17 September 2025

**DECISION**

**HARNESS RACING VICTORIA**

**and**

**JUSTIN CAMPBELL**

**Date of Hearing:** 16 September 2025

**Date of Decision:** 16 September 2025

**Panel:** Magistrate Peter Reardon (Chairperson), Dr June Smith and Mr Des Gleeson.

**Appearances:** Mr Andrew Cusumano appeared on behalf of the Stewards.

Mr Justin Campbell represented himself.

**Charge:** Australian Harness Racing Rule (“AHRR”) 216 states:

A person whether alone or in association with others shall not fraudulently or improperly nominate or start a horse in a race.

**Particulars of charge:** 1. You were, at all relevant times, a licensed trainer and driver with HRV and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules;

2. You were, at all relevant times, the licensed trainer of the horse “Really Really” (the Horse);

3. On 20 January 2025, you nominated the Horse to race in the ‘Happy Birthday Liz 0-2 LTW Pace’ at the Geelong harness racing meeting scheduled for 24 January 2025 (the Race), before scratching the Horse from the Race after the field for it had been released on 21 January 2025;

4. You fraudulently or improperly nominated the Horse for the Race, given that:

a. you nominated the Horse knowing that it would not compete in the Race, after the Horse was diagnosed with an injury on 13 January 2025; and

b. you did so for the purpose of increasing the number of nominations for the Race so that the Race would proceed.

**Plea:** Guilty

**DECISION**

1. Mr Justin Campbell was, at all relevant times, a licensed trainer and driver with Harness Racing Victoria (“HRV”) and a person bound by the Australian Harness Racing Rules (“AHRR”).
2. On 20 January 2025, Mr Campbell was the licensed trainer of “Really Really”, a horse that he nominated to race at the Geelong harness race meeting scheduled to run on 24 January 2025. Mr Campbell subsequently scratched the horse after the field for that race had been released on 21 January 2025.
3. In accordance with the HRV guidelines, a race may only proceed as scheduled if there are more than five acceptors. If there are five or fewer, the decision to proceed is at the discretion of the racing office.
4. Mr Campbell nominated the horse knowing that it would not start as it was injured. Mr Campbell nominated the horse with the purpose of increasing the nominations for the race so that the race would have sufficient numbers to proceed.
5. HRV Stewards have charged Mr Campbell pursuant to AHRR 216. He has pleaded guilty to that charge.
6. On 13 January 2025, Mr Campbell presented Really Really to the Ballarat Veterinary Practice Equine Clinic as it had an injury to its front leg. The horse was assessed by veterinarian, Dr Joel Hummel. After an ultrasound examination was conducted and radiographs were obtained, the horse was diagnosed as having suspensory ligament desmitis of the medial and lateral branch of the left front suspensory ligament and sesamoiditis of the left front medial proximal sesamoid bone. Dr Hummel advised Mr Campbell that any work with Really Really had to stop and Mr Campbell was provided with treatment options.
7. The options included a number of therapy treatments with long rest periods with limited chances of success. The other option was retirement from racing with Really Really to be entered into an off-track program.
8. Mr Campbell ultimately decided to retire Really Really and not train the horse anymore.
9. On 20 January 2025, Mr Campbell accessed the harness web system and lodged a nomination for the horse, “Really Smartie” to compete in the Happy Birthday Liz 0-2 LTW Pace at Geelong scheduled for 24 January 2025.
10. The event only received two nominations prior to the deadline of 12.00pm. The nomination deadline was extended to 7.30am on 21 January 2025.
11. On the evening of 20 January 2025 at approximately 7.30pm, Mr Campbell nominated Really Really and “Really Regal” to compete in the Happy Birthday Liz 0-2 LTW Pace, being the same race that Really Smartie had been nominated for.
12. On 21 January 2025, at approximately 11.30am, the field and barrier draw was finalised and released for the Happy Birthday Liz 0-2 LTW Pace. This was confirmed as Race 6.
13. On the afternoon of 21 January 2025, Mr Campbell accessed the harness web system and scratched Really Really from Race 6 at Geelong on 24 January 2025. The Stewards commenced an investigation and the following day on 22 January 2025, they attended the location of his stables in Cobblebank, Victoria.
14. Really Really was located in a yard at the stables and did not have any racing shoes on. Mr Campbell stated that was because he did not put shoes on until close to the actual race.
15. Mr Campbell advised the Stewards that he had scratched Really Really from the race due to a leg injury to the near side foreleg and that the horse had been scanned the previous week which confirmed this injury.
16. Stewards noticed that both Really Smartie and Really Regal were in the yard and had racing shoes on. Mr Campbell produced the results of the veterinary report regarding the examination of Really Really conducted on 13 January 2025.
17. During the interview with Stewards, Mr Campbell admitted that he did the wrong thing by fraudulently or improperly nominating Really Really for the Geelong meeting. He gave the following reasons:
18. Trying to earn some money with the harness horses;
19. Nominated for races a fortnight ago and the meeting was cancelled;
20. Really Regal was an emergency the race prior and was balloted out the week before that;
21. He had fit horses for two months and only had two starts;
22. Nominated Really Really to keep the race going and earn some money because things had not been going too well lately with everything;
23. He had done it this time and got caught but knew of thousands of times where people have done it. He confirmed that he intended to retire Really Really and not put the horse back into work.
24. Ultimately, the race proceeded a scheduled at Geelong with six runners. Regal Smartie finished first and Really Regal tired badly, ultimately finishing well beaten into sixth and last place.
25. This type of breach is serious as it was never Mr Campbell’s intention to race the horse because it was injured. It was a ruse because Mr Campbell was hoping, by entering Really Really, that the race would have sufficient numbers to proceed as scheduled.
26. This type of offence strikes at the integrity of harness racing. HRV desire to maintain an honest and transparent industry. General and specific deterrence are both relevant in this type of case. It is important to deter people trying to illegally influence the conduct of racing in Victoria.
27. Mr Campbell states he was in financial difficulty and relies on the fact he has been in the industry for over 26 years. Prize money has dropped over the years and expenses have increased dramatically. He has a secondary job to keep going. Mr Campbell only trains six horses, all on his own budget. He is struggling to survive in the industry.
28. Mr Campbell, to his credit, admitted the above to HRV Stewards on 22 January 2025 and has co-operated fully with them.
29. Mr Campbell has had a number of matters heard before the Stewards over the years and has received a variety of different penalties imposed on him, ranging from cautions and fines through to suspensions. He has not had any similar matters to this breach before.
30. The Tribunal notes that the integrity of harness racing must be upheld at all times and there is a need for consistency of penalties.
31. In all the circumstances, taking into account penalty submissions, recent penalties in like matters and the seriousness of this particular offence, the penalty imposed is a $2,000 fine, with $500 suspended for a period of 12 months pending no similar offences during that time.

Kathleen Scully

Assistant Registrar, Victorian Racing Tribunal