

Sir,

As a fair-minded publication, I trust you are open to the notion that views very different to your own should be available for consideration on the subject of what may represent racing's best interests in these horrific times.

I do not need to repeat the details of the significant loss of life and catastrophic impact this pandemic is having on society. You preface your comment with sufficient detail of this. It appears however that you do so, to create the impression that the people you then attack are not at all mindful of the tragedy unfolding daily. This is unfounded.

You comment that there is a constituency within racing that believes racing should be free to do what it likes when it likes but offer not one shred of evidence that this is the case. Moreover, you clearly believe in fact that you with the outlet of your publication at your disposal can attack and insult with impunity.

Part of your defence of Nick Rust is that he took flack over the running of Cheltenham that was unfair and unfounded. I agree, but it goes with the job description. The fact that was so does not lend itself to a conclusion that he is the right leader to take racing forward. The public and media abuse, post Cheltenham, is of much more relevance to the notion that society must give permission for racing to resume and that racing has lost the goodwill of the public.

Racing never had the goodwill of the public. There are supporters of it, a vast majority who view it with indifference and a small but vocal extreme group who have been given a voice by the media and some politicians that would rather see it erased from existence.

Why does racing have to pander to those who clearly ignore the facts yet still feel entitled to berate and abuse and deny minorities (racing participants) their right to go about their jobs and lives. We all understand the need for pragmatism but to pander to perception driven by those hostile to racing's very existence should not be racing's operating rationale.

That racing must move forward in conjunction with the Government's decisions on the easing of restrictions in line with its five criteria is a given. The central issue for all moving forward is that of managing public gatherings and ensuring safe social distancing.

The resumption plans, at the very least, acknowledge that the sport will recommence behind closed doors. More radical plans detail quarantined racing hubs. In these circumstances the fallout from Cheltenham is an

irrelevance and should be managed as such not used as an excuse to become reactive rather than proactive in how racing tackles its ability to restart.

The government have given indications that there may be a phased approach to the easing of restrictions. There is nothing wrong at all in wanting to ensure that racing is in a position to go as soon as that is permissible.

You voice the opinion that as someone sitting on the resumption planning committee, Ralph Beckett, has done himself and the sport a disservice. It is as rational to argue that if concerns are held regarding a lack of leadership and consequently the lack of progress it is perfectly permissible for a party in the process to express those concerns. You share Nick Rust's view that management of public perceptions is the key to progress. It is not a panacea and a contrary view is not shameful.

Mark Johnston's history as a Director of the BHA is irrelevant to whether he should express his opinions now on his assessment on the performance of its leader. No one would disagree that if asked for his opinion he will give it. He is certainly sufficiently time served in racing to be entitled to do so.

You speak with much confidence and glowing praise of the BHA CEO but do not actually provide any tangible evidence of how he is promoting racing's cause currently. The only sin that I can see Ralph Beckett and Mark Johnston have committed is to have a view on whether the sports regulatory chief is actively and adequately pursuing racing participants' desire to bring the sport back as soon as is safely practicable. It would be a dereliction of duty to their staff, horses and owners if they failed to do so.

The BHA press release yesterday talks of racing's values - to be respectful and not single out individuals unfairly for carrying out their role. Not something you would appear to hold to in your treatment of Messrs Beckett and Johnston.

There are obviously differing opinions on whether Mr Rust is the right leader right now. He is stepping down soon and some may feel he does not have the same passion for racing's future as the participants he leaves behind.

You state that Beckett and Johnston may have done serious harm to racing's cause but you do not make a case for that view. They have the standing and passion and financial interests for themselves, their families, staff and owners to be entitled to express their views.

If public division, as you state, is harmful then why does the CEO of the betting industry's trade advertiser partake in it. If you are simply an observer with a duty to report then report, do not bombard the racing public with your controversial opinion. It is feasibly equally harmful to racing's cause.

Yours faithfully

Mel Roberts