

Former Horse Racing Executive Joe Gorajec Speaks Out on Bob Baffert and Medina Spirit Drug Test

Former head of the Indiana Horse Racing Commission explains the 2021 Kentucky Derby winner's blood test, protocols, and medication controls

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, June 2, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- By [Marty Irby](#), executive director

In most years, the running of the Preakness Stakes at Pimlico is a high-profile, high-stakes follow-up in the Thoroughbred racing world to the running of the Kentucky Derby. Not this year, though.

After racing authorities flagged Derby winner Medina Spirit with a banned substance in his bloodstream, it threw the outcome of the race into dispute and immediately put Pimlico race officials on the spot.

“

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Joe Gorajec in 2016

The controversy was compounded by the fame of the trainer, the infamous Bob Baffert, the winningest trainer of Triple Crown races of all time.

Over the past 40 years, Baffert's horses have failed more than 30 drug tests — five of those within the last two

years. Churchill Downs and the Kentucky Derby have indefinitely suspended Baffert, and so has the New York Racing Association ([NYRA](#)), which operates the Belmont Stakes, the third and final leg of the Triple Crown.

NYRA took a different approach than Maryland racing authorities and that sent a signal to the public that at least some racing authorities won't look the other way with serial violations of



AWA executive director Marty Irby testifying at a House hearing on H.R. 1754 in January 2020

existing anti-doping rules.

NYRA was a tremendous partner in ushering the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA) to passage, and it's important that the State of New York is addressing medication abuses in a serious-minded way.

Over the six years we spent working to pass the HISA, I made a great new friend, a hero in my eyes: Joe Gorajec, the former head of the Indiana Horse Racing Commission. A man who went against the grain as a very early supporter of the HISA, Gorajec has spent his entire adult life in the horse racing industry and has been a true reformer for decades.

"I truly believe that the welfare of our horses should be the priority of all racing industry participants," Gorajec said in 2016, not long after we met. "As their guardians we need to put their interest above the commercial interest of their owners, trainers and the tracks where they race." Gorajec has tremendous insight into the issue and has remained a steadfast supporter of equine welfare and we are fortunate to have him join us on the Animal Wellness Podcast.

[Click here to listen to episode 28 of The Animal Wellness Podcast.](#)

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., who was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @MartyIrby.

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