



## The Steward's Corner: Three Strike Rule

One of the most prominent topics in horse racing is the use of the riding crop. In 2008, the Association of Racing Commissioners International (ARCI) adopted model rules for the specifications of a riding crop to replace the whip. This new, shorter, padded riding crop was initially in use for steeplechase racing and international racing. Promoted as a positive move for the welfare of the horse, the new riding crop was adopted fairly quickly across most the 38 states with pari-mutuel horse racing at that time.

Over the next several years, the riders adjusted to the new riding crop and in some cases increased the frequency in which they applied the riding crop to motivate their mounts. As with any rule changes in the sport of horse racing, each state has a rule making process that must be followed. With this in mind, several jurisdictions in the United States and Canada began to develop their own rules to govern the use, and misuse, of the riding crop. Rulemaking authority in some states can move quickly, and rules can be changed as soon as the next commission meeting while other states' rulemaking process requires legislative approval. What has evolved is a national debate within the horse racing industry as to the proper use of the riding crop.

The current Indiana rules governing the use of the riding crop closely ascribe to the existing ARCI Model Rule, which is quite lengthy. In particular, the section which specifically applies to the factors required to be considered by the Stewards are:

### **71 AC 7.5-6-5(f) Post to finish**

- (5) *The riding crop shall only be used for safety, correction, and encouragement.*
- (6) *All riders should comply with the following when using the riding crop:*
  - (A) *showing the horse the riding crop and giving it time to respond before hitting it;*
  - (B) *having used the riding crop, giving the horse a chance to respond before using it again; and*
  - (C) *using the riding crop in rhythm with the horse's stride.*
- (7) *Prohibited use of the riding crop includes, but are [sic, is] not limited to striking a horse:*
  - (A) *on the head, flanks, or any other part of its body other than the shoulders or hind quarters, except when necessary to control a horse;*
  - (B) *during the post parade or after the finish of the race, except when necessary to control the horse;*

- (C) *excessively or brutally causing welts or breaks in the skin;*
- (D) *when the horse is clearly out of the race or has obtained its maximum placing; or*
- (E) *persistently even though the horse is showing no response under the riding crop; or striking another person or horse.*
- (g) *After the race, horses will be subject to inspection by a racing or official veterinarian looking for cuts, welts, or bruises in the skin. Any adverse findings shall be reported to the stewards.*
- (h) *The giving of instructions by any licensee that if obeyed would lead to a violation of this rule may result in disciplinary action also being taken against the licensee who gave such instructions.*

At the beginning of this race meet, the Stewards reviewed these rules, discussed their experience with use of the riding crop rule interpretation and developed the “Three Strike Rule” policy. Not to be confused with “three strikes and you are out”, “three strikes” refers to the number of times a jockey can strike his or her horse in succession. The Stewards require the jockey to allow the horse two full strides to respond after striking. Secondly, jockeys are not allowed to raise their riding crop above their shoulder. Finally, the jockeys are to be very focused on not hitting their horse in the flanks, which often results in cuts, welts and bruises.

As the jockeys were licensed at Indiana Grand, the Stewards met with each jockey to explain the Three Strikes Rule Policy in detail. We also cautioned the jockeys to have at least two lengths between horses when they cross over. Signs to this effect were posted in the Jockeys’ Room in both Spanish and English. The jockeys were also cautioned that riding crop rule violations would result in graduated penalties.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Offense: A Warning
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Offense: \$250 fine
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Offense: \$500 fine
- 4<sup>th</sup> Offense: 3-racing-days suspension

In addition, the jockeys were warned that crossing over when the way is not two lengths clear--or causing interference through careless riding--would more than likely result in a minimum of a three race day suspension.

Race riding the first several weeks was quite contentious. A number of incidents occurred where jockeys came over when the way was not clear, did not control the horse properly leaving the gate, or allowed their horses to change lanes in close traffic. The results were seven disqualifications in the first seven days of racing and just six disqualifications in the next 12 days of racing. The Stewards have issued 10 three race day suspensions for careless riding and one 30 day suspension for extremely careless riding – most of which were in the first two weeks of racing. All but one of the fines and suspensions for misuse of the riding crop have been levied against Quarter Horse riders.

As the race meet at Indiana Grand has progressed from opening day, according to comments from a number of horsemen, the race riding has improved significantly, especially with the Thoroughbred riders. Less use of the riding crop requires the jockeys to hand ride more during the course of the race, especially in a tight finish. In addition, we have seen more racing that is true to form with 35.8% winning favorites and 74.1% in the money (top three). As direct result of this, the misuse of the riding crop has decreased substantially.

When asked how the stewards have seen the jockeys and horses react to the new Three Strikes Rule, Dan Fick, head steward at Indiana Grand noted, "I have always felt that we have a very accomplished colony of race riders for both breeds here at Indiana Grand. These ladies and gentlemen are professionals. They are experienced." "They can ride safely and use the riding crop properly. They just need to be encouraged and required to do so."

Associate steward Jim Lages comments, "The jockeys have adjusted well and are using the crop sparingly. There is more of a thought process involved when a rider strikes the horse, instead of indiscriminate use of the crop. The horses respond better to the crop and stay straighter throughout the race."

Associate steward Eric Smith has observed improvement as well, saying, "Greater cognizance of crop usage has led to an increase in the amount of hand-riding through much of the stretch which has resulted in straighter, safer races and more exciting and competitive finishes. The feedback on the three-strike policy from jockeys, owners, trainers, and fans has been overwhelmingly positive."