

Australian Race Caller Victoria Shaw Weighs in on Disqualification Ruling

7 May 2019, Horsereporter, USA ~ Although the 2019 Kentucky Derby will be remembered by many for less than favourable reasons, the disqualification of Maximum Security raises many issues.

As an Australian I am always intrigued by one of the world's classic thoroughbred races taking place on the dirt. This year was no exception given the heavy rainfall that had clearly taken its toll on the track and I wondered how far the horses actually get down into the track before they find solid footing. As a race broadcaster the first thing that springs to mind apart from whether or not the horses will handle the heavy going, is the jockeys' silks being covered in mud, making it difficult to distinguish one runner from another. However, the bright pink colours of Maximum Security and War of Will (black cap) one of the horses briefly impeded about 2 and half furlongs out from the finish managed to shine through the muck and kick back, even as far back to seventeenth place as we would find out later.

Let's be clear on one thing - a 100,000 plus crowd can have an impact on a race and horses do get stirred up and distracted by excessive and unfamiliar sights and sounds. The race footage I have managed to view on the internet of this year's Kentucky Derby gave me a brief glimpse of a photographer that looked to be high above the crowd on the infield, perhaps an odd sight and momentary distraction for a well-schooled racing animal that had to contend with the roar of the crowd whilst galloping with a full head of steam and considerable ability on a rain affected dirt track. As humans we will never know what exactly caused Maximum Security to shift out or shy from something that rattled his concentration. Just simply being under pressure in a race is enough to cause that. Any jockey aboard a three-year old battling out one of the world's classic events, approaching the home turn would anticipate plenty of race pressure. As the home corner loomed

even War of Will looked to be under an extremely tight hold and at that point may have already run his race?

Whatever the case, an overall winning margin of nearly 2 lengths, compounded with the fact that Maximum Security was drawing clear from other runners at the finish suggests that they were no match for him on the day. By Australian standards this protest would more than likely have occurred, however the stewards in Australia would have dismissed it given the overall winning margin and the fact that Maximum Security was running on in very difficult going.

The furore around this decision does highlight many questions including the review of the race by the stewards. Would they have upheld such a decision if other riders in the event had not launched a protest, as many have noted several minutes had elapsed before any official notification was conveyed to the public that a protest had been made? Making matters worse is the fact that the stewards at Kentucky have not been willing to discuss with the press (so far) their decision, which has cast an even greater cloud over American racing, post the many horse deaths recently at Santa Anita.

However, the rules of the racing jurisdiction that governs horse racing in Kentucky are what they are and their decision stands. The United States, like Australia, has its horse racing dominions governed by each state. Racing nations such as France, Japan, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates no doubt wonder why racing is not run by one authority in a country like the USA or Australia and that the rules of racing should be uniform across the entire nation. Additionally, racing participants across the globe constantly ponder world standards and recent concerns about Cobalt levels in horses racing in Australia and Hong Kong caused some very serious problems with acceptable levels of the mineral varying greatly between the two countries. Adding further weight to the argument presented by many, for world racing standards.

No doubt connections of Maximum Security also had grand visions of a racing afterlife for their colt and as a Kentucky Derby winner his future sire fee would have been high. Breeding dreams are clearly tarnished by such a controversial outcome.

I would like to offer the following race replay for non-Australian racing fans to consider, the 1996 Golden Slipper won by Merlene. Merlene jumps from the inside with the red cap to sit about four and half lengths off the leader early on the rail in the Golden Slipper, the richest two year old race in the world. Plenty of pressure in this event too, the jockeys are usually read the riot act behind closed doors before the race by the chief steward.

Merlene's jockey, Greg Hall, just before the home turn quickly looked across and commenced his move to the outside nearly causing absolute chaos. This manoeuvre is still talked about in racing circles down under today. However, Merlene did go on to victory in emphatic fashion taking out one of the world's classic thoroughbred races and her jockey, Greg Hall was severely reprimanded and fined heavily. The 1996 Golden Slipper was awarded to the best horse on the day and I couldn't

help but think no matter how many times I view the replay of this year's Kentucky Derby that Maximum Security was like Merlene – the best horse on the day, just that sadly victory would not be his.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQsP22uYjwI>

Maximum Security's owners, Gary and Mary West, will file a lawsuit aimed at overturning a stewards' disqualification of Maximum Security in the Kentucky Derby. On Monday, 6 May, an appeal of the disqualification to the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission (KHRC) was denied. KHRC bylaws state that all race rulings are final.

*Victoria Shaw is the only female Australian Racing Broadcaster and winner of many awards