



## Possible Change in Drug Rules Questioned

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The Association of Racing Commissioners International is looking at extending the cutoff time for use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in racehorses beyond 24 hours prior to a race, but horsemen's groups claim the action is premature.

The RCI board met in late July in California, and issued a release Aug. 4. RCI president Ed Martin acknowledged the move may not be popular in some quarters.

"We are under no illusion that a change of this magnitude will be controversial for some, but there is a general belief that a reform of this rule is necessary, and we would like this to be a priority going forward," Martin said in a statement.

NSAIDs such as flunixin and phenylbutazone are commonly used for therapeutic purposes. The 24-hour limit was agreed upon several years ago by the RCI and Racing Medication and Testing Consortium, a group of about 25 industry stakeholders.

Martin said input from the industry will be solicited. The RCI board listened to a presentation by Dr. Tom David, equine medical director for the Louisiana State Racing Commission and chair of the RCI Regulatory Veterinarian Committee.

The same presentation was made to the RMTC board in June, said Alan Foreman, chief executive officer of the Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association, which is represented on the RMTC.

"It's irritating," Foreman said. "The recommendation flies in the face of a decision by the RMTC that it's going to study the issue through its Scientific Advisory Committee and then make a recommendation. We've got all the scientists working together for the first time; RCI's action is premature and without scientific basis."

Foreman said The Jockey Club Thoroughbred Safety Committee also is getting involved in the discussion on NSAIDs. "I told the Thoroughbred Safety Committee to let the scientists do their work," he said. "We had all agreed on that."

The RMTC could have a recommendation at its September meeting.

Florida Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association executive director Kent Stirling, chairman of the National HBPA Medication Committee and representative on the RMTC board, agreed with Foreman that scientific research is necessary before changes are made.

"It shouldn't be based on anecdotal stuff that doesn't hold water," Stirling said. "This whole thing is getting silly. We're getting to the point where we're not making progress anymore. I'm proud of the work the RMTC has done, but politics is killing it."

Stirling said the National HBPA had five or six individuals in attendance for the recent RCI Model Rules Committee meeting, but the NSAIDs proposal wasn't discussed.

"In furtherance of our concern for the health of our equine athletes, RCI strongly supports pre-race veterinary examinations and has received a recommendation indicating that the current policy toward NSAIDs may be too liberal and needs revision in order to ensure that the best possible pre-race exams can be performed," Martin said in the release. "We do not seek to interfere in medical decisions by veterinarians as to what an appropriate medication regime should be for any horse, but we do need to safeguard the horse, its owners, and the fans from those instances where a medication is used to hide an infirmity that otherwise would exclude a horse from competition."

Martin suggested the cutoff for NSAIDs could be moved to 48 hours, 72 hours, or longer. A model rule will be prepared by December, he said.

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