

Animal Wellness Action Applauds Churchill Downs for Extending Suspension of Trainer Bob Baffert

Horseracing Authority also suspends high-profile trainer Jonathan Wong for doping.

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, July 3, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Wayne Pacelle, president of [Animal Wellness Action](#) and the [Center for a Humane Economy](#), applauded the



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*Wayne Pacelle, president,
Animal Wellness Action*

announcement by Churchill Down Inc. that trainer Bob Baffert is suspended from racing at its tracks through 2024.

The suspension, which had originally been slated to end this month upon conclusion of the 2023 spring meet, was triggered when Baffert’s 2021 entry into the Kentucky Derby, Medina Spirit, tested positive for a prohibited substance, the anti-inflammatory steroid betamethasone. Baffert denied any wrongdoing, and Medina Spirit was allowed to run in the Preakness Stakes. New York state

racing authorities barred Baffert from racing in the final leg of the Triple Crown of Thoroughbred racing, the Belmont Stakes. Medina Spirit collapsed and died of a heart attack at Santa Anita Park in December.

Churchill Downs officials announced the extended suspension in a statement released earlier today.

“Mr. Baffert continues to peddle a false narrative concerning the failed drug test of Medina Spirit at the 147th Kentucky Derby from which his horse was disqualified by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission in accordance with Kentucky law and regulations,” noted today’s statement from Churchill Downs. The company noted that Baffert “did not comply” with the terms of the agreement with Churchill Downs and that he showed “continued disregard for the rules and regulations that ensure horse and jockey safety, as well as the integrity and fairness of the races conducted at our facilities.”

Pacelle, whose organizations have been highly critical of Baffert because of the long list of doping allegations against him, agreed with the extension of the suspension, noting that

Churchill Downs has had continuing problems with trainers breaking the rules on doping.

“Churchill Downs Inc., which has been under fire for the 12 racehorse deaths leading up the Kentucky Derby, made the right call to scratch Baffert through the end of 2024. His long record of breaking the rules speaks for itself,” said Pacelle.

Last year alone, it is believed that more than 900 horses died on racetracks and doping is widely viewed as a major contributor to deadly breakdowns. The use of agents that artificially enhance performance or mask pain must be strictly monitored, and when violations are found, the trainers must be suspended until foul play can be ruled out.

Pacelle further noted that the new Horseracing Authority is also stepping up and imposing much-needed discipline in the sport. The Authority suspended California-based trainer Jonathan Wong after one of his horses failed a test for a metformin. That suspension was from the Horseracing Integrity and Welfare Unit (HIWU) and applies to all U.S. tracks.

HIWU is the enforcement and administrative arm of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority.

Added Mr. Pacelle:

"The prompt response of HIWU to the positive drug-test of Jonathan Wong's horse is an example of the right action at the right time when it comes to drug violations among our racehorses. Doping horses to enhance their performance abilities or to mask their pain is a dangerous and egregious practice. When trainers are suspended for doping violations and other actions that put horses at risk, only then might we see a reduction in the toll of horse deaths at racetracks."

He added:

"The trainers have the most control of the horses and they must assume responsibility when young, healthy horses die in competition. We should not accept that it's part of the business of racing for hundreds of horses to die every year in American racing. Trainers who lose horses should face mandatory suspensions."

According to [one website](#) that tracks racing-related deaths, at least 175 horses have died so far in 2023—a number the site's editor predicts will rise dramatically as information comes in from Freedom of Information Act requests. Later this year, fall meets will resume and the Breeders Cup will be held, setting racing up for more fatalities.

ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels that forbid cruelty to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal

Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all. Twitter: @AWAction_News

Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both. The Center believes helping animals helps us all. Twitter: @TheHumaneCenter

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