



op/ed

by rob whiteley

IT'S NOT THE WHIPS, IT'S THE WHIPPING.

I happened to watch She'sawontontomato win the 6th race at Golden Gate on Saturday, June 4, as two of my favorite commentators celebrated Russell Baze winning his ninth race in 11 starts. ([video](#))

Winning without honor, however, is not winning. After 30 strikes with the whip, I lost track of the number of times Baze hit the filly from the quarter pole home. The TV analyst's comment was, "He [Baze] had to work for it."

What have we become as people, and to what depths have we sunk, to be so anesthetized to this obscenity and barbarism? And how can we be so stupid to blindly support this largely uncontrolled abuse of horses as we also seek to increase our fan base and prevent our sinking "sport" from descending toward relative obscurity?

Sadly, this tradition of whipping is not even necessary. If jockeys only carried whips for safety, the winner of each race would reflect the competitive quality of the horse and the true horsemanship and talent of the jockey.

As stated on the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame home page, many people consider Isaac Murphy to be the greatest jockey of all time, winning more than 35% (and maybe as many as 45%) of his career mounts. His greatest accomplishment, however, was that he never whipped his horses.

The poet Frank X. Walker captures Murphy's essence and genuine gift in his recent poem, *Murphy's Secret*:

*"... I just nudge 'em like they exhausted mammas do
soon as they are born an licked dry
until they unfold them wobbly legs an stand.
When I'm up there I rub my hands against they neck
lean into they ear, pretend I'm the wind an whisper
'Find yo purpose. Find yo purpose' ... an hold on."*

Where have you gone Isaac Murphy? And where did we lose our way?

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