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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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STEWARDS SUSPEND VALENZUELA FOR REST OF YEAR

DEL MAR, CA – The Del Mar stewards suspended jockey Patrick Valenzuela on Friday through December 31, 2004 (the term of his current license) and recommended that he not be considered for future licensing by the California Horse Racing Board.

Valenzuela has been riding for several years under the terms of a conditional license agreement, which was amended in May by the California racing commissioners to include additional conditions upon his early return from a previous suspension. One of the additional conditions was that he submit to hair follicle testing. However, when CHRB investigators asked Valenzuela for hair samples on July 1, they determined that he had shaven his head and other parts of his body from which a sufficient number and length of hairs would normally be collected. The Del Mar stewards suspended Valenzuela on July 2 pending a formal hearing.

The ruling Friday by stewards Ingrid Fermin, George Slender, and Tom Ward followed a hearing that involved seven witnesses who testified for a total of approximately six hours over a three-day period last week. Deputy Attorney General James Ahern represented the CHRB. Attorney Neil Papiano and his associates represented Valenzuela.

Valenzuela said he was not familiar with the most recent addition of requirements to his conditional license, but Ahern provided verification that a certified copy had been sent to Valenzuela's home.

In their Statement of Decision, the stewards wrote that "rather than make every effort to comply with the hair follicle testing process, (Valenzuela) found another way to evade testing, and thereby violated (the license agreement)."

The stewards also wrote, "The issue of safety on the racetrack includes jockeys, exercise riders, pony riders, outriders, and, of course, the horses. These obligations cannot be compromised. (Valenzuela) has been a talented jockey for many years, but it is evident that he has failed to learn that he must be held accountable for the consequences of his behavior."

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