliminating doping in horse racing to eliminating horse racing itself,” said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action.

The California Horse Racing Board plans to release in December the results of its investigation into the deaths at Santa Anita. The Los Angeles District Attorney’s office has yet to indicate when its probe will conclude.

As with the other fatalities, Mongolian Groom will undergo a required necropsy at UC Davis.

The gelding whose owner and trainer are Mongolian had been a surprising success story after being bought for \$12,000 as a 2-year-old in training in 2018. Besides winning the Grade 1 Awesome Again at Santa Anita in September to earn a berth in the Classic, Mongolian Groom had a second and two thirds in other graded stakes to go with career earnings of \$579,141.

A day before the Classic, trainer Enebish Ganbat wouldn’t lay out his vision for the race. “Mongolian people do not predict the race before the race,” he said. “It’s bad luck.”

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[Sports](#)

Two Horses Die At Del Mar Racetrack, Another Injured

The deaths were the fifth and sixth at Del Mar since July 17. The four previous deaths had happened during trainings.

By **Nick Garber, Patch Staff**

Nov 10, 2019 7:09 pm ET | Updated Nov 11, 2019 4:44 pm ET



"We are sad to confirm that in today's third race on the turf course Ghost Street suffered a catastrophic injury to his left front sesamoid and was humanely euthanized," the track said. (Shutterstock)

DEL MAR, CA — Two horses were fatally injured during races Sunday afternoon at el Mar Racetrack, the track said.

Ghost Street, a three-year-old gelding making his fourth career start, "suffered a catastrophic injury to his left front sesamoid and was humanely euthanized," the track [said in a tweet](#) at 2:17 p.m.

"We are deeply sorry for owner Aaron Sones, trainer Patrick Gallagher, his staff and everyone who cared for him," the track said.

Later that afternoon, Prayer Warrior, a 3-year-old colt, was fatally injured in the day's sixth race and was euthanized.

In a statement, the nonprofit group Animal Wellness Action condemned the horses' deaths, calling for [Congress to pass currently-pending legislation](#) that would regulate doping among racehorses.

"The body count continues to climb, and the American people will no longer tolerate the deaths of our iconic American horses for entertainment," the group's executive director Marty Irby said.

Another horse, Princess Dorian, suffered a front leg injury during Sunday's second race at Del Mar and was transported to San Luis Rey Equine Hospital, the track said.

The deaths were the fifth and sixth [to occur at the racetrack](#) in the last several months, with the last one having occurred on August 13. The four previous deaths had occurred during training.

City News Service contributed to this report.

Los Angeles

MAGAZINE



[A Spate of Horse Deaths at Santa Anita Has Activists and Lawmakers Pushing for National Reform](#)

A crackdown on doping is in the works

By [Zoie Matthew](#)

October 18, 2019

The United States horse racing industry has long been criticized by animal rights activists for its high fatality rates—according to the [Jockey Club's Equine Injury Database](#), an average of ten horses a week died at American racetracks in 2018. Over the past year, Arcadia's Santa Anita Park has been in

the spotlight as its death toll spiked, with [33 horses dying](#) at the facility since December.

While some of these deaths have been attributed to inclement weather and a dirt track, many also blame [a reported tolerance](#) for trainers who have been cited for giving animals performance-enhancing drugs, which experts say are a leading cause of horse death. Now, in the wake of national media attention surrounding the deaths, a number of animal rights groups and industry leaders are pushing to establish a national program that would crack down on the use of these drugs, bringing the United States in line with international standards.

Drugs like Lasix, a diuretic that causes horses to shed water weight before a race, can weaken the animals' bones over time, leading to a greater likelihood of injury, says Marty Irby, executive director of [Animal Wellness Action](#). "Then they start giving them other drugs, like pain-masking agents and numbing agents, when they're injured, and running them when they shouldn't be," he says. Typically unable to recover from the bone injuries they incur, the horses are euthanized.

Introduced in March, [the Horse Racing Integrity Act](#) would ban the use of these drugs on race day, and would create an independent committee to oversee testing and enforcement nationwide. Made up of horse racing experts and members of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, which monitors human athletes' drug testing, the committee would establish uniform standards for racetracks, which are currently overseen by 38 different jurisdictions.

Thus far, the bill has been co-sponsored by 172 members of Congress, and has garnered support from numerous animal rights groups. Two legs of the triple crown—the Belmont Stakes and the Preakness Stakes—are proponents of the bill. Churchill Downs, which owns the Kentucky Derby, remains neutral.

The Preakness Stakes is owned by the Stronach Group, which has also owned Santa Anita for 20 years. In March, it implemented a strict new set of regulations at Santa Anita, banning both race-day drugs and whips, but denied the California Horse Racing Board's request to cancel its season in June.

Currently, the Los Angeles district attorney's office is conducting a [sweeping investigation](#) into this year's spate of horse deaths.



CHRB rejects Bolt d'Oro trainer's requests for hearing on Justify's failed drug test

[Tim Sullivan](#), Louisville Courier Journal

Published 8:33 a.m. ET Oct. 16, 2019 | Updated 12:52 p.m. ET Oct. 16, 2019

CJ's Dominique Yates, Tim Sullivan and Jason Frakes share thoughts on the report that Triple Crown winner Justify failed a drug test. Dominique Yates, Louisville Courier Journal

Mick Ruis is asking for answers. He is seeking a hearing from the California Horse Racing Board to revisit the race that launched Justify toward a Triple Crown and the disregarded drug test that has tainted that achievement.

Tuesday, that request was rejected.

"Please be advised that the Board dismissed the matter as authorized under (California) Business and Professions Code 19577(d)," CHRB counsel John McDonough wrote in reply to a letter from Ruis' attorney, Darrell Vienna. "Therefore, further hearing on the subject is not required or warranted."

These are probably not the last words on that subject.

“The request for a hearing is necessary to exhaust administrative remedies prior to litigation,” Vienna said via e-mail Tuesday night. “However, at this point, we are hopeful that the CHRB will provide a full, open and transparent hearing. Should the CHRB fail to provide such a hearing, we do not rule out the pursuit of any and all legal remedies.”

“We don’t want to make a big scene out of this,” Ruis said. “But we want to get to the bottom of it.”

More: [The handling of Justify's failed test shows Bob Baffert benefits from a double standard](#)

The owner/trainer of Bolt d’Oro wants to press the CHRB on its decision against disqualifying Justify from the Santa Anita Derby despite a failed drug test; a race that enabled the lightly raced colt to qualify for the Kentucky Derby and cost Ruis \$400,000 in purse money.

Substantial traces of the banned substance scopolamine were found in Justify’s urine following his three-length victory over Ruis’ Bolt d’Oro at Santa Anita. But the results of that test and the process by which regulators gave Bob Baffert’s horse a pass were not shared publicly until the New York Times broke the story last month.

Though the CHRB’s position has been that Justify’s positive test was the result of an “environmental contaminant” rather than chemical chicanery, Ruis questions whether the board abused its discretion in a case fraught with conflicts of interest and seeming double standards.

At the time the CHRB began its deliberations, Baffert was training a horse for the board’s then-chairman, Chuck Winner. Meanwhile, California had yet to adopt standards revised by the Association of Racing Commissioners International downgrading scopolamine from a Class 3b substance – one which could have triggered disqualification – to a less serious level 4c.

News of Justify’s drug test and the CHRB’s failure to get ahead of the story has proved to be a royal pain to the sport of kings; another argument for national oversight of racing and another blow to a business reeling from a rash of fatalities at Santa Anita.

"Denial of further investigation into the potential corruption in California continues to drag down the industry and compromise the welfare of the horses," Animal Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby said Wednesday in response to the CHRB's stance.

"Congress should intervene."

Horses commonly ingest scopolamine when jimson weed infiltrates their feed, and multiple veterinarians have expressed doubt about its benefits. Dr. Mary Scollay, executive director of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium, suspects the substance may be more “performance-impeding than performance-enhancing.”

“It’s not clear why anyone would administer that in hopes of getting an advantage,” she said.

Still, inasmuch as winning the 2018 Santa Anita Derby was worth \$600,000 and second place paid only \$200,000, Ruis has a hefty financial incentive to overturn the CHRB’s decision. And he’s not the only potential plaintiff. Hall of Fame trainer Jerry Hollendorfer, who is battling a ban from multiple California tracks, saddled fourth-place finisher Instilled Regard in the 2018 Santa Anita Derby.

Had Justify been promptly disqualified – implausible given the turnaround time for drug testing and CHRB procedures – third-place finisher Core Beliefs would have had enough points to qualify for the Kentucky Derby.

“A rule’s a rule,” Ruis said. “It was a banned substance. It was an overage. That’s it: disqualification. You don’t get to appeal, ‘Oh it was jimson weed.’ You know what? Everybody on the backside can make an excuse for something, right? But not everybody has money to hire an attorney so they can continue to race.”

Ruis, who purchased the Woodford Thoroughbreds farm outside Lexington in the spring, has the means to pursue the matter and is motivated by the belief Justify’s drug test was “swept under the rug.”

“I’d rather fight than go and argue in a court,” he said. “It’s ridiculous to hire an attorney. To hire attorneys is the last thing Mick Ruis ever does. I think it’s a waste of money. But I had so many people on the backside who said, ‘Mick, we’ve got to stop this. This is ridiculous.’ I mean, very, very credible horsemen. . .

“I could care less about the \$400,000. That’s not it. But I do care for every small trainer and little guy who is running and racing clean on the backside to have a chance. Let the best horse win, not the best whatever-else-they-use win.”

Vienna said the request for a hearing is “based upon evidence that members of the CHRB were not apprised of significant and essential facts and were misinformed regarding existing rules and regulations.” He declined to elaborate.

“I would hope the CHRB would do the right thing,” Ruis said. “But then again, if they don’t and we go farther, I would sure love to start subpoenaing records and stuff like that. Then we can really find out what went on.”

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[Report on Justify spurs call for national horse racing regulation. Here’s what’s next. | Lexington Herald Leader](#)

BY [JANET PATTON](#), [LESLEY CLARK](#), AND [MIKE STUNSON](#)

SEPTEMBER 12, 2019 04:41 PM, UPDATED 22 MINUTES AGO

Horse racing’s latest black eye is likely to increase calls for oversight of the sport as Washington plans a congressional hearing into legislation that would nationalize regulation of racing.

The sport was shaken by [a New York Times report](#) released late Wednesday that Justify, the 2018 Triple Crown winner, tested positive for the chemical scopolamine after winning the Santa Anita Derby. According to the story, Justify could have been disqualified from running in the Kentucky Derby. The California Horse Racing Board eventually dropped the case after a closed-door hearing.

Coming on the heels of dozens of racehorse deaths this year at Santa Anita Park, U.S. Rep. Andy Barr, R-Kentucky, said Thursday that the news bolsters arguments for a national standard.

“It underscores the confusion that is generated by a system that is a patchwork of conflicting jurisdictions,” Barr said. “I don’t know the facts of this particular case, but the confusion itself is evidence of the need for our legislation.”

He said the story “showcases how confused the betting public is, how confused fans are about what the rules are in any given jurisdiction and it points to the need for national uniform medication rules.”

He said he’s talked with Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Illinois, the chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce, and she plans a hearing on the legislation.

Barr’s Democratic co-sponsor, Rep. Paul Tonko of New York, suggested on Facebook and Twitter that the legislation would help clean up the sport.

“A painful blow for our sport of kings,” Tonko said of the story. “Nationwide drug testing standards are long overdue for horse racing. Anything less will keep putting horses, jockeys and the future of the sport at risk.”

He added that the legislation “will get it done. Congress needs to move it forward ASAP.”

Justify’s trainer, Bob Baffert, on Thursday denied drugging the horse, who later sold for a reported \$60 million to global Thoroughbred breeding giant Coolmore and now stands at stud in Versailles.



Trainer Bob Baffert watched as Triple Crown winner Justify arrived at Ashford Stud in Versailles. Carlos Ramos

“I unequivocally reject any implication that scopolamine was ever intentionally administered to Justify, or any of my horses,” Baffert said in a statement. “Justify is one of the finest horses I’ve had the privilege of training and by any standard is one of the greatest of all time. I am proud to stand by his record, and my own.”

Baffert blamed environmental contamination for a positive finding for the chemical, which is found in jimson weed. He also said he had no “input into, or influence on, the decisions made by the California Horse Racing Board.”



Trainer Bob Baffert watched a morning workout at Churchill Downs during the lead-up to the 2018 Kentucky Derby, which Baffert won with Justify. He has denied drugging Justify before the Santa Anita Derby. Charlie Riedel *AP*

Kentucky racing officials were never informed of the finding. According to the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission, they did not know until Wednesday’s report. The commission had no comment.

Churchill Downs racetrack president Kevin Flanery issued a statement saying that the track where the Kentucky Derby is run also had no knowledge of the California test results.

“Until media reports surfaced Wednesday night, neither Churchill Downs nor the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission had knowledge of any potential positive tests that may have emanated from California in advance of the 2018 Kentucky Derby,” Flanery said. “We do know that all pre- and post-race tests for 2018 Kentucky Derby participants came back clean, including Justify. In advance of our race each year, the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission conducts pre-race out-of-competition testing for every Kentucky Derby starter and all starters’ results were clean. After the race, the top finishers are tested for a myriad of banned substances and the results for all were clean.”



Winning jockey Mike Smith sprayed champagne after riding Justify to victory in the 144th running of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky. To the far left are Starlight Racing’s Jack and Laurie Wolf, to the right of Smith is Winstar Farm owner Kenny Trout, and just behind them is China Horse Club’s Teo Ah Khing, all of them part of Justify’s ownership group. Charles Bertram CBERTRAM@HERALD-LEADER.COM

Dr. Mary Scollay, who was Kentucky’s equine medical director at the time, confirmed that the state wasn’t notified.

Scollay, who is now the executive director of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium, said that a drug positive typically doesn’t become public knowledge until after stewards have issued a ruling on confirmed test results, which could take several weeks “or longer.”

And if there is an appeal of the stewards' ruling, any official sanction is delayed until the case is adjudicated.

Scollay said that while scopolamine does act as a bronchodilator, "it wouldn't be my go-to drug" as a performance enhancer.

"It can actually cause colic, which can be pretty severe," she said.

While the international threshold for scopolamine is 60 nanograms in urine, Justify had 400 nanograms, according to the New York Times. But Scollay said she's been unable to determine from published literature if that would have been significant.

Baffert's attorney, W. Craig Robertson III, called it a "trace amount" that wouldn't have had a "pharmacological effect on a thousand pound animal."

Robertson commended the California authorities for their handling of the matter.

But the controversy has stirred animal welfare groups PETA and Animal Wellness Action to urge passage of Barr's legislation.

Calling California's handling a "nasty cover-up," PETA called for a complete overhaul.

"Drug testing should be conducted and overseen by impartial operators and not by industry players with a vested interest in looking the other way. The Horseracing Integrity Act would put the independent U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) in the saddle and allow it to clean up a sport addicted to doping that's caused countless horse deaths," said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action, in a news release.

"House and Senate Commerce Committee Chairmen Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and Roger Wicker (R-MS), should swiftly schedule a hearing on the legislation and investigate the corruption in horse racing for the well-being and protection of our iconic American equines, and to preserve what little integrity remains within the sport."

But Scollay pointed out that federal rules wouldn't have changed the timeline in the Justify case.

“It wouldn’t relieve the legal obligation to provide due process,” she said. “There is a clear need for uniformity in testing, in regulation, in enforcement, all of it. But the industry has the potential to do that. ... In some areas, we already have uniformity, particularly with therapeutic medications. We all have the same thresholds and testing. Where we still see variability is in how those findings are addressed by regulatory authorities.

“We’re far better off than 20 years ago, but we need to do better.”

LEXINGTON
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[The Justify bombshell shows even more the need for federal oversight of racing | Lexington Herald Leader](#)

[BY LINDA BLACKFORD](#)

SEPTEMBER 12, 2019 10:58 AM



See the race and the win unfold for Justify, No. 7, his jockey Mike Smith and trainer Bob Baffert. The 144th Run for the Roses photos are from the Herald-Leader crew. BY HERALD-LEADER

New York Times racing writer Joe Drape [dropped a bomb](#) on horse racing, reporting that Justify, the winner of the 2018 Triple Crown, tested positive for a regulated substance in California not long before the Kentucky Derby but California racing regulators hushed it up.

Apparently, Justify tested positive for scopolamine, which can open up blood vessels and airways, but the California Horse Racing Board kept it very quiet in the weeks leading up to the Derby, and eventually dismissed it in a closed door hearing, according to Drape. The chairman of the board has an interest in horses trained by Bob Baffert, Justify's trainer, a legendary figure in racing who had broken the Triple Crown's 37-year drought in 2015 with American Pharoah.

The predictable squawking and squirming started Thursday morning in an industry already besieged by troubles of its own doing: the increased [deaths of racehorses](#) in California and elsewhere, the confusing [disqualification of Maximum Security](#) in the Kentucky Derby, and a general feeling that the sport is neither humane nor honest. A 2018 Jockey Club report found that only 22 percent of the population has a positive view of racing, according to the Blood-Horse.

Scopolamine is not banned altogether, according to [the Daily Racing Form](#), but is judged on threshold levels. To make it more confusing, scopolamine can be found in jimson weed, which is sometimes included in hay and food. It's also regulated in Kentucky. It's not clear if a more speedy process in California would have affected Justify's run in the Triple Crown races. I assume he tested clean in those three places, but today, it's even more obvious the racing public is the last to know.

The only clear point that can be made this morning is that Congress should pass the [federal Horse Racing Integrity Act](#), and the sooner the better. The bill is sponsored by Kentucky Republican Rep. Andy Barr and Rep. Paul Tonko, a Democrat from New York, two men who represent the horse hubs of Lexington and Saratoga Springs, two places that depend not just on horse racing, but on breeding, raising and training them too. The bill would create a private agency that would be in charge of anti-doping efforts from every racing state with standard regulations, rather than the hodgepodge of state rules that exist now. It would also ban race day medications, which would put it in line with racing rules in the rest of the world. This agency would be overseen by the Federal Trade Commission.

The proposed bill has gone from pariah status to a movement supported by Keeneland, the Jockey Club, numerous groups and people, most recently, [billionaire B. Wayne Hughes](#), the owner of Spendthrift Farm in Lexington. Holdouts such as Churchill Downs are believed to have kept Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell from signing on. The country's two largest horsemen's groups, the National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association and the Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, are also opposed because of the raceday medication rule.

If the insular racing industry thinks this will just go away, they might want to think again. Consider this from Marty Irby, director of Animal Wellness Action this morning:

“Drug testing should be conducted and overseen by impartial operators and not by industry players with a vested interest in looking the other way,” he said in a press release. “The Horseracing Integrity Act would put the independent U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) in the saddle and allow it to clean up a sport addicted to doping that's caused countless horse deaths.”

Irby went on to urge Congress to call hearings on the proposed bill AND start an investigative hearing to “investigate the corruption in horse racing for the well-being and protection of our iconic American equines, and to preserve what little integrity remains within the sport.”

“What little integrity remains.” It's a shame these human shenanigans have tarnished the stunning accomplishments of that strapping chestnut colt and his ilk. People love to rally around Triple Crown winners like Justify, provided those wins are clean. That's why if racing has any sense of self preservation, they should support and pass the Horse Racing Integrity Act. They need to prove they're worthy of the trust of the public and the horses who work so hard for them.

Linda Blackford writes columns and commentary for the Herald-Leader.

The Jockey Club Endorses Whip Ban

Other Safety Measures Urged

By Richard R. Gross



The Jockey Club has endorsed safety measures to help lift the cloud currently hanging over horseracing in the U.S. ©Richard R. Gross

The Jockey Club concluded its 67th Annual Round Table Sunday in Saratoga, NY by recommending the American Thoroughbred industry unite on several measures from banning the use of the whip “for encouragement” to uniting on the drug policies in American racehorses and bringing interference rules in racing in compliance with worldwide practices.

The Round Table is available in its entirety [here](#).

James L. Gagliano, The Jockey Club president and chief operating officer stressed the need for uniting on consistent policies “if (Thoroughbred industry) stakeholders wish for it to be successful.”

The Jockey Club is the official breed registry for North American Thoroughbreds and serves as a strong advisory board for the Thoroughbred industry in the United States, which is officially governed by regulatory authorities in the 38 states that sponsor Thoroughbred racing.

Most notable was the Club’s outright endorsement of banning the use of the whip, sometimes called a crop, during races. Chairman Stuart Janney III announced the recommendation, which was made by the Club’s Thoroughbred Safety Committee, which also included penalty guidelines for breach of the ban.

The call for the ban was immediately endorsed by Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, a Washington-based animal advocacy group established for “helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty.”

“The use of a whip to force horses to run faster is archaic and should be eliminated on a global scale,” said Irby in response to the Club’s endorsement. While use of the whip currently is unrestricted in U.S. racing, its use is regulated, usually by the number of allowable strokes, in most racing jurisdictions worldwide.



Janney offered support for the ban with polling data from research commissioned by the Club.

“Consumer research conducted earlier this year indicated that making penalties stricter for violation of rules regarding use of the riding crop received the most support among current and potential fans,” Janney remarked. “No horse or rider will be disadvantaged by the rules, and we will still have fair winners.”

Irby added, “If the racing industry fails to follow The Jockey Club’s lead in implementing reforms, we’ll see more advocates and groups emerge to work on eliminating the sport of horse racing in its entirety.”

Use of the hard leather whip has always been controversial, but came under widespread criticism following the 2008 Kentucky Derby when filly Eight Belles, a clear second-place finisher with no chance of winning was whipped several times in the final stretch. She broke down after the finish, shattering both front ankles and was immediately euthanized with the announcement made on NBC before an international television audience.

Viewer discretion advised:

Its use is equally controversial among trainers, with some opposing its use altogether, while many jockeys regard it as a safety tool needed to control a racehorse.

Perhaps lesser known than People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Animal Wellness Action seeks to “alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals and wildlife,” including the elimination of dogfighting, cockfighting and the regulation of factory farming. It also works to eliminate the controversial use of drugs in American racing, another topic addressed at Sunday’s Round Table.

Gagliano hosted a question-and-answer session with John Messara, owner of Arrowfield Stud in New South Wales, Australia. Arrowfield has served as the Southern Hemisphere

breeding season home of Kentucky Derby winning stallion Animal Kingdom, well-regarded in Australia for his drug-free 2013 win in the then-\$10 million Dubai World Cup.

Messara emphasized the positive effect uniform drug-use policies would have on American Thoroughbred breeding.

“I think that having a national drug policy would unleash an economic monster in America,” said Messara. “It is difficult for us in Australia to judge if we should buy a mare or stallion from the U.S. because we do not know if it received medication. Rather than get bitten by it, we stay away.”

The use of the anti-bleeding raceday medication Furosemide, trade name Lasix or Salix, is common in the U.S., but banned in Australia and other countries. It is often thought to mask the genetic tendency of horses to bleed from the lungs following the stress of a race thereby passing the flaw along to their progeny.



Addressing the current interference rules and their public relations effect also were on the Round Table agenda. Controversy marred this year’s running of the Kentucky Derby when Maximum Security was disqualified for interference by Churchill Downs stewards, who awarded the roses to 65-1 longshot Country House, a horse not involved in the disqualifying incident. Stewards compounded the controversy by refusing to explain their decision or to take media questions at the brief post-race press conference where they announced their decision.

Kim Kelly, chief steward of The Hong Kong Jockey Club urged adoption of the so-named category 1 interference rule. The purpose of the category 1 rule is to reward the best-performing horse. Under this rule, issues ranging from interference to the over-or-under performance of horses are resolved on raceday. In cases of potential interference,

jockeys appear before a stewards panel immediately following the race in question before a determination is made. The U.S. and Turkey use the so-named category 2 rule.

“It is my respectful opinion that category 2 yields inconsistent and undesirable outcomes,” said Kelly. “While category 1 may not be perfect, one interference rule is significantly less imperfect than the other.”

Kelly also emphasized that it is vital for racing regulators and stewards to be transparent in explaining how they determine their rulings and that they share their explanations with the media and the public.

“So long as decisions are properly considered with all of the relevant factors and competing arguments being taken into account, then those decisions will always be able to be supported,” explained Kelly. “Transparency is king. Confidence in the regulation of racing is paramount. Confidence lost, everything lost.”

Echoing Kelly was David Fuscus, president and CEO of Xenophon Strategies, a Washington DC public relations firm specializing in crisis management. Fuscus addressed the industry’s current public relations crisis following the high number of fatalities this season at Santa Anita Park, comparing the industry’s reaction with the successes and failures of other industries facing similar loss of public confidence.

“Define rather than be defined, exhibit fast self-disclosure, respond directly to customers, and undertake public-facing actions to ensure it never happens again,” said Fuscus.

In perhaps its most important recommendation since it is the one least likely to be read and understood by the public, the Club called for support the Horseracing Integrity Act of 1919, H.R. 1754, reintroduced March 14 by Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY). As stated in The Congressional Record:

“This bill establishes the Horseracing Anti-Doping and Medication Control Authority as an independent, private non-profit corporation with responsibility for developing and administering an anti-doping and medication control program for (1) Thoroughbred, Quarter, and Standardbred horses that participate in horse races; and (2) the personnel engaged in the care, training, or racing of such horses.”

The Federal Trade Commission would exercise oversight for five years after which time regulatory authority could be relinquished to an interstate compact. The Bill presently has 137 co-sponsoring House members. Similar bills in recent years have incurred legislative opposition sufficient to thwart their passage.

William M. Lear Jr., vice chairman of The Jockey Club, explained the Horseracing Integrity Act is in the best interests of the horse racing industry, comparing the issue’s current regulation with a fox-guarding-the henhouse analogy.

“This legislation is founded upon the unremarkable proposition that the regulatory authority should not be controlled by those being regulated, but instead by independent persons with deep knowledge of and experience in the sport but with no conflicts of

interest and nothing to gain or lose personally, including financially, as a result of the regulations adopted,” said Lear.

Other legislation discussed at the Round Table included the Safeguard American Foods Export Act of 1919, H.R. 961, introduced Feb. 4 by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), which amends existing legislation by placing a total ban on the slaughter of horses for human consumption in the U.S. as well as a ban on the export of horses for slaughter and human consumption to all foreign countries.

Valerie Pringle, the campaign manager for equine protection for The Humane Society of the United States, urged support for the measure.

Finally, Dr. Nancy Cox, the dean of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, provided an update on work with the Thoroughbred industry to improve track surfaces. The University plans to invest in “enhanced technical support,” establish an endowed professorship dedicated to racing safety, and conduct research into technologies to better maintain track surfaces.

In related news, officials at Santa Anita Park have announced a new main track drainage system would be installed under the inside rail before its upcoming fall meet. The Park was the scene of the high number of horse fatalities during the winter season, some of which were attributed to excessive rain and possibly inadequate drainage.

AP



[Horse racing's uncomfortable truth: Horses die](#)

May 11, 2019 3:30 AM

By DAVID WENNER

(Updated and Reprinted from Original PennLive.com story)

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Thoroughbreds provide many reasons to marvel.

The fastest can top 40 mph. Their speed-producing features — extraordinary concentration of muscle, body and lungs forming a natural bellows, oversized hearts circulating ten gallons of blood — inspire comparison to locomotives.

Yet the 1,100-pound animals, taking 20-foot-plus strides, gallop on ankles which have been likened to glass.

Suddenly, the entire sport of thoroughbred racing stands on fragile legs.

The crisis reared up at famed Santa Anita Park in California, where 23 horses broke down and had to be killed during a recent 14-week period.

It put a national spotlight on a hard reality the public normally doesn't think about: horses commonly break down during racing or training and are put to death.

The goal is to end the suffering, but a central Pa. horse vet argues it happens too often.

In Pennsylvania, 87 horses died at the state's three thoroughbred racing venues last year, a rate of about 1.5 a week.

Forty-five of the deaths were at Penn National near Harrisburg; 34 at Parx near Philadelphia and eight at Presque Isle Downs in Erie. The figures, from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, include horses which died of racing and training injuries or other causes while at the track.

The good news is those numbers are far lower than they were less than less than a decade ago, when 187 horses died in one year at Pennsylvania thoroughbred tracks. While the decline is partly the result of fewer races, the death rate also has dropped.

But the Santa Anita spike is well outside the norm, and came at a particularly bad time — the lead-up to the Kentucky Derby. That's the horse racing equivalent of the Final Four, something the industry depends upon to attract casual fans and help keep the sport alive.

The Santa Anita deaths have shocked the track's owners and people everywhere with a stake in the sport. They give new ammunition to activists who believe horse racing is cruel and should be outlawed.

As breakdowns mounted, Santa Anita shut down twice as a national expert probed and studied the dirt surface. Nothing seemed wrong. Deaths continued, although not since early April. The cause or causes remain a mystery.

But many say the root causes have long been obvious and rampant across horse racing: Drugs to make horses run faster and mask injuries. Whipping them down the stretch. Decades of breeding that have yielded maximum muscle and power, but relatively light bones. A decline in thoroughbred births, forcing horses to race more often.

Now powerful voices, including the owners of Santa Anita, are backing major change.

“We are taking a step forward and saying, quite emphatically, that the current system is broken,” said Belinda Stronach of the The Stronach Group, which also owns Pimlico in Baltimore.

The influential Jockey Club, a 125-year-old organization that works to improve racing and thoroughbred breeding, issued a damning white paper warning the sport must rid itself of drugs or face a public and political backlash that could kill it.

“This isn’t about a single track — horse fatalities are a nationwide problem, one that has shocked fans, the industry, the regulators, and the general public,” the Jockey Club wrote.

Unlike the NFL or NBA, thoroughbred racing has no overall governing body. It’s regulated independently by each of the 38 states where the sport is legal. In Pennsylvania it’s governed by a racing commission within the agriculture department.

That’s a problem, according to the Jockey Club. It means, the organization says, “we lag behind cheaters and abusers and by the time we have caught up they move on to the next designer substance.”

Unlike most sports, horse racing hasn’t changed much from its primitive days. Now it must change, say some major players, or face extinction. In Pennsylvania, the latter would mean a loss of 7,400 direct jobs and thousands of other related jobs, according to the Pennsylvania Horse Racing Association.

Interest in horse racing has already dropped dramatically since the early 1960s, when it could credibly claim to be America’s most popular spectator sport. Today, it ranks among sports such as men’s tennis and women’s professional basketball.

The decline is attributed to various forces, including widespread legalization of casinos, online gambling and greater concern for well-being of animals. There are also fewer tracks, sometimes because the land became more valuable for other uses.

Ray Paulick, who has written about horse racing for 40 years, says “I’ve never seen the sport in such peril as it is today.”

Pennsylvania says it tightened the rules

A few years ago, Pennsylvania faced its own horse racing crisis, centered at Penn National in Grantville. It involved FBI and local investigations and witnesses who said rampant cheating stretched back decades. Much of it involved illegal drugging of horses.

“Almost everybody did,” trainer Stephanie Beattie testified in federal court in 2017. She was Penn National’s top trainer in 2009, with 222 wins and \$3.4 million in earnings.

“Ninety-five to 98%. It was a known practice. We wanted to win and they weren’t testing for those drugs at that time.”

Penn National, while pointing out most of the cheating was done by people it didn’t employ or control, promised to do everything it could to stop it.

Pennsylvania also vowed to clean up the sport.

In 2016, legislators passed a law intended to give the Pennsylvania Racing Commission greater ability to catch and punish people who illegally drug horses or otherwise cheat.

So how is Pennsylvania doing?

Kate Papp is a Dauphin County-based horse veterinarian and a national voice on safe treatment of horses. She and her husband, a trainer, race thoroughbreds at Penn National. She cares for their horses and some owned by others at Penn National.

Not long ago, Papp says, she considered Pennsylvania the worst in the nation at protecting horses and catching what she calls “juice trainers” who illegally drug horses.

With its new regulations, it has “improved about 25 percent,” she said.

“I don’t think we’re doing well at all,” she says. “We’re not doing a good enough job of weeding out the horses that shouldn’t be allowed to race.”

Papp expresses sympathy for the state racing commission, saying it faces a daunting task in catching cheaters. Pennsylvania has a state-of-the-art testing lab based at the University of Pennsylvania. It has new authority to conduct off-site, “out of competition testing.” Still, cheaters use “designer drugs” to beat the system, Papp says.

At her farm a few miles from Penn National, she reaches into a tote bag and pulls out stacks of race horse death reports obtained from the racing commission through right-to-know requests. She points to columns showing test results for dozens of drugs. But cheaters have access to far more drugs than the commission can test for at any given time, she said.

Papp further believes cheaters receive tips about what the lab will test for, enabling them to beat the tests. Her husband, trainer Monti N. Sims, says cheating trainers also “stack” legal drugs to get some of the effects of illegal drugs.

To truly clean up the sport, Papp says, Pennsylvania needs stiffer penalties for cheaters, with fines and suspensions extending to owners and horses. “You have to hurt their livelihoods,” she says.

As it stands, much of the evidence against cheaters amounts to what is seen and heard by fellow trainers and veterinarians, according to Papp. They are reluctant to testify. To overcome that, she says, cameras must be installed.

Another serious problem in Pennsylvania, according to Papp and Sims, stems from the approximately \$240 million per year of casino money that flows into horse racing to bolster the industry. Much of the money has gone toward larger purses for claiming races — low level races where each horse is for sale for a “claim price,” sometimes well under \$10,000.

When available purses are substantially higher than claim prices, critics say it creates an incentive for uncaring owners to buy cheap, possibly ailing horses, and run them hard for quick profit. The solution, Sims believes, is a rule that limits the gap between the claims price and the available purse.

Paulick is the publisher of The Paulick Report, which is based in Kentucky and has a national scope and a mission of “shining light” on the industry. Asked how Pennsylvania is doing, he says: “It’s hard to really gauge, because the Pennsylvania Horse Racing Commission is not very responsive to media inquiries . It’s hard to know what their policies are and what policies they have changed.”

Racing toward transparency?

Concern over transparency isn’t new to the racing commission, which was revamped in 2016 to enable it to better police the sport. Around that time, lawmakers sanctioned a report which took a top-to-bottom look at Pennsylvania’s horse racing industry. The report concluded public reporting of penalties for doping and mistreatment of horses “could strengthen the public’s trust in the industry’s ability to care for these animals.”

In 2016, Pennsylvania doubled the maximum fine to \$10,000.

“We believe the increased fines, restructured commission staff, and increased checks and balances in our administrative and lab processes have been an effective deterrent for those who seek to skirt the law,” commission spokeswoman Shannon Powers said.

The racing commission drug tests the winner and a randomly selected finisher for each race. It also tests each horse that has a fatal breakdown or otherwise dies at Pennsylvania tracks.

The 2016 reforms further gave the commission authority to conduct unannounced “out-of-competition” tests at off-track locations. In 2017, the commission conducted 374 out-of-competition tests but found no violations, according to Powers. In 2018, it conducted 418 tests, with two violations.

Powers says the commission is still staffing up for its expanded enforcement role. A new search feature will give the public more information regarding drug-related and other penalties. But due to a staff shortage, the feature isn’t up to date, according to Powers.

“Improvements are underway which will make information about penalties much more readily available,” she says.

Central Pa. tracks address deaths

Penn National near Harrisburg is one of the only tracks in the United States that races year-round. That means horses are kept there, and trained there, year-round, creating maximum opportunities for horses to break down.

Christopher McErlean, Penn National's vice president of racing, says the track's 2018 fatality rate of 1.84 deaths per 1,000 starts reflects many things being done well. It's better than the national rate of 1.86 deaths per 1,000 starts on dirt tracks. And with three racing-related deaths as of April 27 of this year, Penn National is on pace for its safest year -- knock on wood -- since 2001, he says.

"I think we have a good program in place. We are constantly trying to improve, learn," he says.

Penn National can't claim all the credit. As McErlean explains, horses at Penn National are largely under the control of others: owners, trainers, veterinarians. Penn National provides the "stage." Its main responsibility is to provide a safe track surface.

However, Penn National, which owns five thoroughbred tracks, was one of the first to voluntarily report deaths to the Jockey Club, according to McErlean. It also was a pioneer in conducting in-house reviews of horse deaths. In a program now considered a "best practice" in the industry, Penn National's director of racing and track veterinarian conducts mandatory reviews involving the trainer of each horse that dies, he says.

McErlean says "the vast, vast, vast" majority of horse-racing professionals at Penn National are competent and well-intentioned. Still, while they are licensed, some trainers aren't as skilled as others. A lesser-skilled trainer or other horse professional can jeopardize the health of a horse, increasing the risk of a death. The death, however, tends to get blamed on the track.

Nor can Penn National necessarily ban someone whose practices it disagrees with. That was highlighted in its failed effort to eject Eduardo Rojas. His wife, Murray Rojas, is a former top trainer at Penn National who was convicted of illegally drugging horses. She transferred horses to her husband.

Penn National saw it as continuation of a troubled operation and permanently evicted Eduardo Rojas. He appealed to the state racing commission, which reduced it to three years. Rojas appealed to Commonwealth Court, which ruled his rights were violated.

“Our race tracks and company have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees defending our positions on not allowing unscrupulous individuals to race at our facilities, but frustratingly, we have not always been successful in that regard,” McErlean says.

He also points out testing for drugs and punishments for violators are the responsibility of the racing commission and its counterparts in other states. As it stands, Penn National would welcome greater “uniformity” regarding allowed drugs, testing and penalties, including “more extensive and aggressive out-of-competition testing,” McErlean said.

Still, Penn National has declined to support a bill before Congress, the Horseracing Integrity Act, that would create a private, independent organization to set and enforce national drug standards, similar to the Olympic anti-doping program.

Organizations that include the Jockey Club and the Santa Anita owners have come out in support of the bill, saying it’s needed to save the sport.

Penn National, however, has concerns about the financial sustainability of the organization and about federal involvement, McErlean says.

Marty Irby, the executive director of Animal Wellness Action, argues the bill could correct many of the ills that caused the scandal at Penn National.

He says Penn National is among the “few major tracks” which haven’t backed the bill. Penn National’s silence, Irby says, “has had a chilling effect on Pennsylvania lawmakers signing on to this important pro-animal, pro-horse racing legislation.”

Fewer deaths, less racing

Thoroughbred racing, in terms of fatal breakdowns, has become safer over the past decade.

In the United States, there were 493 fatal breakdowns in 2018, according to the Jockey Club. Those figures take into account only deaths resulting from a race, not those related to training.

In tracking safety, the Jockey Club calculates the number of fatal breakdowns per 1,000 racing starts. In 2018, there were 1.68 fatal breakdowns per 1,000 starts in the United States. That's down from 790 deaths in 2009, a rate of 2 fatal breakdowns per 1,000 starts.

In Pennsylvania, 38 of the 87 fatal breakdowns last year involved races, which equates to 1.40 deaths per 1,000 starts - better than the national average. The rates were 1.84 at Penn National, 1.49 at Parx and 0.51 at Presque Isle.

Presque Isle, however, can't be directly compared to the other two tracks. It has a synthetic surface, which is considered safer than the more common dirt and turf tracks. Presque Isle also has considerably fewer races than Penn National and Parx. Still, its fatality rate is well under the national average for synthetic tracks of 1.23 per thousand starts.

A decade or so ago, there was a push toward synthetic tracks. Many tracks switched. But some eventually concluded they are prone to problems such as chemicals leaching into the soil below and causing instability, and maintenance problems in certain climates. Some tracks switched back, and they are no longer widely considered a key to preventing breakdowns.

At critical moment, a drug divides

Much of the cheating involves "race day drugs" given to horses to enable an injured horse to race or otherwise aid performance. In general, horses can't be given drugs within 24 hours of a race.

But there is a controversial exception: Lasix.

Lasix is a diuretic which causes fluid loss. It's used to prevent lung bleeding that thoroughbreds often experience while sprinting.

Horse trainers and veterinarians are strongly in favor of Lasix. They argue that, in preventing the bleeding and resulting damage, it's good for horses.

However, by making horses lighter, Lasix enables them to run faster. Some also believe that, by diluting the urine, it makes it harder to detect illegal levels of other drugs.

As the Santa Anita death toll mounted, the owner announced it was backing an array of reforms, including a ban on Lasix. The Jockey Club also argued vigorously for a ban, noting race-day Lasix is rarely used outside the United States, where rates of catastrophic breakdowns are lower.

Organizations representing trainers, veterinarians and owners are objecting. It threatens to divide the industry on a subject many see as essential to erasing a public perception of a drug-riddled sport.

Two weeks ago, a national coalition of tracks and associations approved a ban on Lasix. Supporters include Churchill Downs, which hosts the Kentucky Derby. The ban will be phased in, beginning in 2020, when two-year-olds will race without Lasix. By the 2021, the three-year-olds in the Kentucky Derby and the other Triple Crown races will run without Lasix.

But it remains to be seen if the Lasix ban will filter down to lower level tracks, including Pennsylvania's three thoroughbred venues. The coalition behind the ban consists of tracks which hold races involving the top horses. Such races comprise only a tiny fraction of races held in Pennsylvania, so the ban wouldn't automatically apply to them.

A Lasix ban in Pennsylvania would require acceptance from assorted stakeholders.

The Pennsylvania Equine Coalition, representing owners, trainers and breeders, doesn't believe it's warranted.

"No correlation has been shown between the use of Lasix and the breakdowns at Santa Anita, so a ban in Pennsylvania based on the pretense of safety - a view not shared at this point by veterinary groups - would appear premature. We believe that policies related to the administration of Lasix should be based on what credible medical experts

and national veterinary organizations say is best for the health of the horse,” spokesman Pete Peterson says.

Supporters of the ban warn that the average American associates horse racing with drugs and horse deaths. Unless the sport goes drug-free, including Lasix, public opinion will continue to swing against it, they contend.

“It just seems to me that if a horse requires a drug to race, you have to wonder should that horse be racing,” says Paulick, the veteran racing writer. “It’s disappointing to me that the rest of the world can do something we can’t do, and that is to race completely drug-free.”

Proof it can be done

Papp’s husband, Monti N. Sims, always uses his middle initial or middle name, Neal. It distinguishes him from his father and grandfather, each named Monti and each a horse trainer.

On recent day, power lines buzz above their farm in the countryside between Harrisburg and Penn National, where he spends part of every day training horses. Now, he hauls feed and otherwise tends their barn and stables. He works amid a menagerie of animals, most of them rescued from abuse or neglect: Tied up pit bulls. A horned steer Papp bought as a calf, on impulse, while shopping for vegetables. A goat with a paralyzed face that causes its tongue to hang out. Another goat which Sims steers into a pen, saying it “can be a handful.”

About a dozen thoroughbreds loll in the pasture, most of them former racers being readied for a second life. An older horse ambles up to Papp. The horse was given to her as a two-year-old. He made noise during heavy breathing, indicating an obstruction. Papp spent thousands on surgery, hoping the horse could race. But it suffered medical complications and became incontinent. The constantly dripping urine has a corrosive effect on a hind leg. Still, Papp says the horse is capable of enjoying life, although she has little hope of placing him.

“If that’s his biggest problem in life, we’re fine to manage him. But we wouldn’t ask anyone else,” she says.

On this day, she sits on an overturned bucket and uses a portable x-ray machine to examine the leg of a horse. Papp says she routinely performs x-rays, not only to evaluate known injuries but to look for the beginnings of injuries.

Papp and others say catastrophic injuries that end in euthanization often result from accumulated smaller injuries masked with drugs and not given time to heal.

She says she won't use drugs to mask an injury or for any purpose other the therapeutic benefit of the horse. Sometimes the only fix is time away from training and racing. All too often, she contends, trainers use drugs to get horses to the starting gate.

Yet even Papp uses Lasix, despite believing most horses lack a medical diagnosis to justify it. Lasix is responsible for about a length-and-a-half in performance, she says. She doesn't use it in a horse's first races. But eventually they would risk losing the horse in a claiming race to someone who would undoubtedly give it Lasix. So she uses it.

However, Papp and Sims boast that in seven years of racing, including 100 or more starts per year, they have never put down a horse.

"We want to prove it can be done," he says.

Pasadena Star-News

[LOCAL NEWS](#)

[Santa Anita takes historic steps to tighten rules on medication, whips after 22nd horse death](#)

The Arcadia venue and Golden Gate will become the first North America tracks to follow stricter international standards.



The home stretch and stands are empty at Santa Anita Park in Arcadia, Calif., Thursday, March 7, 2019. Extensive testing of the dirt track is under way at eerily quiet Santa Anita, where the deaths of 21 thoroughbreds in two months has forced the indefinite cancellation of horse racing and thrown the workaday world of trainers, jockeys and horses into disarray. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

By [JASON HENRY](#) | jhenry@scng.com | Pasadena Star News

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Santa Anita Park announced it will crack down on the use of medication and whips at its racetrack following the death Thursday of a 22nd horse at its winter meet.

In an open letter, Stronach Group President Belinda Stronach said the company's Santa Anita and Golden Gate racetracks would become the first North America racing venues to follow strict standards set by the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities.

"The sport of horse racing is the last great sporting legacy platform to be modernized," she wrote. "If we expect our sport to grow for future generations, we must raise our standards."

Roughly 50 horses die per year at Santa Anita Park, according to two decades of racing statistics obtained from the California Horse Racing Board. It is one of the most used — and deadliest — tracks in the state.

An unprecedented 22 horses have been euthanized following injuries during races or training on Santa Anita's main dirt track and turf course since opening day on Dec. 26. On Thursday, the latest, Princess Lili B, broke down during a timed workout.

Twenty-nine other horses were working on that track at the same time, according to data provided by the website Equibase.

Following extensive tests, surface experts have deemed the main track safe. The nearly 15 inches of [rain](#) in the past three months and [the heavier use](#) of Santa Anita as a result of other tracks closing are considered possible factors in the deaths. Last week, Santa Anita announced it would [cut down](#) on the number of horses running at the same time and improve the tracking of medical records. Now, the Stronach Group's California venues will also take a "zero tolerance" stance on race-day medication and ban certain medications, such as the diuretic Lasix. New rules limit the use of shock-wave therapies, joint injections and steroids.

Horses in training will be permitted to have therapeutic medication only with a qualified veterinarian's diagnosis.

To catch potential abuse, the Stronach Group is increasing testing of horses outside of races and will require horses to be on site earlier prior to an event.

Additionally, the use of riding crops by jockeys should be limited to a "corrective safety measure," the statement said.

On top of the stricter standards, Santa Anita's owners pledged to invest in diagnostic equipment that can help detect pre-existing conditions.

At a news conference Thursday afternoon, Chief Operating Officer Tim Ritvo said the company's employees have been devastated by the 22 deaths.

"We, too, love horses and we are making these changes to put the horse and the rider first," he said.

Ritvo declined to take questions and left immediately after his brief statement.

Spokesman Mike Willman said he was not aware of any evidence of doping from necropsies performed on the horses that have died so far. There's no clear-cut cause for the deaths, according to Willman.

"We maintain that it is multifactorial," he said.

The CHRB is still investigating the deaths. As a result, the agency has declined to release the necropsies on the horses that died from Dec. 26 until now.

The racetrack will open again Friday morning for training and is expected to resume racing on March 22.

Santa Anita was under significant pressure from animal rights activists to institute the changes. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has protested outside Santa Anita and called for a criminal investigation by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

In a statement, Kathy Guillermo, the senior vice president of PETA, supported Santa Anita's efforts. The animal-protection organization has called for increased scrutiny of medication use in the wake of the deaths.

"This is a historic moment for racing, and PETA urges every track to recognize that the future is now and to follow suit," she said.

Santa Anita has offered to assist with the rehabilitation, retraining, rehoming and aftercare of any horses unable to race as a result of the decision.

The Del Mar Thoroughbred Club and the Breeders' Cup, slated to take place in November at Santa Anita, have announced their support of the Stronach Group's reforms.

Though Stronach said her company would not wait for legislation, the announcement came only hours after the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity and two congressmen announced the introduction of the Horse Racing Integrity Act of 2019 in Congress.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Paul Tonko, D-New York, and Rep. Andy Barr, R-Kentucky, aims to create an independent, anti-doping agency called the "Horse Racing and Medication Control Authority" to oversee standards in the industry.

"Horses should race and train only when they are free from performance-enhancing drugs and not on a cocktail of medications," said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action, in a statement about the bill.



[Horseracing Integrity Act Reintroduced, 'Back In The Starting Gate' For Congress](#)

03.14.2019 | 12:07pm

Today, U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko (D-NY), and Andy Barr (R-KY), who represent two of the meccas of American Thoroughbred racing – Saratoga Springs and Lexington – introduced the Horseracing Integrity Act to create a uniform national standard for drug testing that would be overseen by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).

"My team and I have been chomping at the bit to get the Horseracing Integrity Act back in the starting gate for the 116th Congress," said Rep. Paul Tonko. "We set a fast pace last session, garnering more cosponsors down the stretch than ever before in our efforts to get this bill across the finish line. In all seriousness, I look forward to continuing our important bipartisan

work to pass this worthy legislation so that we can do right by our equine athletes and ensure that horse racing can thrive as an industry that will capture the public's imagination for generations to come.”

“As the Representative of the Horse Capital of the World, I am proud to once again introduce the Horseracing Integrity Act with my colleague Congressman Paul Tonko,” said Rep. Andy Barr. “I continue to believe the future prosperity of Kentucky's signature horseracing industry depends on national uniform standards and testing procedures that are critical to the integrity and safety of the sport. Last Congress, we secured more than 100 cosponsors, and I look forward to building upon this bipartisan work to restore international competitiveness and public confidence in this great American sport.”

“We are sincerely grateful to the Co-Chairmen of the Congressional Horse Caucus, Congressmen Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Andy Barr (R-KY), for sponsoring this legislation, critical to America's horse racing future,” said the Water Hay Oats Alliance. “Since 2012, WHOA has worked with legislators in Washington D.C. to create a bill that would create an independent horse racing anti-doping authority under the leadership of the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA). With uniform rules, testing procedures, lab accreditations and penalties, the proposed nationwide anti-doping program for horse racing would replace the patchwork of state systems that currently govern horse racing's 38 jurisdictions.

“Members of the Water Hay Oats Alliance continue to support a ban on race day medication and the development of rules in step with international standards.”

“This is a horse-first bill. This bill will help ensure a safer environment for horses and riders at all tracks,” said Shawn Smeallie, executive director of Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity (CHRI). “Representatives Tonko and Barr, along with their respective staff members, have worked tirelessly on this legislation. Thanks to their efforts, this initiative has gained the support of key stakeholders across the industry and continues to gain momentum. We look forward to working with other racing industry organizations to ensure productive legislative activity this year.”

H.R. 1754 is nearly identical to the Horseracing Integrity Act of 2017 (H.R. 2651), also introduced by Reps. Barr and Tonko, which garnered the bipartisan support of more than 130 representatives last Congress. Joining the effort in 2019 are Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), chair of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Protection & Commerce, and Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Vern Buchanan (R-FL), co-chairs of the Congressional Animal Protection Caucus. CHRI is hopeful and optimistic that the legislation will move through the committee process this year, building on this strong showing of support from key lawmakers.

“Horse should run on hay, oats, and water, not on a cocktail of performance enhancers and medications,” said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. “Our organization has already completed more than 150 meetings with key legislators on this issue in 2019, and we are pleased to join leaders in the horse racing industry and animal protection groups that

have come together to end a shameful period where unscrupulous trainers have put horses and jockeys at risk.”

The Horseracing Integrity Act is backed by the Coalition for Horse Racing Integrity, which includes Animal Wellness Action, The Jockey Club, The Breeders' Cup, The Preakness Stakes (Stronach Group), The Belmont Stakes (New York Racing Association), Keeneland, and the Water Hay Oats Alliance.

Additional data related to horse deaths on U.S. racetracks

Source: HorseracingWrongs.com

2020: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/killed-2020/>

2019: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/killed-2019/>

2018: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/killed-2018/>

2017: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/killed-2017/>

2016: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/kia-2016/>

2015: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/kia-2016/>

2014: <https://horseracingwrongs.org/killed-in-action-2014/>