



Ohio State Racing Commission

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Ohio Racetrack Veterinarians offer Thoughts on Out of Competition Testing

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by Kimberly Rinker, OSDF Administrator

A quintet of Ohio-based, practicing racetrack veterinarians provided the Ohio State Racing Commission members with their thoughts on out of competition testing at the OSRC's monthly meeting, Nov. 29, in Columbus.

The veterinarians—who between them have over 150 years of experience—included: Dr. John Piehowicz, Cincinnati (Thoroughbreds/Standardbreds); Dr. John Reichert, Grove City (Standardbreds); Dr. Barry Carter, Lancaster, (Standardbreds); Dr. Dan Wilson, Cleveland, (Standardbreds); and Dr. Scott Shell, Cleveland (Thoroughbreds).

All five veterinarians agreed that clients in their respective practices were in favor of out of competition in the Buckeye State.

“We need to establish a simple process, whereas a public training center or private farm would be able to be easily licensed by the OSRC,” Dr. Barry Carter stated. “By being licensed, it would allow the OSRC to walk onto a property at any time and test and/or examine any racehorse.

“The race secretaries would only accept horses from licensed facilities,” Dr. Carter added. “And the licensing fees should be nominal, so everyone would be encouraged to get licensed.”

“My major concern is, what will test for?” said Dr. Dan Wilson. “The RCI protocol is currently burdensome and we need to narrow the focus of testing and test for street designer drugs such as neuro-toxins, blood doping agents and venoms.

“Also, we'll have to deal with horses coming in from neighboring states such as Michigan and New York. At Northfield we have a ton of horses coming from these areas every night and have anywhere from 640 to 740 horses stabled on the grounds.”

“Out of competition testing will eliminate the ‘shooting star’ trainers, as well as the gossip and innuendoes that are a backstretch constant,” Dr. John Piehowicz acknowledged. “Out of competition testing also serves as a strong deterrent to those few bad apples we have in the racing industry.

“Racing is a privilege, just like driving, and protocol will need to be set well in advance,” Dr. Piehowicz continued. “We’re going to need to establish who does the testing? What criteria is that person going to have to be authorized to test horses? What about out of state competitors? How do we handle them? We’re going to have to work closely in cooperation with surrounding states.

“The penalties need to be stiff too—ten or 15-year suspensions or a life ban for medications that are injurious to the welfare of the horse,” Dr. Piehowicz stressed. “This year at Belterra Park we had 900 horses on the grounds and 30 to 40% of those on race day are ship-ins, so a slap on the wrist for a drug that has no business being in a horse’s system isn’t appropriate.”

“I’m firmly in favor of out of competition testing but the RCI model as it currently stands is just way too large,” said Dr. Scott Shell. “There are drugs out there right now that have no business being in a horse: venoms, toxics and blood-doping agents like synthetic EPO. However, there are a lot of drugs on the RCI list that we use as healing agents and we need to narrow the scope to those harmful agents.

“Out of competition testing will also help to eliminate excess testing expenses,” Dr. Shell continued. “In order for me to keep my veterinarian license, I’m required to be accountable for every drop of medication that goes into every horse and when and where I performed that service. Therefore, a trainer needs to be able to produce a vet record of his or her horses so that regulators have a clear idea of what is therapeutic and what isn’t.

“For instance, anabolic steroids are a controlled substance that we, as veterinarians, use therapeutically, and we need to establish the difference between when medications are used therapeutically and when they are not.”

“Out of competition testing has become a necessity,” Dr. John Reichert admitted. “The majority of trainers are operating within the rules, but because of the few bad apples we need out of competition testing and we need to establish accurate testing. I’m talking about agents that have long term effects on a horse’s system: blood doping, venoms, etc. We need an effective narrow scope of testing, and the accuracy of testing is paramount to establishing severe penalties for the cheaters.

“We also need to think about legal concerns,” Dr. Reichert continued. “For instance, do we do random testing, or do we pick the obvious cheaters? There’s not many trainers

who operate on a 400 to 600-win average. But we're also going to have to think about horses that throw in bad races for reasons such as flipped-palates and tying up, and then dramatically improve when in the hands of a new trainer who can help alleviate those issues.

"I also think that logistically we'll have to figure out how we're going to cooperate amongst the other states who already have out of competition testing in place," Dr. Reichert noted. "For instance, different states have different testing procedures. Are we going to test the horses in the state they're currently in or do we bring them to a central location? The manpower to do the testing has to be credentialed and capable as well."

"In my opinion, out of competition testing is the biggest deterrent to illicit drug use in this industry," Dr. Barry Carter concluded.

"Obviously, out of competition is a multi-faceted issue which needs to be discussed further," stated Robert Schmitz, OSRC Chairman. "At our January 2019 meeting I'm asking the Ohio Department of Agriculture's testing lab to be on hand to lend their insight into this issue."