



Changing the Rules

Clarity and consistency in the adjudication of North American racing is possible with a shift to the Category 1 philosophy

Executive Summary

History is littered with the cries of athletes, fans, reporters and bettors who feel a sport's officials made a "bad call." But whether it is real or perceived, inconsistent officiating can be maddening and has the potential to erode customer confidence and impact future participation.

Horse racing is no different. The virulence of opinions regarding inconsistency in the officiating of racing, not just from an isolate meet, but across the entire North American racing landscape for a considerable period, has prompted the Thoroughbred Idea Foundation to pursue the topic.

There is an alternative to the inconsistency, and with it comes far fewer inquiries and fewer demotions. What racing **would** get is greater consistency, clarity and a betting sport where the participants – be them jockeys, trainers, owners or bettors – understand what fouls warrant demotion.

The philosophy applied in North America, and the cause of this inconsistency, is identified by the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) as Category 2 – still in place in only two major racing jurisdictions, the United States of America and Canada. .

The Thoroughbred Idea Foundation recommends that North American racing jurisdictions move away from Category 2 and adopt a Category 1 interference philosophy.

According to the model rule published by the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities, the main rule on which Category 1 is based, is as follows (underlined area shown for emphasis):

"If, in the opinion of the Staging Authority's relevant judicial body, a horse or its rider causes interference and finishes in front of the horse interfered with but irrespective of the incident(s) the sufferer would not have finished ahead of the horse causing the interference, the judge's placings will remain unaltered."

Adopting Category 1 across North America would yield a sport with a greater understanding of how a race is adjudicated, far fewer instances in which the stewards are called upon to review a race, fewer demotions, comes with an enhanced penalty structure for jockeys guilty of careless riding and increased confidence for all stakeholders in the adjudication of the race.

Rates of reviewed incidents and demotions in North America, as exhibited through figures displayed for New York and Southern California, reflect a racing culture far more litigious than those using Category 1. While there are surely benefits attained through global rules harmonization with a switch to Category 1, the white paper offers extensive evidence that Category 1 produces a more consistent approach favoring the “best horse.” Horses found guilty of interference currently, despite wide winning margins, would be highly unlikely to be demoted under Category 1.

Using the rate of reviewed incidents and demotions from Category 1 stalwart Great Britain in 2017 (1.16% for RI, 0.19% for demotions), the paper projects demotions would have declined five times in NYRA races and 12-fold on the southern California circuit. Japan, which changed from Category 2 to Category 1 at the beginning of 2013, has yet to reach the number of reviewed incidents or demotions over the last five full years of racing (more than 17,000 races) as they experienced in their last single year using Category 2 (from 3,454 races).

Several American stewards have studied the differing philosophies, and per their remarks at the 2017 Global Symposium on Racing, the feedback on a potential switch is generally positive.

California steward Scott Chaney said:

“From a steward sitting in the stand, I like Category 1 because we don’t get any grief. Everyone kind of agrees what the result is going to be, it’s straightforward”

Illinois chief state steward Eddie Arroyo echoed similar sentiments.

“It simplifies what we do, but at the same time, if we all did it, and you know how hard it is in this country to get everyone to apply the same rule, we would be really consistent, not just in our state, but across the country. It needs some discussion, but I think it has a future.”

The first major step to implementing a rules philosophy change would be the adoption of the IFHA-backed model rule. Fortunately, the topic is on the agenda for discussion at the 2018 Model Rules Committee in Tucson this December. If a model rule is adopted by the committee, now or in the future, individual jurisdictions would be required to take their own steps to accept and adopt.

Commensurate with the model rules update, training would be required for North American racing officials. Already a function of the Racing Officials Accreditation Program (ROAP) which oversees the accreditation and continuing education of stewards, the infrastructure is in place to effect such change.

There is no perfect solution. Interference in a race cannot be adjudicated to the point that a single solution will yield an entirely fair result for every party. Category 1 sacrifices equity in exchange for clarity and consistency. Category 2 does the opposite. We believe there is tremendous value in adopting a philosophy which emphasizes clarity and consistency for stakeholders – prime values to bolster market confidence.

This would be a significant improvement and confidence boost for the financial drivers of the sport – horseplayers and owners. To read the full paper, visit RacingThinkTank.com.