

TDNA

With LOUIS ROMANET

By Barry Irwin

Addressing the annual meeting of the IFHA (International Federation of Horseracing Authorities) recently in France, the organization's leader Louis Romanet began his remarks about drugs by stating, "Whatever will be the term of my position of Chairman, I can guarantee you that the fight against medication will remain as my absolute priority. We must eradicate it in all graded and black-type races, which are the races that make the breed worldwide."

Well, that certainly grabbed my attention. Mighty bold words, especially considering that the one jurisdiction sticking out like a sore thumb is the United States, which has sputtered in its recent attempts to eradicate Lasix from graded races.

As so many American owners and horsemen have tried and failed in their attempts to wean our stock off the drug, I decided to interview Monsieur Romanet to find out exactly how he planned to accomplish this challenging goal.

Barry Irwin: What authority do you have as chairman of your organization that gives you the clout to be able to do this?

Louis Romanet: I have the authority of talking on behalf of the Federation of 60 members from around the world which have been working together since the first international conference was conducted by my father in 1967. Since I became Chairman 20 years ago, I have been working to harmonize the rules of racing to achieve what



Louis Romanet
Racing Post photo

other sports federations do, but with one big difference: other federations generally organize the big events like world championships. Our federation cannot authorize any big international events because we cannot impose our rules. So we talk to our members in order to establish guidelines. We seek a level playing field, where a positive in one country would be a positive in another country, that the welfare and security of the horse is the absolute priority.

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We clearly have no possibility to enforce these rules, as it is up to each country to follow our guidelines and to implement them nationally. Because of mutual respect and mutual understanding, we have made giant steps in harmonization. We are an executive that represents the principal countries of the world. We show that we are all working to guarantee the integrity of horse racing, to protect the welfare and integrity of the judges and the horses. We want to give confidence to the bettor, because the sport is based on generating huge turnovers, so you have to give confidence to people and protect the image of the sport.

Irwin: Why are you so keen to create uniform rules for medication?

Romanet: It's clear that a sport with medication today is unacceptable in any other sports federation around the world. Why should it not be the case for horses? Medication is strictly controlled around the world. So we discuss the issues in specific countries, because how can you call a horse a world champion that has run on medication? In bicycling, there has been a lot of scandal for the first big use of steroids, at a time when we already had been disqualifying our athletes for this for five years.

So I think it is the objective of the federation to encourage the people to follow our strict guidelines, to protect the integrity worldwide, knowing that there are difficult situations and we do not have the power to impose our rules.

Irwin: So basically what you have is influence. Your position is not unlike that of the United States, where we have several jurisdictions with their own rules. We

have no national body. The Jockey Club is the titular head of racing, but like you, they cannot enforce anything, they can only influence it, which is a situation that has become extremely frustrating to those interested in embracing international medication rules.

Romanet: I am from a country where the racing authority has all the powers. It is totally different in the U.S., but you

have an organization with a leadership position in The Jockey Club, which was a founding member of the international federation with France, England and Ireland. I understand about the racing commission, but you also have some powers of influence like we have and clearly the Breeders' Cup is one, as is The Jockey Club. Fantastic progress was made in the two years after the Big Brown steroid case. We had a big discussion on steroids. There was clear agreement that anabolic steroids have no place in horse racing. I spoke on behalf of everybody when I said they should not be used in or out of competition and everybody agrees. We work with jurisdictions to permit exceptional use with stringent control and a minimum standard period to limit the performance-enhancing effects.

Everybody knows that this cannot be done in a day, especially in a continent like North America, or South America, when there is no control outside of racing. In the States, horses are under control of their own yards or training centers, so Federal rules are needed to address the situation. I don't know, it's not up to me to tell the American jurisdiction what to do.

Irwin: No concrete steps have been taken to rid Lasix from graded races. Is it possible that a threat from you could be used by them to take action in America?

Romanet: That's a very good question. I've been fighting for this since I've been involved in the racing industry. I spent more than 45 years with the racing authority France-Galop and the IFHA. I've always been trying to convince people. I've never been trying to blackmail or put pressure on people because I think when you do that it's impossible if you don't have the concrete power to exclude some countries. It's very difficult to succeed. Just one important point--in 2009, I made a speech at The Jockey Club Round Table exactly for that, for protecting the 4% of the breed's black-type races in America. I explained quite strongly the policy and what we were doing about the testing and screening limits to harmonize detection of substances, especially. The Round Table had the top people in the racing industry and I was really surprised by the positive reception. Should all the people in that room decide to do it, you can achieve it. But we all know what happened when the Breeders' Cup made changes with the rules for use of Lasix.

Irwin: What do you think of recent talk among international racing men about using a symbol to lessen the importance of graded races in sales catalogs?

Romanet: I do not propose personally to put an asterisk on black-types. SITA (Society of International Thoroughbred Auctioneers) are in charge of that. It's hard to do it. I think it's better to have influencing bodies like The Jockey Club, Breeders' Cup, RMTC and ARCI make a decision and have everyone follow their lead. We saw in South America the success of influence. I consider that a lot of progress has been made in the States over the last four years.



Animal Kingdom, 2013 Dubai World Cup. "I think it can only come from the position of leadership, as when you see an American horse going to win the Dubai World Cup, crossing the world to run in the heat and humidity without medication."

Racing Post photo

However we've not yet been successful.

The Breeders' Cup board has been changing its mind and I hope the board members will follow, but I think it can only come from the position of leadership, as when you see an American horse going to win the Dubai World Cup, crossing the world to run in the heat and humidity without medication.

Irwin: In your position as IFHA Chairman, explain your relationship with SITA.

Romanet: I was the original chairman of IRPAC (International Grading and Race Planning Advisory Committee), which is subcommittee of the IFHA. SITA (Society of International Thoroughbred Auctioneers) is represented on IRPAC, which is an advisory group in charge of introducing the principle of regulation of races in Part I, II and III countries. SITA ratified an order that it implemented in (public auction) sales catalogs. But the principle is established by IRPAC. It was IRPAC a few years ago that indicated an international ranking in our world rankings of horses that have run under medication. We studied it and it became a very difficult issue because clearly the consent of medication is different in different states in the United States, the declaration is different in some countries, and we found out that in both North America and South America it was very difficult to have consistent policy. Probably, it will become easier when we are able to eradicate Lasix and steroids in most of the countries. Today the biggest pressure on North America is South America, which is why I welcome this South American conference, where we will have a round table with all the countries. It's very disappointing the Breeders' Cup stepped

down on the Lasix, but we must not say that nothing has happen

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ed in the States, because a lot of issues have been happening. I hope we can find solutions also concerning use of steroids in out of competition. So I think we are making progress.

Irwin: If Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton spearheaded a movement, do you think SITA members would have an appetite to put the American Graded Stakes Committee on notice that unless it changes its policy to award graded status to major U. S. races in which Lasix is used that these fixtures will lose their designations?

Romanet: I would think it would make the world totally different if Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton would support it. It would complicate it. These houses are in competition against each other. Sales companies for many years have been trying to put the house in order so that catalog pages would be uniform throughout the world. It has been a great challenge. I don't understand how the Breeders' Cup can have reversed its decision, it was a logical approach, a positive approach, and with some time they could have delayed with the extension of one year from 2013 to 2014.



**Romanet at the 2013 IFHA Conference:
"If we do not handle the issue properly
we will fail to win the new generation
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racing is full of medication issues."**

Michele MacDonald photo

At the same time they are trying to encourage foreign-trained horses to come over, we now have new big things happening in Europe. This year you have the British Championships and next year the Irish Championships beginning. You will have Ireland, France and England staging the three biggest racing weekends before the Breeders' Cup. The risk is that the foreign horses will no longer go to run there. Clearly over here there is some bad feeling with the quality of the Breeders' Cup and it's very clear that it has been sending very disappointing signals to see the Breeders' Cup reversing its decision. I was ultimately planning not to go to the Breeders' Cup this time, but I came out of this weekend and decided to go out there and talk to the people to exchange views, to see how we could still make steps on the issues because we will all lose from it. Soon there would be fewer Europeans buying horses in the United States, there will be fewer South American stallions under Lasix, and I think everybody will be harmed at the end.

Irwin: Americans, in and out of racing, increasingly have become isolationists and shown a disdain for Europe. They don't want to be told what to do by Europeans. Do you sense this?

Romanet: Well I think so. Everything depends on the attitude of the new generation. I think I am a good example of somebody who has been in too long. When you've been in it for 46 years and your family for 100 years, people can say he's just talking, not achieving. I think we've made a lot of progress, but I think a lot will depend on the thought of the new generation. That's where the big issue is, because I'm absolutely confident that the medication issue is fundamentally a communication issue for the young generation, if we want to attract them to our world.

If we do not handle the issue properly we will fail to win the new generation because we will still have people saying racing is full of medication issues. We only hold a part of the truth, but I think together we must continue the dialogue. I understand what you mean, but when I spoke at the Round Table, I had the impression by the reaction of the people in the room that I wasn't wasting my time.

Irwin: Which entity, if any, has the best chance of finally ridding American Graded races of the stain of drugs?

Romanet: IRPAC and SITA both. IRPAC with SITA around the table draft the recommendations for the black-type book. But to take strong action against one country? That would have to be ratified by both the parties. That is the way we established it 50 years ago.

When I was there, something like 40 years ago we started a principle that the racing authorities, the breeders, and sales companies are represented and should make the decision to harmonize the cataloging page. At that time we had some negative reaction from people who would talk to me about commercial worth. We are talking the same language. We will achieve it now that we have quality control with rankings all around the world. We still are making a lot of progress on medication issues, we have established rankings all over the world and I think that's where it can be done hand in hand with SITA, because SITA will be the one implementing it with a commercial impact on the catalog page.

Tomorrow: Irwin talks to a round table of industry leaders regarding Romanet's pledge to eliminate race day drugs from graded races worldwide, including Jim Gagliano (President and COO of The Jockey Club), Dan Metzger (TOBA CEO), Carl Hamilton (Chairman of The Jockey Club Information Systems) and Matt Iuliano (Executive Director of The Jockey Club).