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# Racing's integrity rated low, study finds

By Jay Privman

As grim as is the general public's perception of medication in racing, people inside the sport have an even more dire view, Craig Dado, the vice president of marketing at Del Mar, said during a presentation on Monday at the American Association of Equine Practitioners' 54th annual convention at the San Diego Convention Center.

According to a consumer research study done by the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, "the more you know about racing, the less you believe it's a sport of integrity," Dado said. A full 52 percent of people defined as "industry stakeholders" - trainers, breeders, etc. - rated drugs a 10 on a scale of 10 in terms of it being a serious problem.

Dado was pinch-hitting for Alex Waldrop, the president and chief executive officer of the NTRA, who did not attend due to a death in his family. Dado moderated a slide show recapping the research, which included the finding that a sobering 42 percent of core fans "say performance-enhancing drugs are a serious problem," Dado said.

"We can't talk our way out of the problem," Dado said. "We have zero credibility right now."

Dado said racing could go the way of Tylenol, which responded prudently to a product tampering case years ago, or boxing, which Dado said "ignored warning signs over integrity."

Dado said that "unless there is meaningful, swift, decisive, and transparent action," then "a significant portion of fans will abandon the sport."

The panel at which Dado spoke included regulators and veterinarians from both racing and other performance-horse disciplines, such as show jumping. Dr. Rick Arthur, the equine medical director for the California Horse Racing Board, said that the public makes no differentiation between drugs that enhance performance, and drugs that are legally used for therapeutic purposes.

"It doesn't make much sense to us, but perception is reality," Arthur said.

Arthur said the fact that there is no uniformity as to standards in equine testing laboratories makes it difficult to have uniformity in terms of drug rules in each state.

"It's useless if there's not uniformity in the labs," Arthur said.

Arthur lauded the work being done by the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium, whose executive director, Dr. Scot Waterman, said 2008 had proven to be a productive year in terms of getting states to adopt rules on anabolic steroids. The issue came to a head during the Triple Crown run of Big Brown, the Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner.

"We're on target to have all 38 jurisdictions have our steroid policy adopted by the end of the year," Waterman said.

Waterman also said studies are being done in order to determine uniform withdrawal times for steroids that regulators and labs can then implement.

Both Arthur and Waterman said further funding was needed to carry forth all objectives of the RMTC. Waterman said racing-related groups, such as the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association and the Breeders' Cup, were among those stepping up during an economic climate that finds state budgets

tightening.

"We're seeing organizations drive change," Waterman said.

"Integrity costs money," Arthur said.

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