

Race-Day Catering in Professional Horseracing: Does Current Provision Facilitate Weight Management and Riding Performance?

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Received: October 13, 2017; **Published:** November 13, 2017

Abstract

The present paper provides a qualitative study exploring the perceptions of the horseracing industry on weighing room food provision in the UK. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on professional jockeys (n = 10), racecourse clerks (n = 8), jockey coaches (n = 4), jockey agents (n = 2) and racehorse trainers (n = 3) to establish their views on the quality and conduciveness of provision in relation to the demands of the sport. Despite some good practice in the selection of foods provided for jockeys, themes described a consensus that further improvement of the current provision is required. Specifically, improvement to the quality of foods in terms of fresh and nutrient dense options versus frozen and high calorific value foods, as well as their ability to facilitate weight-making and riding performance. Developing a system of greater governance from regulatory bodies to ensure compliance with these standards was suggested. Similarly, the role of the caterer on race-days was debated with most deemed inexperienced and unaware of the difficulties of weight-making by jockeys. Based upon findings and suggestions throughout the narrative, key recommendations for the industry are 1) the development of minimum catering standards to be embraced by all UK racecourses with regulatory oversight, and 2) preliminary training for catering staff to educate them on the lifestyle and weight-making pressures of professional jockeys. These recommendations may assist jockeys in their performance and weight-management strategies.

Keywords: Jockeys; Horseracing; Nutrition; Catering; Qualitative Research

Introduction

The importance of optimal nutrition in weight sensitive sports is a crucial variable on performance [1]. Unlike other 'weight making' sports, professional horseracing offers a year-round provision with race meetings taking place 363 days of the calendar year thereby underlining the importance of best nutrition practices. Spring and summer months are typically dominated by Flat racing, and the Autumn and Winter months subjugated by National Hunt racing (commonly referred to as Jump). Both formats operate a minimum riding weight, legislating the lightest weight a jockey can ride at with the exception of conditional and apprentice jockeys who can claim additional allowances to incentivise their use by trainers [2]. In Great Britain, present minimum ridings weights are 50.8 kg and 64.0 kg for Flat and Jump respectively making them amongst the lightest in the world despite statistically having the tallest riders of all major horseracing nations [2]. This contradiction means many jockeys struggle to adhere to such stringent weights in an already demanding weight-sensitive sport. Professional jockeys are unique weight-making athletes in that they are required to 'make weight' daily in comparison to other light-weight and weight-making athletes who have weeks or months to meet a specified weight and/or composition [2]. Furthermore, unlike combat sports where athletes 'weigh-in' prior to competition only, allowing re-hydration and re-fuelling to take place before exertion [3,4], jockeys are not afforded the privilege. In contrary fashion, jockeys routinely compete within minutes of weight verification and are

therefore often in a state of dehydration [2]. A wealth of evidence unequivocally indicates an archaic culture of weight making amongst professional jockey with dehydration, excessive food restriction, self-induced vomiting and laxative use reported [2,5-8]. An alternative approach specific to this population has been devised based on a high protein consumption (~2.5g.kg.bw.day) and total energy intake correspondent to measured resting metabolism [9,10]. Maintenance of the described diet facilitated significant losses in total body weight from a decrease in fat mass whilst maintaining lean tissue and improving fitness scores [10]. On these bases, a well-constructed high protein diet is conducive to professional jockeys given their necessity to maintain a lean physique and maintain muscle mass, and the low energy expenditure measured during simulated race riding [11,12]. Despite the availability of a safer strategy, a high prevalence of dehydration and sauna use at racecourses still exists. This could be attributed partially to the insular culture of jockeys and a preference to learn from senior and retired riders [8]. Alternatively, in a recent study adopting a qualitative approach, jockeys themselves identified weighing room provision as problematic in maintaining a competitive weight and is a key determinant in poor dietary intake generally [13]. Given the unremitting racing calendar, jockeys conveyed they spend much of their week at racecourses and for many is their main opportunity to eat, however some food provision is not conducive to weight management with fried and calorie dense foods commonly available. Similarly, contention within the industry over the athletic identity of jockeys exists, with some stakeholders in the industry holding the cultural view of the horse as the athlete in favour of the jockey [13], which may explain why some food provision is not adequately prepared with weight making athletes in mind.

It is known that a range of cultural, social, physiological and psychological factors can influence food choice [14] however research into the choice motives of athletes is limited. Hunger is considered to be the primary determinant of food choice driven by appetite and satiety [15,16] with research suggesting greater feelings of hunger result in an increased likelihood of an unhealthy choice. This factor should be of significant consideration based on the prolonged and regular periods of fasting engaged in by jockeys [13]. Environmental cues such as the positioning and order of presented foods [17] and the lighting around it [18] have been shown to influence healthy vs non-healthy food choices. Equally point-of-selection food information has also shown to positively improve food selection [19]. Whether factors such as these are considered by racecourses is unknown. Catering provision in other sports is highly regulated with menu development done collaboratively between sports dieticians and caterers to enable best provision with subsequent reviews post-competition to enable a model of continuous development [20,21]. To date, no previous studies have sought to investigate race-day catering for jockeys however considering the frequency and duration of time they spend at courses throughout the year it is a logical and necessary line of enquiry.

Multiple stakeholders are involved in race day operations with racecourse clerks being the most prominent. Clerks are responsible for most facets of racecourse management and race-day logistics. Although they themselves do not directly provide food provision to jockeys, they are responsible for the hiring of catering staff and agreeing budgets and provision. Given the multiple stakeholders involved in race-day operations, a qualitative approach was preferred to allow jockeys, racecourse clerks, and jockeys supporting staff (i.e. trainers, coaches) to share their opinions. Therefore, adhering to a qualitative framework the aim of this study was to explore the industry's perception of current food provision at racecourses on its quality and conductivity to weight management and riding performance.

Methods

Participants

To gain a comprehensive view, a range of professionals associated with race-day performance were invited to participate. In addition to jockeys (n = 10), their support network made up of racehorse trainers (n = 3), agents (n = 2), and jockey coaches (n = 4) similarly contributed. A total of 19 racecourses were represented via Clerks of Courses (n = 7), some of whom govern multiple tracks. Ethical approval to conduct the study was granted by Liverpool John Moores University. Utilising the professional body's monthly publication, an open letter was sent to jockeys detailing the study and respondents were subsequently followed up via email. Representatives from apprentice and conditional jockeys through to senior professionals contributed enabling maximum data sampling [22]. The other four groups were initially contacted through gatekeepers (general secretaries, chief executive officers) at their respective professional bodies via email.

Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were completed with all 26 participants adopting an ‘open-ended’ [23] approach. Questions were presented with a conversational and informal tone to create an environment where participants were more likely to speak with freedom and to build an affinity between the interviewer and participant, prompting a greater level of honesty and depth in responses [24]. Follow-up questions where appropriate were asked to gain further insight [25].

All participants were invited to Liverpool John Moores University for interview however due to the widespread geography of racing, interviews were also offered at racecourses, two UK jockey schools, and the two industry injury-rehab centres for convenience. The three trainers were interviewed at their own racing yards. Questions were focussed around opinions of present racecourse provision in terms of quality, quantity and conduciveness to weight-management and performance. A pilot interview with a former professional jockey allowed for a validation process to occur prior to data collection [26]. All interviews were conducted in person, recorded using a dictaphone and transcribed verbatim. In order to maintain a quality investigative and analytical process the present study adhered to the guidelines constructed by Smith., *et al* [27].

Data Analysis

All transcripts were uploaded to analysis software NVivo10 (QSR International Ltd., 2012) to store, manage and organise data prior to the process of thematic analysis [28]. Multiple readings of the transcripts allowed the researcher to become immersed with its content before initial coding occurred with the researcher identifying any relevant content. Once coded, the pertinent data which shared a ‘common thread’ [29] was arranged in order to identify themes. Themes were reviewed, some codes were transferred between themes and others were removed from analysis. Themes were named or defined prior to writing the report giving the reader a general sense of each one. This process was repeated for each interview group.

Results and Discussion

Themes that emerged during data analysis are outlined throughout this section using verbatim quotes to highlight the participants’ responses. To clearly identify the narratives of the different stakeholders, the following section is split into three sections a) the perception of jockeys, b) the perception of racecourse clerks, and c) of the perception of the support network (i.e. trainer, agents, coaches) all in relation to current racecourse food provision.

The Perception of Jockeys on Racecourse Food Provision

Two general dimensions emerged (see Table 1) relating to this initial theme; 1) The perception and satisfaction of racecourse food provision is explored through discussions relating to catering staff in addition to the food they provide, and secondly 2) jockeys offered solutions to improve the provision. Higher order themes are indicated by the use of italic text throughout.

Raw Data	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
He’s [caterer 1] a nice guy. Like I walk in, “All right, [name of jockey]. How are you doing? Cup of tea?” I’d say, “Yes, please”, and he’d go, “Two sugars? Good drop of milk?” Like he remembers you, and he’s more, like I don’t know him that well, but you’d call him more a friend than, you know, he’s...Some of the people there, you know, they’re just doing their job, they’re just caterers, it’d just be a young lad, not young, probably the same age as me, but they’re just, you know. It’s not nice to say, but they’ve not got an idea, you know (Jockey 5).	Relationships with Catering Staff at Racecourses (n = 9)	Perception and Satisfaction of Racecourse Food Provision
They leave it out on the table all day, so after two races it’s turning rotten. Not rotten, but it’s lost its colour, and it looks shit. Then you wouldn’t eat it, and it’s the same with like all the other stuff, all that stuff (Jockey 2). The stuff they bring down sometimes, you wouldn’t give to a dog, and sometimes it’s like crap, and I am a fussy eater, but that’s what I think (Jockey 6).	Discontent with Current Food Provision at Racecourses (n = 10)	
More choice, and you get people like yourself, telling you that you’ve done your tests, and that has proven that’s what we should eat. Now that’s the sort of stuff you want to be seeing when you go to the races, and then it’s going to be easier to follow that. Because when you’re at the races every day, you can’t cook your own food. You have to rely on whatever’s there. (Jockey 4)	Food provision conducive to performance and weight management (n = 10)	Offered Solutions to Improve Provision
It’s probably unrealistic, but more sociable people serving food like [caterer 1] and [caterer 2]. They make a big difference for a start (Jockey 3).	Catering staff more relevant and engaging with jockeys (n = 5)	
Unless there is a rule change, tracks aren’t going to (improve) because they’re owned by some people who are self-contained. They’re owned by other companies, and it has to be a rule across the board that ‘this’ has to be provided, ‘that’ has to be provided (Jockey 6).	Embedding regulatory minimum standards for racecourses to adhere to (n = 5)	

Table 1: General Dimensions and Higher Order Themes of Jockeys Perception of Racecourse Food Provision.

The Perception and Satisfaction of Racecourse Food Provision

This initial dimension describes the current thoughts of jockeys on the food provision at racecourses, and furthermore their level of satisfaction with what it provided. It appears that relationships with catering staff at racecourses is a key factor in how jockeys perceive and rate racecourse food provision and overall satisfaction of the service:

Researcher: What makes [racecourse] good, then?

Jockey 2: Different people, I think.

Researcher: So would you say it's the people?

Jockey 2: Yes, different caterers.

Researcher: Because [caterer 1], he's got a good reputation?

Jockey 2: [Caterer 1] is great yes, and he helps - do you know what I mean? I'm like, "[caterer 1], go and find us some Yorkshire puddings", and he would find me some Yorkshire puddings or something if they're not on there, and things like that. Do you know what I mean?

(There's) a lady up at [racecourse] (who) is a lovely woman like, makes some homemade food and wants to look after us, so yeah she's OK too. I guess [caterer 2] and [caterer 1] have that craic, really funny like (Jockey 3).

A personalisation of the service provided by catering staff and interaction towards jockeys appears to clearly influence the decision to engage with foods. Jockey 5 describes one caterer: "*Lovely fella, tries to help you out, remembers your name, and that goes along way you know*".

I don't like everything they do because I'm not a fan of chicken and fish, but then again, I say that, [caterer 2] who does [racecourse] does chicken wraps and I'll eat them (Jockey 7).

Fair play to the woman at [racecourse]. I can't think of her name that does the food, but she's ok, it's not the healthiest food in the world, but at the same time, everyone eats it (Jockey 8).

The use of emotive words and phrases such as "help" and "look after" was a common feature in descriptions of the caterers who resonated with jockeys. Although not stated explicitly, in the context of the conversations this was undoubtedly referring to their assistance and empathy in the necessity to make the competitive riding weight. This point is substantiated further by recollections of negative experiences and a lack of understanding or knowing by caterers:

Some of the young lads and girls (caterers) in some of the weighing rooms, [famous jockey] could walk in the room and I don't think they'd know who he is. Fair enough they may not be in to the sport and it's just their job, but there's no enthusiasm or will to help a jockey out you know. They have no idea the lengths some of the lads go to, to make a weight (Jockey 8).

The lads behind the food bar working in the jockey's room, they aren't like trained cooks they're just told to shove it in a deep fryer... they're all nice people but they haven't a clue of what it takes, how healthy you have to be, or what it means to make a weight (Jockey 10).

It is not clear from previous research if catering staff specifically have enough presence to influence food choices, however individuals who are acknowledged as peers or friends may be able to [30]. Unlike other sports where caterers may be one-off contractors, or who only appear for a short period at meal times, caterers within the weighing room are in the same environment as jockeys for up to five hours per day, and for multiple days over the year. These accounts clearly highlight a novel finding in that catering staff, or individuals who are providing food to jockeys may play a key role in jockeys' relationship and engagement with food. This should be considered by racecourses when deciding who is present in the jockeys weighting room. Such changes may subsequently improve their ratings with jockeys considering all jockeys alluded to a *discontent with current food provision*. The most prevalent aspect jockeys feel an improvement is necessary is the type or quality of foods provided:

Most aren't that good, some will do some good things and some bad things. Quality wise most of the hot foods aren't that smashing. More quantity than quality you know, big vats of curries or whatever, chilli's (Jockey 3).

A lot of the food they provide, it's not nice, so people won't eat it. Do you know what I mean? Like some of the food that you see at the tracks, honestly, it's horrendous (Jockey 6).

Heavy pasta dishes, lasagnes, curries, don't get me wrong I think they taste good a lot of the time. I love a lasagne but I don't be needing it before a race you know. It weighs on you a lot, and even if weight were no issue I guarantee on a 3 miler I'd throw it back up half way round (Jockey 8).

Similarly, several jockeys eluded to being particular with the aesthetic appeal of foods, "*if I don't like the look of something, then I don't eat it*" (Jockey 2) and "*certain things look minging, they're probably not but I eat with my eyes sometimes*" (Jockey 3). Although weight is the main concern for jockeys, the sensory aspect of foods remains important to many [31,32]. If jockeys opt to consume non-conductive foods over healthier alternatives due to their appearance, this may further compound weight-management issues whilst potentially impairing riding performance. Providing a catering service for such a unique population and their associated sporting demands is challenging. Whilst jockeys unanimously declared a need to improve food provision and its service as a general term, some acknowledgement was given to a number of racecourses who already provide high quality foods. For other jockeys, the availability of foods were the main areas of concern:

The only problem I have is that when you go there before racing and there's never any food out. I'm one of the few people that don't have a weight problem... if I've just rode out, come home from work, literally got a quick shower, jumped into my car, gone racing and get there I need to eat something... but the food doesn't normally come 'til after the first race, which OK, like I say, maybe I'm only one in fifty, but I still need some food to eat. Do you know what I mean? (Jockey 1).

You might have a light ride later on in the day, and you can't eat until you've finished that ride, or 'til you've finished the day, and then it's, well, everything's gone, you know? You (will have to) stop on the way home and pick up a sandwich at the services (Jockey 6).

Offered Solutions to Improve Provision

This second general dimension naturally occurred following initial discussions surrounding the perception of provision. Subsequently, higher order themes within this general dimension mirror those of the opening one. Jockeys initially discussed making *catering staff more relevant and engaging with jockeys*.

It's probably unrealistic, but more sociable people serving food like [caterer 1] and [caterer 2]. They make a big difference for a start (Jockey 3).

It was felt that being able to approach and converse with catering staff who understood the demands of weight-making and racing would go a significant way, and perhaps lead to an improvement in service. Similarly, jockeys described that some caterers in the weighing room often lacked autonomy in being able to provide individual nutritional requests in contrast to the aforementioned favourable caterers who were. This finding may suggest employees of catering companies may benefit from some initial training on the lifestyle and demands placed on jockeys and be encouraged to engage in dialogue and discussion with them. The strongest higher order theme within this dimension related to *developing a food provision conducive to performance and weight management*, indicating a preference towards better quality foods over their quantity:

Rather than cereal bars and chocolate bars, I'd like to see more protein bars, more Greek yogurt and things, and the meats... plenty of choice for your meats (Jockey 4).

Light foods, stuff you can pick away at. A lot of lads can't or won't eat before a race, or if they do it's just a little bit of something to satisfy them, they don't want a plate of stodge (Jockey 8).

A recurrent suggestion was the availability of more cooked meats due to both the feasibility of portion control and low calorie content, alongside its favourable taste. Furthermore, its versatility to make more substantial meals for when circumstances allowed was possible:

Some courses have several meats, [racecourse] for example have a beef, chicken, a turkey crown, pork and that. Now that's good because we know it's good for you, it tastes pretty good and you can pick at it no problem. You can make a sarnie... it's up to you, wraps, whatever (Jockey 3).

In tandem with the suggestions of providing more cooked meats, a reduction in the availability of perceived unhealthy foods was heard:

Just cut out all the absolute you know, sausages and all the stuff that's no good, just cut it out. When you've had a long day it's just too tempting it grab that and just eat it you know? I think you should just make it so there isn't even that option to have (it)... If you eat a healthier meal, you feel like you've had a meal and it will stop you stopping on the way home as well (Jockey 10).

The notion of needing to visit service stations to eat after competition repeatedly featured throughout the jockey narrative and related directly to a lack of availability of food provision towards the latter stages of race meetings. A desire to seize the impulsion of 'stopping off' to eat on the journey home was a common thread throughout interviews. Due to the financial costs of service station foods, but more importantly the negative implication of energy dense foods on weight management, jockeys expressed a clear message in wanting foods more readily available to take away with them after race meetings:

I'd rather have more stuff that you can take away with you... sometimes when you get home it's late, and then you don't want to eat, so you'd rather have something (from the racecourse), or I'd end up stopping somewhere for a sandwich (Jockey 5).

(I'd like more) stuff to take away, at the minute you've either got to sit and eat some chilli or whatever before you leave or end up stopping off half-way home for some food. Sometimes I'm that buzzing I can't eat straight after the races, I need an hour to calm down you know but at the minute you can't really take much away with you other than a handful of biscuits or jelly sweets (Jockey 3).

The final higher order theme related to *embedding regulatory minimum standards for racecourses to adhere to*. It was clearly communicated that an inconsistency exists amongst food provision at racecourses with some racecourses praised for their quality and effort, where others were condemned by multiple jockeys. A common theme of standardising provision was explored with some suggestion for this to be underpinned by regulation to force lesser performing courses to improve their offerings.

Like some of the food that you see at the tracks, honestly, it's horrendous. I don't want to start naming them, but if it was a legal thing, or a thing set up that this is what you have to have in, then they'd have no other choice but to comply with it. But unless it's something brought in by the medical side of the BHA, it's never going to change (Jockey 6).

An alternative suggestion was to share good practice between racecourses, enabling prominent racecourses to be learned from by others.

What I'm saying, there's no standards there, so they're kind of getting to do what they want, when they want... but identify the people or the courses that are the best, and basically pick that up and try and replicate it everywhere else (Jockey 9).

The Perception of Racecourse Clerks on Racecourse Food Provision

Clerks responses under this theme were defined into two general dimensions; 1) Their perception of factors influencing racecourse food provision, and secondly 2) Offered solutions to further improve provision (see Table 2).

Raw Data	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
Generally speaking, we do seem to be getting it better, and we're getting a better reaction to what we're putting out. Now whether we're putting the right things out is still open to debate, but we're getting less... adverse reaction to what we put out (C-2).	Food at racecourses (n = 7)	Perception of Factors Influencing Racecourse Food Provision
We have a strange relationship with the jockeys, because they're in a position to make our life pretty uncomfortable, and we have no leverage over them. So it has to be a rapport between the clerk and the jockeys, built on trust (C-7).	Jockey-Clerk relationship (n = 3)	
They all seem to like [caterer 2], but I'm not convinced he does anything actually that different. I think it's just because he's one of them, they really like him (C-1).	Caterers and budget (n = 7)	
A lot of these weighing rooms haven't got kitchens, so the stuff's got to come from somewhere else, and then you start to run into food standards whatever it is for that, transporting stuff about too much, and that is, I don't think there's ever so much a cost issue for the racecourses, it's always the actual logistics (C-6)	Feasibility and logistics (n = 3)	
I mean, the costs... I used to be like, "Oh God, don't put this in, and don't put that in", but as I say, for the past ten years, it's just easier to see it as money well spent, if it's doing, I see it as money well spent to keep them happy, as long as it is what they want (C-1).	Jockey satisfaction is priority over budget (n = 7)	Offered Solutions to Improve Provision
I think the guidelines that we had were a good starting point. Had they been more widely agreed, or somehow got accepted by the jockeys, we would have been able to go a little bit further forward now (C-4).	Regulatory guidance and governance (n = 7)	

Table 2: General Dimensions and Higher Order Themes of Jockeys Perception of Racecourse Food Provision.

Perception of Factors Influencing Racecourse Food Provision

Racecourse clerks generally held a common belief that the *food at racecourses* has improved in recent times: "I think it's got an awful lot better, actually. I have seen quite a change in it" (Clerk 1); "I think it's improved a lot over the years, and I think that most of us would always be glad act in accordance with the best advice" (Clerk 7), however ambiguity still exists to what optimal provision is:

It's a bit of a minefield. We find it difficult to know what foods to put out... over the years we've received several different sorts of fact sheets about what we should and shouldn't be doing. You get to a point where you get a bit confused (Clerk 2).

Jockey's food typically is one that has, over the years, caused more headaches than anything else (Clerk 5).

Despite a lack of clarity, many clerks perceive their racecourse provides food of an acceptable standard for that of professional sportspeople, and on balance is met with approval from the jockeys:

I mean, we've piled a lot of effort into it here, and I believe it's as good as any buffet restaurant you could walk into. So I think the standards here are right (Clerk 4).

I think our fare is very reasonable compared to a number of racecourses... we don't get many complaints. Every now and again somebody will come and have a bit of a paddy because we haven't laid on specifically what they want. [Ex jockey] had a moan once, so fillet steak was brought down for him. We haven't had a complaint about the food here probably for eighteen months, I should think (Clerk 5).

No, I don't think there's a need (to improve provision), from my tracks anyway. I think there's a nice balance there already (Clerk 6).

An alternative perspective from some clerks however is that in the current absence of regulatory guidance, a balance in provision between optimal foods and comfort or “bad” foods still needs to be provided in order to pacify jockeys who openly engage in archaic eating and weight-making practices:

I think, for [racecourse], I think the quality is pretty good, but again, I know that they shouldn't be having chips, pizza, chicken nuggets, whatever else. But there is salad there, and there's cold meat, and they can make their own, do what they want with it. Should they be having sweets and bits of chopped up Mars Bar? No, probably not, but there's a balance between providing some of what's good for them, and some of what they want, because until it goes in the rules, we're going to get lynched (Clerk 6).

We will, for as long as it's legitimate, provide what you would consider to be bad food, because as I've said before, for the management of our relationship with the jockeys, I'm just not telling them, “Listen, I know better than you, and I've taken sweeties off the menu”. I've got other things to argue with them about (Clerk 7).

Clerks openly conceded that a more fundamental priority for them than food provision on race day is the track running surface and correctly judging its condition, or it's 'going'. This judgement is one on which the whole industry relies upon to make decisions relating to racing or placing wagers on certain horses.

I'm there to look after the racing surface and racing, so my first concern is that racing goes smoothly, the jockeys are happy with the ground, everybody else is happy with the ground. The last thing you want is to have, as [sports psychologist] described it, a hunting pack of flat jockeys when they're on the moan about something. So where you can keep them happy, or not upset them, then you're going to do that. So yes, we probably know what we need to do for the good of the jockeys, but they would not like us doing what we know is for their own good, if they don't want it (Clerk 6).

This hesitance to remove perceived “bad” foods was described to be in the interest of upholding the *jockey-clerk relationship*, a factor they feel is scarcely considered by other industry members.

We have a strange relationship with the jockeys, because they're in a position to make our life pretty uncomfortable, and we have no leverage over them. So it has to be a rapport between the clerk and the jockeys, built on trust (Clerk 7).

Food provision impacts on our business in the jockeys moaning and screeching, and then, because they didn't win a race, they're now going to say, “Oh, the ground's shit”, because they're pissed off because they haven't got the can of Red Bull, or whatever it is (Clerk 6).

This unique finding identifies an important factor which influences the current provision at some racecourses in the UK. Previous assumptions by jockeys have been made that foods offered have been solely based on budget, however this new aspect should be factored into future discussions debating the existing and previous food provision.

Depending on the racecourse, the *caterers and budget* vary significantly. Some racecourses provide the jockeys' food provision “in house” from a main industrial kitchen which is subsequently transported to the weighing room. Alternatively, some tracks employ an external company, or individual, to provide catering for race day. Clerks are in agreement, similar to the position of jockeys, that the person present in the weighing room can influence both the provision and the perception of it.

Some bring in outside caterers, which can work, and sometimes does, and sometimes doesn't. One caterer looked after [racecourse] and [racecourse] for a bit, and she got rid of some things, did whatever, and I would say, the quality was better. She then couldn't do it... got somebody to cover for her, and the food just nose-dived (Clerk 6).

They all seem to like [caterer 2], but I'm not convinced he does anything actually that different. I think it's just because he's one of them, but they really like him. It's not rocket science really, what he's doing, is it? But they do like him, but I think it's probably because he is 'one of them' (Clerk 1).

A noteworthy factor is that race day food provision receives no industry funding. Consequently, financial expenditure on weighing room food impacts on total revenues for racecourses, or reducing profit margins to third-party catering companies who receive a fixed fee:

Racecourse caterers can be very good, but ultimately they don't make any money out of it. It costs them. So again, they're trying to, not do it on the cheap, but do it as cheaply as they can (Clerk 3).

The *feasibility and logistics* of providing foods determines the type of foods certain courses are able to provide. Several of the UK's racecourses hold listed buildings, some of which contain the weighing rooms meaning their facilities are limited with an inability to significantly modernise in line with the growth and demands of the sport. Similarly, adherence to health and safety laws and classification of buildings need to be recognised:

If you start putting ovens and things into rooms, you then start to class it as a kitchen, and then it comes under separate fire regulations. The whole building starts to become differently categorised... [Racecourse] for example has got no cooker, they've got a sink, a kettle, a microwave, and that's it. Everything else comes in, and the area for the lady to work in would be (very small) (Clerk 6).

Many racecourses operate across multiple buildings and is common for the kitchens to be housed in a separate building to the weighing room. Clerks were pragmatic in explaining the operational challenges posed of transporting food from one building to another, stating it needs to be "*operationally achievable, and it has to be operationally sustainable*" (Clerk 5) on race days when often several thousand people stand between the two locations:

A lot of these weighing rooms haven't got kitchens, so the stuff's got to come from somewhere else, and then you start to run into food standards whatever it is for that, transporting stuff about too much, and that. I don't think there's ever so much a cost issue for the racecourses, it's always the actual logistics (Clerk 6).

Offered Solutions to Improve Provision

It was generally accepted that the discussed logistical barriers could not be remedied without unlikely and highly significant changes in circumstance such as a reclassification of premises or the development of a new building. In contrast, clerks openly offered solutions relating to factors that were within their control, some of whom have been proactive in implementing them. Referring to food specifically, clerks described that *jockey satisfaction is priority over budget* and typified by a statement from Clerk 7 "*in the grand scheme of things, budget's not a part of this*".

Caterers are responsible for their catering budget, and they know what that's a non-revenue making area. However, I bang on that we need a good relationship with jockeys (Clerk 5).

If I showed you my list of what we spend on jockeys' food each meeting, and the menu that we provide... there must be over twenty different food types on that list. There's chicken, there's pasta, there's pork, there's bread, there's salads, there's beans. You name it, it's on there, and I now have the case of, if they want it, give it to them, because it is easier (Clerk 1).

This representation of budget not being the influencing factor and clerks ultimately want to satisfy jockeys, indicates a willingness to implement strategies with the caveat that they are endorsed by jockeys and supported by the industry's regulatory bodies. The strongest suggestion focused around receiving *regulatory guidance and governance* on food provision rather than being allowed complete autonomy.

There needs to be a minimum standard, and if that could be as tall as it is long, as it is wide, whatever, then racecourses can pick and choose from within those parameters. If [regulatory bodies] come up with the policy where there's been a conversation with jockeys... it gets easier to implement, doesn't it? (Clerk 5).

We would certainly like to match what you're telling them to do. From our point of view, it's important to put on what they're being told... there's little point in us not following that, because it's a very important education message to get across, as to what a sportsman should be doing (Clerk 2).

Whilst some clerks suggested guidance and regulation simply as a concept that would be welcomed, others offered more specific models of how they felt new guidelines and directives would benefit all stakeholders:

I'd break it down into points (scoring system). Thirty points, fifty points, whatever. You must score forty-two out of fifty (for example). We accept some things you won't be able to do, but there is no excuse for not having "this" because that's easy. OK, you can't provide the ready-cooked omelette when they want it, because you can't put a cooker in there... we accept some things you just can't do where you are. You should be aiming for it, and if you rebuild the weighing room... (it should then be included) (Clerk 6).

The prospect of guidance from industry bodies on food provision is not original, however previous attempts to do this within horseracing have lacked consultation with both jockeys and clerks to devise an agreeable solution [33]. Similarly, previous guidelines have never been made a mandatory requirement of racecourses by the sport's regulatory body, the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). Clerks appear keen to have a framework by which they are bound, allowing them to provide optimal food provision whilst having legislation to refer to when debating with jockeys who request non-conductive foods:

It would undoubtedly have to be driven by the BHA, and not by any other party. Otherwise, what you will get is, you will get a certain number of the jockeys to embrace it voluntarily, and the others won't (Clerk 7).

I think it's a very good thing, but it needs to go into the rules, so we are able to say, "Look, the rule says..." It's a breach of the BHA's instructions, which are what we have to (follow), and if we're in breach of them, we get fined (Clerk 6).

The Perception of the Support Network on Racecourse Food Provision

This general dimension reflected the support network's thoughts on current provision through their position as key stakeholders in jockeys' performance. Comparable with the previous participant groups, higher order themes for the support network were separated in to 1) Perceptions of weighing room provision and influence on weight, and secondly 2) Offered solutions to further improve provision (see Table 3).

Raw Data	Higher Order Theme	General Dimension
I think it's, and I go to racing once a week, and I think it's head and shoulders above what it used to be, consistent and fresh and hot and all those sorts of things (Jockey Coach 2).	Better quality provision than before (n = 4)	Perception of Weighing Room Provision and its Influence on Weight
The clerks of the courses, the only thing they want is calmness. They don't want any objections; they just want to keep the peace. So the best way to keep the peace is just give them the food that they want, rather than what they need, so it'd be chocolates, biscuits, you name it, pastries, sausage rolls (Jockey Coach 3).	Not conducive to weight management or riding performance (n = 4)	
They've got to the stage now where they're much more educated. You know, jockeys that take the middle out of a sandwich if it's a sandwich sort of thing, and so there's more option, and some of the food can be quite wholesome, and they can ride, and when they've finished riding, they can have a warm meal, and so they don't need then to stop on the way home. But if the food looks a bit skanky, they stop on the way home, because they've got to put fuel in, the same as a car (Agent 2).	Improve food quality and align with education content (n = 4)	Offered Solutions to Improve Provision

Table 3: General Dimensions and Higher Order Themes of Jockeys' Support Network's Perception of Racecourse Food Provision.

Perceptions of Weighing Room Provision and its Influence on Weight

Support network participants generally agreed that weighing room provision although not always ideal, is considerably better quality provision than before, echoing similar sentiments to the racecourse clerks:

I think that they've come on a lot, bearing in mind I used to ride, it was just like pork pies and stuff like that... I ask my jockeys about it, and they've got like everything. They've got thumbs up for some, and maybe not, sort of borderline, with others (Agent 2).

Holding more personal relationships with jockeys, the support network was similarly able to reflect upon open discussions with their athletes regarding positive developments in racecourse provision:

I think even some of the older ones would so much appreciate it. Like as soon as I asked [jockey], it was like, "Ah, [racecourse] is great, you get joints of meat" (Agent 1).

Concurrent with views of jockeys and clerks, support staff recalled multiple anecdotes that despite improvements many racecourses still offer food that is not conducive to weight management or riding performance:

It was literally a lump of dough with a tiny piece of ham in the middle, and I thought, that is ridiculous, to give somebody something to eat with this lump, and then I said to [jockey] about it, and he said the food recently, it's terrible. Like chocolate and sweets is all he said they got somewhere. I've been there, and they've [the jockeys] gone to me, "I'm going in now, because the chips are coming out" (Agent 1).

One of the biggest problems is the fridges. I can remember, and it's probably changed... but the fridges would be full of Coke and Red Bull (Jockey Coach 1).

A relevant point raised within the narrative is the clear disconnect between what jockeys are advised to eat during their limited nutrition education during jockey school and what is often provided on racecourses:

They (jockeys) would all tell you that crap is what they're fed. Which you can't try and educate them on nutrition as to what they're supposed to eat... then it's like, "Well, yes, it's great what they told me there, and I understand all of that, but now what do I do?" Because none of what you've told them they should be eating is actually on that table in front of them (Agent 2).

The offered solutions sought to address this conflict with participants suggesting that what is conveyed in education material needs to be represented in the foods provided to jockeys in the weighing room. It appears sensible to suggest that until these two elements of jockey nutrition are aligned, a shift in culture is unlikely to occur:

You can only tell them what is right, but you then need to be able to put things in place for them to eat what you've said to them is right, which at the moment is not there, is it? (Jockey Coach 1).

General Discussion

This study aimed to explore the horseracing industry's perception of current food provision at racecourses in relation to both its quality and its contribution to weight management and riding performance. This paper is the first conducted that seeks to determine the perception and satisfaction of jockeys and other key industry stakeholders on the food provided on competition day. Through interviewing a range of figures it provides a novel and transparent lens into to the complexity of getting food provision right in a sport where food and weight management are important factors. The findings provide insight to the perceptions of jockeys, racecourse clerks, trainers, agents and coaches, specifically on the improvements already achieved in weighing room food provision however with the need to further develop quality and availability of certain foods. The findings also outline suggestions by stakeholders to improve the standard of catering, focussing on food itself, catering staff, and improved governance to increase adherence.

Through implementation of some of the previous advisory catering guidelines [33], jockeys and their support network acknowledged improvements in food provision and that some racecourses consistently deliver acceptable standards of food. Provision which offers both

quality and variety exists, and those courses that attempt to align offered foods with that of the recommendations of previous research on jockeys [10] were praised. Despite this, the strongest theme that ran throughout the data was that food provision requires further development in a manner which better facilitates the demands of modern day professional jockeys, specifically their requirement to make weight and optimise their riding performance. The data identifies a conundrum faced by racecourse clerks. They suggested that whilst some jockeys are now better educated and demonstrate behaviours that are distancing themselves from archaic tendencies, many still follow deep-rooted practices and a complete cessation from this appears to have the potential to cause distress to some, justifying the continued inclusion of some unhealthy foods. This outlook may in part contribute to the notion that some racecourse provision prioritises quantity over quality, with too great of an emphasis on calorie dense foods, a view held in contention with clerks. Despite acknowledgement that an improved and more standardised approach is warranted, the general consensus amongst clerks was that current provision was of a good standard. In their opinion, the delivery of a balanced provision, providing a range of foods both conducive and contradictory to weight management has been seen generally to be the most diplomatic and tactful approach from racecourses. This finding underlines the general consensus that whilst provision has improved, more still needs to be done.

There is a unity in opinion between jockeys and clerks in the perception that the racecourse caterer, and more specifically the catering staff who have direct contact with jockeys hold a significant role in the quality of provision. Recent research has indicated the social factors such as food availability and the influence of others, plays a part in the food choices of professional sportspeople [14] and is indicated as more defined in weight-making athletes [34]. Some caterers are reported to provide a lack of quality foods or an inflexibility in adjusting to specific needs of individuals, whereas others who are responsive and engaging with jockeys hold stronger relationships and facilitate a better eating environment. Although the reasons behind the dichotomy in service approach was not founded within this study, jockeys consistently suggested a lack of understanding from inexperienced catering staff. This may indicate a need for caterers who are new to horseracing or have had no previous interaction with professional jockeys to undergo an initial training or induction process to narrow the gap. A similar intervention has previously been successful with catering teams in the lead up to Olympic games, with front-line caterers undergoing education sessions to better understand nutrition for sports performance and to standardise their approach and interaction [20]. With a lack of facilities in some cases and limited funding, caterers are often providing food on minimal profit margins and with basic facilities. Foods that are requested or considered conducive to weight management may often be financially unviable, or logistically unfeasible adding to the already complex task. These circumstances should be considered when judging the quality or credibility of racecourse catering.

A collective outlook and a mind-set focussed on future and continuous development of racecourse provision was a consistent and positive theme. With the interest of improving riding performance for jockeys, and the prospect for clerks being able to deliver consistently amenable food provision, there was an interest in suggesting improvements from all participant groups. Presentation and availability of foods are areas of provision that jockeys value and improvement of these aspects alone could help with the perception of some existing foods. The sensory appeal of foods is considered the foremost determinant of whether an individual will eat or reject it [35] and similarly the convenience of food plays a significant role in food selection [36]. If racecourses can better present and have readily available food at the end of race meetings where many jockeys feel provision is at its poorest, satisfaction is likely to increase.

A cross-participant proposal of better governance or improved regulatory guidance was a clear suggestion. Guidance for caterers has been present in many other sports since the 1980s [21,37], where catering for athletes has evolved from a focus on variety to more specialized food provision that considers their performance needs [19]. Examples of specific catering have recently been promoted in professional football [38], professional road cycling [39], and the Olympic games [40]. Similarly, processes exist in other sports where catering guidelines are issued and subsequently reviewed [21], a model that racecourses collectively could potentially benefit from. Whilst these approaches have been attempted previously within horseracing by the industry's nutrition team [41], due to a lack of central funding and governance these have only been sporadic attempts on an advisory rather than regulatory basis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the novel and intricate findings of this study, two practical recommendations for the industry can be construed. A new set of regulatory minimum standards for racecourse catering provision should be developed with coherent guidelines for racecourses that are periodically reviewed. The guidelines should be founded on the existing evidence base for jockey nutrition and as such can be endorsed by nutrition professionals and align with the nutrition education provided in racing schools. In consideration of multi-stakeholder perspectives the guidelines should seek to find a suitable middle ground where they are a) financially and logistically sustainable for courses to adhere to, b) satisfy the taste needs of modern day professional jockeys, and c) are conducive to health, performance, and weight management. Secondly, preliminary training and greater autonomy should be provided for catering staff working directly with professional jockeys, providing basic knowledge of the lifestyle and weight-making pressures of professional jockeys and allowing them the freedom to provide individual requests where appropriate.

The present paper seeks to add to the growing literature base on professional jockeys, giving a unique qualitative insight into the perception and experiences of nutrition, whilst providing practical recommendations for the industry. Whilst the general consensus was a need to improve food provision at racecourses, narratives of positive experiences and realistic solutions were provided by all participant groups, giving clear and optimistic direction for the professional horseracing industry to consider.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the British Horseracing Authority for the funding provided towards this research.

Conflict of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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