

## Re-think needed on whip rules

As Jim Crowley serves his 20-day ban for transgressing the whip rules in the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes, it is worth reflecting that it is now over a year since the BHA announced that it would be tightening those rules.

The changes came into force in the spring and the BHA has been backtracking ever since, with five separate amendments already. Whip offences were at an all-time low in 2019, the last full year before Covid affected the fixture list, and the ill-advised changes have served only to bring the vexed topic of use of the whip back to the top of the news agenda after a welcome period out of the limelight.

Sadly, history continues to repeat itself. The latest edition of Britain's midsummer all-aged championship produced its third pulsating finish of recent times, each of them featuring two really game older horses. However, as in 2015 and 2018, an exhibition of British Flat racing at its best was marred by whip suspensions visited on the jockeys involved, the coverage of which conveyed a completely wrong impression to the wider public.

The rules are the rules and no blame attaches to the Ascot stewards or the whip referral committee for enforcing them. However, as with the epic battles between Postponed and Eagle Top in 2015 and Poet's Word and Crystal Ocean in 2018, it was hard to imagine any fair-minded observer being offended by what they saw at Ascot when Hukum and Westover fought out the latest King George. None of the horses involved in those three dramatic finishes suffered abuse. No injuries, no weal marks, no subsequent reports of not eating up.

The jockeys involved in the three King Georges, Andrea Atzeni and Frankie Dettori in 2015, James Doyle and William Buick in 2018 and Jim Crowley and Rob Hornby in 2023, are

polished performers right at the peak of the sport and they gave everything to help their mounts in the finish. The penalties imposed on them were grossly unfair and wholly disproportionate, and media coverage of their punishment did the sport's image absolutely no favours, portraying it as a cruel, even barbaric sport.

The modern, cushioned whip is not a welfare issue for racing and, even if it was, 'whip abuse' could not be measured accurately by simply counting the number of hits. Horses are different and respond differently to the whip. What might be appropriate on a mature horse, perhaps with a lazy streak, certainly wouldn't be acceptable on an inexperienced two-year-old.

Imposing a strict limit on the number of times the whip can be used has always been at the root of the problem. Four out of five suspensions are related to using the whip more than the permitted number of times and, by reducing that number, there have inevitably been more cases, a staggering 400 or so at the last count since the changes were introduced. The emphasis in the rules should not be on how often the whip is used, but on making sure it is used correctly and without excessive force, or in a manner that could bring racing into disrepute (something which certainly did not apply to any of the six King George rides).

The need to maintain public and political trust is becoming just a requirement for racing in modern times,

but the sport cannot afford to present open goals to those whose ultimate aim is to see it banned. Had Jim Crowley used his whip just once more at the finish of the King George, Hukum would have been disqualified with all the negative publicity that would have brought for the sport.

The BHA needs to rethink the whip rules and adopt a similar approach to Hong Kong where the stewards decide whether a jockey has used his whip in an 'excessive, improper, unnecessary or inappropriate manner.' In these days of professional stewarding it is surely not expecting too much for such a rule to meet the necessary 'public image' parameters and to work consistently across the sport.

Stewards are required to exercise judgement in so many areas of the Rules of Racing. Why not with the whip rules?

*Geoff Greetham  
Luddenden, Halifax*

## Business is business!

I imagine that I am not alone in noticing what a splendid business model Tattersalls has -- for them!

One buys or sells a horse at their auctions; they take your money (including their commission of course), and keep it for many weeks, surely investing it wisely and earning

themselves many more doubloons!

Then they tell us, virtually: 'If you want your money, ask for it'.

A horse of mine was sold in mid-July, and at the time of writing I still haven't had my few bob. Thankfully I'm not having to go down to the food bank just yet.

I suppose Tattersalls do have the odd expense, but I do wonder which side of their business is the more remunerative: the auctions, or their investments? I suspect the latter. However, business is business, and what would we do without them?

On a lighter note, I recall an old racing tale of one of those pillars of society, a bookmaker. Picture the scene, at Brighton races just after the Second World War when the size of racing crowds resembled today's football crowds and you could have your pocket picked twice before the first race.

A bookmaker 'chalked up' a favourite in a five-runner race at 10-1 instead of evens. Well, the hordes swept forward in unison like a tsunami to avail themselves. The hapless bookmaker was swept out into the Channel, ending up on the Isle of Wight two days later. Minus his chalk and trilby.

Now I have never believed this legendary tale that leans towards exaggeration (or even hyperbole). Chalking up 10-1 on an even-money chance? Were it 100-1, yes I'd have believed it!

*Paul Dean  
(Owner of Sir Jock Bennett)  
Duckinfield, Greater Manchester*

*Mark Johnston writes:* Paul makes an interesting point here. Rumour has it that Tattersalls, after more than two centuries in business, has vast sums in unclaimed sales proceeds which, while it is not technically theirs, they can invest and use.

They are not the only business with such a model. Pensions funds, especially industry funds, have vast sums which go unclaimed and continue

to attract management fees.

However, Paul does miss the main point about the service that Tattersalls and other sales companies offer. They guarantee payment to the vendor, regardless of whether or not the purchaser has paid.

## The great Sir Gordon

Next month sees the 90th anniversary of one of the greatest records in British racing, the 12 consecutive winners ridden by Gordon Richards.

As a young lad back in the 1940s, my sister Valerie would take me to the Cardiff Continental Waxworks that used to be in St Mary Street in the Welsh capital.

I would gaze up in awe at the wax effigy of the famed jockey, later to become Sir Gordon Richards, which was said to be dressed in the colours he had worn when winning the 1930 St Leger on Singapore. I was only 10 at the time, but Sir Gordon's wax effigy made a lasting impression on me.

Many, many years later, I met Sir Gordon at a Chepstow Racecourse press luncheon and he kindly signed my menu card for me. He told me that although he had set a record when winning 11 of those 12 consecutive races at Chepstow, his favourite racecourse was Newmarket, because of its wide-open spaces.

It was on October 3, 1933 that Gordon won the final race at Nottingham before winning all six events at Chepstow the next day. And the day after that he won the first five races at the same track, failing only narrowly to win the sixth.

The 12 consecutive wins is still a British record. By the end of that season Gordon had clocked up 259 winners, breaking Fred Archer's record which had stood since Victorian days. Gordon's record stood until surpassed by Tony McCoy in 2002 with 289.

As Sir Gordon was born in Donnington Wood in Shropshire, now

part of Telford, the son of a Welsh miner, I tried to persuade him that, like me, he was Welsh. Although he agreed that Richards was a Welsh name, he wouldn't quite agree to being a Welshman!

I wonder what ever became of Sir Gordon's wax effigy?

*Brian Lee  
Cardiff*

## Well said, Mark!

A belated word of praise to Mark Johnston for his excellent recent 'Straight Talking' column on the animal rights protesters disrupting racing and specifically the Animal Rising group's views on the relationship between man and animals.

The racing industry could do worse than send a copy to the mainstream media, rather than indulge the anarchists of the various Animal/ Occupy/Extinction/Stop Oil/etc groups in a fruitless debate. As a terrorist once said in a different situation . . . 'it's not the damage or the victims that interest us, only the publicity'.

Away from that issue, the Klarion's recent items on Natwest not lending to racehorse trainers reminded me of a (true) story from about a decade ago.

An Indian trainer of my acquaintance invited a moneylender to his home. The lender duly arrived with a bulging briefcase which he opened and placed on the dining table. While chatting over a cup of coffee, the loan shark asked the trainer what his line of work was. Upon hearing the answer, he quietly turned the briefcase towards him, snapped it shut, and walked out without saying a word.

Mark's point about blanket discrimination against an occupation is well made.

*Murari Kaushik  
Hampshire*

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*Letters may be edited*