

Life Bans Must Be Given To Doped Horses, Says BHA Chief

British Horseracing Authority's chief executive has remarked that life bans should be given to all doped horses and therapeutic exemptions should not stand.

Paul Bittar, the most senior executive in British racing, remarked that time had come for the BHA to take “a strong stand” against [anabolic steroids](#) by outlawing them completely. Bittar admitted it was important to retain public confidence in horse racing. Bittar has been hailed very highly in the world of horse racing. He is credited with transforming the fortunes of the British Horseracing Authority during his two years in charge. Bittar advocated a zero-tolerance approach to the use of [steroids in British racing](#) even if the horse has a genuine medical reason for being administered those substances.

According to the recommendations of an independent report commissioned in the wake of the Godolphin and Sungate scandals last year, there may be an increase in suspension. Presently, racehorses serve a six-month suspension if they are found to have used steroids. However the report by Sandy Love, professor of equine clinical studies at Glasgow University, is set to spark a debate among the British Horseracing Authority board when the report will be discussed in the coming weeks.

The British Horseracing Authority's chief executive believes the science behind the effects of anabolic steroid use in horses is not robust enough for any exemptions to be granted. The Mahmood Al Zarooni and Gerard Butler doping sagas and recent revelations that Irish trainers [Philip Fenton](#) and Pat Hughes had appeared in court charged with possession of anabolic steroids could help Bittar make a strong case for increased suspensions. The British Horseracing Authority was left in a dilemma after criminal proceedings were initiated against Fenton, with three of his horses scheduled to run at Cheltenham, including the Gold Cup third favorite Last Instalment.

Bittar also admitted that a massive cut in budget of the BHA in the three years before he became chief executive led to it being definitely cut back too far in testing and exposed British racing to some of the risks that we saw last year.

The BHA Chief Executive however has some reasons to smile. A few days back, the Government said it was backing the BHA's bid to extend the Levy to offshore bookmakers operating within the UK. Bittar pledged any increase in the Levy as a result of an amendment to the Gambling Act going through Parliament would result in even more investment in the British Horseracing Authority's integrity services.

Bittar's focus as of now is on Cheltenham. Bittar said it is the best racing festival in the world, so you want it to be about the racing, you want it to be about the stories and remarked you want it to be about Britain versus Ireland and everything that comes with that. He also remarked so if we can get through the week, decent weather, people talking about racing and from a welfare perspective it's been a good week, that is the best possible outcome for us.