



 Irish Harness Racing Association CLG, Unit  
18, Brewery Business Park, Ardee Road,  
Dundalk, Louth

 01 5310 365

 [info@irishharnessracing.com](mailto:info@irishharnessracing.com)

 [www.irishharnessracing.com](http://www.irishharnessracing.com)

## **IHRA Members Update 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020**

### ***Welcome***

As we approach, what should be the first summer bank holiday weekend of the year, we find ourselves in a vastly different climate to any previous occasion with the current international pandemic of Covid 19, continuing to pose a threat to our country.

It is an incredibly stressful time for all involved in Harness racing, with all racing suspended and the temporary closure of Portmarnock Raceway for training purposes until further guidance on the current restrictions will be announced. Since our last update on this matter, the 2020 season is suspended until 12<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> May, provided the restrictions are lifted and then, the IHRA will be able to run behind closed doors in Portmarnock.

The race-course committee are currently revising the fixture list and an amended fixture list will be published in the coming fortnight. I would like to reassure at this point, regardless of our season being shortened, the IHRA are committed in fulfilling the prizemoney budget for the 2020 season and are currently looking at increasing the purses of all races, right through the remainder of the fixtures.

For any member who has yet to declare their horses in training, an online form is available for this purpose. Any trainer who has not completed this form is urged to complete it, as, horses must be declared 28 days in advance of racing. Over 250 horses have been declared at this moment and will be cleared to race for the season opener, provided the following second phase is completed, that being, for all license holders to complete the online form for license renewals on the website and to arrange payment as soon as possible as it is our full intention to commence once the restrictions are eased. If the above is not complete prior to the restrictions being lifted, then we will not be able to start racing and this not something which nobody would like.

As you are aware of the structure of the IHRA changed when we moved from the IHRC to the IHRA CLG. This included the decision-making process and the procedure around this. Any changes to our rules and regulations are firstly discussed by our committee structure. Any recommendations made, as a result of these discussions and brought forward to the board for endorsement.

Over the last number of days, we have decided to update all members electronically on all decisions made by the IHRA committee structure and approved by the board since the 2019 season closed in mid-November last. In this update you will be able to read all the remaining recommendations approved by the board, brought forward by the committees.

To conclude, we hope that all of you are safe and healthy currently and we look forward to meeting you soon at a race meeting whether it be in Dublin, Armagh or Cork.

### ***IHRA Board of Directors:***

The IHRA board of directors meet on a monthly basis to oversee the management of the company and approve any recommendations made by the committees at meetings held prior to the board meeting itself. The board has met on four occasions since racing ceased in November and next scheduled meeting is for May 2020.

The IHRA board of Directors are Mark Flanagan (Chair), James O Sullivan, James Levis, Kevin Corey, Clive Richardson, Finbar Quill, George Mc Cullough, Paul Corrigan. The minutes of these meetings are taken by our company secretary "O'Gorham & Hughes".

### ***IHRA Committee Members & Structure:***

Stakeholders, Breeding, Racecourse & Integrity are the four committees which make up the structure of the organisation below board level. They meet on a regular basis and any issues brought to the attention of committee members from grassroots members are discussed. They make recommendations, arising from these discussions, to the board for approval.

The Integrity committee meets independently to the other committees and is responsible for the health and welfare of the horse, the upholding of our rules, appeals and hearings. You will receive an update from the integrity in the coming week, independently of this update, to bring all members up to date with their proceedings.

The following is the current members of the committee's:

**Stakeholders:** Donal Murphy, Patrick Hill, Noel Cowden, Simon Duggan, Jonathan Nixon, William Flanagan, Patrick Kane, Sean Kane, Billy Roche, Finbar Quill, James Levis

**Racecourse:** Mark Flanagan, Kevin Corey, Micheal Duggan, Sean Duggan, Jeremiah O Mahony, Connie O Sullivan, David Sheehy, Ivan Swindle, Jonathan Nixon

**Breeding:** James O Sullivan, David Sheehy, TJ O'Farrell, Micheal Duggan, David Sheehy, Mark Flanagan, James Levis

**Integrity:** James O Sullivan (IHRA), Peter Clarke (IHRA), James Levis (IHRA), Peadar O Scanail (Independent), Marcus Swail (Independent), Val Good (Independent), Liam Delaney (Independent).

Since November, the committees have met on eight occasions, prior to the virus these meetings would usually take place in Portlaoise but since the restrictions have been in place, meetings have convened via conference call. We would like to sincerely thank all the members who take the time out of their schedules to meet and discuss issues, to better the sport and ultimately make recommendations to the Board of directors for approval.

### ***IHRA Office:***

As you may be aware, the IHRA office has recently moved locations in Dundalk. The new office address is Unit 18, Brewery Business Park, Ardee Road, Dundalk, Co Louth. Donna Baldwin, IHRA office secretary is now working from home due to the restrictions and the phone lines are open from 10am to 11.30am, Monday to Friday. All post and emails are checked and opened daily. All postal correspondence should be sent to this address or any emails to [info@irishharnessracing.com](mailto:info@irishharnessracing.com)

***Recommendations by the committees and approved by the board are as follows:***

### **1. Streaming of Races:**

The aim of this recommendation is to stream all our race meetings to a dedicated racing channel, where the account holder can watch the races in real time or watch them later by selecting the archive option. This streaming of races will consist of a minimum of two cameras on all tracks, microphones to pick up the sounds during a race and a full race number tracking system during the actual race, like other international racing videos. Account holders will need to subscribe to this service and the project itself, is well and truly underway as the tender process is now complete. A separate full update will be sent to members in the coming week with full details of this project.

### **2. Restricted Warm-Ups:**

After careful consideration from both veterinarian advice and observations from international bodies there will be a permanent restriction on warmups as of the start of the 2020 racing season. No horse will be allowed to warm up until 20mins before the post time of the race. There will be a 25-minute interval between races and should there be any delay caused, the times of any remaining races will be altered accordingly. A countdown timer will be used to guide connections on the starting time of the next race. This will allow more adequate time for the integrity committee to carry out pre integrity tests on any horse competing on the day.

### **3. Format change to Heat & Final Structure in Open Handicap:**

Throughout 2019 many stakeholders and public attendees were critical of the heat and final structure being used and that many connections were manoeuvring their horses to set them up on the gate in the weeks leading up to the event. Therefore, taking the best foot forward for our sport, the following was agreed for the 2020 season:

Any race meeting which previously had a handicap heat and final in 2019 will be replaced with the revised system.

- a) The top 16 horses entered (pacers and trotters) will be divided into two elimination races.
- b) The elimination races and the top graded final will be run for the largest purse on offer at the meeting.
- c) 1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> will qualify for the top graded final.
- d) The remaining horses entered will be divided into straight, tired races, with larger purses for higher grades and lower purses for lower grades.
- e) The grade F race in both codes will be the lowest graded race and its purse will be the lowest on the card but in line with premium meeting's prizemoney.
- f) The division of horses into the specific races, who are on similar grades will be split, based on the winnings of their last five starts.
- g) All races will be run as FFA's.

### **4. Trainers Declarations & the 28 Day Rule:**

Introduced last year, the trainer's declaration form is again active for all trainers to complete as their primary step in the process of registering their horses. This year the IHRA are enforcing the 28-day rule with trainer declarations, which will see no horse cleared to race unless they have been declared in training for this minimum period. Trainers are reminded that once the form is completed, there is no need to redeclare your horses each month, however, you are reminded that it is your responsibility when a horse joins your training yard or leaves your care that you inform the office of this change.

**5. Amateur Driver Nomination:**

The committee's put forward Timmy O Leary and Nigel Quigley (reserve) as the Irish Nomination for the Amateur Race in Vincennes in January 2019.

**6. UET Championship Nominations:**

The committees' put forward both Oisín Quill & John Richardson to be the IHRA's nominations for the 2020 UET Apprentice Championship in Finland and European Driver's Championship in Belgium, respectively. Both competitions are due to take place in the Autumn.

**7. Awards Criteria:**

All members received a separate update on this matter earlier this week.

**8. Handicap Review:**

All members received a separate update on this matter earlier this week.

**9. Travel Sickness Payment in Future Trotteur Francais Sales:**

This payment is aimed at providing our own travel insurance for TF horses coming in, in the future. The current sale price of aged TF horses is €3800 (inclusive of the stake) and this price will increase by €200 to €4000. This additional €200 will act as an insurance pot of money for any horses that is no longer fit for racing due to travel sickness. Should any claims be made within 72 hours, along with a vet's certificate stating that the new horse fits this criterion, then the following payments will be made; mares will receive 50% & geldings will receive 75%. In any case the new owners will keep the horse and in the unlikely event of two or more claims, this additional insurance purse will be split evenly. Should there be no claims, the additional €200 will be credited to your account and returned. In other words, the new owners of these TF horses are self-insuring the transportation. In all future sales, a contract will be signed by the new owners indemnifying both the IHRA & LeTrot, who are currently only facilitating these sales.

**10. Random Draw:**

In 2020, the framing of races will continue live on Facebook, however an electronic draw system will be used for all races. The timing of information (graded entries, framed race-cards etc.) will be more precise throughout the season. With regards to all major race meetings, all framing and draws will be made live on Facebook like previous years.

**11. Stud-book Grants 2020:**

The IHRA was successful yet again on three of the nine applications made to the Equine Support Scheme 2020 programme.

In 2019, the IHRA's integrity budget was put under pressure with a total spend of €25,000. Taking this into consideration, the IHRA sought further funding with respect to this, through the above-mentioned scheme. We are delighted to inform you that the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine will contribute 50% of this year's integrity budget, which is now set at €55,000 and we would like to thank DAFM for this financial input. To claim this full amount from DAFM, the IHRA will need to spend their share of the budget before receiving

this. To achieve this, the decision has been taken to increase the entry fee by five euro. This levy will go directly towards the financing of integrity matters. As part of the application, the integrity committee intends to send all post test samples to LCH in Paris for the forthcoming year. To be more specific, this budget will allow the integrity arm of the association to carry out approximately 400 pre samples & 100 post samples, which will include out of competition testing.

The second successful project was for a new website. Work has started on this and we are hopeful that in the next month we will have it up and running.

Finally, we received our annual funding for the RDS Horse show but as we now know this event has been cancelled due to the current situation.

### **12. All Ireland Series:**

The following changes were made to this series for 2020.

- a) The series will run throughout the 2020 season
- b) Series open to all grades from F+
- c) All races ran as FFA
- d) A Minimum of 10 horses must be entered for both series to be viable
- e) All heats and finals will be run as FFA and ballot for position.
- f) Horses may be split for same owner/trainer, by open ballot, should there be two heats on any given race day
- g) Horses will be split into heats by open ballot
- h) The points system will be as follows: (1<sup>st</sup>:16pts, 2<sup>nd</sup>:8pts, 3<sup>rd</sup>:4 pts, 4<sup>th</sup>:2 pts & 5<sup>th</sup>: 1 pt)
- i) The top 50% of entries will be placed in the Gold Final and the remainder in the Silver Final

The dates of these heats for this series, will be sent to all members following the revised fixture list been approved.

### **13. Apprentice Championship:**

The 2020 apprentice championship will run throughout the year and the winning driver will be nominated as the IHRA's nomination for the following years apprentice championship. The points system for the championship will be: 1<sup>st</sup>:16pts, 2<sup>nd</sup>:8pts, 3<sup>rd</sup>:4 pts, 4<sup>th</sup>:2 pts & 5<sup>th</sup>: 1 pt. The apprentice series to run across the entire season, 1-2 races per month and advertise on the calendar. The winner of this award will be the IHRA's nomination for the UET's Apprentice Championship the following year.

### **14. Breeding Initiatives:**

The IHRA Breeding Committee has completed a five-year strategic breeding programme for Irish Trotteur Francais mares and their future progeny. The initiatives will be come into effect immediately and the IHRA are greatly appreciative of the financial contributions made by Le Trot in this respective. The schemes will be reviewed in early 2024. The full update has been sent to members and is available to view on the website.

### **15. Covid-19 Contingency Plan:**

Once restrictions are lifted, the IHRA board and committees are fully committed to commencing the 2020 season as quickly as possible. Racing will take place at Portmarnock only and these meetings will be run “behind closed doors” until restrictions allow the industry to move into our other regions. The fixture list will be amended accordingly. Strict protocols will be enforced, and a draft has been sent to the Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine and the local superintendent for their approval. Once fully approved all members will be updated.

### **16. Development Levy:**

In 2019 the total prizemoney was €670,000 and in 2020 it is projected to be €930,000. A 7.5% levy on all prizemoney will be deducted from all purses in 2020 to create a fund for the development of the sport in all regions. The fund will be used to aid any infrastructural developments or other projects, to help grow the sport to its full potential, by each region going forward.

This levy in numbers will see a fund of €69,750 approximately being created and the net prizemoney received by owners and trainers will be €860,250 in 2020. By taking this levy into account, the IHRA net prizemoney will still be increased by 28.5% on last year and will total increase of €190,250. The levy will be taken out of all gross purses and only the net purses will be advertised on race cards, which literally means that the prizemoney advertised will be prizemoney each owner or trainer will receive.

### **17. Portmarnock Raceway Closure:**

Adhering to the current restrictions and upon seeking clarification from the local superintendent, the use of Portmarnock raceway for training is not seen as essential travel for anyone who is not currently located at the track. The local gardai will be observing Portmarnock Raceway until the current restrictions are lifted and advice all our members to abide by them for the health and wellbeing of all persons.