

The Rudderless Ship

Arthur Hancock, Op/Ed

The real problem with the horse industry is that nobody is in charge. We are a rudderless ship and the way we are going, we will end up on the rocks. Our ship has many captains and they all have a different agenda.

I have come to the conclusion that we cannot regulate and govern ourselves no matter how much we wish we could. We are too fragmented and too diverse. We are composed of too many “fiefdoms” and each one is led by a Nero-like chieftain who had rather do things his way than help the cause as a whole.

How many fiefdoms are there? You can start with each and every state which has its own racing commission and its own chairman. Then you have the Jockey Club, the NTRA, the Jockeys Guild, the HBPA, the TOBA, the Breeders’ Cup, the American Horse Council, the AVMA, the AAEP, KEEP, the KTA, TRA, etc. etc. etc. There are dozens of organizations in addition to the states, and getting them all to work toward the same end is like trying to steer a herd of stampeding buffaloes. It is impossible and cannot be done except in one way...and one way alone.

The Horse Racing Act of 1978 is the vehicle through which we may succeed. Each state can be controlled because the Federal Government has the right to pull the signal if the states do not conform to the regulations. For instance, if there is a ban on steroids and in the future a state will not abide by the rule, that state could not broadcast its signal.

I have said for years that we must remove drugs and thugs from our game. In 1960, horses made 11.3 starts per year and in 2007 they made 6.31 starts per year. This is a dramatic drop of 44% and is a startling statistic which shows that the breed is becoming softer and weaker. This leads one to the inescapable conclusion that there will be more frequent and more severe catastrophic injuries which will do us irreparable harm. It is a vicious cycle. Drugs must be banned if we are going to survive as an industry and if thoroughbreds will survive as a robust breed.

Why don’t we create a level playing field and do away with drugs? We must remember that drugs are money for veterinarians. They convince the trainers who convince the owners. Once I told a vet. Not to treat my horses and he responded, “Well, Arthur, you want to win races, don’t you?”

If anyone cares where our ship will end up they would be wise to embrace the philosophy of Federal Guidelines for Excellence and support a movement to clean up this mess via Federal legislation. Barring this control and guidance, our ship will most assuredly be wrecked or dry docked. Without a rudder, we are lost.

*“Who is in charge of the clattering train,
The carriages creak and couplets strain.
And the pace is fast and points are near,
But sleep has deadened the driver’s ear.
And the whistle shrieks through the night in vain,
For death is in charge of the clattering train.”*

....Winston Churchill