



The Steward's Corner: Interference Rules & Protocols; **Consistency in Interference Decisions**

Most jurisdictions have adopted the Association of Racing Commissioners International (ARCI) Model Rule for the running of the race during flat racing.

ARCI Model Rule 010-035 Running of the Race

E. Post to Finish

(2) Interference, Jostling or Striking

(a) A jockey shall not ride carelessly or willfully so as to permit his/her mount to interfere with, impede or intimidate any other horse in the race.

(b) No jockey shall carelessly or willfully jostle, strike or touch another jockey or another jockey's horse or equipment.

(c) No jockey shall unnecessarily cause his/her horse to shorten its stride so as to give the appearance of having suffered a foul.

(3) Maintaining a Straight Course

(a) When the way is clear in a race, a horse may be ridden to any part of the course, but if any horse swerves, or is ridden to either side, so as to interfere with, impede or intimidate any other horse, it is a foul.

(b) The offending horse may be disqualified, if in the opinion of the stewards, the foul altered the finish of the race, regardless of whether the foul was accidental, willful or the result of careless riding.

(c) If the stewards determine the foul was intentional, or due to careless riding, the jockey may be held responsible.

(d) In a straightaway race, every horse must maintain position as nearly as possible in the lane in which it starts. If a horse is ridden, drifts or swerves out of its lane in such a manner that it interferes with, impedes or intimidates another horse, it is a foul and may result in the disqualification of the offending horse.

(4) Disqualification

(a) When the stewards determine that a horse shall be disqualified for interference, they may place the offending horse behind such horses as in their judgment it interfered with, or they may place it last.

(b) If a horse is disqualified for a foul, any horse or horses in the same race owned or trained by the same interests, whether coupled or uncoupled may also be disqualified.

The key is determining if, as noted in (3)(b) above, the foul altered the finish or outcome of the race. As experienced stewards know, this can be a difficult decision to make, as each incident can have variable factors to consider. These factors include contact, intimidation, altered course, checked, pulled up, clipped heels, no room, no opening, blocked, herded, forced wide, in tight, accelerating, decelerating, continued to ride, race riding, and other terms commonly used by stewards to explain their decision-making process. Being consistent can be difficult, as the factors involved in making the decision to disqualify or not are rarely the same.

Stewards, however, must try to be as consistent as possible. Being uniform in how they arrive at their decisions will improve consistency. Hanging the inquiry sign as soon as the stewards know they have an incident that requires review is the first step. The jockeys, horsemen and fans want to know that you are looking even if a disqualification may not be warranted. Race replay videos should be reviewed from all possible angles. Jockeys, patrol judges, starter, and outriders should be talked to whenever pertinent. Claims of foul by jockeys and trainers obviously require the same scrutiny.

A written record, known as a Steward's Report, is kept for each race day and includes information regarding the stewards' decisions on all inquiries, objections and whether or not there was a disqualification. Such records help with consistency and include a reference to the applicable rules and an explanation as to why the stewards made their decision. Copies of these reports can be requested from the Stewards and can also be found in the racing office and the jockeys' room (and are soon to be posted to the Commission's website) to help jockeys, horsemen and fans better understand the decision-making process.

In an effort to continue the emphasis on transparency and education, race officials require jockeys with a race day violation to review the race replay video prior to the next race day to help the jockeys recognize all of the factors involved in the assessment of a potential penalty. This also gives the jockeys an opportunity to disagree and often offer constructive comments. Owners and trainers are given the same opportunity to review the race replay videos with the stewards. Offering such transparency will hopefully allow horsemen to understand and appreciate all the factors involved in making these difficult decisions. In addition, stewards recognize that they may not always be correct, and routine race replay review helps them be more effective and consistent.

Simulcasting, whereby a racing fan might see decisions on interference made by stewards at five or more tracks in a given day, will show the inconsistency between boards of stewards across jurisdictions. To try to be more consistent across the country, stewards should avail themselves of the opportunity to watch races and race replays from other tracks, especially incidents of interference and disqualifications. In addition, all can access race replays on the ROAP website. Just click: <https://www.horseracingofficials.com/live-races-and-replays>