2027 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 2027 Annual Meeting.

*Additions are **bold underlined**; deletions are ~~struck out~~.*

1. Rule 4.04 Allowances

Amend to eliminate claiming allowances for fillies and mares.

4.04 Allowances.—Given on claiming price in claiming races depending on the ~~sex and~~ age of the horse. Allowances are also given when determining the horse's eligibility in conditioned races based upon age ~~and sex~~ of the horse. The price allowances that govern for claiming races are as follows:

	Colts, Stallions, Geldings and ~~Spayed~~ Mares	~~Fillies and Mares~~
2-year-old	100%	~~120%~~
3-year-old	50%	~~70%~~
4-year-old	25%	~~45%~~
5-year-old and up	0	~~20%~~

Sponsor: Lori Sporn, Randolph, NJ

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"This proposal would eliminate the additional claiming price due to sex. Thirty or 40 years ago, many yearling fillies were bought and bred without ever being trained. In 2026, it would be rare for an owner/breeder to claim a horse for breeding; therefore, it makes no sense for a female to have an additional allowance for claiming purposes. I can't recall any instance where a horse (or female) were claimed with the express reason of future stallion or broodmare value."*

2. Rule 6.04 Disqualification to Act as Official

Add language to expand the conflict-of-interest provisions for racing officials by defining potential conflicts and establishing requirements for disclosure, recusal, and disciplinary action for noncompliance.

6.04 Disqualification to Act as **an** Official.—A person under suspension, expulsion, or other disqualification, or who has any **direct or indirect ownership, financial, business, employment, family, or other substantial** interest **in a race,** ~~or~~ any bet on a race or has an interest in any of the horses engaged therein, is disqualified from acting in any official capacity in that race.

For purposes of this rule, an interest may include an interest held through a spouse, family member, household member, business relationship, partnership, stable, farm, or other entity when the relationship is such that it could reasonably affect, or appear to affect, the official's impartiality.

An official who knows or reasonably believes that a relationship or circumstance may constitute a conflict of interest shall disclose the relationship or circumstance, before acting in the affected race, to the regulatory authority having jurisdiction over the meeting, or, in the absence of such authority, to the person designated by the sponsoring organization as responsible for the appointment or supervision of racing officials.

The official shall not act in the affected race until the appropriate authority determines whether the official may act. An official shall recuse himself or herself when required by the appropriate authority or when the circumstances constitute a disqualifying interest under this rule.

Failure to disclose a known conflict of interest or failure to recuse when required under this rule shall constitute a violation and may subject the official to disciplinary action, including suspension or revocation of the official's USTA license.

Sponsors: Gabe Wand, District 4 Director; Marilyn Breuer-Bertera, District 2 Director

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"This proposal is intended to make the conflict-of-interest rule clearer and more practical. Officials should not be placed in a position where a personal, family, business, or financial relationship could affect or appear to affect, their ability to officiate fairly.*
>
> *The proposal gives officials a clear responsibility to disclose potential conflicts and provides the appropriate authority with the opportunity to decide whether the official should participate. The goal is simply to protect the integrity of racing and maintain confidence in the fairness of officiating."*

3. Rule 7.02 Program Information

Amend to add subsection (o) to require trainers to declare whether any shoes will be removed from a horse on race day.

7.02 (o) A trainer must declare at the time of entry whether shoes may be removed from their entrant on race day. A final decision regarding whether the shoes will be removed must be made by the trainer no less than one (1) hour prior to the scheduled post time of the first race.

If a trainer has declared that shoes may be removed, the trainer may elect to put the shoes back on the entrant up to forty-five (45) minutes prior to the scheduled post time of that entrant's race.

If a trainer fails to declare whether shoes may be removed by the required deadline, the trainer shall not be permitted to remove shoes from the entrant on race day.

Sponsor: Michael Carter, District 7 Director

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"The wagering public should have as much information as possible when handicapping races. Understanding whether a trainer may or may not pull shoes could influence their wagering decisions."*

4. Rule 14.09 Opening of Entry Box and Drawing of Horses

Amend to add verbiage on drawing races by lot when the number of declarations exceed the permitted number of starters.

14.09 Opening of Entry Box and Drawing of Horses.—At all USTA member tracks the entry box shall be opened by the presiding judge at the advertised time and the presiding judge will be responsible to see that at least one horseman or an official representative of the horsemen is present. No owner or agent for a horse with an entry in the box shall be denied the privilege of being present. Under the supervision of the presiding judge all declarations shall be listed, the eligibility verified, preference ascertained, starters selected and post positions drawn. If it is necessary to reopen any race public announcement shall be made at least twice and the box reopened to a definite time.

Unless stated in the published conditions, all early closing events, late closing events, stakes, futurities, and other events in which entries are divided into eliminations, divisions, or multiple dashes and the

number of entrants exceeds the number of permitted starters, the assignment of horses to each elimination, division, or dash shall be determined by lot, subject to the seeding requirements for coupled entries.

Sponsors: TC Lane and Michele Kopiec, USTA Staff

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"This proposal provides for the random assignment of horses by lot when an event must be divided due to the number of entries, unless otherwise specified in the published conditions, while preserving seeding requirements for coupled entries."*

5. Rule 14.09 Opening of Entry Box and Drawing of Horses

Amend to add verbiage to require the opening of the box and draw to be made electronically available.

14.09 Opening of Entry Box and Drawing of Horses.—At all USTA member tracks the entry box shall be opened by the presiding judge at the advertised time and the presiding judge will be responsible to see that at least one horseman or an official representative of the horsemen is present. No owner or agent for a horse with an entry in the box shall be denied the privilege of being present. Under the supervision of the presiding judge all declarations shall be listed, the eligibility verified, preference ascertained, starters selected and post positions drawn. If it is necessary to reopen any race, public announcement shall be made at least twice and the box reopened to a definite time. **The opening of the entry box and the subsequent draw shall be made available for public observation in real time through a live video feed or other electronic means.**

Sponsor: Timothy Lust, Smyrna, DE

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"Show live video of the opening of entry boxes and the draws to allow the horse people affected to more readily be present with exercising their privilege under the current ruling. Once live video feeds are originated from each race office, the cost should be quite minimal and could be administered with adding an attachment to the entries of each race, better confirming just how these entries got there, I mean after all, this entire industry is labeled as 'A Sport.' Let's perhaps implement this technology allowed, simple change to ensure the depiction of a sport remaining fair and impartial by inviting better transparency."*

6. Rule 14.19 Drawing of Post Positions

Amend to add verbiage regarding horses drawing inside or outside consecutively.

14.19 Drawing of Post Positions.—A separate procedure to determine the post positions of horses in a race shall be conducted for each individual race of a race card. The results of a draw procedure shall not be applied to more than one race of a race card nor shall such results be applied to another race that is part of another race card.

In overnight races, excluding handicap races, if a horse draws one of the three outside post positions in three consecutive starts, the horse shall draw from post positions 1, 2, and 3 for its next start. Conversely, if a horse draws post positions 1, 2, or 3 in three consecutive starts, the horse shall draw from the three outside post positions for its next start.

Sponsor: David Brenner, Cape Elizabeth, ME

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"Owners are often forgotten members when it comes to rule changes. This change would allow owners to draw better if given three bad draws in a row."*

7. Rule 17.07(d) Contents of Application for Trainer's License

Amend to add criteria for upgrading from a limited trainer's license to a general trainer's license; also removes redundant language.

17.07(d) Effective January 1, 2021, an applicant for a new general trainer's license must be a member of the USTA for at least one full year **at the time of application** and show evidence that he or she has been licensed as a groom ~~or trainer~~ by a state racing commission for at least three consecutive years. New applicants without such experience will be issued a limited license, which must be held for a period of not less than 12 months. **A limited trainer licensee may be considered for upgrade to a general trainer's license only after meeting all of the following requirements:**

1. Completing the initial 12-month licensing period with no rule violations.

2. Starting horses in at least 12 charted races while licensed as a limited trainer.

~~Submit evidence of his or her ability to train and manage a racing stable which shall include at least three years' experience working as a groom and/or second trainer.~~

Sponsors: Robert Corey, Presiding Judge, Delaware Harness Racing Commission; Mark Loewe, USTA Vice Chairperson/District 8A Director; Michele Kopiec, USTA Staff

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"This proposal establishes additional eligibility requirements for upgrading from a limited trainer's license to a general trainer's license to ensure applicants have acquired practical experience training their own horses before being eligible to train for a public stable. Also, the words 'or trainer' should be removed from the third line of this rule, as it is not consistent with USTA Rule 17.02 Mandatory Licensing of Trainers which states 'No person shall be programmed as the trainer of a horse in any race of a track member without having first obtained an active membership including a trainer's license.' In addition, the last sentence of the current rule is redundant, as it is stated within the text requiring licensing from a state racing commission for at least three consecutive years."*

8. Rule 18.09 Use of Hobbles

Amend to add subsections (a) and (b) to prohibit the use of trotting hobbles, effective January 1, 2028.

18.09 Use of Hobbles.—No horse shall wear hobbles in a race unless it starts in the same in the first heat and having so started shall continue to wear them to the finish of the race, and any person found guilty of removing or altering a horse's hobbles during a race or between races for the purpose of fraud shall be suspended or expelled. Other than as aforementioned, the use of hobbles from race to race shall be in the sole discretion of the trainer, and not precipitate qualifying the horse.

(a) Effective January 1, 2028, and afterwards, no trotter horse shall be permitted to use trotting hobbles or any mechanical device intended primarily to artificially support or stabilize the trotting gait in all pari-mutuel races, fair and matinee races, sanctioned events, schooling races and qualifying races conducted in the United States. Horses currently competing with trotting hobbles are permitted to race in them until December 31, 2027, after which time all use of trotting hobbles in all pari-mutuel races, fair and matinee races, sanctioned events, schooling races and qualifying races conducted in the United States is strictly prohibited. The use of hobbles is restricted to pacing horses only.

(b) An asterisk shall be placed beside the trotter horse's name to indicate one or more world or track records were established while the horse competed in trotting hobbles.

USTA Note

The approval of this proposal would also require amendments to the following rules:

4.80 Hobbles—A leg harness used for controlling the gait of a pacer ~~or trotter~~.

6.15(b)(15) The standard symbols for breaks, park-outs and free-legged pacers ~~and trotting hobbles~~ where applicable.

7.02(j) Indicate pacers racing without hobbles ~~and trotters that are racing with hobbles~~.

Sponsor: Karen Naja, Lexington, KY

SPONSOR STATEMENT

"To the Board of Directors of the United States Trotting Association, State Racing Commissions and Members of the Harness Racing industry:

The undersigned, respectfully proposes the adoption of a rule prohibiting the use of trotting hobbles on trotters in all forms of harness racing conducted within the United States. This application is to amend the existing rule 18.09 by adding subsections (a) and (b). Trotting hobbles were introduced as equipment intended to assist in gait stabilization which can enhance racing performance for a horse that would normally go off stride. As the sport continues to evolve, concerns exist regarding:

1. Advantage. *The unfair advantage is allowing horses with trotting hobbles to outperform the horses that do not wear them and take the chance of breaking stride. Trotting hobbles do not necessarily give horses that wear them a speed advantage but give a substantial reliability advantage especially when pushed to top racing speed. Trotting hobbles minimize the risk. Trotting hobbles assist the horse when it gets fatigued, unbalanced or pushes past its natural trotting threshold. There was a time when trotting hobbles were rarely used, now the amount of the trotters using them is extreme. Trotting hobbles no longer reflect the integrity of the trotting breed;*

2. Soundness. *Trotting hobbles on a horse can, perhaps, cover up soundness issues or promote unsoundness issues. It is possible when unsoundness presents itself during competition, the hobble will compensate so as to not allow breaking their gait. Trotting hobbles can cause an issue with a horse's natural trotting gait by changing their stride. This can lead to muscular strain and soreness, tendon strain, joint strain and lameness. Trotting hobbles may mask underlying issues and pose the problem of potential misuse;*

3. Natural Gait, Durability and the Breed. *By blending selective genetics and physical conditioning, a natural trotting gait can be achieved without breaking stride even at maximum speed. Horses wearing trotting hobbles can pass on genes for poor natural gaits. These faults can damage the quality of the genetic progression of the breed's conformation, gait and durability. Trotting hobbles may also allow for an inappropriate time to condition and set-up a trotter just to cut down the time to get the horse to the races.*

Continuing to rely on trotting hobbles sends the wrong message to fans, critics, breeders and future generations of horsemen. A trotter should excel because of natural ability, soundness, conditioning, breeding and horsemanship, not because of artificial gait-assistance equipment. Of course, a possible drawback might be that some trotters will be unable to remain on the trot at top racing speed. A detriment might be less trotters to compete at the very top level. But on the other hand, horses that have trotting hobbles removed might actually excel and the quality of horse racing may surpass all expectations.

Prohibiting trotting hobbles would:

1. Create a more level and authentic competitive environment in which trotters compete without trotting hobbles thereby taking away the advantage of horses with trotting hobbles over those without;

2. Promote natural athletic ability of the trotter breed by encouraging horses to compete on their inherent gait and balance without breaking stride;

3. Encourage breeding and training practices that prioritize natural trotting ability, soundness and *durability;*

4. Strengthen the public perception of harness racing by demonstrating a commitment to modernization to the sport and concern for the well-being of each horse.

Harness racing has a well-documented and very proud history rooted in horsemanship, athleticism and respect for the horse. The future success and integrity of the sport depends upon continued efforts to continue the true trotting breed, improve safety and public confidence.

The continued use of trotting hobbles:

1. Creates an uneven playing field between trotters with and without trotting hobbles.
2. Compromises the natural movement and athleticism of the trotter, placing undo physical stress through mechanical restriction and constant motion;
3. Encourages breeding and training practices that prioritize speed over natural gait quality and durability.

Envisioned is a future of trotters competing without trotting hobbles. Fans can watch races knowing the welfare of the horse comes before performance enhancement. A trotter should excel because of breeding, soundness, conditioning, durability and horsemanship – not an artificial support device that may cause horses to excel above those horses that are without.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the United States Trotting Association and all regulatory authorities:

1. Amend current racing regulations to prohibit the use of trotting hobbles on trotters in all pari-mutuel races, fair and matinee races, sanctioned events, schooling races and qualifying races conducted in the United States;
2. Establish a reasonable phase out period to allow owners, trainers and breeders to transition accordingly.

This application is submitted in the interest of equine welfare, integrity of the sport, preservation of the trotting breed to the highest standards and future sustainability of the sport. This application is not meant to disparage horsemen, trainers or others in the harness racing business."

9. Rule 18.21 Sulky Performance Standards/Approval

Amend to add new subsection (n)—Sulky Service History, Inspection and Continuing Structural Safety.

(n) Sulky Service History, Inspection and Continuing Structural Safety.

1. Accident Reporting and Service History—When a racing sulky is involved in an accident or significant incident noted in the official USTA race chart or judges' report, the manufacturer, model and serial number shall be recorded by the USTA. Reportable incidents may include collisions, locked wheels, overturning, falls, or other events that may subject the sulky to abnormal structural stress. Minor racing incidents do not necessarily cause structural damage, but should still be charted. Such reporting shall not imply that the sulky is unsafe or that any manufacturer or owner is at fault. The record shall remain associated with the sulky's serial number to provide an accurate service history.

2. Post-Accident Inspection—A sulky involved in a recorded incident shall not automatically be removed from competition solely because the incident occurred. However, when an incident results in visible damage, deformation, cracking, significant impact, overturning, or other circumstances that reasonably raise a structural concern, racing officials may require the sulky to be inspected before being returned to competition. Inspection and repair shall be performed by the manufacturer or the manufacturer's authorized representative due to the specialized jigs, welding procedures, and other OEM-specific equipment and knowledge required to properly evaluate structural integrity. Any significant structural repair should thereafter be included in the sulky's service history.

3. Continuing Service and Structural Condition—Racing sulkies are not designed to last indefi-

nitely and may be affected over time by age, use, accidents, corrosion, storage, maintenance and repair history. A sulky should not be removed from competition solely because of age. Older sulkies may remain in service if structurally sound, with inspection guidance established by the USTA Sulky Committee. Visible cracking or structural deterioration should be treated as a warning requiring inspection, but shall not, by itself, be considered evidence of defective design or manufacture. A distinction should be recognized between progressive deterioration that allows detection and repair and a structural failure involving complete separation of a major component.

4. Review of Significant or Repeated Structural Failures—When the USTA receives evidence of a major structural separation, or multiple substantially similar structural failures involving the same approved model, the Sulky Committee may review the circumstances to determine whether the failures are related to age, maintenance, accident history, repair history, manufacturing consistency, design, materials or another cause. The manufacturer shall be given an opportunity to participate in that review and provide relevant information. The purpose of such review shall be prevention and safety rather than assignment of fault.

Sponsor: Timothy Betts, CEO, UFO Bikes LLC

SPONSOR STATEMENT

"The USTA has been a leader in establishing testing and performance standards for racing sulkies and Dayton's facility does a fantastic job of evaluating new models. This proposal does not in any way question the effectiveness of the existing USTA/Dayton approval process. Instead, it addresses something fundamentally different: ***what happens to a sulky during the years after it has successfully passed its original approval testing.***

The importance of this distinction has been demonstrated in previous years following sulky failures. Recently, the USTA appropriately investigated a series of incidents and reviewed its testing standards. The USTA Racing Committee subsequently concluded that the existing approval be rescinded, but that the testing procedure remained valid while emphasizing both manufacturing consistency and the responsibility of purchasers to properly care for and maintain their sulkies.

That is an important principle. A sulky can be properly designed, properly manufactured and properly approved and still accumulate damage during years of actual racing use.

Harness racing is particularly demanding on this equipment. Sulkies lock wheels. They are involved in minor collisions. They can be dropped following races, struck during accidents, transported thousands of miles, repeatedly washed and sometimes stored outdoors or otherwise exposed to the elements. Some are repaired or repainted, sold to second or third owners and remain in service for many years. They are not designed to last forever.

Today, much of that history disappears.

Ironically, the USTA's existing Sulky Failure Report already recognizes the importance of this information. The form asks for the sulky's serial number, purchase date, whether it was purchased new or used, whether it had previously been involved in an accident, who reconditioned it, and approximately how many races it had been used in.

Those are exactly the right questions. However, they are generally being asked after the sulky has failed.

This proposal would allow the USTA to begin collecting the most important portion of that information when the event actually occurs.

If a sulky is involved in an accident that is already significant enough to be recorded in an official USTA race chart or judges' report, recording the identity and serial number of the sulky imposes relatively little additional burden. That information would then follow the sulky throughout its racing life.

Such a system would also protect manufacturers as well as participants. If a ten-year-old sulky fractures and its history shows multiple racing accidents, previous structural repairs and years of service, *that information is highly relevant in determining why the failure occurred. Without that history, an equipment failure may incorrectly be assumed to represent a design or manufacturing problem.*

Conversely, if several relatively new sulkies of the same model with no meaningful accident histories experience substantially similar structural failures, the USTA would have objective information supporting further investigation.

Recent developments internationally demonstrate the growing importance of continuing sulky safety.

Harness Racing Australia advised participants in August 2026 to regularly inspect sulky frames, shafts and wheels for cracks, wear and structural fatigue. It specifically cautioned about second-hand sulkies with unknown histories and noted that prior incidents can affect structural integrity over time.

Source: https://natsite.harness.org.au/media-room/news-article/?news_id=73833

Harness Racing New Zealand has similarly placed increased emphasis on structural inspection following a serious sulky failure, with particular attention being given to welded joints. HRNZ has also investigated whether its existing periodic sulky inspection requirements should become more frequent.

The proposed USTA approach can accomplish many of the same safety objectives without imposing an arbitrary expiration date or unnecessarily requiring participants to replace structurally sound equipment.

It also recognizes an important engineering and safety principle: ***a developing structural problem that gives a visible warning can be identified and addressed; a component that suddenly fractures or separates completely provides no such opportunity.***

UFO Bikes has intentionally worked to design and manufacture its sulkies so that, to the extent reasonably possible, accumulated structural stress presents progressively and visibly rather than resulting in sudden complete separation of a major component. No manufacturer can guarantee that a racing sulky will never crack. Age, accidents, maintenance, corrosion, storage and usage all matter. The objective should therefore be early detection and prevention of catastrophic failure.

During the past year, photographic and video evidence involving multiple sulkies that appear to have experienced substantial structural failures has been circulating throughout the industry. This information should be provided to the USTA for independent review. The purpose of referencing these incidents is not to conclude that the sulkies in question are defective or to seek action against any manufacturer. Rather, when considered alongside previous matters and recent international safety initiatives, these incidents demonstrate why a uniform system for tracking the actual service history of racing sulkies would benefit the entire industry.

The proposed rule would provide that system.

It would not make manufacturers responsible for damage caused by accidents, poor maintenance or years of use.

It would not require horsemen to replace a sulky merely because it reaches a certain age.

It would not remove a sulky from competition every time wheels lock or a minor racing incident occurs.

Instead, it would allow the USTA to develop an objective history of the equipment being used in competition and provide racing officials, owners, manufacturers and the Sulky Committee with better information when a genuine safety concern develops.

The USTA is uniquely positioned to lead North American harness racing in this area and establish a practical system that protects drivers and horses while remaining fair to horsemen and manufacturers. Safety first!"

10. Rule 26.16 Failure to Submit Information & New Rule 28 Investigations

Amend 26.16 and add new Rule 28 - Investigations, to establish investigation and hearing procedures.

26.16 Failure to Submit Information.—A person or entity shall, upon request, submit records and information to the USTA or its authorized agent relative to the breeding, veterinary care, registration, ownership and/or transfer of a horse or stallion syndicate share, as well as records and information relative to the administration of approved or unapproved medication to a Standardbred horse or possession or purchase of approved or unapproved medication. **The requirement to submit records and information shall not be unlimited, but rather, shall be restricted to the information specified in this paragraph.**

The USTA or its authorized agent may require that the production of said records and information be accompanied by an unsworn declaration made under penalty of perjury that the contents of the production are true and correct. Failure by a member to submit requested information to the USTA or its authorized agent or additional aids to identification relative to the breeding, veterinary care, registration, ownership, and/or transfer of a horse, or relative to the administration of approved or unapproved medication to Standardbred horse or possession or purchase or approved or unapproved medication, may constitute a violation and subject the member to a fine or suspension by the USTA.

(a) **Disputes arising under this rule in connection with a USTA investigation shall be subject to the provisions of Rule 28.**

Rule 28—Investigations.

28.01 Investigative Committee.—The Investigative Committee shall oversee all USTA investigations and shall perform such investigative and adjudicative functions as defined by the USTA Rules and Bylaws.

1. Duties.—The duties of the Investigative Committee shall be to oversee all USTA investigations, conduct hearings, and make recommendations to the Executive Committee and/or the full Board of Directors regarding the disposition of investigations.

2. Composition.—The district boards of the thirteen (13) districts shall each elect one (1) member to serve on the Investigative Committee. The President of the USTA may appoint an employee of the USTA to facilitate the functions of the Committee, however, he or she shall not be a voting member of the Committee. Except in the case of a tie vote. In that instance, he or she may vote. The appropriate district board shall fill vacancies on the Committee. The Committee shall elect a chair and vice-chair. In the event of the absence, recusal or removal of the chair, the vice-chair shall act in his or her place.

All members of the investigative committee shall be subject to the conflict-of-interest requirements set forth in the rules and bylaws. In the event of an actual or perceived conflict, a committee member may recuse him or herself or be removed from participation in any investigation upon motion and by a majority vote of the Committee.

28.02 Authority to Conduct Investigations. —

The USTA may initiate an investigation when there exists a reasonable cause to believe that a member or other person subject to the USTA rules has violated a USTA rule, regulation, or another requirement.

The USTA may conduct an investigation through its officers, employees, agents, counsel, or other persons or entities authorized by the USTA to conduct investigative functions. The USTA may also enter into an agreement or other formal arrangement with an independent investigative organization or other qualified person or entity to conduct, assist with, or oversee an investigation on behalf of the USTA.

Any investigation conducted pursuant to an agreement or other arrangement with an independent

investigative organization or other authorized investigative entity shall remain a USTA investigation for purposes of the USTA Rules and Bylaws. The USTA shall retain authority over the application and enforcement of its Rules and Bylaws and the ultimate disposition of any alleged violation. The scope, procedures, responsibilities, confidentiality requirements, reporting obligations, and other terms governing the investigation will be subject to the authority of the Investigative Committee as provided in this rule.

The Investigative Committee may initiate an investigation:

1. At the request of the President or an officer or employee of the USTA authorized to request an investigation;
2. At the request of a voting majority of the Board of Directors;
3. Upon information received from a governmental agency, racing commission, regulatory authority, investigative organization, or other reliable source; or
4. Upon its own determination an investigation is warranted.

28.03 Powers of the Investigative Committee.—

The Investigative Committee shall have the power to:

1. Authorize, initiate, and oversee all investigations involving alleged violations of the USTA Rules and Bylaws.
2. Require a member or other person subject to the USTA Rules to provide information pursuant to USTA Rule 26.16.
3. Adjudicate all disputes between the person or entity conducting the investigation and the subject member, or any other member, arising during an investigation concerning requests for records, information, testimony, or other evidence.
4. Issue such investigative directives as authorized by the USTA Rules and Bylaws;
5. Conduct hearings as provided by this Rule; and
6. Make recommendations to the Executive Committee and/or the Board of Directors regarding the disposition of an investigation.

28.04 Investigation Procedure.—Investigations authorized pursuant to this rule shall be conducted in a manner consistent with the USTA Rules and Bylaws, applicable requirements of due process and shall follow the procedures set forth herein:

1. Notice of Investigation.—The person who is the subject of an investigation shall be provided with written or electronic notice of the investigation and the rule or rules alleged to have been violated.
2. Representation.—A member who is the subject of an investigation shall have the right to be represented by an attorney at the expense of the member. Nothing in this rule shall require the USTA to provide or pay for legal counsel for a member unless otherwise authorized by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors or as required by applicable law.
3. Investigative Report.—The person or entity conducting the investigation shall report in writing to the Investigative Committee within six months of the initiation of the investigation, or at any other time requested by the Committee. The report shall set forth the material facts developed during the investigation and, if necessary, a recommendation concerning the disposition of the matter.
(a) A copy of said report shall also be provided to the subject member.
(b) The subject member shall have fourteen (14) days to file objections to said report.
4. Investigative Committee Hearing.—If the person or entity conducting the investigation recommends the subject member be disciplined, the Investigative Committee shall convene a hearing. At this hearing, the burden of proof shall be upon the person or entity conducting the investigation to demonstrate by a preponderance of the evidence that the subject member has committed a rule violation and should be disciplined.

At least thirty (30) days prior to the hearing, the subject member shall receive notice of the alleged rule violation, notice of the evidence that is reasonably expected to be introduced at the hearing, and a list of witnesses reasonably expected to testify, subject to such exceptions as may, in the opinion of the Committee, be necessary to protect the integrity of an ongoing investigation or the safety of a witness.

The chair shall determine the manner in which the hearing shall proceed, provided that the hearing is conducted consistent with USTA Rules and Bylaws and that the subject member is afforded applicable due process rights, including, but not limited to:

(a) the right to a presumption of innocence;

(b) the right to notice of the alleged violation or violations;

(c) the right to be represented by an attorney;

(d) an opportunity to be heard;

(e) an opportunity to review and challenge evidence introduced against the member; and

(f) an opportunity, subject to reasonable limitations established by the Committee, to cross-examine witnesses whose testimony is presented against the member.

(g) hearsay evidence alone material to support a finding shall not provide a sufficient basis to sustain a charge against a member.

5. Findings and Recommendation.—At the conclusion of the hearing, the Investigative Committee may, by a simple majority vote of the members eligible to participate, dismiss the alleged violation or issue a written Finding of Violation.

(a) The Finding of Violation may recommend any disposition provided by the USTA Rules and Bylaws, provided that:

(b) Notwithstanding any other USTA Rules or Bylaws, the maximum fine issued in USTA investigations shall not exceed five thousand dollars ($5000.00) per occurrence, or an aggregate fine of twenty thousand dollars ($20,000.00).

The Investigative Committee shall submit any Finding of Violation, together with its recommended disposition, to the Executive Committee for consideration and action pursuant to this Rule.

28.05 Authority of the Executive Committee in USTA Investigations. —

1. The Executive Committee shall have authority to act upon a Finding of Violation and recommended disposition submitted pursuant to this Rule, consistent with USTA Rules and Bylaws.

2. The Executive Committee may review documentary evidence, hear witness testimony, receive argument from the Investigative Committee chair, the person or entity that conducted the investigation, the subject member, and/or the member's representative, and may impose any disciplinary action authorized by the USTA Rules and Bylaws, within the limitations of Rule 28, and the authority delegated to the Executive Committee by the Board of Directors.

3. Any member of the Executive Committee who has an actual or potential conflict-of-interest concerning the matter shall be subject to USTA Rules and Bylaws regarding conflicts of interest.

4. The Executive Committee shall issue its decision in writing and shall state the rule violation or violations found to have been committed by the subject member and the disciplinary action imposed, if any. A written copy of this decision shall be provided to the subject member forthwith.

5. The findings and decision of the Executive Committee shall be appealable within 30 days by the subject member to the Board of Directors.

28.06 Authority of the Board of Directors in USTA Investigations.—A voting majority of the Board of Directors shall have the final disciplinary authority over the subject member as provided in USTA Bylaw section 10.04 (b).

1. The Board of Directors may examine the documentary evidence, hear witness testimony and/

or arguments from the Investigative Committee chair, the person or entity that conducted the investigation and/or the subject member and/or his or her representative.

2. The Board of Directors may, by a simple majority vote, affirm or modify the findings and decisions of the Executive Committee, dismiss the Finding of Violation, in whole or in part, or take any disciplinary action provided by the USTA Rules and Bylaws.

3. The findings and decision of the Board of Directors shall be issued in writing and provided to the subject member forthwith.

4. The findings and decision of the Board of Directors shall be a final disposition of the matter, subject to judicial review.

Sponsor: Michael Torcello, District 8 Director

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"The purpose of these proposed rule changes is to establish clear and reasonable procedural guardrails for investigations conducted by or on behalf of the USTA, while preserving the USTA's ability to promptly investigate suspected violations of its rules and bylaws.*
>
> *The proposal recognizes that the USTA must have the authority and flexibility to investigate allegations that may affect the integrity of Standardbred racing, the registration and ownership of horses, medication compliance, or other matters within the USTA's jurisdiction. At the same time, the exercise of investigative authority should be accompanied by appropriate procedural protections for USTA members and other persons subject to the USTA rules. Because an investigation can have significant consequences for a member's reputation, livelihood, license, horses, and participation in the sport, the process should provide fundamental fairness while allowing the investigative process to continue. These proposed rule changes establish basic due-process protections for our members. The USTA should be held to some standard of due process for members accused of rule violations.*
>
> *These proposals strike a reasonable balance between two important USTA responsibilities: the responsibility to investigate potential violations effectively and the responsibility to administer its rules fairly and consistently. Establishing these procedures in the USTA Rules provides greater predictability for investigators, the Investigative Committee, the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, and members who become the subject of an investigation. Clear procedures reduce uncertainty, help ensure consistency from one investigation to another, and strengthen confidence in the integrity of the investigative and disciplinary process.*
>
> *For these reasons, the sponsor believes the proposed amendments provide necessary and appropriate guardrails for USTA investigations without compromising the USTA's ability to investigate suspected violations. The proposal preserves investigative authority while ensuring that members are afforded meaningful notice, an opportunity to respond, a fair hearing, and appropriate avenues of review before disciplinary action becomes final."*

11. Rule 26.23 Embryo Transfer

Amend to add language to (c) to require the age and breed of the recipient mare to be recorded.

26.23 Embryo Transfer.—A foal that results from an embryo/ovum transfer shall be eligible for registration only if the following requirements are met:

(a) The donor mare is at least two (2) years of age or older at the time of the embryo/ovum transfer.

(b) Prior to the embryo/ovum transfer, the Application for Embryo Transfer is completed and submitted with the application fee to the USTA and approved by the registrar. Failure to comply with this requirement shall result in a penalty fee.

(c) Subsequent to all embryo/ovum transfers, a Certificate of Embryo Transfer is completed and filed with the registrar within thirty-five (35) days following each embryo/ovum transfer. **The certificate**

shall include the breed of the recipient mare and the recipient mare's year of foaling. If the recipient mare is not breed registered or the recipient mare's year of foaling is unknown, that fact shall be indicated. Failure to comply with this requirement shall result in a penalty fee.

(d) Only a donor mare's first-born embryo/ovum transfer foal each year will be eligible for registration. A maximum of one embryo per donor mare will be permitted to be transferred to a recipient mare per heat cycle of the donor mare regardless of the number of embryos successfully recovered. Pregnancy in the recipient mare terminates the embryo collection process for the donor mare and also terminates the breeding of the donor mare for the duration of the same breeding season unless the recipient mare is subsequently determined not to be pregnant in which case the transfer process may be re-initiated. The person having responsibility for the relevant breeding records must keep records adequate to enable the USTA to verify compliance with this requirement. Failure to comply with this requirement shall result in a penalty fee.

(e) A donor mare shall not be exported or be declared to race in claiming races during the recipient mare's gestation period.

(f) All other normal registration requirements are met.

(g) For purposes of USTA registration, an embryo/ovum transfer foal shall be considered to be the property of the owner of the donor mare at the time of mating.

(h) A foal resulting from a frozen embryo/ovum transfer shall not be eligible for registration.

Sponsor: Murray Brown, Roslyn, NY

SPONSOR STATEMENT

> *"The recipient mare is the one that raises and nurtures the foal. There are reasons why the breed and age of the mare is of importance. For example, a young vibrant Standardbred mare is more likely to raise a healthy yearling, than an old broken-down mare who's previous racing is unknown. Regardless, the more information available the better for the buyer."*

12. Rule 25.05 & Rule 27.09(b) Imported Horses / Import-Export

Amend to add subsection (g) to Rule 25.05 clarifying which horses import registration fees apply to, and increases the import registration fee under Rule 27.09(b) from $325 to $5,000.

25.05 Imported Horses.—Horses imported into the United States from countries other than Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Finland and France may be registered with the USTA as Non-Standardbred, provided the following requirements are complied with by the person or persons seeking such registration.

(a) Horse must be registered in the country of birth and certificate of such registration must accompany application.

(b) Complete history of breeding including sire, and first, second and third dams and chain of ownership must accompany application if not fully set forth on registration of origin.

(c) Clearance or export certificate from country of origin including markings, positive identification of horse and veterinarian certificate must accompany application.

(d) If horse is leased a valid executed lease signed by all parties must accompany application. If lease is signed by agents written authorization from their principals must be submitted.

(e) Person or persons seeking such registration must be USTA members.

(f) A standard USTA application for registration must be filed, signed by the person to whose ownership the horse was cleared from the foreign registry and the requisite fee paid.

(g) An import registration fee shall apply to any horse previously registered with a foreign Standardbred registry, including any horse subsequently registered or re-registered with Standardbred Canada prior to registration with the USTA.

27.09 Import/Export of Horse.

(a) Export Certificate $350.00

(b) Import Registration ~~$325.00~~ **$5,000**

Sponsor: Christopher Antonacci, District 6 Director

SPONSOR STATEMENT

*"**This is a breed-development program, not a revenue measure.** The first $500 of each import registration fee shall be retained by the Association as general revenue, covering the administrative cost of processing the registration - record research, verification of foreign racing and breeding history, parentage verification, identification, and integration into the registry. The current $325 fee does not cover that work; $500 reflects its true cost. That cost does not disappear because the fee rises, and the Association should not be asked to subsidize it. The remaining $4,500 shall be dedicated, by resolution accompanying this rule change, to three purposes - each of which returns the money to the domestic ecosystem the fee is designed to protect:*

*• **Accredited Standardbred aftercare.** Imported horses retire in the United States and enter an aftercare population funded entirely by American owners, breeders, sales companies, and stallion owners. Directing a share of this fee to the STA or STA-accredited organizations means those horses would, for the first time, meaningfully contribute to the infrastructure that eventually cares for them.*

*• **Registry and member-facing technology.** The Association's registration, eligibility, and records systems are the backbone of the North American sport and are overdue for real investment - electronic registration and transfer, modern owner and trainer account services, integrated microchip and parentage records, and clean data exchange with tracks, commissions, and Standardbred Canada. Funding this from import fees is substantively coherent: processing foreign registrations is among the most labor-intensive work the registry performs.*

*• **National-audience marquee events.** A dedicated share to promotion and purse enhancement for the events capable of growing the sport rather than merely distributing within it - for example, the Breeders Crown, a properly marketed Triple Crown, the Hambletonian, and a coordinated national broadcast and digital presence around them. Harness racing's money is spread thin across an enormous number of small events, and no casual fan is ever given a reason to care. This is the kind of investment the sport has never been able to make because no one has ever had unallocated funds to make it with.*

The Association should defer to a subcommittee set up to determine a reasonable starting allocation, with annual reporting of amounts collected and disbursed. The specific split is the Association's to set; the commitment to dedicate rather than absorb is what makes this a development program.

Why the fee must rise.

__The domestic system is self-funding, and imports don't fund it.__ Every American-bred horse reaching the racetrack arrives only after its connections have paid in at every stage - stallion and service fees, mare and foal registration, USTA membership, transfer and eligibility fees, sire stakes nominations and sustaining payments, Breeders Crown nominations, early- and late-closing payments - layered on eighteen to twenty-four months of board, veterinary care, farrier work, breaking, and training carried by American farms, employees, and vendors. An imported horse pays none of it. It arrives fully formed, already raced, already vetted, and for $325 is granted access to the same purse account the domestic economy spent years capitalizing. The current fee is not a contribution to the system; it barely covers the cost of processing the paperwork.

__Purse money is legislatively dedicated to a domestic agricultural purpose.__ The purse structures that make US harness racing worth entering are substantially funded by gaming revenue allocated under state statutes enacted to support in-state agriculture, preserve farmland, and sustain rural employment. Legislators in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Indiana, among others, did not appropriate that revenue to reward horses bred and raised overseas - and every purse dollar won by an imported horse weakens the case our industry makes each session when that funding comes under *attack.*

The risk asymmetry is total. *A domestic breeder commits capital at conception and carries it through a high-washout-rate pipeline with no assurance the horse ever starts. An importer commits capital to a known quantity, assumes none of the breeding, yearling, or development risk, and then competes head-to-head for conditioned purses against people who assumed all three. This fee is the only point in the system at which that asymmetry can be priced at all.*

The fee is de minimis relative to the transaction. *Air freight alone commonly runs well into five figures before quarantine, veterinary, and commission costs. A genuinely good horse - the kind whose arrival improves the racing product - will still come. What $5,000 deters is volume importation of moderate, conditioned-class horses, which is precisely where displacement of domestic horsemen is most acute and the benefit to the sport least.*

Closing the Standardbred Canada routing gap. *The current structure permits a horse from a foreign registry to be registered with Standardbred Canada first and then transferred onto the USTA registry, avoiding the import fee entirely. The fee should apply based on the horse's origin, not on the routing its connections select."*

13. Article 5.02 Terms of Directorship

Amend to add verbiage to limit the terms of directors to three, effective May 1, 2027.

5.02 Terms of Directorship.—All directors will be elected for a three (3)-year term. Terms shall begin with the seating of the directors at the annual meeting of the full board of directors following the elections and to run until the third annual meeting following the seating.

Membership directors elected or appointed to fill a vacancy for the first time after May 1, 2027 will serve a maximum of three terms.

Sponsor: Ellen Harvey, Aiken, SC

SPONSOR STATEMENT

"This proposal comes at no cost to the association. It affects none of the directors who will decide this matter.

Term limits are supported by 80-90% of Americans, across all parties and forms of government, with 100% of presidents and 76% of governors subject to term limits. Left to the electorate, there is no doubt all legislators would be subject to limited terms.

Implementation of this proposal will encourage candidates with fresh perspectives, talents and skills, operating daily under USTA policies, but fear reprisal or perception of an election challenge as disrespectful to the incumbent.

On a board 361% larger than General Motors' (13 GM/60 USTA), turnover of new directors serving up to nine years will never constitute a sufficient number to disrupt intent and commitments of extant board actions and policies.

Incumbents will have the opportunity and freedom to adopt and act on positions they believe are important without consequence to their re-election prospects.

A common argument against term limits is the "learning curve" necessary to be an effective representative. Assuming that is accurate, this proposal provides a full three year term to learn, followed by double that time to implement first term lessons.

Term limits provide a graceful exit for directors who have dutifully served neatly a decade and would be relieved to have a successor.

If this proposal is accepted, I will propose a change in 2027 to amend By law 5.01 (b) to extend *director emeritus status to those with nine years of service instead of the existing ten."*

14. Article 8.04 Time for Hearing Appeal

Amend to add verbiage for a deadline for a district to render a decision on an appeal, with referral to the executive committee if the deadline passes.

8.04 Time for Hearing Appeal.—Appeals shall be heard at the next scheduled meeting of the appropriate district board or executive committee after an appeal is filed, unless a continuance is requested by the appellant. Each appellant shall only be entitled to one continuance.

If a district board has not rendered a final decision on an appeal within 90 days after the initial appeal hearing and regardless of whether the matter has been tabled, postponed, continued, or otherwise deferred by the district board, the president may refer the appeal to the executive committee for hearing and final determination. The executive committee shall possess the same authority to hear and decide the appeal as the district board. Decisions of the executive committee shall be final.

Sponsor: Salvatore DiMario, District 3 Director

SPONSOR STATEMENT

"This proposal is intended to ensure the timely resolution of appeals by allowing the USTA President to refer an appeal to the Executive Committee when a District Board has not rendered a final decision within 90 days of the initial appeal hearing. The change provides a mechanism to prevent appeals from remaining unresolved for an extended period while preserving the same authority and review process available to the District Board."