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Maryland Racing Commission to adopt steroid rules

by **John Scheinman**

The Maryland Racing Commission voted unanimously Tuesday to adopt on an emergency basis rules banning the use of anabolic steroids in racehorses beginning January 1, 2009.

The decision reversed a position taken earlier this year to await the results of blood plasma-based research being conducted by Dr. George Maylin, head of the drug testing and research program at Cornell University.

Last October, the Maryland Racing commission joined other racing commissions in the Mid-Atlantic region in an agreement to test horses for anabolic steroids, which was scheduled to begin last spring. The commission pulled out in January after horsemen's groups objected because of unanswered questions about withdrawal times, therapeutic use, penalties, and whether to test urine or blood samples.

After the vote Tuesday during the monthly commission meeting at Laurel Park, Wayne Wright, executive secretary of the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, said "it's time to move forward" since Maylin's work "doesn't seem like it's coming today or tomorrow."

The commission will follow model guidelines developed by the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium. The rules set quantitative standards for stanozolol, nandrolone, boldenone, and testosterone in urine samples taken from horses.

The American Graded Stakes Committee of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association announced last month that races would lose their graded status next year in states that failed to adopt RMTC guidelines. Wright pointed out that two nationally prominent winter sprint stakes races—the General George Handicap (G2) and Barbara Fritchie Handicap (G2) at Laurel Park—would be affected if the ban was not adopted.

Penalties were not addressed but John Franzone, chairman of the Maryland Racing Commission, said after the meeting that he would like them to be stringent and to discourage cheating, particularly if state voters pass a slot-machine referendum in November that will galvanize purses at Laurel Park and Pimlico.

John Scheinman is a Maryland-based Thoroughbred Times correspondent

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