

# HORSE RACING — A SPECTACLE OF CHEATERS, LIARS AND DOPERS by JANE ALLIN

## PART 1: INTRODUCTION

TWENTY HORSES, dirt flying around the first turn at Churchill Downs and the sound of hooves thundering down the stretch toward the finish line in pursuit of the first jewel in the Triple Crown — the Kentucky Derby.

Steeped in tradition, the first Saturday in May brings with it fancy and outrageous hats and frosty mint juleps served over crushed ice in souvenir Derby glasses while fans belt out “My Old Kentucky Home” as the young Thoroughbreds step onto the track.

Beneath the Twin Spires, top-notch trainers and horses in the North American Thoroughbred racing industry convene to vie for the coveted garland of roses and gold Derby trophy – the “most exciting two minutes in sports” they say.

But behind all the pomp and circumstance lies an ugly truth mired in a sordid drug culture that permeates the very core of the industry.

Most will acknowledge that despite the questionable reputation of PETA, the explosive article in the *New York Times* penned by Joe Drape shook the foundation of North American racing.

"The story in question, “PETA Accuses Two Trainers of Cruelty,” came on like a thunderclap and is profound for many reasons. First, the video upon which it is based allows people to see for themselves a little\* of what animal activists have long alleged at the highest level of thoroughbred racing. The focus is on trainer Steve Asmussen, a controversial conditioner, and his top assistant trainer, Scott Blasi.\*\* The images are of the treatment of world-class horses training at two of the most revered and distinguished tracks in America—Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Saratoga Race Course in upstate New York." [1]

While some dismiss the video as activist propaganda, it unquestionably probes into the underbelly of the backstretch to reveal what everyone already knew – so-called secrets guarded by those in the industry with a pretext akin to the Hippocratic Oath upheld by physicians and health care professionals across the globe.

Perhaps the rush for measures of reform in the wake of this most uncomfortable exposé of racing indignities in the name of horse welfare will force the industry to re-think its business model – an opportunity to recapture what was once referred to as the “Sport of Kings”. No doubt the public is deserving as are those in the industry with a conscience but loathe to compromise their livelihood, lest they lose it.

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I am not holding my breath. This purported reform has been in the works for years without consolidated movement within the machinations of this fragmented miasma called North American horse racing. It is without direction and at the discretion of those who want it to remain deceitful with the bogus façade of responsible governance simply to serve their egos and lust for monetary needs.

As it is, it is a free-for-all for those at the top – more precisely, the celebrated trainers – millionaires who have no misgivings about putting the horse at risk – reckless abandon so to say.

Unwarranted medications, manipulation of the entry box (yes Mr. Baffert we know all about it), grossly overpaid veterinarians attesting to the integrity of the sport spewing both lies and unbalanced science yet accepted as fact. Why? Because the industry has no governing body and fails to hold itself accountable.

In the scurry following the PeTA video there has been a plethora of horse racing organizations jumping on the bandwagon and demanding tighter control over medications leading up to and on race day – all sorts of articles proclaiming that it must be done.

- Alex Waldrop, president and chief executive officer of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and chairman of the Racing Medication and Testing Consortium demanding the implementation of uniform drug rules across the nation.  
<http://goo.gl/pyL4ti>
- Breeders' Cup president Craig Fravel, in comments made on the first day of the Association of Racing Commissioners International's three-day conference in Lexington, also encouraging racing regulators and other industry officials that they should use existing tools to push states to adopt the National Uniform Medication Program. <http://goo.gl/cQK3dH>
- Ed Martin, president of the Association of Racing Commissioners International (RCI), horse racing's umbrella regulatory group, accusing the sport of "self-flagellation" and participants' refusal to take responsibility for their actions—or lack thereof.  
<http://goo.gl/AsA0kD>
- The Jockey Club's stance on supporting federal legislation to put the United States Anti-Doping Agency in charge of bringing law and order to the sport known for its

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pervasive drug culture and ineffectual ability to implement across the board drug regulations despite having come up with a national uniform medication program – only 4 of the 38 states with racing have fully executed this agenda. <http://goo.gl/Eyl67E>

The list goes on, but what if anything will actually be done about it? Will this PETA incident simply be swept under the table as time goes on? Forgotten and filed away as insignificant misdemeanors just like all the other racing wrongs in the past?

One announcement in particular caught my eye especially given the impending Triple Crown. Coming from The Jockey Club and backed by a number of prominent Thoroughbred owners and trainers a movement akin to what was once taboo in the shedrows of the racing word – public veterinary records.

Gasp!

“A large and growing number of prominent Thoroughbred owners and trainers have voluntarily pledged to make veterinary records of their horses competing in graded stakes races in the United States and Canada available to the public, The Jockey Club announced April 17.

Such records will cover the 14-day period preceding and including the day of each race and will be available on the day of the race at least two hours prior to post time. The pledges take effect immediately.” [2]

Wonderful news indeed – finally a modicum of transparency in an otherwise “cloak and dagger” enterprise replete with lies and deception and renowned for punishing those who speak out about the truth.

Or is it?

First of all, it’s voluntary. Secondly, a closer look at the roster of owners and trainers in agreement with this progressive, yet implausible, initiative reveals an expected trend.

“The current list of high-profile owners includes Frank Stronach’s Adena Springs, John Amerman, Antony Beck, Gary Biszantz, Bill Casner, Claiborne Farm, Sheikh Mohammed’s Darley and Godolphin, Adele Dilschneider, Dogwood Stable, Will Farish, Glen Hill Farm, Harris Farms (John Harris), Stuart S. Janney III, Charlotte Weber’s Live Oak Stud, Earle Mack, Josephine Abercrombie’s Pin Oak Stud, Dr. Hiram Polk Jr., Phipps Stable, Dr. J. David Richardson, Barbara Banke’s Stonestreet Stables, Stella

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Thayer, Three Chimneys Farm, Tic Stable (Ian Hight), Terry Finley's West Point Thoroughbreds, Peter Willmott, WinStar Farm, Woodford Racing (Bill Farish), and Zayat Stables.

Trainers include Roger Attfield, Mark Casse, Christophe Clement, Neil Drysdale, Mark Hennig, D. Wayne Lukas, Richard Mandella, Michael Matz, Shug McGaughey, Ken McPeck, Graham Motion, Bill Mott, John Shirreffs, Al Stall Jr., Dallas Stewart, and Ian Wilkes." [3]

As much as owners should be held accountable for the administration of drugs prescribed by trainers and their steadfast veterinarians this is rarely the case.

Trainers run the barns and dictate the needs of their horses to their subservient veterinarians – servile perhaps but not without underlying reason, after all money talks. Moreover several of the owners on the list employ trainers who aren't on the list – so how does that work?

For example Winstar Farm has agreed to transparency yet Todd Pletcher who is the trainer for Derby hopeful Vinceremos hasn't.

Consequently the move is purely altruistic and serves itself up as false hope – meaningless propaganda. Clearly the trainers that have opted to disclose their medication records are all the "good guys" – those who garner respect and have ethics when it comes to both racing and the horse. Sadly trainers that should be there simply aren't.

So who are these trainers missing from this brave new world, one that is long overdue in Thoroughbred racing? There is no need to look further than the top-ranked trainers in the U.S. – those who dominate the country's most important races, also known to manipulate the system and literally "get away with murder" simply because they can.

How you may ask?

It is the lack of oversight in a crippled and corrupt system with cronies at the top making decisions based on their debauched relationships with those who hold power and prestige within the Thoroughbred racing world. Lord knows what goes on behind closed doors but it has been said many a time that there is nothing above-board about it.

Recently the 2014 American Graded Stakes Standings were published in a Paulick Report Article including the top five ranking trainers in North America. [4]

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RANK	TRAINER	WINNERS/WNS
1	Todd Pletcher	13 (15)
2	Bob Baffert	6 (7)
3	Jerry Hollendorfer	6 (6)
4	Steve Asmussen	5 (6)
5	John Sadler	5 (5)

Not a single graded stakes trainer in the top five in the industry is willing to bare it all. And for good reason – they all cheat.

In fact a look at the top 20 trainers for 2014, in terms of winnings, shows only three trainers on the list that have agreed to public veterinary records – Graham Motion, Bill Mott and D. Wayne Lukas. [5] How on earth can anyone have faith in an industry when the best-of-the-best fail to participate in something that stands for integrity and moral substance?

There is only one answer – they have something to hide.

After all, 14 days before a race is a long time to stay clean rather than pumping your horses full of poison to keep them on their feet and moving.

Of the three in the top twenty in agreement with publicizing records one in particular is predictable – Graham Motion, who brings with him an unblemished record without a single medication violation. Bill Mott has a strong reputation and despite being cited for medication violations none have been for performance-enhancing drugs with no therapeutic value – in effect, simple overages and not deliberate attempts to influence the results of the race.

D. Wayne Lukas is a surprise given his checkered past – the era of the Class 1 cocaine violation, buzzer mania and other serious infractions. Perhaps implications on the PETA video may have him looking to disinfect his reputation or more likely the fact that Lukas is also a commissioner on the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission, which is investigating PETA's allegations.

With the running of the Kentucky Derby this Saturday, the pinnacle of North America's prestigious Graded Stakes, let's have a quick look at the Derby contenders in relation to those who chose to participate in transparency.

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The list of the 23 horses eligible to race in the Derby as of April 29th including trainers and recent scratches and be found here:

<http://www.bloodhorse.com/pdf/20140428DerbyOaksUpdate.pdf>

Mind you, only 20 will end up racing but the 23 contenders are there lest any horse is scratched due to injury or whatever reason. Since this time the entries and post positions have been confirmed. [6]

<b>ROAD TO THE KENTUCKY DERBY LEADERBOARD PRESENTED BY TWINSPIRES.COM</b>				
#	Horse	Points	Trainer	NRSE
1.	California Chrome	150	Art Sherman	\$782,250
2.	Vicar's in Trouble	120	Mike Maker	\$760,000
3.	Dance With Fate	108	Peter Eurton	\$600,000
4.	Wicked Strong	102	Jimmy Jerkens	\$630,000
	<del>Toast of New York</del>	<del>100</del>	<del>Jamie Osborne</del>	<del>\$1,200,000</del>
5.	Samraat	100	Rick Violette Jr.	\$640,000
6.	Danza	100	Todd Pletcher	\$620,000
	<del>Constitution</del>	<del>100</del>	<del>Todd Pletcher</del>	<del>\$600,000</del>
7.	Hoppertunity	95	Bob Baffert	\$576,000
8.	Intense Holiday	93	Todd Pletcher	\$527,500
9.	Wildcat Red	90	Jose Garoffalo	\$610,000
10.	We Miss Artie	60	Todd Pletcher	\$544,000
11.	Ride On Curlin	55	Billy Gowan	\$354,387
12.	Chitu	54	Bob Baffert	\$440,000
13.	Tapiture	52	Steve Asmussen	\$470,738
	<del>Midnight Hawk</del>	<del>52</del>	<del>Bob Baffert</del>	<del>\$420,000</del>
	<del>Ring Weekend</del>	<del>50</del>	<del>Graham Motion</del>	<del>\$260,000</del>
	<del>+ Asmar-IRE</del>	<del>40</del>	<del>Fawzi Abdulla Nass</del>	<del>\$557,500</del>
14.	General a Rod	40	Mike Maker	\$240,000
15.	Medal Count	40	Dale Romans	\$226,500
	<del>Albano</del>	<del>34</del>	<del>Larry Jones</del>	<del>\$190,000</del>
16.	Candy Boy	30	John Sadler	\$380,000
	<del>Cairo Princee</del>	<del>24</del>	<del>Kieran McLaughlin</del>	<del>\$520,000</del>
17.	Uncle Sigh	24	Gary Contessa	\$180,000
	<del>+ Emirates Flyer-GB</del>	<del>20</del>	<del>Saeed bin Suroor</del>	<del>\$381,691</del>
18.	Vinceremos	20	Todd Pletcher	\$191,666
19.	Harry's Holiday	20	Mike Maker	\$152,622
20.	Commanding Curve	20	Dallas Stewart	\$104,000
21.	Pablo Del Monte	20	Wesley Ward	\$102,000
	<del>Bayern</del>	<del>20</del>	<del>Bob Baffert</del>	<del>\$100,000</del>
22.	Social Inclusion	20	Manny Azpurua	\$90,000
	<del>Havana</del>	<del>14</del>	<del>Todd Pletcher</del>	<del>\$660,000</del>
	<del>Honor Code</del>	<del>14</del>	<del>Shug McGaughey III</del>	<del>\$340,000</del>
23.	Big Bazinga	14	Katerina Vassilieva	\$92,149

It is definitely a sad day when only three trainers on the list of Kentucky Derby hopefuls have agreed to disclose veterinarian records to the public (Graham Motion, Dallas Stewart and Shug McGaughey III), and even more so when two of their horses have been scratched

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(Motion and McGaughey). Only a single horse with a principled trainer will be running in the crown jewel of North America's most revered horse race.

Pitiful.

Now let's look at the top five graded stakes trainers, none of whom support public drug records. All but one (Hollendorfer) have horses as Derby contenders and in a very disproportionate number. Scratched horses are included in the tally to better illustrate how some trainers dominate and are virtually guaranteed a position at the gate.

Trainer	Contenders	Percentage (%)
Todd Pletcher	6	17.6
Bob Baffert	4	11.8
Steve Asmussen	1	2.9
John Sadler	1	2.9
Total	12	35.2

A whopping 35% of would-be entrants are represented by four trainers, not one willing to lay bare their drug records.

OK, fair enough – there is nothing atypical of Asmussen and Sadler having a single entrant given they are in the top five trainer rankings but the number of entrants connected to Pletcher and Baffert is contemptible – 29% of the horses split between two trainers.

Talk about domination – and these aren't the only horses these individuals had running for the roses.

In contrast to morally responsible trainers each of the top five graded stakes trainers has been involved in questionable practices to the detriment of the horse.

It is not simply unintentional overages that any of these trainers have been cited for – it is deliberate use of performance enhancing medications – both illegal and therapeutic – devious exploitation evolving from greed and ego.

Cheating is a choice not a mistake.

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[1] <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/03/the-ugly-truth-about-horse-racing/284594/>

[2] <http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/84439/key-owners-trainers-to-publicize-vet-records#ixzz2zHYtBhWB>

[3] <http://www.bloodhorse.com/horse-racing/articles/84439/key-owners-trainers-to-publicize-vet-records#ixzz2zHbN8kYX>

[4] <http://www.paulickreport.com/features/keeneland-presents-american-graded-stakes-standings/keeneland-presents-american-graded-stakes-standings-sweet-success-for-candy-ride/>

[5] <http://www.equibase.com/stats/#tab=trainer&page=1>

[6] <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/2046755-kentucky-derby-2014-post-positions-complete-listing-for-every-horse>

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## PART 2: CHEATERS, LIARS AND DOPERS

— STEVE ASMUSSEN

Where better to start than the new poster boy of the Thoroughbred racing world – the unscrupulous Hall-of-Famer Steve Asmussen – Public Enemy number one according to Andrew Beyer.

“He has shamed thoroughbred racing so badly that the chairman of the Jockey Club, Ogden Mills “Dinny” Phipps, declared that there is “a dark cloud hovering over our sport” and that Asmussen ought to stay away from the Kentucky Derby and the Kentucky Oaks.” [1]

While the indiscriminate use of therapeutics and performance-enhancing drugs in the horse racing industry is not really news, the undercover recordings made by a PETA investigator at Asmussen’s barn are. For decades these activities have taken place, clandestinely if you will, hidden from public scrutiny by the code of silence.

- Although it’s approved only as a prescription medication for horses with hypothyroidism, the drug thyroxine was being administered to many, if not all, horses in Asmussen’s New York stable, without any apparent testing or evidence of any thyroid condition. This drug was recklessly administered seemingly just to speed up

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metabolism—not for any therapeutic purpose.

- Lasix—a controversial drug banned in Europe on race days—was injected into “basically all” of Asmussen’s horses who were being raced or timed in New York. A powerful drug meant to prevent pulmonary bleeding in the lungs during extreme exercise, Lasix is a diuretic that can serve as a masking agent for other drugs and also dehydrates horses to make them lose weight and run faster. One of New York State’s top horse-racing veterinarians admitted on camera to PETA’s investigator that Lasix is a performance-enhancing medication.
- Horses’ legs showed multiple scars from being burned with liquid nitrogen—a process called freeze-firing—and burned with other irritating “blistering” chemicals, purportedly to stimulate blood flow to their sore legs.
- Horses were also given muscle relaxants, sedatives, and other potent pharmaceuticals to be used for treating ailments such as ulcers, lameness, and inflammation, at times even when the animals had no apparent symptoms. [2]

Exactly what everyone assumed is now out there for public scrutiny.

Over time Asmussen has run up a history of racing violations as have many of the top ranking trainers in the industry.

Probably the most serious violation was a 6-month suspension he served for a filly named No End in Sight who tested positive for mepivacaine, an illegal nerve-blocking agent that suppresses pain and permits horses to run on injured legs.

Despite the fact the No End in Sight tested 750 times over the legal limit, Asmussen claimed he hadn’t a clue as to how the drug got into her system. In fact he suggested that the veterinarians had mistakenly given the horse mepivacaine, a lame excuse by any measure (pardon the pun). Interestingly enough, at the same time, he admitted to using two other illegal drugs on race day – one to increase endurance and the other to reduce bleeding in the lungs (on top of the Lasix shot).

“The vets said this would be impossible. Mepivacaine was injected directly into the joint. The other illegal drugs, which they insisted they hadn’t given, were shot into the jugular. If mepivacaine were injected into the jugular it would bring a horse to its knees.” [3]

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Given the horse's history together with the fact that he had ordered cortisone shot a week prior to the race for knee problems, speculation has it that the administration of the drug was intentional. If so this is exceptionally reckless behavior as it not only jeopardizes the horse but also those on the racetrack – jockeys and horses alike.

Asmussen had used this tired excuse on several earlier occasions to explain away positive tests for illegal drugs on race day – once for ketorolac a powerful anti-inflammatory and twice for clenbuterol. The ubiquitous clenbuterol — a widely abused bronchodilator medication in the racing industry for respiratory problems regularly used to build muscle by mimicking anabolic steroids even when administered in therapeutic doses.

And that's not all; there were positives for acepromazine, a powerful sedative and the anesthetic lidocaine among others.

Yet in spite of all these infractions over the years his devoted assistant, now terminated after the PETA scandal, assumed responsibility of Asmussen's stables so that no horses missed a race – in fact not a penalty at all – business as usual.

As a prime example, when Asmussen was suspended for the mepivacaine in 2006, Blasi assumed the responsibility of "trainer" and Asmussen walked away with over 14 million dollars in earnings. [4]

Criminal – simply criminal.

— BOB BAFFERT

Moving on to Bob Baffert.

To start, in 2013 Bob Baffert was number three on the list of top trainers by earnings with the most medication violations – a total of 20 violations resulting in 545 starts per medication violation. [5]

This list itself changes from year-to-year however Baffert always manages to make it into one of the top positions.

For example in 2010 Baffert (465 starts per violation) maintained that bronze medal position just edging out John Sadler (478 starts per violation) who had to settle for fourth that year. [6] Both consistent repeat offenders near the top of the list.

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The most recent scandal associated with Baffert is the rash of mysterious “sudden deaths” due to cardiovascular/pulmonary failures of seven race horses over the course of several months (November 4, 2011 through March 14, 2013). [7]

What is particularly disturbing about these deaths is that by all accounts sudden death failures are a relatively rare occurrence, together with the fact that of the total number of “sudden deaths” over the same time period roughly 20% were stabled with Baffert.

As expected, Baffert was cleared in the sudden deaths of the seven horses by the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB). An extensive investigation concluded there was no evidence of wrongdoing yet the CHRB could find no specific reason for the abnormal number of deaths in one stable – inconclusive at best – Dr. Rick Arthur to the rescue of course.

The question remains as to whether the results were inconclusive or intentionally covered up? One will never know, however it is well recognized that the CHRB and the members of the TOC (Thoroughbred Owners of California) are chronically corrupt – no one it seems has the power to enforce rules and disband the manipulators even after all these years of lies and deceit.

There are several theories of what may have gone wrong in the sudden deaths of Baffert’s horses. One is linked to the finding of a rodenticide in one of the horses, an anti-coagulant that thins the blood. But why would anyone administer an anticoagulant to a horse, particularly since it is a highly toxic compound in EPA Toxicity Class I?

EPO has been widely used as a performance-enhancing drug despite being an illicit drug in horse racing. EPO increases the number of red cells circulating in the blood which increases its viscosity but also increasing its oxygen carrying capacity and hence endurance. From a doping perspective the administration of an anticoagulant such as Diphacinone will counterbalance the effect of thicken blood. Conjecture, well yes but . . .

Then there is the administration of Thyro-L (levothyroxine) to “all” of his horses regardless of their thyroid function wherein Baffert was using it as a supplement rather than medication.

Thyro-L is a thyroid hormone (T4) used to treat hypothyroidism, a condition where the body fails to produce a sufficient amount of thyroxine which revs up the metabolism. In doing so Baffert was clearly doping.

The fact that a drug is administered when there is no apparent underlying condition present is

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simply seeking to achieve a surrogate benefit; in this case enhanced performance (speed) due to weight loss. Of course Baffert (and Asmussen) gave it to all of his horses. He was legally cheating to win.

Don't forget Baffert's past either and the disappointing decision made by the CHRB.

Initially the CHRB suspended Baffert for 60 days after the horse Nautical Look tested positive for morphine after finishing first in the 7th race at Hollywood Park on May 3, 2000.

Baffert however appealed the decision using the pretext that the morphine positive was pharmacologically insignificant and likely resulted from environmental contamination – from poppy seed bagels consumed by stable employees (poppy seeds contain opium alkaloids one of which is morphine).

If administering morphine to enhance a horse's performance isn't bad enough, Baffert had the audacity to coerce a groom in his employ to lie to investigators. Baffert testified that the positive finding was a result of "unintentional contamination" from a food source containing poppy seeds (poppy seeds contain opiate alkaloids one of which is morphine).

While it is true that poppy seeds can generate false positive drug tests, Baffert went a step further. When notified of the positive result he repeatedly contacted his groom and encouraged him to admit to eating bakery products while in close proximity to the horse Nautical Look.

If that doesn't reek of guilt, what does?

In any case, the CHRB dismissed the case after 5 years despite the fact that there was lax security in the barn the evening before with no night watchman. Moreover Baffert's attorney argued that Nautical Look's blood sample was part of a batch randomly discarded as a cost-cutting measure so there was no blood to test to support the results of the urine sample. What wasn't mentioned is that a separate split sample was available for 45 days following the race yet Baffert did not request a test of that sample. [8]

You be the judge.

Keep in mind that Baffert hails from California and has close ties to all those instrumental in running the CHRB – all the important people like Chuck Winner, Bo Derek, Dr. Rick Arthur for example, and other prominent influencers such as Zayat Racing Stables. Rumor has it that Zayat is under investigation for placing large bets allegedly manipulating the outcome of races

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in conjunction with Baffert.

Asmussen and Baffert are not alone when it comes to a past tainted with drug violations.

— TODD PLETCHER

Todd Pletcher, the leading graded stakes trainer, has his share of dirty laundry as well.

Probably one of the saddest stories to come out of Pletcher's drug cabinet was that of Coronado Heights.

One need only recall the fate of this 4-year-old thoroughbred who received a diagnosis of early degenerative joint disease.

In the week prior to a race at Aqueduct, ten different drugs were administered, often in multiple doses, to quell his unsoundness, the only reason being that his ethically challenged owner and trainer – Todd Pletcher – could not bear the thought of losing out on the prospect of winning. Sadly Coronado Heights broke down and was euthanized on the track.

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[1] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/othersports/as-kentucky-derby-approaches-racing-industrys-portrayal-of-steve-asmussen-as-a-rogue-trainer-ignores-widespread-issues/2014/04/27/5f33f444-ce0d-11e3-b812-0c92213941f4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/othersports/as-kentucky-derby-approaches-racing-industrys-portrayal-of-steve-asmussen-as-a-rogue-trainer-ignores-widespread-issues/2014/04/27/5f33f444-ce0d-11e3-b812-0c92213941f4_story.html)

[2] <http://goo.gl/kFupOG>

[3] <http://www.dallasobserver.com/2007-06-28/news/dark-horse/full/>

[4] [http://www.boston.com/sports/other\\_sports/horse\\_racing/articles/2009/11/05/cup\\_trainers\\_not\\_saddled\\_by\\_drug\\_suspensions/](http://www.boston.com/sports/other_sports/horse_racing/articles/2009/11/05/cup_trainers_not_saddled_by_drug_suspensions/)

[5] [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/01/sports/industrys-drug-issue-is-one-that-trainers-can-address-instead-of-avoiding.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/01/sports/industrys-drug-issue-is-one-that-trainers-can-address-instead-of-avoiding.html?_r=0)

[6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/04/sports/04racing.html>

[7] <https://tuesdayshorse.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/deadly-to-horses-the-baffert-effect-part-1/> and <https://tuesdayshorse.wordpress.com/2014/01/08/deadly-to-horses-the-baffert-effect-part-2/>

[8] <http://espn.go.com/horse/news/2001/0621/1217145.html>

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PART 3: DRUGS, SUFFERING AND DEATH

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Phenylbutazone; Estrone; Flunixin; Hyaluronic acid; Lasix; Adequan; Xylazine; Vitamin B12; Methylprednisolone; Calcium.

While all of these drugs are considered therapeutic, enough is enough. Any horse that requires this much medication to run should not be running at all. Just like Asmussen's unfortunate colt NEHRO.

“The video details Nehro's acute foot problems, but despite warnings from a blacksmith that one of Nehro's feet has become 'a little bitty nub,' Asmussen and Blasi continued to train and race him. Nehro died at Churchill Downs on the morning of the 2013 Kentucky Derby [May 4, 2013]. Asmussen said Nehro had colic and died on the way to the hospital. Blasi described it as the most violent death he'd ever seen.” [1]

Outside of the misuse and abuse of legal therapeutics leading up to a race, Pletcher also has numerous illegal medication violations on his record.

For example, in 2008 the CHRB fined Pletcher \$25,000 and suspended him for a minimum of 10 days when WAIT A WHILE tested positive for the anesthetic procaine a Class 3 drug in the state of California.

Procaine can act as a stimulant and Wait a While was found to have more than 300 times the allowable limit in her system.

“In defense, Mr. Pletcher, through his vet, said the 'overage' came from a weeks-old granuloma (which formed after treating a fever) that ruptured and released the trapped drug during the race. The California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) practically called this ridiculous. More likely, it said, Wait a While was given another shot(s) of procaine closer to raceday, perhaps within 48 hours. But since there was no proof that Pletcher ordered or knew of it (imagine that), he was handed a 10-day suspension. Wait a While, then 5, never ran again.” [2]

It doesn't stop there.

In 2004, the horse, TALES OF GLORY, trained by Pletcher tested positive for the Class 2 drug mepivacaine – the same illegal nerve-blocking agent that suppresses pain that Asmussen received a suspension for.

Pletcher appealed with the tried-and-true excuse of environmental contamination along with other possible explanations for the positive but the appeals court dismissed them all.

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Then of course there is the LIFE AT TEN controversy – the two-time Grade 1 winner who placed last in the 2010 Breeder’s Cup Ladies Classic.

Not a drug violation per se but rather a not-so-subtle attempt to cheat the bettors – the very crux of the racing industries source of profits.

“Life At Ten came into the Breeders’ Cup off her two-length 2010 Beldame victory and was sent off at nearly 4-1. She finished last after Pletcher and jockey John Velazquez, in separate television interviews, made comments suggesting that the mare was listless in the paddock and was not warming up properly. During the race, Velazquez did not push Life At Ten, who days later developed a fever and was found to have a high white blood-cell count indicative of infection.

Neither Velazquez nor Pletcher had contacted Churchill Downs stewards or track veterinarians before the race, but an HRTV producer, Amy Zimmerman, did relay their comments to the stewards.” [3]

Simply put, LIFE AT TEN should have been scratched.

Cheating the bettors – a sure way to eventually shut down the entire industry – not knowing whether the performance of a horse is related to talent, the drugs they have received or injury. The mindset of those who support this is unthinkable. Preying on the bettors is such a sorry and non-humanitarian way to generate profits.

This is just a snapshot of three of the most controversial trainers out there.

Sadler and Hollendorfer have their own drug violations, as do other prominent trainers, and consistently rank in the top repeat offender list — there is little difference in their perverse methods.

What is clear is that the vast majority of the top trainers in North America resort to illegal and intentional use of therapeutic medications for the single purpose of performance enhancement. And it follows that if top-tier trainers are participating in this level of illegal and “legal” drugging, the competitive rationale for trainers at all levels is to run with the herd.

An article penned by Andrew Cohen “The Ugly Truth About Horse Racing” says it best:

“The alleged behavior goes on, decade after decade, because the industry is unwilling

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to police itself. Because state regulators are feckless and because there is no uniformity among racing jurisdictions. Because the people who develop performance-enhancing drugs are almost always one step ahead of the officials developing tests for those drugs. Because veterinarians give their horses too many drugs too often. And because too many still within the sport equate real reform with a bad-for-marketing acknowledgement of how bad things are. Well, guess what. We are here. There is no longer a man behind a curtain.

“How about telling the truth? It can finally set this industry free. Instead of pretending this problem of abuse does not exist, or claiming that the problem is under control, the sport can take the bold leap it will need to take to get to the other side—the side where animal activists aren’t picketing racetracks. That will mean more money for enhanced drug tests. It will mean legislative efforts to better regulate trainers and veterinarians. It will mean swifter and stricter punishment for offenders. It will mean an end to the insider’s code of silence.” [4]

Amen.

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[1] <http://m.utsandiego.com/news/2014/mar/28/horse-racing-steve-asmussen-peta/>

[2] <http://horseracingwrongs.com/2013/10/30/todd-pletcher-the-other-side-of-the-story/>

[3] [http://espn.go.com/horse-racing/story/\\_/id/7059974/life-ten-retired-racing-keeneland-sale](http://espn.go.com/horse-racing/story/_/id/7059974/life-ten-retired-racing-keeneland-sale)

[4] <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/03/the-ugly-truth-about-horse-racing/284594/>

END.