

Kentucky commission adopts Jockey Club standards on toe grabs

The Kentucky Horse Racing Commission voted to outlaw all but the shortest front toe grabs at its meeting on July 14 at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington.

The commission adopted the standard recommended by the Jockey Club's Thoroughbred Safety Committee limiting the length of front toe grabs to two millimeters. The standard is even stricter than the length permitted in an Association of Racing Commissioners International model rule, although that model rule could be adjusted to the Jockey Club standard when the RCI Model Rules Committee meets on August 1.

Lisa Underwood, the Kentucky commission's executive director, said the rule would be forwarded to the Kentucky General Assembly. It could be approved by this fall.

Elizabeth "Betsy" Stone Lavin, chairwoman of the commission's equine health and safety committee, recommended the change, noting studies have shown long toe grabs halt a Thoroughbred's natural action, which produces some forward slide each time a front foot lands. Because toe grabs halt that action, studies have shown they put stress on the cannon bone.

Keeneland Race Course and Turfway Park both went a step further on July 17, jointly banning most traction devices for both front and hind

horseshoes for training and racing at the facilities.

The policy will not allow toe grabs, calks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turn-downs, trailers, or heel extensions. The only permitted shoes will be flat, Queen's Plate, and Queen's Plate XT or their equivalents. Queen's Plate XT shoes have a two-millimeter raised toe.

Keeneland is a co-owner of Turfway, and both tracks have Polytrack main surfaces.

The Kentucky commission and the Thoroughbred Safety Committee have not addressed the use of traction devices for hind shoes.

Studies presented at the Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit also showed that just in wearing the shoes, stress is produced when a horse is standing.

Chief State Steward and retired Racing Hall of Fame trainer John Veitch said toe grabs can help some horses gain traction on certain tracks, but he said the negatives

of toe grabs outweigh the positives.

"A lot of these came into use when tracks were less manicured," Veitch said. "They're great on certain types of horses—horses pulling a wagon for instance ... but they're not good for horses running 40 miles per hour."

Retired Hall of Fame jockey Chris McCarron said toe grabs increase the chance that horses will fall if they



clip heels because the grabs can catch when contact occurs. He said most international jurisdictions do not allow toe grabs, and he did not think racing was adversely affected.

Lavin said the two-millimeter maximum length would apply to all sur-

faces and be in effect for racing and training.

In other commission news on July 14:

- Owners, trainers, assistant trainers, exercise riders, and



veterinarians will see their licensing fees increase from \$100 to \$150 in 2009;

- Turfway Park was approved to host an exhibition race featuring seven riders from the North American Racing Academy;

- Turfway was approved to host a Quarter Horse race in September. It will be the first Quarter Horse race conducted on a synthetic surface;

- Turfway was approved to add the Super High Five wager; and

- Kentucky Downs received approval to conduct two steeplechase races at its 2008 meeting.—Frank Angst

Penn National to implement Jockey Club recommendations

Penn National Gaming Inc., the parent company of Penn National Race Course and five other pari-mutuel racing facilities, announced on July 15 three initiatives designed to improve the health and safety of its horses.

The initiatives echo ones recently recommended by the Jockey Club's Thoroughbred Safety Committee.

"Penn National Gaming endorses and embraces the Jockey Club Thoroughbred Safety Committee's recommendations, which are sound steps toward ensuring the health and welfare of our equine partici-



CHRIS McERLEAN

pants," Chris McErlean, Penn National Gaming's vice president of racing, said in a statement.

Effective on October 1, all Thoroughbreds racing or training at Penn National facilities will not be permitted to use toe grabs larger than two millimeters in height. With the decision, Penn National

joined the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission in adopting the new standard. The Kentucky commission approved the new toe-grab regulations on July 14.

Additionally, Penn National offered its racetracks as training grounds for new, safer riding crops.

On June 17, the Jockey Club recommended whips with shock-absorbing characteristics be used.

Penn National Gaming also endorsed the Jockey Club's call to adopt the Association of Racing Commissioners International model rule on anabolic androgenic steroids.

However, Penn National advocated "a practical and thoughtful approach to the limited use of all medications on equines for racing and training purposes."

The organization also stated "the adoption of consistent rules and regulations related to medication, withdrawal times, testing thresholds, combined with enhanced testing procedures, and facilities should be the overriding goal of all participants in our industry."



JOHN VEITCH

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