

## 2026 PROPOSED RULE AND BYLAW CHANGES

*The following proposed rule and bylaw changes will be considered by the membership at each district's annual meeting and will be voted on by the USTA Board of Directors at the 2026 Annual Meeting. Additions are **bold underlined**; deletions are ~~struck out~~.*

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**1. A proposal to amend existing Rule 4.130 Person Not In Good Standing to add language to include an individual or entity who resigns membership during an investigation:**

4.130 Person Not in Good Standing – A person or entity that failed to comply with one or more of the requirements for membership specified by the USTA's Rules and Bylaws and as a result is serving an indefinite suspension or revocation of their USTA membership, or a person or entity who resigns their membership while under investigation, shall be considered a person or entity not in good standing with the USTA.

Sponsor: Standardbred Racing Investigative Fund (SRIF)

[The sponsor states: "This proposal is necessary to reinforce the USTA's commitment to integrity by providing a clear and consistent process for identifying and excluding individuals who are ineligible for membership. Establishing this safeguard strengthens transparency, protects the rights and interests of eligible members, and ensures that the credibility of competition and the reputation of both the USTA and harness racing are preserved for the long term."]

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**2. A proposal to amend current Rule 6.11 Duties of the Judges by adding new subsection (e) in regard to reporting equine fatalities (will also require renumbering of current 6.11 [e] through [h]):**

6.11(e) Judges shall report to the Association any equine fatality occurring within 72 hours following a race that resulted from injuries sustained during a race. This shall include all catastrophic breakdown fatalities as well as sudden deaths. Judges shall complete in its entirety, the USTA Death Certificate and transmit to the USTA Equine Health and Wellness Database. Judges shall further report all horses vanned off the racetrack following a race and it shall be their responsibility to ascertain the condition of any horse vanned off and to report such condition to the Association and local racing authority.

Sponsor: Dr. James Robertson, Ohio State Racing Commission Consulting Veterinarian

[The sponsor states: "There may be fatalities associated with accidents, but the majority of the fatalities are the result of a catastrophic breakdown or sudden death and would not be classified as an 'accident.' The other point I would like to make is that many of the horses that suffer catastrophic injuries limp off the track and are euthanized once they leave the track proper and the Judges have no idea what happens to the horse, unless, the jurisdiction requires that the Judge be notified by the track or attending veterinarian who euthanizes the horse."]

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**3. A proposal to amend current Rules 6.15 (b) and 7.02 to add a requirement to note the removal/addition of shoes as part of a horse's recorded raceline:**

6.15 (b)(14) Clerk of the Course/Charter.— Standardized symbols for shoeing information to include front shoes off, hind shoes off, all shoes off, any of the first time changes from the previous race's shoeing.

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7.02 (o) A trainer has the option: to pull the shoes on their horse, or replace shoes (if previously raced without shoes) which must be indicated at the time of entry; changes after initial entries may be made by scratch time with drivers' changes in order to be printed in the official program. No further changes will be allowed unless approved by the judges for reasons such as adverse weather or track conditions. Furthermore:

1.) Failure to comply with any part of this Rule or to make the aforementioned declarations in a legible, clear and accurate fashion may subject the trainer and/or track member to a fine and/or suspension.

2.) Any excessive injury to the horse's feet because of pulling shoes may subject the trainer to a fine and/or suspension, depending on the degree of injury to the horse.

Sponsor: Tom Charters, Hambletonian Society Executive Vice President

[The sponsor states: "By next year's Hambletonian, we can give the public a program that not only tells them which horses that day would be racing without shoes (no shoes, only front shoes, only hind shoes, and whether this is the first time shoes have come off) AND also if they have worn shoes, or not, in their 2026 races to date. The time has come for regulating pulling shoes, or 'shoes off.' Horsemen have been doing it for at least four decades both on trotters & pacers. We're more than two decades behind Europe. Announcing it the day of the race at the track or on the simulcast is no longer adequate. Our wagering customers deserve it. Other horsemen should have access to this shoeing history, if they're considering claiming horse, trotter or pacer. And equally if not most important, the data should be collected in the interest of safety for our horses.]

\*\*\*USTA note: Data collection and changes to the USTA database and program products will need to be completed prior to this rule, if approved, going into effect. An effective date of January 1, 2027 will allow time to gather shoeing data to accurately provide this information.\*\*\*

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**4. A proposal to amend current Rule 11 to add new sub-section (12) Retirement Contribution Requirement to require 3% of the claiming price be added to any horse claimed, effective January 1, 2027:**

11.12 Retirement Contribution Requirement - Any horse claimed through a claiming race shall, in addition to the standard USTA transfer fee, be subject to a Retirement Contribution fee equal to three percent (3%) of the total claim price.

(a) The Retirement Contribution fee shall be collected at the time of the claim, together with the transfer of ownership paperwork, and forwarded to the USTA Retirement & Aftercare Fund (or a USTA-approved partner organization).

(b) Funds collected pursuant to this rule shall be used exclusively to support the retirement, rehabilitation, retraining, and rehomeing of Standardbred racehorses.

(c) No claimed horse's transfer of ownership shall be deemed valid or complete until the Retirement Contribution fee has been paid in full. Nonpayment will render the claim void and the horse shall remain under prior ownership until compliance is met.

Sponsor: Dein Spriggs, USTA District 6 Director

[The sponsor states: "The justification for this proposal is many-fold:

*Equine Welfare: establishes a dedicated, sustainable funding mechanism to ensure Standardbred horses receive proper care and retirement opportunities; Shared Responsibility: by tying the contribution to the claiming price, the cost is distributed fairly. The 3% fee is modest but meaningful; Transparency and Accountability: Earmarked funds will be reported annually to the USTA, ensuring proper oversight; Industry Reputation: Shows the sport's proactive commitment to equine welfare, enhancing public trust. The anticipated impact is to provide a consistent funding stream for retirement and aftercare to help reduce financial strain on charitable aftercare organizations to improve retirement outcomes for Standardbred horses. It will also strengthen goodwill within the harness racing community and among the public."*]

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**5. A proposal to amend current Rule 14.03 Length of Race and Number of Heats to add new sub-section (b) and re-number current (b) to (c) to add a limit to the number of purse starts two and three-year-olds may have in one calendar year:**

**14.03 Length of Race and Number of Heats.**—Races or heats shall be given at a stated distance in units not shorter than a sixteenth of a mile.

(a) The length of a race and the number of heats shall be stated in the conditions for the race. If no distance or number of heats are specified all races shall be at a single mile except at county fairs and meetings of six days or more where the race will be conducted in two heats at one-mile distance.

**(b) Horses that are two and three-year olds will have a start cap with the number of purse races in which they may compete in a calendar year - two-year-olds - 20 starts, three-year-olds - 25 starts .**

(c b) Two-Year-Old—No two-year-old shall be permitted to start in a heat or race exceeding one mile in distance and no two-year-old shall be permitted to race in more than two heats or dashes in any single day. Starting any two-year-old in violation of this rule shall subject the track member to a fine and the winnings of such two-year-old shall be declared unlawful.

**Sponsors:** Joel Milby & Jack Remy, USTA licensed judges

[The sponsors state: *“Horses are considered immature as two and three-year olds, which makes this period important for proper growth and development. Two and three-year-olds that race a lot of starts run the risk of lameness, soundness issues and bone and muscle injuries. Limiting the starts will prioritize the well-being of the horses, proving adequate test and recovery between races.”*]

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**6. A proposal to amend current Rule 23.06 Appeal Statement and Bond to require a \$100 deposit for an appeal, due at the time an appeal is submitted to the USTA:**

23.06 Appeal Statement and Bond.—All appeals shall be in writing and sworn to before a notary public or one of the judges of the meeting. At the time the appeal is filed, a deposit of \$100.00 must accompany the appeal. ~~or an agreement to forfeit the sum of \$100.00 in the event the District Board determines the appeal is not justified~~ In the event the District Board feels that the appeal was justified it will refund the money to the appellant. This procedure does not apply to protests.

**Sponsor:** Michele Kopiec, USTA Staff

[The sponsor states: *“The current language is confusing as written, members don’t know if they need to send a deposit, if it will be refunded, etc. Requiring a \$100 deposit for all USTA appeals - which will still be refunded if the District Board finds that the appeal was justified - makes it easier for all.”*]

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**7. A proposal to amend current Rule 26.06 Breeding Requirements to change the verbiage in the fifth paragraph so the total mares bred to a stallion standing in the United States shall not exceed 160 as follows:**

**26.06 Breeding Requirements.—**

The total mares bred to a stallion standing in the United States that has never bred a mare or had a list of mares bred filed previously shall not exceed 160 ~~140~~.

**Sponsor:** David Reid, Briarcliff Manor, NY

[The sponsor states: *“To improve the standardbred breed by enabling a higher number of mares bred while maintaining the parameters of genetic diversity within our breed. With 15 years of the number of registered foals since the 140 mares bred limit was instituted has in effect over corrected the limit of foals a stallion. This amendment will provide an opportunity for all stallions, regardless of fertility, to prolong their breeding career while at the same time increasing diversity in the breed. In practice, each Stallion manager or corresponding officer will be required to evaluate individual stallion statistics to manage the stallion’s book accordingly. By this increase, this would lead towards more harmonization within the North American Standardbred breeding industry. We can safely increase the book by 20 mares and still be below the 140 concerns and would ease mares being replaced that have reproductive issues. Additionally, a review of the current fines could be reviewed with the increase.”*]

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8. A proposal to amend current 26.23 to add new section (i) which delineates the parameters of embryo transfer and what has to be done to get a foal that can be registered:

Effective January 1, 2029, the recipient mare must be a Standardbred, registered by the US Trotting Association or Standardbred Canada.

Sponsor: Ellen Harvey, Aiken, SC

[The sponsor states: “This proposal will ensure commercial value and productive purpose for more Standardbred mares than are currently used as recipient mares. The existing rule does not stipulate the breed of the recipient mare. Standardbred mares have carried, delivered and raised Standardbred foals for centuries, with infrequent and recent exceptions in some embryo transfer foals. The rule has no cost to the USTA, no additional cost to breeders, and provides two full breeding seasons for transition to accommodate those who need Standardbred recipient mares. There is an abundance of reproductively sound mares with successful histories of raising foals, but whose genes are not commercially attractive. This rule change will provide some of those mares with enhanced commercial value and secure care. Mares are less desirable than geldings as adoption prospects. I have surveyed Standardbred adoption groups’ ‘available horses’ via their websites over three months and mares are disproportionately represented as adoption prospects. Geldings constitute about 2/3 of horses offered for adoption vs about 1/3 for mares. There were 62 registered embryo transfer foals in 2024. This rule change will ensure a useful career and enhanced value for likely about 100 plus mares annually in a role at which they are unquestionably well suited and successful. To the extent a mare contributes to the athletic ability of progeny because of the manner in which they raise them, this provides all embryo transfer foals with that advantage. If this proposal passes and there is sentiment to do so, a category within Pleasure Registration can be added to ensure a mare conveyed for recipient use cannot be used to produce a foal other than as a embryo recipient, or for racing.”]

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9. **A proposal to amend current bylaw 9.01(a)(5) Executive Committee Composition:**

One membership director from each of the district boards and six track directors, who shall be appointed by the president at each annual meeting of the full board of directors.

- a. Four of those so appointed shall be pari-mutuel track directors.

Sponsor: Don Marean, USTA District 9 Director

[The sponsor states: “This bylaw change increases the size of the executive committee by six representatives and assures membership representation from each district. It also maintains the 2/1, membership director to track director ratio. It will add no additional operating costs to the association, and will ensure that both members and tracks have seats at the table.”]

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