



THE INTERSECTION OF SPORTS LAW AND ANIMAL RIGHTS: ETHICAL AND LEGAL CHALLENGES IN EQUESTRIAN, RACING, AND WILDLIFE SPORTS

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Abstract

The intersection of sports law and animal rights presents unique ethical and legal challenges, particularly in equestrian sports, racing, and wildlife-based competitions. While these sports generate significant economic and cultural value, they also raise concerns about animal welfare, regulatory inconsistencies, and ethical responsibilities. This paper examines the legal frameworks governing animal use in sports, including welfare laws, anti-cruelty statutes, and international regulations. It explores case studies highlighting controversies in horse racing, rodeo events, and hunting sports, emphasizing the tension between tradition, commercial interests, and evolving animal rights advocacy. Additionally, the paper discusses enforcement challenges and potential legal reforms aimed at balancing competitive integrity with humane treatment. The study concludes that a harmonized regulatory approach, integrating stricter oversight and ethical considerations, is essential to address existing gaps and enhance protections for animals in sports.

Keywords: Sports Law, Animal Rights, Equestrian Sports, Racing Regulations, Ethical Challenges.

Introduction

Sports involving animals such as equestrian disciplines, greyhound and horse racing, and wildlife-based hunting sports exist at the complex juncture of sports law and animal rights. These industries generate billions of dollars worldwide, attracting both regulatory scrutiny and ethical debate². The legal landscape governing these sports is multifaceted, combining traditional sports law principles, such as liability and doping regulations, with evolving animal welfare laws aimed at preventing cruelty and exploitation³.

One of the key concerns in equestrian sports is the welfare of competition horses, particularly in high-stakes events like the Olympics and Grand Prix show jumping. While international bodies such as the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) enforce regulations to ensure horse welfare⁴, controversies persist regarding training methods, drug use, and competition-induced injuries⁵. Similarly, in greyhound and horse racing, allegations of overbreeding, performance-enhancing drugs, and post-career neglect have sparked calls for stronger legal protections⁶.

1. Associate Professor of Law, Ajayi Crowther University.
2. J.K. Blackshaw & A.W. Blackshaw, *Animal Welfare Considerations in Sport and Recreation*, 16 Sports Med. 109 (1993).
3. C. McEwen, *Equine Sports Law and the Ethical Treatment of Performance Horses*, 13 Int'l Sports L.J. 201 (2013).
4. FÉDÉRATION ÉQUESTRE INTERNATIONALE, *EQUESTRIAN REGULATIONS AND HORSE WELFARE GUIDELINES* (2023), <https://www.fei.org>.
5. C.R. Heleski et al., *Assessing Equine Welfare During Competition: A Review of Current Frameworks and Future Directions*, 10 J. Vet. Behav. 27 (2015).
6. R. Evans & B. Wilson, *The Greyhound Racing Industry: Welfare Concerns and Legal Challenges*, 23 Animal L. Rev. 45 (2017).

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Wildlife sports, including regulated hunting and fishing competitions, present additional ethical and legal dilemmas. While proponents argue that such sports contribute to conservation efforts through licensing and funding⁷ critics highlight instances of cruelty, ecological imbalance, and ineffective enforcement of wildlife protection laws⁸. The balance between cultural traditions and evolving ethical standards continues to shape legal debates in this area.

This paper explores the intersection of sports law and animal rights by examining the regulatory frameworks, ethical considerations, and enforcement challenges in equestrian, racing, and wildlife sports. By analyzing case law, legislative developments, and ethical theories, the study aims to highlight the gaps in current regulations and propose reforms that align competitive integrity with animal welfare.

The Evolution of Animal Rights: A Historical and Legal Perspective

The concept of animal rights has evolved significantly over centuries, influenced by philosophical, legal, and social movements. Initially seen as mere property, animals gradually gained recognition as sentient beings with legal protections. This section explores the evolution of animal rights, tracing its development from ancient civilizations to contemporary legal frameworks.

Ancient and Religious Perspectives on Animal Rights

Historically, many civilizations viewed animals as instruments for human use. In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Aristotle posited that animals existed for human benefit⁹. However, Pythagoras and later Plutarch advocated for humane treatment of animals, suggesting an early recognition of their moral status.¹⁰

Religious traditions also influenced attitudes toward animals. Hinduism and Buddhism, for instance, promoted ahimsa (non-violence), extending moral consideration to all living beings¹¹. In contrast, Christian doctrine historically emphasized human dominion over animals, though figures like St. Francis of Assisi championed compassion toward them.

The Enlightenment and Early Legal Protections

The Enlightenment period introduced rationalist arguments challenging human exceptionalism. Thinkers like Jeremy Bentham argued that the capacity to suffer, rather than rationality, should determine moral consideration. Bentham's work laid the groundwork for utilitarian approaches to animal welfare.

The 19th century saw the emergence of formal legal protections. The British Parliament passed the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act in 1822, followed by the establishment of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in 1824.¹² Similar developments occurred in the United States, where Henry Bergh founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in 1866.¹³

The Rise of Animal Rights Movements

The 20th century witnessed a shift from animal welfare to animal rights. Philosophers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan played pivotal roles in this transformation. Singer's *Animal Liberation* introduced the concept of speciesism, arguing that discrimination against animals is analogous to racism and sexism. Regan expanded this idea, advocating for animals as rights-bearing individuals rather than mere beneficiaries of human kindness.

Legal advancements accompanied philosophical shifts. The U.S. Animal Welfare Act (1966) established minimum care standards, though it fell short of recognizing

7. A.J. Loveridge et al., *Does Sport Hunting Benefit Conservation? Key Issues in Animal Conservation*, 11 *Science* 123 (2006).
8. C. Batavia et al., *Hunting for Trophies: Ethical and Legal Considerations*, 12 *Conservation Letters* e12600 (2019).
9. TOM REGAN, *THE CASE FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS* (1983).
10. PETER SINGER, *ANIMAL LIBERATION* (1975).
11. WENDY DONIGER, *HINDUISM: AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY* (2009)
12. JAMES TURNER, *RECKONING WITH THE BEAST: ANIMALS, PAIN, AND HUMANITY IN THE VICTORIAN MIND* (1980).
13. LAWRENCE FINSSEN & SUSAN FINSSEN, *THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN AMERICA: FROM COMPASSION TO RESPECT* (1994).

animal rights¹⁴. The European Union has progressively incorporated animal protection measures, with the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) recognizing animals as sentient beings¹⁵.

Commercial Interests vs. Animal Welfare Reforms

Horse racing, rodeo events, and hunting sports have long-standing cultural and economic significance. However, these activities have increasingly come under scrutiny from animal rights organizations and ethical scholars. The tension between tradition, commercial interests, and evolving attitudes toward animal welfare presents a complex challenge for stakeholders. This paper explores the ethical and legal controversies surrounding these activities, emphasizing key arguments from different perspectives.

The Ethical Debate in Horse Racing

Horse racing, a sport with deep historical roots, is a multibillion-dollar industry involving breeding, training, and gambling. However, concerns about animal welfare have intensified due to the prevalence of injuries, drug use, and the euthanasia of injured horses¹⁶. Organizations such as PETA argue that the rigorous training and racing conditions push horses beyond their natural limits, leading to severe injuries and even fatalities¹⁷. In response, regulatory bodies have implemented reforms, including restrictions on race-day medication and track safety improvements¹⁸. Despite these meas-

ures, incidents such as the high mortality rates at Santa Anita Park in 2019 highlight ongoing risks.¹⁹.

Controversies in Rodeo Events

Rodeos are often defended as cultural traditions that celebrate skills rooted in ranching history. Events such as calf roping, steer wrestling, and bull riding, however, have faced criticism for their treatment of animals.²⁰. Research indicates that the physical strain and potential injuries inflicted upon rodeo animals raise serious welfare concerns²¹. While proponents argue that strict regulations and veterinary oversight ensure humane treatment, opponents cite cases of electric prods, spurring injuries, and stress-related conditions in participating animals²². Legal restrictions vary widely; some states have banned specific practices, while others protect rodeos under agricultural exemptions.²³

The Ethics and Conservation Debate in Hunting Sports

Hunting sports, particularly trophy hunting, are among the most polarizing forms of animal-related recreation. Advocates argue that hunting plays a role in conservation by funding wildlife management programs and controlling animal populations²⁴. However, animal rights activists challenge the ethical justification of killing animals for sport, particularly when endangered species are involved²⁵. High-profile cases, such as the killing of Cecil the lion in 2015, have amplified public

14. SONIA S. WAISMAN ET AL., ANIMAL LAW: CASES AND MATERIALS (6th ed. 2020).

15. GARY L. FRANCIONE, ANIMALS AS PERSONS: ESSAYS ON THE ABOLITION OF ANIMAL EXPLOITATION (2010).

16. R. Hambling, *The Dark Side of the Racetrack: Drug Use and Injuries in Horse Racing*, 13 Vet. & Sports Med. J. 120 (2020).

17. C. Jones, *Animal Cruelty in Professional Sports: A Case Study of the Horse Racing Industry*, 7 Ethics in Sport 45 (2019).

18. B. Smith et al., *Reforming Horse Racing: A Policy Approach to Animal Welfare*, 12 Sports L. & Ethics Rev. 110 (2021).

19. H. Turner, *Mortality in Competitive Equestrian Sports: Trends and Responses*, 14 Int'l J. Sports Veterinary Sci. 198 (2022).

20. J. Thompson, *Cultural Significance vs. Animal Rights: The Case of Rodeo Sports*, 9 W. Ethics J. 34 (2020).

21. R. Adams, *Rodeo Ethics and Animal Welfare: A Critical Analysis*, 27 Animal L. Rev. 189 (2021).

22. J. Baker & P. Collins, *Pain and Performance: An Investigation into Animal Suffering in Rodeo Sports*, 10 J. Animal Ethics 55 (2018).

23. L. Mitchell, *Legislative Protections and Rodeo Sports: A Comparative Analysis*, 5 Comp. Animal L. Rev. 145 (2017).

24. T. Carter et al., *Hunting and Conservation: Balancing Sport and Sustainability*, 15 Conservation Sci. 102 (2019).

25. R. Nelson, *The Ethics of Sport Hunting: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 22 J. Env'tl. Ethics 178 (2020).

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outrage and led to stricter regulations in some regions²⁶. Additionally, there is ongoing debate regarding the impact of hunting bans on local economies and conservation efforts²⁷.

Commercial incentives play a crucial role in sustaining horse racing, rodeo events, and hunting sports. Economic arguments in favor of these industries highlight employment opportunities, tourism, and revenue generation²⁸. Nonetheless, growing consumer awareness and legal advocacy efforts have prompted reforms, including bans on certain hunting practices and increased scrutiny of horse racing and rodeo ethics²⁹. The emergence of alternative, animal-friendly sports and tourism models suggests that economic success does not have to come at the expense of animal welfare³⁰ (Clarkson & White, 2020).

The debate over horse racing, rodeo events, and hunting sports reflects broader shifts in society's perception of animal rights. While tradition and commercial interests have historically justified these activities, increasing awareness and advocacy for animal welfare have led to legislative and ethical challenges. Striking a balance between cultural heritage, economic benefits, and ethical responsibility remains a contentious issue that will continue to evolve with shifting societal values and scientific advancements.

Contemporary Legal Frameworks and Challenges

Today, animal rights continue to evolve globally. In 2016, New Zealand granted legal personhood to great apes, while India extended similar recognition to certain animal species³¹. However, challenges persist, particularly in industries such as factory farming and

animal testing. Scholars argue that legal recognition of animal rights remains inconsistent and subject to human interests.³²

The evolution of animal rights reflects changing ethical perspectives and legal frameworks. While significant progress has been made, the movement faces ongoing challenges in achieving comprehensive legal protections for animals. Future developments will likely hinge on continued advocacy, scientific discoveries regarding animal cognition, and evolving ethical paradigms.

The Nexus Between Sports Law and Animal Rights

Sports law and animal rights may appear to be distinct legal fields; however, their intersection is evident in areas such as equestrian sports, greyhound racing, and hunting competitions. The ethical and legal considerations surrounding the treatment of animals in sports necessitate a robust legal framework to balance sporting traditions with animal welfare. This section explores the convergence of sports law and animal rights, highlighting key legal cases, regulatory frameworks, and ethical considerations.

Animal Welfare in Competitive Sports

A significant overlap between sports law and animal rights arises in the treatment of animals in professional and amateur sports. Regulations governing animal welfare in sports vary by jurisdiction, but international agreements, such as the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (Council of Europe, 1976),³³ have set a precedent for protective measures.

26. K. Williams, *Trophy Hunting and Public Perception: Ethical Dilemmas and Conservation Goals*, 19 *Envtl. Stud. Q.* 23 (2021).
27. D. Martinez & T. Green, *Hunting Bans and Their Consequences: A Global Perspective*, 16 *Wildlife Pol'y & Ethics* 65 (2022).
28. B. Fletcher, *Economic Impacts of Equestrian Sports: A Review of Horse Racing and Rodeo Industries*, 45 *BUS. & SOC'Y* 90 (2018).
29. P. Henderson, *Legal Reforms in Animal Sports: Progress and Challenges*, 30 *Animal L.J.* 77 (2021).
30. M. Clarkson & G. White, *The Future of Animal-Friendly Tourism: Economic Alternatives to Traditional Sporting Industries*, 8 *ECOTOURISM REV.* 233 (2020).
31. DAVID FAVRE, *ANIMAL LAW: WELFARE, INTERESTS, AND RIGHTS* (2018).
32. PAOLA CAVALIERI, *THE ANIMAL QUESTION: WHY NONHUMAN ANIMALS DESERVE HUMAN RIGHTS* (2001).
33. European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes, Mar. 10, 1976, E.T.S. No. 87.

Equestrian sports, such as horse racing and show jumping, are governed by organizations like the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) and the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). These organizations implement rules regarding the treatment and welfare of horses, including doping regulations and veterinary oversight.³⁴ However, incidents of overexertion, abuse, and fatal injuries persist, leading to legal and ethical debates.³⁵

The Protection of Animals under the Rules of the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) and the British Horseracing Authority (BHA)

Animal welfare in equestrian sports is a critical issue that governing bodies must regulate to ensure ethical treatment and fair competition. Two significant organizations that oversee equine welfare in competitive equestrian disciplines are the Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) and the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). This section explores their regulatory frameworks, legal references, and the impact of these rules on equine protection.

Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI) and Equine Welfare

The FEI is the international governing body for equestrian sports, overseeing disciplines such as show jumping, dressage, eventing, and endurance riding. Its regulatory framework for animal welfare is primarily established in the FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horse, which serves as a guiding document for all FEI-sanctioned events.

The FEI Code of Conduct for the Welfare of the Horses

The FEI Code of Conduct emphasizes that the horse's welfare must always take precedence over competitive considerations (FEI Code of Conduct, 2023). The key principles include:

- Horses must be fit, healthy, and free from avoidable injury or disease before, during, and after sports competition.

- Article 106 **Fédération Équestre Internationale provides for** Veterinary inspections and doping controls ensure horses are not subjected to undue stress or performance-enhancing substances
- Article FEI Dressage Rules, Article 401) provides for the prohibition of training methods or equipment that cause pain or distress, including hyperflexion (Rollkur) **(Enforcement Mechanisms**

The FEI enforces its welfare rules through regulatory inspections, doping control measures, and disciplinary actions against those who violate the Code of Conduct. Sanctions may include fines, suspensions, and disqualification from events.³⁶

British Horseracing Authority (BHA) and Equine Welfare

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) regulates horseracing in the UK and maintains strict welfare guidelines for racehorses. The BHA Rules of Racing contain provisions designed to protect racehorses from mistreatment and ensure their humane treatment.

BHA Welfare Standards

The BHA welfare strategy is underpinned by the Horse Welfare Board's "A Life Well Lived" framework Horse Welfare Board, 2020. Key welfare regulations include:

- The British Horse racing authority creates a mandatory pre-race veterinary checks to ensure horses are fit to race to always guarantee the welfare of the horse³⁷
- The British horse racing also mandates regulation of jockey whip use to prevent excessive force or violence towards the horse or to prevent the overuse of horses.³⁸

34. Fed'n Equestre Internationale, Rules and Regulations Governing Equestrian Sports (2022).

35. *Equine Sports Medicine and Surgery: Basic and Clinical Sciences of the Equine Athlete* (Kenneth W. Hinchcliff et al. eds., 2d ed. 2014).

36. Fed'n Equestre Internationale, General Regulations art. 164 (24th ed. 2020) (updated Jan. 1, 2024).

37. Brit. Horseracing Auth., Rules of Racing Rule 35 (2025)

38. Brit. Horseracing Auth., Rules of Racing sched. (D) 45 (2025).

- Post-race veterinary inspections to detect injuries and ensure appropriate care for affected horses³⁹

Enforcement and Sanctions

The BHA conducts investigations and hearings to address welfare breaches. Penalties for non-compliance include fines, suspensions, and disqualification of trainers, jockeys, or owners found in violation of welfare regulations.

Comparative Analysis and Effectiveness

Both FEI and BHA implement comprehensive regulatory frameworks for equine welfare, but their approaches differ due to the nature of their respective sports. The FEI emphasizes welfare in training and competition across multiple disciplines, whereas the BHA focuses on the rigorous demands of horseracing.

One of the primary challenges in enforcement is ensuring compliance across international jurisdictions for FEI events. Conversely, the BHA operates within a defined national framework, allowing for more centralized enforcement. The effectiveness of these rules largely depends on strict implementation, transparency, and advancements in veterinary care.

The FEI and BHA play vital roles in safeguarding equine welfare in equestrian sports and horseracing, respectively. Their rules, backed by legal and ethical standards, demonstrate a commitment to animal welfare. However, ongoing improvements in regulatory enforcement and monitoring mechanisms are necessary to enhance equine protection and adapt to evolving ethical standards in equestrian sports.

Greyhound racing has also faced scrutiny due to concerns about doping, mistreatment, and the fate of retired dogs. Countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have implemented regulations to address these issues⁴⁰, but enforcement remains inconsistent.

Greyhound racing is often criticized for issues such as overbreeding, abandonment, and injuries sustained by the dogs during competition⁴¹. The intensive training regimens and transportation logistics frequently involve horses, particularly in the movement of trainers and equipment⁴². These animals are subject to potential welfare violations, including inadequate housing conditions, poor veterinary care, and overwork.

Legal Framework Governing Animal Welfare

In many jurisdictions, laws exist to regulate the treatment of animals involved in sports. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 in the UK⁴³ and the U.S. Animal Welfare Act⁴⁴ provide legal protections against mistreatment. However, these laws often lack specific provisions addressing horses indirectly involved in greyhound racing. The Racing Greyhound Welfare Code (RSPCA, 2022)⁴⁵ outlines fundamental principles for ethical treatment, but expanding these to include equine welfare is necessary.

Proposed Code of Conduct for Equine Welfare in Greyhound Racing

1. Housing and Living Conditions

Horses used in greyhound racing industries should be provided with safe and hygienic living environments that meet their physiological and psychological needs⁴⁶.

39. Fed'n Equestre Internationale, Olympic Regulations for Equestrian Events at the Olympic Games art. 36 (2024).

40. J. Smith, *Greyhound Racing and the Law: A Critical Analysis*, 15 Legal Stud. J. 78 (2020).

41. K. Brown, *Greyhound Racing and Animal Welfare: Ethical Considerations* (2019).

42. T. Smith & M. Jones, *The Overlooked Role of Equines in Greyhound Racing Logistics*, 10 J. Animal Welfare Stud. 98 (2021).

43. Dep't for Env't, Food & Rural Affs., Animal Welfare Act 2006: Legislative Review (2020) (UK).

44. 9 C.F.R. §§ 1.1–4.11 (2021).

45. Royal Soc'y for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, *Racing Greyhound Welfare Code* (2022).

46. J. McMillan, *Equine Welfare and Sport: An Ethical Review*, 14 J. Animal Ethics 22 (2020).

This includes sufficient space, proper ventilation, and regular access to clean water and nutritious food.⁴⁷

2. Veterinary Care and Injury Management

Regular health check-ups and prompt veterinary intervention should be mandatory to prevent and treat injuries. Horses must receive vaccinations and deworming treatments as per veterinary guidelines⁴⁸

3. Ethical Training and Handling Practices

Handlers and trainers should use humane methods that prioritize the horse's well-being. Overworking and the use of aggressive training techniques should be strictly prohibited⁴⁹.

4. Transportation Standards

Transporting horses should adhere to welfare guidelines ensuring appropriate vehicle design, sufficient resting periods, and hydration during transit⁵⁰

5. End-of-Career Welfare Considerations

Horses retiring from roles associated with greyhound racing must have provisions for rehoming, sanctuaries, or alternative employment to prevent neglect or slaughter⁵¹

The welfare of horses in greyhound racing is an often-overlooked aspect of animal protection. Implementing a Code of Conduct will ensure their safety and humane treatment. The expansion of current legislation and

industry standards to explicitly include equine welfare will contribute to more ethical sports practices.

Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

Sports law intersects with animal rights through statutory and common law provisions. In the United States, the Animal Welfare Act (1966) establishes minimum welfare standards, but its applicability to sports involving animals is limited⁵². The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act⁵³ (HISA, 2020) provides a more specific legal framework by addressing doping and track safety in U.S. horse racing

Internationally, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other governing bodies incorporate animal welfare considerations into their regulations, but enforcement varies widely⁵⁴. The European Union has made strides in integrating animal welfare protections into its legal framework, particularly with Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, which indirectly impacts animal testing in sports medicine.⁵⁵

Ethical Considerations and Advocacy

Beyond legal frameworks, ethical debates surrounding the use of animals in sports continue to evolve. Organizations like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) advocate for stronger protections, often clashing with traditional sporting institutions⁵⁶.

Public perception plays a crucial role in shaping legal policies. The decline of bullfighting in Spain and the restrictions on fox hunting in the United Kingdom demonstrate how societal attitudes influence legislative changes⁵⁷. As awareness grows, legal professionals

47. G. Wilson et al., *Stable Management and Welfare Considerations for Equines*, 9 *Equine Mgmt. J.* 75 (2018).

48. S. Taylor & P. Green, *Veterinary Care Standards in the Equine Sports Industry*, 8 *Veterinary Welfare J.* 44 (2017)

49. P. Johnson, *Ethical Training Practices for Performance Animals*, 17 *Equine Sci. J.* 112 (2019).

50. R. O'Connor & D. Lee, *Transportation Welfare of Equines in Competitive Sports*, 6 *Animal Transport J.* 67 (2022).

51. L. Foster, *The Fate of Retired Racehorses: Welfare and Rehoming Policies*, 12 *Cambridge Animal L. Rev.* 45 (2021).

52. David Favre, *Animal Law: Welfare, Interests, and Rights* (3d ed. 2019).

53. T. Carroll, *The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act: Legal Implications*, 12 *J. Sports L.* 45 (2021)

54. L. Jones, *International Sports Law and Animal Welfare Regulations* (2017).

55. Council Directive 2010/63/EU, 2010 O.J. (L 276) 33.

56. C. Adams, *Ethical Considerations in Animal Sports* (2018).

57. R. Garner, *Political Animals: Animal Protection Politics in Britain and the United States* (2020).

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specializing in sports law increasingly collaborate with animal rights activists to reform outdated practices⁵⁸.

The intersection of sports law and animal rights reflects broader societal concerns about ethical treatment and legal accountability. While progress has been made in regulating animal welfare in sports, gaps in enforcement and legislative inconsistencies remain. Future legal developments must ensure that sporting traditions do not override fundamental animal rights, promoting a balance between competition and ethical responsibility.

Enforcement of Animal Welfare or Right Dilemma

Animal welfare laws are designed to protect animals from cruelty and inhumane treatment. However, enforcement remains a significant challenge due to regulatory gaps, resource constraints, and competing interests in industries such as agriculture, entertainment, and sports⁵⁹. This section examines the enforcement difficulties faced in animal welfare protection and proposes legal reforms that balance humane treatment with competitive fairness.

Animal-based sports have long been embedded in cultural traditions and economic structures. However, allegations of abuse, overexertion, and unethical training methods have necessitated legal interventions⁶⁰. The enforcement of animal welfare laws in sports is complex due to competing interests between animal rights advocates, regulatory bodies, and sporting organizations. This paper examines these enforcement challenges and suggests legal reforms to ensure stronger protection for animals while preserving the integrity of competitive sports.

2. Enforcement Challenges in Animal Welfare Protection in Sports

2.1 Regulatory Loopholes and Inconsistent Legislation

Many jurisdictions lack comprehensive and uniform regulations for animal welfare in sports. While some sports, such as equestrian events, have international governing bodies like the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), others operate under fragmented or outdated legal frameworks⁶¹. The inconsistent application of laws creates enforcement difficulties, as certain practices deemed cruel in one country may be legal in another.⁶²

2.2 Jurisdictional Complexities and Lack of Oversight

Sports involving animals often transcend national borders, complicating enforcement mechanisms. In horse racing, for example, variations in anti-doping rules and welfare standards hinder cohesive oversight⁶³. This jurisdictional disparity enables exploitative practices to persist, as stakeholders may relocate events to less regulated regions.

2.3 Economic and Political Interests

The economic benefits associated with animal sports, including betting industries and sponsorships, often lead to regulatory reluctance in enforcing stricter welfare measures⁶⁴. Politicians and governing bodies may prioritize industry profitability over animal well-being, limiting the effectiveness of existing laws. This conflict of interest weakens enforcement and perpetuates harmful practices⁶⁵.

58. P. Taylor, *Sports Law and Ethical Considerations in Animal Use* (2021).

59. A. Knight, *The Ethical Treatment of Animals in Sport: Alternatives and Innovations* (2020).

60. Gary L. Francione, *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation* (2010).

61. D.M. Broom & A.F. Fraser, *Domestic Animal Behaviour and Welfare* (5th ed. 2015).

62. Robert Garner, *A Theory of Justice for Animals: Animal Rights in a Nonideal World* (2013).

63. P. McManus et al., *The Global Greyhound: History, Economics, and Ethics* (2012).

64. J. Maher, *The Political Economy of Animal Sports: Power, Profit, and Policy* (2019).

65. G. Wandesforde-Smith, *Animal Protection and Global Governance: Policies and Prospects* (2016).

3. Potential Legal Reforms

3.1 Strengthening International Regulations

Harmonizing international legal frameworks could improve enforcement consistency. A global regulatory body overseeing animal welfare in sports, similar to the World Anti-Doping Agency, could establish and enforce uniform welfare standards⁶⁶. This would prevent regulatory evasion and enhance accountability.

3.2 Enhancing Penalties and Compliance Mechanisms

Stronger penalties, including criminal liability for severe violations, could serve as deterrents against animal abuse in sports⁶⁷. Increasing fines, imposing lifetime bans for repeat offenders, and incorporating independent oversight bodies could significantly improve compliance.

3.3 Implementing Independent Monitoring and Whistleblower Protections

Ensuring independent oversight through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and creating whistleblower protection mechanisms could facilitate transparent enforcement. Confidential reporting channels and mandatory disclosure requirements for sports organizations could enhance regulatory effectiveness⁶⁸.

3.4 Promoting Ethical Alternatives and Technological Innovations

Advancements in simulation technology and non-animal-based competitions could provide ethical alternatives while preserving the competitive aspects of sports⁶⁹. Encouraging investment in such innovations may gradually reduce reliance on animal-based events.

Despite existing legal frameworks, enforcement challenges hinder the protection of animal welfare in sports. Addressing regulatory loopholes, jurisdictional complexities, and economic conflicts is essential for improving compliance. Strengthening international regulations, enhancing penalties, and promoting independent oversight can help balance competitive integrity with humane treatment. Future legal reforms should prior-

itize ethical considerations while accommodating the evolving landscape of sports.

Recommendations

A harmonized regulatory approach to animal welfare in sports should integrate stricter oversight, ethical considerations, and enforcement mechanisms to close existing legal gaps and ensure consistent protections. Here are key legal recommendations:

1. Uniform Legislation & International Standards

- i. Develop a **harmonized legal framework** across jurisdictions to prevent regulatory inconsistencies.
- ii. Align domestic laws with **international treaties** (e.g., OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, European Convention for the Protection of Animals).
- iii. Encourage **regional agreements** for cross-border sporting events involving animals.

2. Stricter Licensing & Oversight

- i. Require **mandatory licensing** for individuals and organizations involved in animal sports (trainers, handlers, event organizers).
- ii. Establish **independent regulatory bodies** to monitor animal sports and enforce compliance.
- iii. Mandate **transparent reporting mechanisms** for injuries, fatalities, and performance-enhancing substances.

3. Enhanced Welfare Standards & Ethical Considerations

- i. Implement **strict anti-doping regulations** for animals in sports, including routine drug testing.
- ii. Define and enforce **clear welfare standards** (adequate rest, training limits, retirement policies).
- iii. Prohibit **excessive breeding and genetic modification** for performance gains.

66. A. Harvey, *Regulating Sport and Animal Welfare: The Global Challenge* (2021).

67. Mike Radford, *Animal Welfare Law in Britain: Regulation and Responsibility* (2001).

68. N. Phelps, *Changing the Game: Animal Rights, Sport, and Society* (2015).

69. A. Knight, *The Ethical Treatment of Animals in Sport: Alternatives and Innovations* (2020).

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- iv. Recognize animals as **sentient beings** in sports laws, ensuring their well-being takes priority.
- iii. Engage **stakeholders (veterinarians, ethicists, animal welfare organizations)** in policy development.

4. Enforcement & Penalties

- i. Impose **harsher penalties** for animal cruelty, neglect, and unethical practices.
- ii. Establish **whistleblower protections** for reporting abuse in the industry.
- iii. Require **event audits** to ensure compliance with welfare regulations.

5. Public Awareness & Industry Accountability

- i. Mandate **ethical training** for all personnel involved in animal sports.
- ii. Promote **responsible ownership** programs for retired animals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a harmonized regulatory approach that integrates stricter oversight and ethical considerations is essential to addressing existing gaps and enhancing protections for animals in sports. By establishing uniform standards, enforcing rigorous welfare measures, and prioritizing ethical accountability, regulators can ensure that animals involved in sports are treated with dignity and respect. Strengthening oversight mechanisms will not only mitigate risks of exploitation and harm but also promote a more humane and sustainable framework for animal participation in sports. Ultimately, a cohesive and ethically grounded regulatory framework is crucial to safeguarding animal welfare while maintaining the integrity of sporting practices.