

Irish Racehorse Trainers Association

Telephone: (045) 522981

Mobile: (087) 2588770

Email: office@irta.ie

Website: www.irta.ie



Curagh House,
Dublin Road,
Kildare, Co. Kildare,
R51 PT80.

Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Written submission on statements made about the integrity and drug usage in horseracing

Deputies and Senators,

On behalf of the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association I would like to thank the members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee for their invitation to express the views of our association and to represent our members in relation to equine anti-doping in Irish Racing.

The Irish Racehorse Trainers Association, founded in 1950, is the official representative body of Irish Racehorse Trainers and is an inclusive all Ireland 32-county association. Our headquarters are located at The Racing Academy Centre of Education in Kildare town.

The Association has played a major role in the progress of Irish Racing since inception, and has set up excellent communication procedures with all concerned in the administration and running of the Irish racing industry.

In my position as Chairman of the IRTA I can honestly say that – apart from well-publicised recent claims imparted from one trainer – I have never received any reports on doping in Irish Racing. I am disappointed and upset that the good name and reputation of Irish Horse Racing, and its world-renowned trainers, is being maligned in this way.

In Ireland we are world leaders in our sport and this is something that we are proud of. Many Irish trainers have competed at the highest level all around the world and as such have their horses regularly and routinely tested. These tests take place both pre-race and post-race, and in all the leading racing jurisdictions. All tests have proved negative to all banned substances. This is a record that all Irish trainers are very proud of.

Over the last few years the IHRB Veterinary Team has been strengthened considerably with the appointment of Dr Lynn Hillyer as Head of Anti-Doping. On race days when horses arrive at the racetrack they are met by the IHRB Veterinary Team. Horses are then inspected and identified by their passports and microchip number. After each race the winner is subjected to a blood or urine sample and on some occasions a hair sample is taken. Horses that run poorly are also subject to sampling. The results of these tests are generally known within 14 days. If there are any adverse findings the trainer is notified and an investigation by the IHRB follows.

The IHRB now has the status of “Authorized Officers” from the Department of Agriculture which means that all horses of all ages can be tested on Stud Farms, Point to Points Meetings, Pre-Training Yards, Schooling Days at Racecourses and also Sales Complexes. At these premises blood and urine samples are taken along with hair samples which can detect the presence of steroids in all stock from a very young age.

All training yards are also subject to random unannounced inspections, where blood, urine and hair samples can be taken.

In fact never has the anti-doping system led to such frequent and thorough testing, yet nothing untoward has been found to suggest that racehorses are receiving anything except all that is permitted and necessary for the welfare and wellbeing of the horse.

We firmly welcome the considerable improvements and modernisations of the anti-doping system. It is often forgotten that trainers are breeders and owners of horses too, and a huge number of horses-in-training are traded from Ireland all over the world. The good reputation of Irish racing is a key component in this trade. For many trainers this trading element of their business is the difference between a successful year in which they can find the investment to improve their premises and increase the amount of people they employ, or not. And so it is in the best interests of Irish trainers that there is an anti-doping system that is modern and thorough.

The integrity of the Irish Horse Racing Industry depends on a vigilant and transparent regulatory body to maintain and secure into the future our world-renowned reputation, and if there is any doping in horse racing then we at the IRTA would utterly condemn such practices and back any measures taken to combat it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Halford", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Halford
Chairman
Irish Racehorse Trainers Association

Date: 09th July 2021