



**UNITED STATES EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION**  
THE NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY FOR EQUESTRIAN SPORT

19 December 2012

Mr. Walt Bogdanich  
The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue  
New York, NY 10018

Dear Mr. Bogdanich:

It seems clear from your inquiries to the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) that the Mandarino case will figure prominently in your forthcoming article. While I understand that you have spoken to many people about this case, I am providing you the USEF's views on the case and on the larger questions it raises about our sport. I fully expect that the Federation's views will be accurately reflected in your article.

The Mandarino case has been one of the most challenging situations the USEF has had to face during my tenure as CEO. It has elevated the issue of horse welfare and protection in an emotional and highly-charged way, and has presented the Federation with a unique set of difficulties resulting from the Mandarinos' refusal to fully disclose all of the information sought in connection with their 9-year-old hunter pony, Humble, which died on May 26, 2012.

Following the filing of a formal protest against Ms. Mandarino by a USEF member, and after being contacted by the Pennsylvania State Police about possible criminal violations, the Federation initiated an investigation while working in cooperation with the Pennsylvania State Police. The USEF's general counsel and the chief administrator of the Federation's Drugs and Medication Department met with police investigators on several occasions. They also discussed the case with pathologists and other experts seeking input on possible causes of the pony's death. Pending the outcome of the investigation and a formal hearing on the protest in the matter, I imposed a temporary suspension against Ms. Mandarino.

The USEF has neither the power to subpoena documents nor to compel witness testimony during our investigations. We must rely on the voluntary cooperation of our members, owners, trainers and riders. In the Mandarino case, we made several requests for information and documentation, including the full list of all substances given to the pony in the week before its death and a full copy of the results from the necropsy done on the pony. Through their attorney, the Mandarinos refused to fully provide the information requested and even challenged the USEF's right to make the request. Ms. Mandarino neither appeared at the hearing before the USEF Hearing Committee on the matter nor requested a continuance to a date when she could appear. During the approximate 60-day period that Ms. Mandarino was



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suspended from USEF competitions, our investigation did not reveal any rule violations that justified the continuance of the temporary suspension or a charge against Ms. Mandarino.

It is clear that the Mandarino case has highlighted significant limitations in the USEF's rules and procedures governing our investigative powers. The Federation has begun a detailed review of the case and will, in close consultation with our stakeholders, make the appropriate changes so the Federation does not find its hands tied in the future when a matter of animal welfare like this presents itself.

However, the Mandarino case is not just about the investigatory limitations the Federation faced. Allegations that a "calming" agent might have contributed to the pony's death have triggered a broader and more urgent conversation among our members about whether our sport has developed a culture in which horses are doped to calm them for competitive advantage. The Federation has taken this issue and the threat it poses to the welfare of our equine partners very seriously as demonstrated by the following actions:

- In early 2012, following extensive research and product testing by officials with the USEF's Equine Drugs and Medications Program (D&M), the Federation determined that the use of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) posed an unacceptable risk to horses and ponies.
- On February 22, 2012, the USEF issued a press release notifying all riders, owners, veterinarians, coaches and trainers that the use of GABA as a "calming supplement" violated "the spirit and intent of the Equine Drugs and Medications Rule" and, as a result was "considered a forbidden substance under USEF rules" effective immediately.
- The press release also indicated that D&M was "actively pursuing" the detection of GABA and that persons responsible as defined by USEF's rules could be subject to "fines and/or suspensions in the event of a positive finding." (The full USEF press release can be found here: [http://www.usefnetwork.com/news/8098/2012/2/22/important\\_information\\_regarding\\_the.aspx](http://www.usefnetwork.com/news/8098/2012/2/22/important_information_regarding_the.aspx))
- Subsequently, D&M developed a scientifically valid test protocol to detect the presence of GABA in horses and ponies.
- In early March 2012, two horses competing in a WEF 8 Horse Show tested positive for the presence of GABA. Following hearings conducted last month by the USEF Hearing Committee, the persons responsible for the care, custody, and control of these horses have now been suspended from competition and fined in accordance with USEF rules. These are the first two cases of GABA use adjudicated by the USEF. Other cases of alleged GABA use are currently pending before the USEF Hearing Committee.
- On July 24, 2012 GABA was added to the FEI's Equine Prohibited Substances List.



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As the USEF continues to learn more about the surreptitious use of GABA from ongoing hearings and discussions with veterinarians, judges, trainers and owners, the Federation is committed to dealing with this emerging issue aggressively through a range of actions, including:

- Convening a taskforce meeting on February 12, 2013 to specifically address the use of calming agents and the full and prompt reporting of such use to the USEF.
- Increasing the duration of suspensions and fine amounts imposed for the use of GABA.
- Launching an inquiry into any USEF-affiliated individuals connected to the production, distribution or sale of products containing GABA.
- Expanding the hotline into the USEF's Drugs and Medication Department to accept confidential information on potential doping violations at USEF competitions.

The USEF will continue to look for ways to strengthen its existing drug testing and enforcement programs, and to enhance its education programs so veterinarians, trainers, owners and riders know the rules and are encouraged to report violations.

The USEF is a member-based organization that, to a very large extent, polices itself and has done so with great success for decades. In the wake of a handful of high-profile doping cases, we demonstrated a willingness to enhance our testing protocols and strengthen our monitoring mechanisms, including the creation, with the FEI, of a banned substance list. Likewise, when the sport was confronted with a spate of rider and horse injuries and deaths in eventing, we came together to make changes to course design and competition rules. There is no question in my mind that we will come together in a similar manner to address the issue of calming agents.

The overwhelming majority of the USEF's 84,000 members compete honestly and fairly, and they take great care of their equine partners. They are the true heart and soul of the United States Equestrian Federation and represent the best our sport has to offer.

Sincerely,

John Long  
Chief Executive Officer  
United States Equestrian Federation



Member, U.S. Olympic Committee