

Graded Stakes Tied to Adoption of Rules

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Eligibility to host graded stakes is now tied to adoption of regulations for anabolic steroids and toe grabs, the American Graded Stakes Committee announced Aug. 8.

The committee, which falls under the auspices of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, took the action during a meeting Aug. 6 in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Under the rules, states or racetracks through house rules must adopt, at a minimum, the Association of Racing Commissioners International model rule on androgenic anabolic steroids by Jan. 1, 2009 or the date of a state or racetrack's first graded stakes in 2009, whichever is later. If a state or racetrack does not adopt the model rule, their races will lose their graded status and will not be eligible again for grading until the rule is adopted.

In addition, states or racetracks through house rules must adopt the RCI model rule on toe grabs on front feet by Jan. 1, 2009, or the date of a state or track's first graded stakes in 2009. If the rule is not adopted, the races will lose their graded status and become eligible for grading once the rule is adopted.

"There has been much discussion recently about how any recommendations put forth by various groups could be implemented given Thoroughbred racing's fractured organizational structure," TOBA president Dan Metzger said in a statement. "The committee members feel strongly about these two issues, and determined that they should be implemented in graded stakes by expanding the conditions of eligibility."

Also, the committee expanded its drug-testing protocol to include testing for alkalinizing agents—commonly referred to as a "milkshake"—in graded stakes effective Jan. 1, 2009. All horses participating in graded stakes are to have blood samples drawn pre-race in accordance with the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium's recommended best practices.

Jurisdictions can determine the testing method. Again, races will lose grade eligibility if the tests aren't performed, the graded stakes committee said.

Several years ago, the graded stakes committee required jurisdictions that host graded events to run a full battery of drug tests, called TOBA tests, in graded stakes.

For 2008, the committee reviewed 718 unrestricted United States stakes with a purse of at least \$75,000, and assigned graded status to 481, seven more than last year. In 2008, 67% of eligible races are grade I, II, or III.