

Legal counsel to equestrians from equestrians



Leone Equestrian Law LLC

Q&A: Does Working for Your Horse's Board Make You a Professional?



Question: I received notice that someone filed a U.S. Equestrian protest questioning my amateur status after they learned that I regularly hack horses for my trainer and help out around the barn in order to offset the cost of board for my horse. I've never received direct financial compensation for my work, and, skill-level wise, I'm very much an amateur rider, currently competing in the Low Adult Jumpers! I'm not at fault, correct?

Answer: You are not alone in your questioning of what disqualifies someone as an amateur in U.S. Equestrian competition; it can be a little bit of a gray area – particularly in situations like your own. Each situation is fact specific.

Unfortunately, I have to be the bearer of bad news. By receiving free or discounted board for your horse in exchange for hacking or exercising horses for your trainer or others, you are likely disqualifying yourself as an amateur.

When you appear to be paid for riding, training, and selling horses, you put your amateur status at risk.

Within the U.S. Equestrian rule book, rule GR1306 (a.k.a. "the amateur rule") defines the term "remuneration" as "compensation or payment in any form such as cash, goods, sponsorships, discounts or services; reimbursement of any expenses; trade or in-kind exchange of goods or services such as board or training."

You'll see board is specifically listed as a form of remuneration.

But wait! If you read a little further, you'll also see the following:

"3. Permitted activities by Amateur. An Amateur is permitted to do the following:

h. Accept remuneration for providing service in one's capacity as a: clinic manager or organizer (so long as they are not performing the activities of instructor or trainer), presenter or panelist at a Federation licensed officials' clinic, competition manager, competition secretary, judge, steward, technical delegate, course designer, announcer, TV commentator, veterinarian, groom, farrier, tack shop operator, breeder, or boarder, or horse transporter."

So now you might be thinking that you're fine, right? Maybe you're thinking that most of what you do around the barn would fall into the same category as work done by a groom, so it's not a conflict – and you would be correct. However, there is one part of what you explained that could be a potential problem: hacking horses. If you are just exercising horses and not training them, the hacking could be considered part of your grooming services. However, if you start training other people's horses for your trainer or giving lessons, you will likely run afoul of the amateur rule.

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Led by Armand Leone, Jr., MD, JD, MBA, Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals ranging from riders and trainers to owners and show managers in the FEI disciplines on a wide variety of issues.

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