

PRESS RELEASE - Use of the Whip in horseracing debate, 2 November 2011

On 2 November 2011 Henmans hosted a lively debate on the introduction of new rules by the BHA, on the use of the whip in horseracing.

Our panel, chaired by Jonathan Hands (barrister), comprised twice Gold Cup winning trainer Noel Chance, national hunt jockey Dougie Costello, and Alan Walker, racecourse vet and founder of Hook Norton Veterinary Practice. We were joined in the audience by some illustrious names in the industry, who aired their views and experience on this difficult issue.

Themes which emerged from our panel and audience included:

- Welfare was a top priority for all concerned in the industry. The design of the whip over the last 20 years was considered to have improved it considerably from a welfare point of view.
- Addressing the public's perception of welfare in racing was a primary concern for all in the industry.
- There was broad agreement that there should be a limit as to the number of strikes permitted in one race.
- The question of whether the new rules stifled jockeys' ability to fulfil their role as licensed professionals, trusted as they must be to ride within their experience, was debated. The whip was felt to have an important role as a tool or aid, imperative for safety, especially in jump racing, which the public may not appreciate.
- There was broad agreement that there should be a limit as to the number of strikes permitted in one race.
- The panel and audience were split on the question of whether the BHA was right to introduce certainty by imposing 'rules' and not 'guidelines' thereby doing away with the discretion which officials had been able to impose. Some considered that rules were in principle, workable, but that discretion ought to be allowed to permit corrective strikes which do not count towards the permitted number, especially in emergency situations.
- Penalties were debated and were felt by many to be too punitive on jockeys. It was felt by some that there was no excuse for breaching the rules and that penalties ought to be imposed consistently and upon the rule-breaker. It was felt by others to be iniquitous that the jockey was penalised, but the horse was not disqualified, it being the only rule which could be violated without the race being forfeited. The impact of penalties upon jockeys and stable hands who are already low-paid was felt to be very serious.
- Questions were also raised about the practicalities of enforcing the rules in the amateur sport, it having been announced the day before the debate that the new rules will apply to the 2011/2012 point to point season.
- Some felt that the rules ought to have been introduced following a trial period. It was commented that, had the rules been introduced at the quieter end of the season, they may not have attracted the same attention. It was generally felt that there had been less effective communication between the BHA and the industry than there might have been.

Henmans would like to thank all those who participated in the debate for making it such a great success. As part of our ongoing commitment to the equine bloodstock industry we are in the process of finalising plans for a Cheltenham preview evening in the Spring. Please see our website for information (www.henmansllp.co.uk) or alternatively, if you wish to be added to our equine and bloodstock events mailing list, please contact our Business Development Team on 01865 781000.

Esther Stirling and Tamsin Hyland (Equine and Bloodstock Team)