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Breeders' Cup horses pass steroid, EPO tests

by Jeff Lowe

No horses tested positive for anabolic steroids, excess bicarbonate (TC02) levels, or blood-doping agents in the Breeders' Cup World Championships on October 24 and 25.

Pam Blatz-Murff, senior vice president of Breeders' Cup operations, said on October 31 that testing was not complete for additional prohibited substances in horses who competed on the October 25 card. All tests for the October 24 card came back negative.

"We have such a full array of testing that has to be done, and it's a lot of work," Blatz-Murff said. "It's a lot of tests that are over and above what is done on a day-to-day basis, even more than [for graded stakes races]."

The Breeders' Cup performed random tests prior to the World Championships for erythropoietin (EPO), darbepoetin, and other blood-doping agents, and all came back negative, Blatz-Murff said. A horse testing positive would have been ineligible for the Breeders' Cup.

The Breeders' Cup and California Horse Racing Board instituted rules against anabolic steroids for the first time this year that could have resulted in disqualification and purse redistribution for a positive test, along with a one-year ban for an offending trainer. The first four finishers in each race were tested, along with at least one horse selected at random.

John Gosden, the trainer of Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) winner Raven's Pass, said prior to the Breeders' Cup he felt the steroid ban was part of the reason European participation increased for this year's World Championships. Steroids have been banned in Europe for more than two decades.

Raven's Pass was one of five European-based winners in nine races on October 25.

"It's a great rule to bring, and it's right for the Breeders' Cup to bring it in," said Gosden, who was based in California for 11 years in the 1970s and '80s before he returned to his native England. "For one state in this country to agree with another is impossible. The more blanket rulings you can get about, the better. It is long overdue."

Alastair Donald, managing director of the International Racing Bureau, which helps coordinate international participation in the Breeders' Cup, cited the steroid ban in assessing the European success.

"There is a feeling in terms of pure results that it was the best Breeders' Cup we've ever had, and I think people put that down to two or three factors," said Donald. "One was that we had a strong bunch of horses that came over, the second being that it was on a synthetic Pro-Ride surface instead of dirt, and also the steroid-free environment. From that, I think Europeans derived a certain amount of encouragement. I think it would encourage people to be back in numbers next year."

Jeff Lowe is a Thoroughbred Times staff writer

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