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EDITION

# WILDCAT CANTER

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY AG EQUINE PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

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# HIGHLIGHTS

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## STATE OF THE HORSE RACING INDUSTRY PANEL

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Five panelists from different segments of the racing industry joined Hurdle and spoke to an audience of about 60 students and interested stakeholders.



## UPCOMING EVENTS AND IMPORTANT DEADLINES

- Jan. 10 - First day of classes
- Jan. 28 - UK Equine Research Showcase

# WELCOME

Congrats Grads!

The time has officially arrived – the end of your undergraduate career. Heading into the “real world” brings on a lot of contradictory feelings...excitement, worry, never ending possibilities, anxiety about what's next, confidence in your work ethic, stress about what's the right move for you. Trust me, we've all felt it! If there's one thing I can tell you during this time, it is this: your feelings are valid, and the University of Kentucky's Ag Equine Programs has provided you a well-rounded education and experience to prepare you for your next phase in life. In simpler terms, you've got this!

As you begin your career or kick off additional education, you will always have Equine Programs and UK behind you. There is a broad network of graduates eager and willing to help you along this new path. One of those resources you have at your fingertips is EQAAN – the Equine Alumni Affiliate Network. We are a network of graduates who have joined together to foster professional pride, promote activities and projects for the advancements, best interests, and welfare of the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and equine industry; and to provide activities, education and support services for students, graduates, faculty, staff, members and friends. If you are ever in need of a networking connection, have a question about your profession or need general support, EQAAN was created to be just that!

One buzz word I'm sure you've heard throughout your time as an undergrad is networking, networking, networking. Oh, and some more networking! When this word became part of my vocabulary, I imagined myself at fancy black-tie events floating around a room discussing business proposals and elevator pitches galore. In reality, networking is about building friendships and relationships with people from varying (sometimes even vastly different) backgrounds. These relationships, especially in the fledgling stages of your career, will serve you greater than anything you could begin to imagine.

When I was a student in Equine Programs, I had a networking moment that shaped the trajectory of my career. I reflect on this pivotal moment often – it's unorthodox, unexpected and completely perfect. Picture this...It's the first semester of senior year of college. I have absolutely no idea what I want to do with my life, no job, no plans...just internally panicking every time someone asks me, “What are you doing after graduation?” Then, I get invited by a friend to a Miranda Lambert concert at Rupp Arena. Oh Rupp, the stories we could tell. At this concert, I sit down next to a very nice and very chatty man. He asks me what my major is, what I want to do with my life (enter: internal cringing) and if I am working (more internal cringing). Next, he proceeds to say a statement that changed my life. Well, I'm Frank Taylor and I own Taylor Made Farm and you should come work for me.

Looking back now, that is the most Frank Taylor thing Frank could say, but at the time, it gave me an opportunity to try something. The concert was Saturday night and I started Monday morning. Since then, I have worked in horse racing for seven years and now work in marketing at a major stallion farm – Spendthrift Farm.

I tell you that story to say this – everyone you meet along your journey has a place and a purpose. Foster those relationships, ask for email addresses, reach out on Instagram/Twitter/Facebook, ask for an informational interview at a coffee shop, reach out to people you met at the racetrack or at a trade show. You never know where it may lead.

Again, congrats to all of you graduates! Exciting things are coming your way and you have the best reputation behind you to kick it all off. Go Cats!



AUTRY GRAHAM,  
EQAAN PRESIDENT, ASSISTANT MARKETING  
DIRECTOR, SPENDTHRIFT FARM



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# JOE HIRSCH LEGACY EQUINE ACADEMY SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED TO UK'S CHARLES CHURCHILL

By Holly Wiemers

Charles Churchill, a University of Kentucky senior majoring in Equine Science and Management from Louisville, has been awarded the 2021/2022 Joe Hirsch Legacy Equine Academy Scholarship.

The scholarship was originally established at UK in 2005 but to keep in step with current industry needs, was recently modified to include a preference for diverse students to encourage inclusivity throughout the equine industry. It now resides in UK's College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, which is home to the Equine Science and Management undergraduate degree program. The scholarship was made possible by the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, the Daily Racing Form and many other contributors and is coordinated in conjunction with the Legacy Equine Academy.

"I am extremely grateful for the Joe Hirsch Legacy Academy Scholarship Fund because it has provided me with additional funds to allow me to continue my studies at the University of Kentucky," Churchill said. "I am very new to the equine program, as I formally applied to alter my major at the top my junior year. By transferring into the program, I look forward to pursuing my interests in the executive management of racetracks. I hope to do this by utilizing UK's curriculum to develop my knowledge on various direct and indirect economic contributions of wagering and necessary protocol required for a successful racing program in respective jurisdictions."



Since becoming an equine major, Churchill said he has joined organizations that can assist him in becoming the professional he aspires to be. He is a member of the UK Horse Racing Club, the UK Collegiate Professional Horsemen's Association and a Wildcat Wrangler, the student ambassador team within the equine major.

"Not only have these clubs provided me with a network of young professionals that I can discuss industry topics with, but it has given others the opportunity to share their unique perspective and life experiences, allowing us to formulate genuine, lifelong friendships with other students in the College of Agriculture," Churchill said. "By completing my college career at Kentucky, I am exposed to an extremely caring group of faculty members as well as a network of likeminded students who are capable of compassion and helping their fellow members of the agriculture community."

Churchill completed an internship with the Keeneland track maintenance team during the summer of 2021.

"The racing industry would not exist and could not function without the contributions of the Black community and people of color. We at the NTRA are committed to supporting the communities we serve. Last year, we embarked on an initiative to create greater diversity and cultural awareness at all levels of the business, including positions of power, by collaborating with Legacy Equine Academy," said Alex Waldrop, NTRA president and chief executive officer. "Through this venture, the NTRA will help fund scholarships for students in the UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment's Equine Programs with the intent of fostering a more inclusive Thoroughbred racing industry for generations to come. Change cannot wait, so we will work with all of our racing partners to further the goal of a more diverse, inclusive environment for all participants in our sport."

James MacLeod, director of UK Ag Equine Programs, agreed. "There is no reason to delay efforts to address diversity and inclusivity challenges. Academic scholarships enable students to focus entirely on educational opportunities and reach their full potential. We are very grateful to the NTRA and partners for their support," he said.

The Legacy Equine Academy, which encourages students in grades 6-12 to attend college and pursue equine, agriculture, natural resources and environmental science degrees, is the brainchild of Ronald Mack, the organization's founder and CEO.

"We are so proud and excited for Charles to receive the Joe Hirsch Legacy Equine Academy Scholarship," Mack said. "I've admired his passion for equine studies and his determination to leverage that passion by pursuing an array of professional opportunities in the horse racing industry. This scholarship contributes to accomplishing Legacy Equine Academy's goal of bridging the historical contributions of African American trailblazers in horse racing history to the modern standards and professional opportunities in the equine industry. Charles is a true 'Legacy Leader.'"

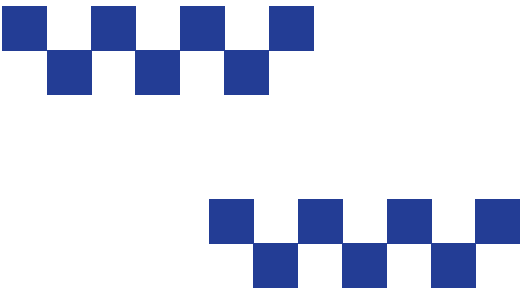
The scholarship had originally been placed into the UK College of Communication and Information because UK didn't at that time have an equine undergraduate program. The Equine Science and Management undergraduate degree was launched in 2007 and since then has become one of the fastest growing majors at the university and is now currently the largest major in the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, making it a natural fit to administer the scholarship.

# UK AG EQUINE PROGRAMS CELEBRATES ITS 13 WINTER GRADUATES

Photos by Holly Wiemers

UK Ag Equine Programs held an open house for the 13 Equine Science and Management graduates Dec. 17 at the Pirri Teaching Pavilion on Maine Chance Equine Campus.





# STATE OF THE HORSE RACING INDUSTRY ADDRESS PLANNED AND EXECUTED BY SENIOR ESMA STUDENT

Story and photos by Sydney Carter

The State of the Horse Racing Industry Address on Dec. 1 was hosted by equine student Naomi Hurdle in conjunction with UK Ag Equine Programs to discuss current issues in horse racing.

Five panelists from different segments of the racing industry joined Hurdle and spoke to an audience of about 60 students and interested stakeholders: Dora Delgado, Breeders' Cup chief racing officer; Dustin Heath, trainer at WinStar Farm; Chauncey Morris, executive director of Kentucky Thoroughbred Association; Richard Nolen, broodmare manager at Three Chimneys Farm; and Mark Taylor, Taylor Made Farm vice president of marketing and sales. Each panelist was strategically chosen to represent a portion of potential careers in racing.



Hurdle began the evening with a question regarding what integrity means to each of the professionals, specifically as it pertained to their niche of the industry. Panelists addressed some issues present within the industry as well as how they hope the industry continues to grow in the future.

The racing industry's "Social License to Operate" was brought up and several suggestions were made to continue to keep up racing's image in the world. Creating outreach programs and involving the public by making racing more accessible to average people was the consensus on gaining societal acceptance.

Standardization of racing policies on medications was also discussed, and Heath tied the topic back to individual integrity of employees within the industry. Uniformity of medication rules was predicted to help trainers operate in a more efficient way.

The Jockey Club's "Stallion Cap" rule was touched on as well as the pressure that it is starting to put on breeding agents and breeding managers. The rule limits stallions breeding to 140 mares per season, where previously, there were no restrictions. The rule applies to stallions born in 2020 and after, therefore the limits will be in place soon. Although economically this is a concern for many, Taylor said he thought it would be a good step for the breed moving forward.

The panelists reflected on their individual hopes for the future of the racing industry.

"I think it went really well. I learned a lot. Everyone did a wonderful job; I was really happy with the turnout overall," Hurdle said.

"I have had several people tell me that they didn't know horse racing could be so interesting. The audience had the opportunity to see these professionals and relate to their lives. I was so pleased with how engaged everyone was," she said.

Hurdle said she hopes to pursue a career in Thoroughbred racing public relations or a similar field. She said she felt that the event, the culmination of a special studies project she worked on over the course of the semester, has contributed to a career in that field with an opportunity to practice event organization and public speaking.



# EQUINE INTERNSHIP SHOWCASE HIGHLIGHTS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

By Ryan Smith, Photos by Sydney Carter

University of Kentucky Ag Equine Programs hosted its annual Internship Showcase highlighting students' professional growth and career preparedness Dec. 7 in the E.S. Good Barn, where 11 students presented to more than 80 attendees.

With last year's Internship Showcase being entirely remote, staff and students alike were pleased to return to presenting in person.

"It was so great to be back in person to celebrate the achievements of our interns. Our students continue to amaze me with the way they add so much value to their internship placements," said Savannah Robin, internship coordinator and event organizer. "I am so happy that our undergrads came out in force to see the achievements of these students as well. I think that gives them a glimpse into what their undergraduate experience will provide and also the diversity of opportunities within our industry."

The first half of the event was focused on students presenting their internship projects to instructors, peers and industry professionals. Presentations featured descriptions of their day-to-day work, what they learned from their experiences and how they hope to use their internships as a launchpad into the equine industry.

Following the presentation section of the event, awards were presented for Outstanding Intern Award, People's Choice Award and Outstanding Internship Host Site. Winners were Daniel Deatrack, Briana Moreno and the Kentucky Horse Park Mounted Police, respectively.

Deatrack, awarded Outstanding Intern Award, said he was excited to have been nominated.

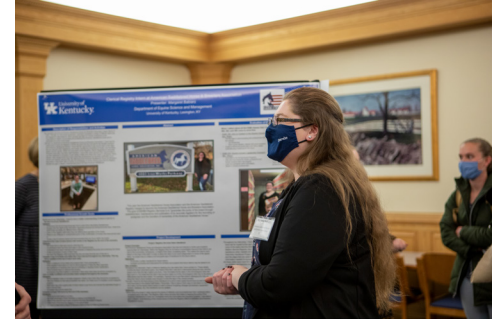
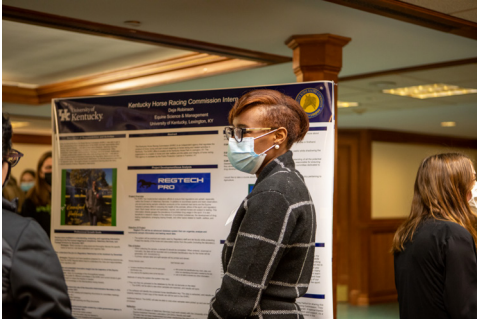
"The internship program gave me an amazing opportunity to do something I've always wanted to do, work side-by-side with and learn from a trainer at a top racetrack like Churchill Downs. The experiences I had, people I met and things I learned from Phil and the Rigney Racing team were life changing. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity while in the equine program at UK," he said.

The event gave attendees the opportunity to learn about the diversity of careers that exist within the equine industry and to see how Equine Science and Management students have developed over the course of their internship.

"Internships provide very valuable experiential learning opportunities," said James Macleod, director of UK Ag Equine Programs and professor within the Gluck Equine Research Center. "Our collaboration with leading industry professionals and organizations, often located right here in Central Kentucky, enable truly special student opportunities and unique first-hand insight into potential career paths."

Robin expressed her thanks to the students who came out to present and support as well as the faculty and staff who helped make this happen.







## Whose opinion matters, on equine health and welfare?

“WHOSE opinion matters?” was the theme of the 2021 World Horse Welfare conference, as experts looked into how best to spread the right word on all aspects of equine welfare.

Delegates at the hybrid event, in London and broadcast on-line on Nov. 11, heard presentations on the importance of science-based evidence in animal health and welfare, the power of opinion and the role of the media, both social and mainstream.

Panel members discussed the various challenges involved in getting the right messages out, in answer to questions asked by members of the audience.

Among the attendees was Camie Heleski, who teaches equine science and management at the University of Kentucky and is actively involved with the International Society for Equitation Science. Asked whether, as welfare can be seen as “shades of grey, and science as black and white, should science ever be disregarded?”



Heleski said she has worked on a paper looking at “when science is not enough.”

“There are times when science doesn’t tell us the whole picture, and you need to add the ethical assessment,” she said. “You look at the evidence but sometimes it’s also what you feel in your heart; this doesn’t feel fair for this horse, though I don’t necessarily have the science to document it yet. I see some practices in the warm-up at shows and we don’t necessarily have the science to say a practice is super-wrong but ethically, you can see it’s not fair for the horse. So there are times science doesn’t give us the full answer and we have to bring in an ethical assessment.”

To read the story in its entirety, please visit [here](#).



## PERSPECTIVES FROM OUR STUDENTS

Note from editor: An important part of the mission of our program includes undergraduate education, specifically with our Equine Science and Management undergraduate degree program. In a class taught by Camie Heleski, a faculty member and lecturer within the program – is one designed to present provocative, often controversial issues that are current to the equine industry. In EQM 305, "Equine Industry Issues," students are introduced to topics, heard from speakers, researched information and communicated about industry issues in written and oral formats. The course is designed to expose students to hot button issues in the industry and encourage them to research and formulate well-communicated opinions about those issues. One avenue made available to this course is publishing some of those stories here.

### **Representation On and Around the Racetrack; The Role and Responsibility of the Racing Industry in Promoting Black Engagement**

*By Cameron Stacy*

A day at the races is a unique and incomparable experience for many reasons, but one in particular that engages visitors of all kinds is the riot of color all around. The visible spectrum is on display in every corner - spectators donning bright and elaborate hats and jockeys sporting the lively and unique silks of each farm in attendance. Even the horses follow suit, as greys, bays, chestnuts and everything in between take to the paddocks, shining in the sun under a crystal clear blue sky. It is a visual array, no color unrepresented. Everywhere you look on race day is adorned in these tones, creating a festive and breathtaking atmosphere without comparison. This vivid setting, however, stands in stark contrast to one key element of the day. The faces and people underneath these glorious trappings occupy a narrow spectrum, strikingly homogenous by comparison.

Throughout the course of history, participation in horse sport has been largely dominated by white individuals. There are a multitude of demographic trends and historical influences to which to attribute this trend, but for most participants in the industry, this notion is simply a fact, a reality of the sport and the industry as a whole. For many, it does not merit further consideration, additional analysis into the why. Why did this become the reality of the horse industry? And more importantly; why are we allowing it to continue?

Horse racing is a particularly prudent discipline to discuss in this context, taking into consideration the popularity and public involvement in the sport nationwide. The pull of this industry with regard to the American population is incredible, particularly when compared with other "niche" disciplines of horse sport. As a result of this heightened involvement, horse racing undergoes far more scrutiny in the court of public opinion.

Despite this position on the national stage, the sport of horse racing has demonstrated relatively poor efforts to increase and promote minority participation, whether that be as a fan or as a professional in the industry. In fact, as was posited by racehorse owners Greg Harbut and Ray Daniels, it is possible the industry has been "...largely tone deaf due to a lack of prominent Black stakeholders in place to guide the sport..." (Whyno). The majority white nature of the sport has created a lack of accountability "...during a nationwide reckoning on [systemic racism]" (Whyno). Organizations, corporations and sporting groups worldwide have committed resources to promote black engagement and ascension in these spaces, driven particularly by the outcry from fans and participants in these spaces. Especially when compared with other high-engagement sporting organizations, such as the National Basketball Association and the National Football League, there is an apparent lack of reciprocation on the part of horse racing in this area. Limitations on representation in sports carry unending negative implications, but this recent shift in priority on the national level highlights serious concerns for the future of horse racing in particular. As the nature of American society diversifies with each coming generation, the status of horse racing as a predominantly white space will ultimately act as a limiting factor on public engagement. Refusal to recognize the importance of representation will contribute to the decline of the sport, one which many already consider an antiquated practice in the modern era.

There was a time, however, when black faces were quite common at the track. Following the conclusion of the American Civil War, the majority of jockeys in the United States were African American. Black jockeys made up the bulk of the field; this was particularly well demonstrated at the inaugural running of the Kentucky Derby, where 13 out of the 15 jockeys in the field were African American (Scherer). They participated and performed admirably at the highest levels of the sport, winning "...six Derbies, one Preakness Stakes and three Belmont Stakes..." (Scherer) over a nine year period (1890-1899).

Despite the apparent talent, availability and success of black jockeys, this demographic trend in racing profession came to a crashing halt at the start of the 20th Century, as white jockeys enacted a campaign of racist and unsportsmanlike attacks against their fellow Black competi-

tors. Dangerous and inhibiting practices on the track, such as "...boxing [Black riders] out during races, running them into the rail and hitting them with riding crops..." (Scherer) became common practice. In the process, white riders significantly decreased the earning potential of the horse and rider under attack, and put extremely valuable horses at risk in the name of racism, two effects which severely diminished the employability of Black jockeys.

Owners who employed Black jockeys incurred an even higher level of risk than the standard in a relatively dangerous sport, as riders and horses alike fell victim to these attacks (Scherer). As a result, the ownership collective in the industry engaged in tacit participation in the limitation on Black representation in the sport. It was simpler and more immediately rewarding for owners to merely stop employing Black riders; with this change, their own liability decreased, the safety of their horses was more secure and the likelihood of their horses finishing in the money increased dramatically. Rather than address the intrinsic issue, the why that allowed for these difficulties to arise in the first place, Black riders were victimized off track, in addition to the on-track abuse they already endured.

Black representation in the sport of horse racing has never truly recovered from this blight - though minimal representation has been recorded throughout the history of the sport in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is incredibly minimal in nature. The lack of Black individuals engaging in authority positions on the track is especially telling. One particularly stark example was the first recorded appointment of a Black head starter in the United States; Rick Walker was awarded the position at Thistledown just 17 years ago (Voss). Ownership has seen similarly slow trends in representation. Necker Island, the ninth-place finisher at the 2020 Kentucky Derby, was the first horse entered in the race in 13 years belonging to a Black owner (Ta & Chiriguayo).

On countless levels, the current state of representation in the racing industry appears behind the times when compared to the general public. The prevalence of systemic racism throughout the course of American societal development has been incredibly apparent throughout history, and is becoming more and more widely acknowledged in recent years. The horse industry cannot continue to exist in a vacuum, shrouded by privilege and void of accountability. It is the responsibility of the industry both to acknowledge its past failings in the protection and support of Black professionals, and to work to promote the engagement and ascension of Black individuals in the sport in the present day. Increased commitment to this goal is representative of the racing industry's foothold in the modern era - not only morally imperative, but necessary to ensure the preservation and promotion of the sport for the coming generations.

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## Speaking Horse or Force?

*By Mackenzie Grunden*



Popular trainers such as Monty Roberts, Pat Parelli and Clinton Anderson all use horse training principles that are based around dominance and respect, commonly referred to as natural horsemanship. Their philosophies are grounded in the idea that horse herds form a strict social hierarchy, and that the handler should be "dominant" over the horses. However, recent research has shown that domestic horse herds typically form bilateral relationships and rarely form strict hierarchies. Training practices using the dominance theory may be detrimental for horse welfare, which is alarming due to popularity among younger horse handlers.

Perhaps the underlying issue in the world of natural horsemanship is the widely believed idea that horses can and should respect us. Respect is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as "admiration felt or shown for someone or something that you believe has good ideas or qualities" (Cambridge Dictionary). This is referring to a human state of mind, which is allowed by our much-developed prefrontal cortex. The idea that horses can respect comes from misinterpretations of herd behavior. It is commonly thought that horses form strict dominance hierarchies, and that the submissive individuals "respect" the more dominant horses. It has since been observed that domestic horse herds typically interact with each other in the context of bilateral relationships. This means that for every interaction a horse has with another, they will form a new "contract" for the individual situation and herd member (International Society for Equitation Science, 2017). In some instances, a particular horse may be more aggressive during feeding time, which is typically due to some sort of food scarcity. In domestic herds, feeding

concentrates can become a source of aggression among herds. Horses who have some sort of food anxiety or have previously been denied access to grain may exhibit more aggressive behaviors in order to ensure they have access to the food. In this situation, that horse may appear "dominant" but in all other situations may not act like this, which is an example of a bilateral interaction.

Natural horsemanship preaches the idea that we must learn to "speak horse" and that by doing so, we can garner the horse's respect and trust. The dilemma faced here is that humans will never have swiveling ears or tails that can swish, among other important communicating factors. Horses in the wild have an innate desire to remain at peace, as aggression expends energy, so the typical response to an act of aggression is avoidance (Goodwin 2009). Round penning is a common training method used by natural horsemanship trainers. The goal here is to get the horses to "lick and chew," turn into the trainer, and/or lower their head, which is taken as a sign of submission. In a recent study conducted by the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, two horses were introduced to each other and any licking or chewing behavior was recorded. The study found that the aggressor in the situation exhibited more of this behavior than the other individual. This study interprets the lick and chew behavior as behavior horses exhibit as a response to a stressful situation; it is likely to occur after the initial tension has passed (Equitation Science, 2018). It is also common to see horses lick and chew after a chiropractic adjustment, which would further support this interpretation. The relief of the pain or tension by the adjuster may have prompted the lick and chew behavior. This refutes the belief that the horse views the trainer as dominant.

In the round pen, the trainer will typically be in the middle of the circular pen, and ask the horse to move forward around them by walking behind the horse in the "flight zone" (the area near the horse's haunches that when entered, elicits a flight response) (Comerford, 2019). The trainer will often raise their voice or swing an arm or a whip to encourage the horse further. These actions are eliciting an instinctual flight response from the horses, where the human is perceived as a predator, not as a dominant herd member. When the horse exhibits the desired lick/chew and head lowering behaviors the trainer will then avert their eyes, cease chasing and adopt a soft body posture, encouraging the horse to stop and look at the trainer. If the horse does not stop/come toward the trainer, they may send the horse out again, resume chasing and then attempt again in a few moments. Throughout this process, the horse learns that the only way to get the trainer to stop chasing them is to exhibit the desired behavior (Henshall 2014). This would classify as a negative reinforcement training technique; removing aversive stimulus when you get the desired response, as opposed to "speaking horse" and becoming dominant as it is advertised. In fact, the round penning technique was replicated in a study using a remote control car in place of a human. This study conducted by Catherine Henshall was able to get the horses to approach and in some cases follow the car (Henshall 2012). This indicates that horses are not interpreting the human body language as that of a horse, they are simply responding to the negative reinforcement taking place.

Natural horsemanship training is advertised as a force-free, humane way of "speaking horse." This language appeals to trainers across a variety of disciplines but is misleading because it ignores the psychological distress/force used. Not only are horses unable to understand human body language in the context of another horse, but the amount of psychological pressure used can also be detrimental. Horse handlers are drawn to the idea that they can communicate and build this relationship based on leadership and respect, but may not understand the true implications and methods. The horses subject to these training methods are not responding to the handlers' efforts to "speak horse," they are responding to the negative reinforcement. This can be especially detrimental to feral horses, or green horses who do not already view humans positively. Negative reinforcement and natural horsemanship have their place in horse training, but it is important to fully understand what you are communicating with your horse and how that affects it psychologically.

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## The Olympic Pentathlon: Is It Safe?

By Christine Lim



When it comes to tradition, how do we the public know when a tradition has outlived its potential or is in need of modifications?

This past summer, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics took place, and while there was an abundance of positive publicity within the horse community, such as the “dancing ponies,” referring to the dressage event, when it came to the show jumping portion of pentathlon, it seemed to be lacking.

Why is that? In pentathlon, you compete in five (hence “pent”) sports to see if you are the “ideal, complete athlete” (History of Modern Pentathlon). These five sports consist of running, shooting, fencing, swimming and equestrian show jumping. Pentathlon began as a way to test a cavalry officer’s abilities in the field and later became a test of the athlete’s ability to be well-rounded and well-versed in a variety of sports. So, if this started as a way to challenge athletes, why is it receiving so much negativity since airing in the 2020 Olympics? (To clarify, the negativity is coming mainly from the equestrian section of the competition, the show jumping.)

In the horse world, the Olympics are a great time to catch the interest of the public and inform them of the sport. It’s a way to catch the attention of others who may not be interested in the sport, and this year, that’s exactly what happened for the Olympic dressage athletes (both horse and rider) with the “dancing ponies.”

In pentathlon, publicity was not so positive for the sport with the controversy of a trainer physically hitting a horse, athletes/riders having breakdowns during the competition and lack of information about what happens to the horses after the competition.

The main issues that need to be addressed relate to both horse and rider welfare, knowledge and training within the show jumping portion, safety standards for the competition and post-Olympic procedures.

When welfare is addressed, there are certain criteria that are examined to see if it has been met or if changes need to be made. In the case of the show jumping portion, there is a lot of room for improvement concerning the welfare of the horse and rider. For reference, in the show jumping portion, riders have 20 minutes to get to know their horse and ride as well as jump before they compete. Riding a random horse is not an uncommon factor of competition since it is used to judge the riders’ knowledge and skill as well as their horsemanship. There is a multitude of competitions that include jumping and riding a random horse including, but not limited to, Interscholastic Equestrian Association (IEA), Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) and NCEA (National Collegiate Equestrian Association).

In these competitions, riders will ride random horses with an allotted amount of time to get to know their horse in and outside of the show ring. Now the difference between these competitions and pentathlon is, just like in any other sport, there are qualifications set in place to determine your division/limits (if any) of what you can do. Only riders/athletes in the same division can compete against one other or else that would be unfair, right? Now a lot of the controversy comes from riders having to ride a “random” and unknown horse. While that poses challenge and risk, it’s not necessarily where there is a concern in welfare. The concern in welfare is where these horses come from. In IEA or any of the other competitions listed above, the horses used to compete with either come from the school or the barn that the team rides out of, ensuring that these horses are knowledgeable and able to compete in their divisions. In the case of pentathlon, the horses are “local” to where the competition is held, but there isn’t much information on the barns where they come from and what kind of training they’ve received.

This in particular is concerning because a talented rider can only do so much given the dynamics of the horse-to-rider relationship (size and muscular differences). With that being said, there needs to be restrictions on how far or how intensely a rider can be tested. The Olympic show jumpers (not a part of the pentathlon show jumping portion) are riders who have dedicated an abundance of time and effort to the sport, and this sport is almost always the only sport they focus on.

This allows the riders to jump at the division and height that they jump at (approx 1.6 meters). In pentathlon, riders are jumping fences of 1.20 meters. This is where another concern lies: are these riders safe and properly trained in their ability to ride? The answer is no.

The riders in pentathlon pursue five different sports, and they are jumping at a level that most people who ride one or two times a week do not attempt. It’s very difficult to be competing at that high of a level when you have to focus on four other sports outside of this one. “Jack of all trades, but master of none,” just because some athletes can compete in five sports and be successful, does not mean that they should be expected to master the sport. People who have devoted a huge part of life to the sport don’t always succeed, so why should the pentathlon athletes be tested at a “mastery” or “professional” level? The Olympic committee should look into lowering the jumps. Not to make it “easier” but to make it safer for both rider and horse.

Another safety issue has to do with when a rider falls off. In many other equestrian sports, if you fall off then that’s it and you are disqualified. In pentathlon, riders are disqualified after two falls instead of one. This is risky since the riders and the horses are not evaluated for safety after falls or refusals (of the horse) that result in the rider falling. Most times, as long as you can get back up and get on, the show continues. There is no serious concern for head or spinal injuries from the fall, especially where riders have fallen underneath the horse.

There is also no big concern for the horses. They catch them and they get back on, not checking to see if the refusal was more than rider/horse error and something such as a tendon or leg injury.



There needs to be more medical clearance for both horse and rider before, during and after the competition.

Lastly, what happens after pentathlon? When all is said and done, where do the horses go? What happens if they were injured? What are the rules about euthanasia and who gets to make that call? Especially since the horses are "local" or donated to the Olympics, where do they go after this? Do we have precedents set in place to ensure that they continue training and continue care? Unlike other events where riders bring their personal horses to compete on, what happens to the horses when the riders leave? On top of this, what happens to the riders/athletes post-pentathlon? Are there monthly or quarterly check-ins for training to ensure that athletes are receiving well rounded training?

Unfortunately, there is not much information of what happens to both horse and riders after pentathlon and there needs to be. There needs to be accountability and transparency in this sport as there is with other sports within the Olympics. In the end, the public and horse community needs to hold these sports and committees accountable. Even if there is no wrongdoing, there needs to be plans set in place for if it does happen. There are changes that need to be made. We the public need to be the voice of reason for these horses and ensure that they are safe and well cared for in all aspects outside and inside the competition. It's also our job as the public and as people within the horse community to ensure that both the adults and youth in this sport are informed of what is safe and how to be in charge of their own safety. If the Olympics wants to hold a competition like this to evaluate whether or not an athlete is well rounded, there needs to be reevaluation to see if certain aspects are worth keeping. For example, the show jumping portion is a great demonstration of being an adaptable and talented athlete, but for athletes who cannot dedicate all their time to this sport, the following changes should be implemented: lowering of jumps, increased safety protocols, increased training requirements and increased accountability and transparency about the horses. The public should have access to the horses' histories (as in where they're from and their training) to keep both the Olympic committee, the riders and the owners of the horses accountable for their welfare. There shouldn't be jumps that are higher than what other athletes (IHSA and NCEA athletes) can compete at, especially since there is a greater difference in devotion to the sport. If the Olympics wants to continue to host pentathlon, they need to make it safe.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: SINCE THE SUBMISSION OF THIS STORY, THE OLYMPIC PENTATHLON COMMITTEE DID MEET AND DECIDE TO DROP SHOW JUMPING FROM THE GROUP OF FIVE SPORTS THAT WILL BE EVALUATED, SUBSTITUTING INSTEAD CYCLING.*

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## **The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act and its Effect on the U.S. Racing Industry**



*By Olivia Bryant*

The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act, also known as HISA, is a proposed bill that has passed through the House of Representatives and is currently sitting in the Senate of the United States Congress. This bill, proposed in March 2019, would create an authority, called the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority, that would be the universal committee for the sport of horse racing regarding anti-doping control, medication control and racetrack safety. The passing of this bill is going to affect many different people, including owners, trainers, jockeys, stewards, veterinarians, the state racing commissions and one of the most important groups, the public.

The current board and committee members for the HISA bill include many former board members of racetracks and racing associations, along with other independent members. These members were appointed by the authority to act as the standing committee and board for the initial processing and enactment of the bill.

Currently, each state where horse racing occurs has their own set of rules regarding anti-doping, medication and racetrack safety. These rules are usually governed by the state government, called state racing commissions. This can pose an issue because trainers, owners, jockeys and other people involved are not being held to a uniform set of anti-doping and medication standards as they travel across the country to different racetracks. This has caused multiple discrepancies and violations at many different tracks across the United States. Also, not all tracks are being evaluated for safety as frequently as other tracks are. The passing of this bill would allow the authority to create a uniform set of racetrack standards.

In the case of the owners, trainers, jockeys and veterinarians in the equine industry, they are going to have to learn and abide by the new rules and regulations that are going to be set forth by the authority. Since this is going to be a program that is widely used across the nation, it should make it easier for those associated with the horse on race day to understand and use the appropriate medications in the correct way. Currently, trainers and owners are having to change and think about what state they are currently racing in, and make sure that they are following the rules of that state. Then, when that track closes, they move on to a different state for a different meet and set of races. That new state might have different anti-doping and medication policies than the previous state, which can make things complicated.

The stewards of the tracks and the current state racing commissions across the country are going to be able to work with and enter into an

agreement with the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority to set standards that will be used uniformly across the country. This task is going to require immense amounts of cooperation from both the state racing commissions and the heads of the racetracks in order to create a smooth transition into a more uniform governing body.

While theoretically the enactment of this bill will provide clearer rules and an easier set of regulations to follow, some equine industry professionals have launched backlash against this bill. Some industry professionals are worried about the implications this is going to have on horse owners and trainers who are not having their voices heard. With any large democratic program, there is always going to be a few people in charge of a multitude of others. Some worry that this is going to negatively affect the industry because the bill is stepping into uncharted waters.

For instance, there has not been much concrete information that tells how the authority will be funded and who will get to make all the decisions. Arguing that the HISA bill inflicts on constitutional rights by giving "improper delegation of legislative authority to an unelected body," (Clabes, 2021) the National Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association (NHBPA) is filing lawsuits against the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act, challenging its constitutionality. The NHBPA also claims that the passing of the bill will create a huge need for funding, which is believed to come out of trainers' and owners' pockets in fees to fund the authority.

A major component of the HISA bill will create a racetrack safety program, meaning that all tracks are going to be evaluated and held to a certain safety standard. That sounds like a tremendous benefit, but a common concern with this is that not all tracks have the funding or the labor force to make drastic changes to the tracks in order to keep up with much larger tracks that have the necessary funds to make improvements. This concern has been addressed in a BloodHorse article that discusses common questions about the HISA bill. The article stated that "The HISA requires the authority to develop its training and racing safety standards while taking into account the differences between racing facilities and the regions in which they operate. Therefore, the law allows for some variation in standards that do not unreasonably increase risks for horses and riders." (Bloodhorse, 2021) This allowance for variation will benefit smaller tracks because they will not have to use as much funding for improvements, but this may not come as a reassurance to the public, owners, jockeys and trainers about the safety of the track and the standard it is being held to.

From the public's point of view, the enactment of an authority that will set medication and anti-doping standards for horse racing across the country will be a great step in the right direction. The racing industry is currently facing a high volume of scrutiny, even more so than in the past due to the recent Kentucky Derby winner, Medina Spirit, testing positive for betamethasone following his 2021 win. The general public who does not regularly follow horse racing watched the mass media coverage that discussed how famous trainer Bob Baffert's Derby-winning horse had tested positive for illegal substances. That media coverage has shone a dark light on the racing industry, one that continuously keeps reigniting but is constantly being put out. In theory, the Horse Racing Integrity and Safety Act may help prevent these types of circumstances from occurring in the future.

In order to save the sport that we all love, the structure and coverage of horse racing needs to change. Most owners, trainers, jockeys and anyone affiliated with horses are doing the best they can to keep their horses safe, happy and healthy. But legislative reform needs to occur to provide a voice for the animals that are unable to fight for themselves. Government protection for the equine animal in the sport of horse racing may be the first step in the right direction towards a sport of positive social change. The Horse Racing Integrity and Safety Act could be the first of many solutions, though I believe that we still have a long way to go.

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