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BOARD SAYS 'NO' TO ANABOLIC STEROIDS

ARCADIA, CA – The California Horse Racing Board took another regulatory step toward eliminating anabolic steroids in horse racing Thursday by setting strict limits on the threshold levels of the four most commonly used steroids that can be present in official test samples.

The move puts California in the forefront of dealing with the regulation of anabolic steroids. The Board adopted a regulatory amendment based on a national model rule, which recognizes that while there are limited legitimate and therapeutic uses for anabolic steroids in the equine, anabolic steroids are not appropriate nor should they be used for horses competing in any race.

"It is our Board's desire to eliminate unnecessary anabolic steroids in horse racing, and this is a major step," said CHRB Chairman Richard B. Shapiro. "With the good science and the national consensus, we've just got to move this forward. Anybody who reads the news knows this is something obvious. This is something that will help the whole industry very quickly."

The CHRB's next steps will be to reclassify the four anabolic steroids and move them into penalty categories calling for meaningful fines and purse forfeiture. That process will begin in the next few months.

Three of the four anabolic steroids – nandrolone, boldenone, and testosterone – are endogenous (naturally occurring) in the horse and are present naturally at low levels, so establishment of a proper threshold level was necessary. A level above the threshold limits in this regulation would be clear evidence they were purposefully administered and not naturally produced by the horse. A threshold level also was approved for stanozolol, the fourth anabolic steroid on the list. Stanozolol is an FDA-approved, non-endogenous anabolic steroid for horses; the established regulatory limit would prevent its use anytime close to racing or for racing purposes.

The national Racing Medication and Testing Consortium (RMTC), which developed the model rule, is in the process of determining withdrawal times for administered anabolic steroids. By the time the CHRB finishes the regulatory process for anabolic steroids, the RMTC study will be completed and the withdrawal information will be available to horsemen. The goal of the Board is to both eliminate anabolic steroids for competitive use and at the same time educate and inform all participants of the rules.

The Kenneth L. Maddy Equine Analytical Laboratory at UC Davis has been preparing for

more than a year by developing appropriate drug-testing protocols for anabolic steroids. For the first several months of the regulation, the Maddy Laboratory will be able to conduct pre-racing testing on request, so that owners, trainers, and veterinarians with any concern about withdrawal times can have horses tested before they race to make certain that any administered steroids have cleared the system.

"If you don't use anabolic steroids, you won't get a positive. It's that simple," said Dr. Rick Arthur, the CHRB equine medical director. Dr. Arthur has been working closely with Dr. Scott Stanley at the Maddy Laboratory and with the RMTC, where he serves on the executive board and chairs the RMTC's scientific advisory committee. The RMTC has engaged in a concerted effort to bring about a national consensus for the effective regulation of anabolic steroids in the United States.

"We have been preparing for this for a long time," said Dr. Arthur. "We're ready."

The Board's regulatory approval Thursday goes hand in hand with a previous Board action placing all other anabolic steroids (except these four) in the Class 3 drug classification and Category B penalty, resulting in the automatic forfeiture of the purse upon a positive finding for any of those other anabolic steroids. Final approval by other state reviewing agencies of the overall penalty guidelines and drug classification regulations has been delayed, but the Board expects those regulations and all of the anticipated regulatory changes for anabolic steroids to be in place before the fall.

In other action, the Board authorized the California Exposition and State Fair to operate a harness meet at Cal Expo from March 6 through August 2 and then, following the summer mixed-bred meet during the State Fair, a second harness meet from September 11 through December 20.

The Board action insures a transfer of continuous operations from the Sacramento Harness Association (SHA), which experienced serious financial difficulties and will run its last program Saturday night, March 1.

Much of the discussion focused on the potential liabilities left behind by SHA, as the racing commissioners repeatedly questioned SHA President Ivan Axelrod about how those obligations will be met. He assured them, "We will be able to satisfy close to 100 percent of our liabilities."

Unconvinced, the Board instructed staff to meet with Axelrod and other SHA principals, along with horsemen and labor representatives and any other parties relevant to the discussion, to go over the books and determine the best course of action.

"We need to make sure everyone is going to get paid," said Chairman Shapiro.

The Board authorized Santa Anita to continue offering up to nine races on weekdays and up to 11 races on weekend cards, subject to their ability to fill those races based on the horse inventory, but the Board did not authorize nor did Santa Anita request any additional Wednesday programs to make up for the days lost during the current meet due to adverse weather and track conditions.

If Santa Anita does decide to request one or more Wednesday programs, the chairman and executive director have authority to approve them, as was the case with the three make-up Wednesday programs that already have been run in recent weeks. However, if Santa Anita were to request any Wednesday programs within the last four weeks of its meet, which runs through April 20, Chairman Shapiro and Executive Director Kirk Breed would first need to determine that the horse inventory was sufficient to accommodate the additional Wednesdays without depleting the inventory to the possible detriment of the upcoming meet at Hollywood Park.

The Board approved for public notice a proposed regulatory amendment to allow horses returning from layoffs of at least 180 days to run in claiming races in which they could not be claimed, provided they are entered at a claiming level at least one level higher than that of their last race. Initially proposed by the Thoroughbred Owners of California, this creation of a category for Alternative Claiming Race is designed to encourage owners to give their horses needed time off.

Commissioner Jerry Moss reported on the February 27 meeting of the Pari-Mutuel Operations Committee, and the Board acted on several of the Committee's recommendations:

- The Board waived the coupling rule for all Breeders' Cup races and for non-overnight stakes races. In these limited instances, horses with the same owner(s) and trainer will race uncoupled in the wagering.
- Pending further action, the Board temporarily suspended the coupling rule to allow horses with some common ownership but not identical ownership to race uncoupled in any race, provided the horses have different trainers.
- The Board instructed staff to work with representatives of the World Poker Tour and other interested parties in drafting proposed regulations and amendments to allow for a pari-mutuel, tournament-style wager on multiple horse races, which the Board will consider at a future meeting.
- The Board indicated support for race meets to offer future book wagers on their signature races (e.g. the Santa Anita Handicap and Hollywood Gold Cup).

Representatives of the Thoroughbred Owners of California and Jockeys' Guild reported that the California Jockey Welfare Corporation had been formed and will oversee and administer the programs providing health and welfare benefits to eligible California jockeys. Under California law, proceeds from uncashed vouchers are used to subsidize the health and welfare program for jockeys. Jockeys are paying about one-third of the cost of premiums themselves. The Board approved administrative changes that will result in the effective processing of claims, billing, and auditing of the program.

The Board authorized the distribution of $46,182 in race day charity proceeds by the Bay Meadows Racing Association to four beneficiaries.

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