



Between Rounds With **ARMAND LEONE JR.**

A CASE FOR MAKING STEWARDS CLEARLY IDENTIFIABLE

Our columnist believes this quick fix to enhance safety is a no-brainer.

At the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association's Annual Meeting in December, members discussed the idea of requiring stewards to wear a form of identification at competitions. Unfortunately, this has been tabled for further discussion and potential clarification. It should have been passed.

Although stewards have a critical role in ensuring fair play at competitions, they are also responsible for something far greater: preventing and intervening when abuse of a horse or rider occurs at a competition.

Stewards need to be readily identifiable so they can be found quickly when needed for emergency medical and veterinary situations but, equally important, for incidents of horse and competitor abuse that must be addressed in the moment. Unlike a competition rule violation, where a remedy can be determined after the event, abuse to a horse or rider cannot be reversed. Any mistreatment or wrongdoing, especially related to a minor or equine athlete, should be considered an emergency and therefore requires immediate intervention. Time is of the essence, and people need to find stewards quickly.

Just as police officers are tasked with upholding the law, the same can be said for stewards whose job it is to ensure the safety of horses and riders. The responsibility to alert a steward about an emergency situation is not limited to the show's exhibitors. While competitors are aware that stewards are present, members of the public

should also be able to easily identify a steward, which may require these individuals to wear badges or other means of identification.

Scenarios requiring immediate intervention are rare but easily recognizable. An example includes a trainer berating a junior rider in front of others in a schooling ring. This is a form of psychological abuse and is subject to the SafeSport code. A steward's intervention can prevent ongoing harm and may even prevent a situation from rising to an increased level of harm, which would be beneficial to all involved. Another example could involve an illegal administration of an injectable medication to a horse, requiring immediate action by a steward to find and preserve evidence. While these kinds of situations are rare, an alert system needs to be in place if they occur. Stewards serve as that alert system.

Ensuring that stewards are able to intervene in and report instances of wrongdoing is also in the best interest of the stewards. For example, if a steward failed to act on a report of athlete abuse, that steward would be liable as a member of the U.S. Equestrian Federation under the SafeSport code. If a steward failed to act on a report of horse abuse, that steward would be held accountable under the USEF rules in a hearing.

Stewards also provide assurance to the public that there are appropriate officials monitoring the health and welfare of the horses and athletes. The judges are often in the jury box, and other officials are in the competition

ring. However, it's not obvious to the public that there are people monitoring the competition outside of those areas. Easily identifiable stewards would help the public know that we take the protection of our horses and athletes seriously.

Interestingly, in Fédération Equestre Internationale competitions, disciplines such as eventing and dressage ensure their stewards are clearly identifiable via designated uniform or armbands. It might behoove our community to create a similar standard for visible identification of stewards across all USEF-governed disciplines on a national level. Doing so might better articulate the role of a steward to both exhibitors and the public.

Our equestrian sport federations and associations are continually seeking new ways to make the safety and welfare of horses and riders the highest priority. Being easily identifiable helps ensure these officials, who protect both human and equine exhibitors from wrongdoing, can do their job to the best of their ability. Being easily identified as a steward is the first step to quick intervention of any abuse-related harm. In my opinion, there are only benefits to making this change, and I hope it's approved in the near future. 🗳️

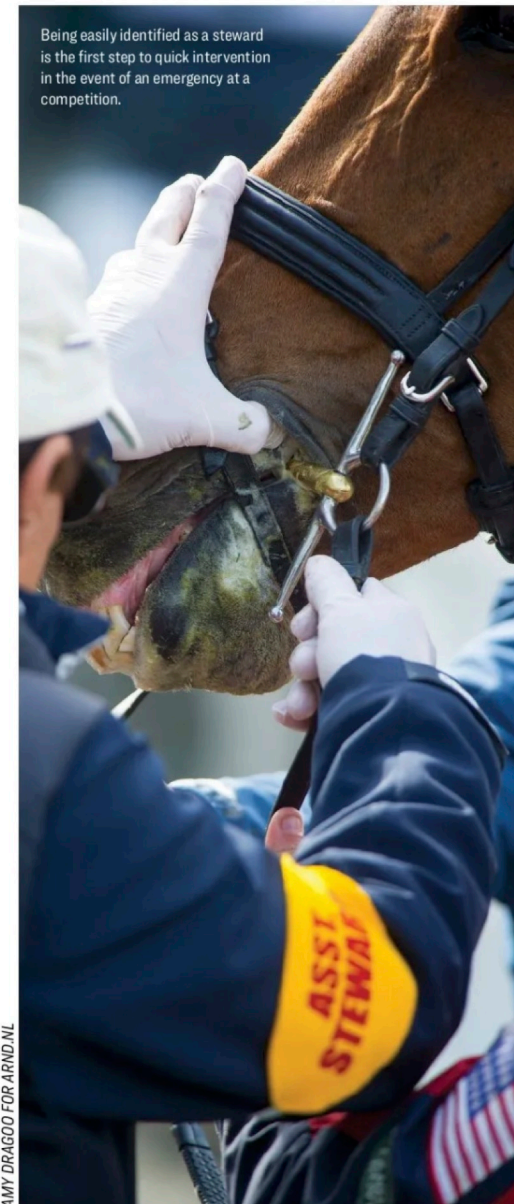
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Armand Leone of Leone Equestrian Law LLC is a business professional with expertise in health care, equestrian sports and law. An equestrian athlete dedicated to fair play, safe sport and clean competition, Leone served as a director on the board of the U.S. Equestrian Federation and was USEF vice president of international high performance programs for many years. He served on the USEF and U.S. Hunter Jumper Association special task forces on governance, safety, drugs and medications, trainer certification, and coach selection.

Leone is co-owner at his family's Ri-Arm Farm in Oakland, New Jersey, where he still rides and trains. He competed in FEI World Cup Finals and Nations Cups. He is a graduate of the Columbia Business School in New York and the Columbia School of Law. He received his M.D. from New York Medical College and his B.A. from the University of Virginia.

Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals. For more information, visit equestriancounsel.com or follow them on Facebook at facebook.com/leoneequestrianlaw.

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