

Warmblood *Who's*

By Summer Stoffel

Fight for Your Right to Sport Your Integrity

When I was asked to be the new writer for this column, I felt both honored and excited to be writing alongside Boyd Martin and Michael Barisone. Because I have been working behind the scenes for the last few years to effect change in the hunter/jumper industry, I will be able to share new insights about the growth and development in our sport.

I started with horses as a child when, at the age of six, I had a serious accident and my parents told me I had to take lessons if I wanted to continue riding. The nearest stable was a hunter/jumper barn and thus began my love for the discipline. Over the years, I've had the privilege of watching young horses we've bred compete in international classes and I enjoy working with many different national and international breed organizations, including foreign federations. This has given me a unique perspective on our sport and breeding here at home. Without a doubt, there are many highly competitive horses being bred and developed right here in North America—often more than professional riders and trainers realize.

Right now, strong winds of change are blowing in our industry. Competitors grew tired of feeling their sport was full of cheating and fraud. North American breeders grew tired of their horses becoming “lost in the system,” leaving breeders and owners unable to track their horses' progress in sport. Together, they found their voices and created a movement.

This movement gained strong traction in 2015 with the passage of microchipping and age verification rules by the United States Hunter Jumper Association. It was widely acknowledged at the 2015 USHJA Annual Meeting that these rules would usher in a new era of transparency at the association. Horses' identities could no longer be fraudulently changed to circumvent eligibility rules or support nefarious sale transactions. Many horses bred in North America could no longer be re-labeled as imports in an effort to bring higher sale prices. Clearly, positive identification brings numerous benefits and fosters an environment to accurately track horses that are being produced and developed here in North America. But that was just the beginning.

In December 2016, the tides changed in USHJA governance and the Sport Integrity campaign was launched at that year's annual meeting. One month later on January 17, 2017, Mary Babick, the new president of the USHJA, set social media on fire with her call for members to join her on the mission to bring order, transparency and a focus on the horse's welfare back to the sport.

These were not empty words. A plan had already been put in action. Behind the scenes a strategy had been formed

to break down this seemingly daunting task into three separate initiatives:

- *Launching the USHJA Sport Integrity Task Force*
- *Working with the USEF to answer sport integrity questions*
- *Preparing to launch an educational campaign*

Even though these initiatives were launched only six months ago in January, we can already see results. The Sport Integrity Task Force was formed and divided into groups tasked with researching the four main areas crucial to improving and maintaining integrity within our sport: judging, stewards, trainers and owners/parents. In the current issue of *In Stride* magazine, the USHJA publication, Mary Babick explains in detail the work and findings of the task force.

This is not a closed-door discussion. In the spirit of transparency, anyone can access further information, education and updates on the Sport Integrity initiative online at www.ushja.org/sportintegrity.

We are at the precipice of a momentous era in our discipline; we are the voice of change. Leadership in our sport has listened and taken decisive action to make an investment in our future. They are working hand in hand with the riders, owners, trainers, breeders, show management, officials and the public to generate interest and preserve the integrity of our sport. Competition managers and investors are working tirelessly to erect the physical structures across the country to provide new and exciting facilities in which to develop our horses. Committee members are passionately creating new and better programs for young horse development. Breed organizations are adapting their registration policies to support this movement and ensure that every horse can be easily identified and found.

Every facet of our industry has been empowered by two common, intertwined goals: growth and integrity. Join with us to help continue all this positive change and “sport your integrity!” 

About the author: Summer Stoffel is the CEO and founder of Equicore, an IT company specializing in the development of data platforms and solutions for the equine industry. As the owner of Silver Creek International, she breeds Warmbloods that are competing both nationally and internationally. She also works with the breed registries, national equestrian federations, the World Breeding Federation of Sport Horses and the World Horse Identification and Recording Data Exchange Commission, as well as serving on the USEF Horse Identification Task Force Committee.

