



***Participation ban for industry legend George Morris intensifies an ongoing debate about the best means for protecting all equestrians.***

“Safe Sport” discussions in the equestrian world reached a new level of intensity on Aug. 5 when the U.S. Center for SafeSport announced a permanent ban on participation to industry legend, George Morris, 81. The ban resulted from an investigation of allegations of “sexual misconduct involving a minor” between 1968 and 1972. The same day, Morris issued an email in which he contested the findings and stated that he would dispute them in an appeal process.

For many on the West Coast, the news came around the same time as the memorial service for California horseman Rob Gage. Gage had also been banned for alleged sexual misconduct, in his case with more than one minor, in the distant past. He hung himself in June, while preparing to appeal the charges.

A Facebook group supporting Morris, called “I Stand With George,” was created after the news of Morris’ ban. It had 7,735 members as of Aug. 20. Two months earlier, a “Safe Sport Overhaul” group was launched as a “voice of reason.” It’s one of a few online groups and fundraisers launched in recent months in response to the latest developments.

The need for equestrian sport to be safe for all is undisputed in all discussions surrounding the issue. The question is how to accomplish that.

The Center for SafeSport stands by its conviction that the passage of time neither negates the impact of sexual abuse on the victim nor justifies any leniencies regarding past abuses. It

defends the investigation process that precedes judgements as thorough and fair, and states that protecting the identity of those who contribute to investigations is critical to enabling victims to come forward and protecting them from harm after they do.

Critics describe the investigation and penalty process as an unfair one that allows unsubstantiated or false accusations to ruin lives.

George Morris' Aug. 5 statement is as follows: "I am deeply troubled by the U.S. Center for SafeSport's findings regarding unsubstantiated charges for events that allegedly occurred between 1968 & 1972. I contest these findings wholeheartedly and am in the process of disputing them. I have devoted my life to equestrian sport and the development of future riders, coaches and Olympians. Any allegations that suggest I have acted in ways that are harmful to any individual, the broader equestrian community, and sport that I love dearly are false and hurtful.

"I share our community's commitment to protecting the safety and wellbeing of all our athletes who need reliable guidance and encouragement at every level, of which I have provided for over 50 years. I will continue, as I always have, to proudly support equestrianism and its continued development around the world."