

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is horse racing becoming the new bullfighting?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

You're going to hear from Ed Chamberlain, who was presenting the coverage of the Grand National 2023 at entry this weekend.

And it's the moment that animal rights activists entered the track and delayed the race.

Nine of those protesters, they were from the animal rising group, were detained.

They tried to attach themselves to fences.

And their argument is that horse racing is cruel and shouldn't happen.

And this is Ed just describing what's actually unfolding.

So this is a developing situation here at entry.

Not a total surprise, it must be said.

The horses, I guess, are being held in the paddock with these scenes going on outside the race course, with these protesters trying to break onto the race course over the barriers to disrupt the most popular horse race in the world.

Well that was Ed then, and we have spoken to Ed today, having had time to reflect on those scenes at entry on Saturday, and he's feeling towards the protesters.

Day, I won't forget in a hurry.

What would I say to them?

I had no problem whatsoever, John, with the protest in the morning at all.

I understand it.

I'm happy to listen.

They're more than entitled to their point of view.

They came at 4.54 when that protest changed, as I'm sure you saw the pictures unfold and you two know exactly what it's like in live television.

And the game changed when it turned violence against the police, which is where I disagreed with it.

So today on The News Agents, we're going to try and look at horse racing, both from the perspective of those who love it, those who think it is the best day out and the best thing to watch.

It gets huge numbers in terms of coverage and the perspective of the protesters, who basically think that horse racing should go the way of bullfighting, that as humans, we should not have the capacity to put horses through activities that are dangerous, even deadly.

Welcome to The News Agents.

The News Agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

We're going to talk about a story which is breaking whilst we record and it involves the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who we now understand is being investigated by Parliament's standards watchdog.

And it concerns a possible failure to declare an interest or it concerns how he declared this.

It's about a declaration of interest into childcare, into shares, into his wife's finances and into whether the budget impacted any of that.

We're going to bring you that a little bit later.

But we're starting with horses.

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Yeah.

We're going to start with entry and the meeting this weekend, a weekend in which we saw three horses die.

But I think what will stick in everyone's mind is the Grand National and the fact that protesters managed to get onto the track and try to attach themselves to a couple of the fences.

It delayed the race for 14 minutes.

One trainer has said that the delay and the subsequent death of their horse was down to the protesters, but it has started a conversation about the most popular day in British racing.

It was watched by seven and a half million people in the UK.

It was watched by 400 million people around the world.

The Grand National is a big event, but questions of cruelty, not just about that event, but about horse racing in general, have come to the fore as a result of the protests by animals rising.

Yeah.

So we're going to be talking to animal rising a little bit later, and it's important to understand that they are against not just horse racing, but any use of animals that is seen as exploitative or dangerous.

So we explored just how far that goes and where, if you like, the lines are drawn for animal rising in terms of the relationship that human beings have with animals overall.

But we're also going to hear from Ed Chamberlain because, Ed, he was the voice you heard right at the beginning, Ed was presenting.

He was the broadcaster that day, and he sets out what it feels like to see a mood change before your eyes.

He cares very deeply about the horses that he comments about, and he also understands the complexities of how our relationship to horse racing has changed in the years and the decades that he has been covering it as well.

Ed, what do you say to the protesters who say what we are doing is championing animal rights?

John, Emily, thank you very much for having me on.

Yeah, I was there on Saturday.

It was quite a day.

A day I won't forget in a hurry.

What would I say to them?

I had no problem whatsoever, John, with the protests in the morning at all.

I understand it.

I'm happy to listen.

They're more than entitled to their point of view.

The difficulty came at 4.54 when that protest changed, as I'm sure you saw the pictures unfold, and you two know exactly what it's like in live television.

And the game changed when it turned violence against the police, which is where I disagreed with it, and I disagree with them.

And I'm speaking here as Ed Chamberlain, the racing fan, rather than ITV's Ed Chamberlain.

And from there, it got very difficult, John, and it was difficult to find the words, the

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right words to describe it.

Emotions were running high, and it was very unfortunate the way it played out.

Sandy Thompson, whose horse, Hill 16, was killed that day, lays the blame squarely at the protesters for the delays, which he said made all the horses jumpy and restless and contributed to their sense of unease that day.

Is that right?

Emily, I think you can understand Sandy would have been incredibly emotional.

I mean, the love for his horse is impossible to describe.

The owner, Jim Fife, who's a Dundee and I's director, has always dreamed, I mean, he says it all.

He's an owner, that was his dream, to have a runner in the Grand National.

And I'm sure in the aftermath, emotions were running incredibly high.

It's impossible to speculate.

We don't know is the truth, Emily.

It can't have helped.

It was warm.

The horses were in the paddock.

You can imagine what thoroughbreds are like.

A few of them were very much on edge, and that delay certainly didn't help.

And the atmosphere at entry, Emily, changed markedly.

It went very quickly from being this giant celebration to being very much on edge.

There was frustration.

There was a real toxic feel, particularly down by the first fence.

It felt really intense and like a cauldron.

And you can only speculate as to why it happened, but I can understand what he's saying.

I simply do not know.

From my point of view, Emily, watching that race, and listen, I've presented so many big sporting events from World Cup finals to big rugby events and so on and so forth.

But I love the Grand National more than any other event as a presenter and a sports fan.

And I'll be honest, I found that uncomfortable to watch on Saturday.

Even I found that race difficult to watch.

Can you send comfortable to watch because you didn't like the protesters being there or you felt that they might have a point and that the horses were going through something really awful?

What do you mean by that?

The race was difficult.

It was difficult to watch.

Listen, I know the Grand National, like so many other sports, it does have an element of danger.

That is part of the sport.

10, 20 years ago, you wouldn't think anything of it.

I know that it's a different world now.

I know the social licence is different.

I watched the Grand National very differently now to when I watched it, when I first started,

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probably 1981, all the 80s year, because I literally watched it with my fingers crossed that everything is going to be okay.

I understand the danger.

I understand the importance of the race.

But you know, I'll be open with you as Ed Chamberlain, the racing fan.

That was a difficult watch on Saturday.

It was a very eventful race.

The first couple of fences were difficult to watch.

And then you've got the horses running loose, which again makes things difficult.

But they've done everything in their power.

Safety is the absolute priority at entry.

The race has changed so much over the years.

But if safety is the overriding priority at entry, why is it that every year, during the entry meeting, there are dead horses?

There are horses that have to be put down?

Because sadly, John, horse racing is a wonderful sport but has that trapdoor to despair.

That is the nature of it for so many different reasons.

Horses are half a tonne of animal on the most delicate of legs.

Horses can have accidents anywhere, in a field, at home.

Lucinda Russell, the winning trainer, actually said she feels safest when her horses are at the racecourse because of all the care that is taken.

Sure.

But I guess not all races.

And if you look at Cheltenham, you don't have 40 runners in the field, whereas you do at entry.

And that's something, listen, that's something maybe we need to look at.

We will listen.

And the one thing you know, the sport will review everything as it has with every Grand National every year.

Could it be the runners?

Could they still look into that?

Could it be the ground?

It isn't the fences.

I know that because you don't want the horses going too fast.

There are so many elements to it, but you also have to put it into perspective, John, in the sense that there are 20,000 racehorses and 90,000 runners a year.

The fatality rate is 0.21%.

Now we don't want any.

Of course, you have sympathy with everybody that suffers from that, and particularly with Jimmy Fife and Sandy Thompson from the weekend.

But there is danger in this sport, but this is what the horses are bred to do.

This is what horses love doing.

They love running.

They love jumping.

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And to any of the guys that want to stop the Grand National or stop jump racing, they need to understand, John, that these are what these animals are bred to do.

My question to them would be, what do you do with nearly 20,000 horses in training, that's 50,000 thoroughbreds in the UK, if they can't race?

Because these animals, they aren't pets.

They need professional handling, they need professional care.

And the care they get in this country, you keep emphasizing it, and I'd love people to come and see it.

I'd love you two to come with me to a stable to see the love and care and the way these horses are cherished.

But I make no secret of the fact that is that element of danger in horse racing, and that is part of it.

Ed, can we get philosophical for a moment?

Because I guess the way this debate would go, and we're going to be speaking to protesters in a moment, is they would say, what gives human beings the right to put animals through incredibly dangerous events or activities?

Fine if you as a jockey want to risk your life.

Fine if you want to do, you know, extraordinary skiing.

But when we're talking about Formula One, the collateral damage is to a car.

But when you're talking about Aintree, the collateral is an actual horse.

And that is horses, Emily.

And I totally understand the way the world has changed and society has changed.

And if they get their way, it would happen the same way that say, Shire horses, who were part of everyday life 20, 30 years ago, working horses.

That breed is so rare now, and that is what will happen to thoroughbreds.

And they are such majestic animals.

I don't think anyone would want that to happen.

And the fact is that I've talked about the care.

I've talked about how they can't be a pet.

This is what horses are bred to do.

This is what they love doing.

So that either you do this or you don't breed them at all and they stop existing.

Is that the binary choice?

Well, you'd need to ask the protesters two questions.

Yeah, is that what they want?

And secondly, if they do stop racing, what happens to these horses?

What happens to these horses, Emily?

What is their plan with these horses?

What do you do with 20,000 race horses?

What do you do with 50,000 thoroughbreds?

That would be the welfare crisis.

Because these things stand.

They've got the professional care that they have to have.

You cannot put a thoroughbred out in a field.

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Honestly, it just would not work.

They need to understand that.

These thoroughbreds are not pets, promise you.

And we, on our side, the sport has got to make the safest environment it possibly can.

And that is what Aintree have done and will continue to do.

Ed, thank you so much.

Thanks, Ed.

Thank you.

Thank you, guys.

Thanks for having me.

We're going to hear from the protesters now, from animal-rising themselves.

Because around 100 animal rights activists were arrested over the weekend.

Nine protesters from their group, Animal Rising, were detained because they tried to attach themselves to fences along this sort of four-mile course.

And one woman was even seen trying to attach herself to one of the jumps whilst other supporters were stopped by police trying to scale the perimeter fence with ladders.

And some were sort of dressed as punters and were trying to sort of escape the security by other means.

But the question, I guess, is whether animal rights activists like Animal Rising feel that they created the sense of instability and danger that the horses were then in, or whether they feel that they have got what they wanted because, look, here we are, we're all talking about it, and it was a moment that, for better or for worse, no one will forget over the weekend.

Yeah, to frame it, did they highlight a problem or create a problem?

Well, we're joined in the studio now by Claudia Pena Rojas, who is from Animal Rising, and you were at Aintree at the weekend and arrested and then released without charge.

I suppose my first question is, are you pleased with the way things unfolded at Aintree?

Well, first of all, thank you so much for having me here today.

I am obviously disappointed that the race happened, that a horse was hurt, which is obviously what we were trying to prevent, but I am really happy with the conversation that is now taking place because what we want to do is have a national conversation about our relationship, not just regarding race horses, but our treatment of animals in general.

And what do you say to the trainer who says that the delay to the race led to his horse falling and ultimately having to be destroyed?

I actually had a conversation with him this morning, and first of all, I'd give my condolences to him and anyone who is feeling pain and loss at this moment due to this really tragic death.

However, to say that this was a result of this protest, I think it's totally wrong.

This was not an isolated incident, free horses have died at the Grand National already this year, and Hill 16 is the 50th horse to die in British horse racing this year, and there were no protests there.

So to shift this responsibility onto a protest that was trying to raise awareness of this and prevent this from happening is wrong.

What did he say to you during that conversation?

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So he explained that he thought that this disruption might have made the horse anxious and that he felt that the horse was anxious.

And what I would say is, you know, if we have this connection, which they always say that the Jockeys have this amazing connections with the horses, then I believe that they do really love these horses.

But if that was the case, and you feel that this horse is uneasy, and their welfare is their priority, which is always what's said, then that horse should have never been allowed to run.

And so my question is ultimately, why do we keep putting animals in these positions where they aren't safe when we don't need to?

So can I ask how far you would go then?

You would like horse racing to disappear entirely?

I'd like us to stop using animals wherever is unnecessary.

I think our relationship with animals and the natural world as it stands is really broken.

So just think equestrian is out.

So you wouldn't have show jumping, you wouldn't have dressage, you wouldn't have any of it?

No, I think any time that we're putting animals in a situation where they are being exploited, where they're potentially in danger and they just don't need to be, should be avoided.

And I think it's really possible for us to have a much healthier relationship with animals where we find ways to love them because we are a nation of animal lovers, but where our actions are in line with those values.

We can't ask animals that.

I guess my question is how far you would press that.

I mean, if we ask our pets, like if I took my dog marathon training with me on a 20-mile run.

I mean, is that something you'd say that's exploitation?

But these horses are firstly, you know, they're whipped multiple times every race, despite extensive evidence over 10 years worth of research that shows that they feel that pain just as we would a horse dice every other race.

I think it's very different circumstances and these horses don't have a choice the way a human athlete does.

And so again, my question is, why do we continue to put animals in these positions?

I'm just asking, I totally understand that and I really hear the difference between whipping and treatment.

Obviously the jockeys would say these horses are not pets.

They're incredible thoroughbreds and they are loved and treated incredibly well.

But I'm just interested from animal rising's perspective, where does animal exploitation start?

Does it start just with simply owning a pet?

I think, you know, we can really get into what is and all these really micro things.

But I think when we do that, we're really neglecting to look at the big issue that is here, particularly when we're talking about our food system and the way it exploits animals and not only the way that animals suffer, but the impact that this is having on the natural world that's impacting us, that's going to impact our children.

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Do you think that race horses are beautiful?

I think they're absolutely amazing.

And so what would happen to them if there was no horse racing?

Well, I think part of the issue here is again, our relationship with animals is the fact we can't imagine animals existing for a purpose that isn't for our use.

And at the moment, we continue to breed these animals for this purpose.

But what I would love to see... If horse racing ended tomorrow, what would you do with the horses?

But that's not, you know, I think we both know that that's not going to happen, that this is transcription.

But it's a real question.

But it's not realistic.

So we're looking at the situation that doesn't exist, and we're neglecting to look at the very real issues that exist in the system now.

I understand the argument you're making, which you find the system cruel, but if you suddenly stop all equestrian activity, whether it be a gym car, whether it be show jumping, whether it be dressage, whether it be horse racing on the flat or over jumps, then you're going to have an awful lot of very redundant horses, and they are bred to race.

But again, this is something that would happen over time.

And just because we have something that is happening now, that is a norm, doesn't mean that things can't change.

And there are things that, you know, have been acceptable in the past.

Dog fighting, for example, that was incredibly popular.

And we came to the conclusion as a society that that's not the kind of people that we want to be.

We're not the society that we want to live in.

And with horse racing, we know that over 80% of people under 40 will not attend a horse race because of moral and ethical concerns.

So this is not a niche opinion.

This is something that the public are very aware of.

I guess it's worth just putting the other side, which is we had Ed Chamberlain, who's the host of ITV Racing, and his broadcast had, you know, 7.5 million viewers.

It's the most watched sporting event on ITV so far this year.

I mean, I guess Ed's point was that this is a breed.

They are thoroughbreds or a breed.

They're not a pet.

And if they didn't have this place in national life, they wouldn't exist.

So is it better that these horses don't exist at all than that they exist, live in these conditions?

What would animal rising say?

That I would love us to be able to imagine and really envision animals existing for a purpose that wasn't for us.

But the thoroughbred wouldn't, right?

You wouldn't have to have a thoroughbred or you wouldn't have a thoroughbred if it wasn't

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for equine related sport.

But I think part of the reason we have these animals right, A, because we love them and we seek to have this connection for them.

Well, let's just hear from the Jockey Club themselves.

They actually own Aintree and this is their CEO, Nevin Trustail, and he explains why without this sport, you wouldn't even have the thoroughbred racehorse.

We are national animal lovers in this country.

We love the thoroughbred.

That's why we in racing put the welfare of the thoroughbred right at the centre of absolutely everything we do.

And we will not rest until we have improved equine welfare standards even further than we have already, 99.8% of thoroughbreds who go out to race come back safe and sound.

And ultimately, those thoroughbreds are bred to race.

Without racing, there is no thoroughbred.

There is a connection between racing, breeding, and the sustainability and development of a thoroughbred.

And that is why the welfare of these beautiful animals, our equine heroes and superstars is something that we put right at the heart of everything we do.

There are so many other ways that we could have connections with other animals where we don't have to breed these animals for exploitation.

So one of the things we'd love to see is this transition to plant-based food system.

And along with that, we would reduce the amount of land that we need to produce food by over 60%.

So we could produce more food and less land.

And we could re-wild that land.

And we could bring back native species, elk, beavers.

We could even have wild horses who could live freely.

And imagine how amazing that would be.

And in terms of that, we're also preserving a future for our children.

And I just think that would be so beautiful.

And that's the kind of future that we all want to live in.

So I'm just trying to understand the sort of basics of this.

Would anyone be able to ride a horse again?

This isn't about telling people what they can and can't do.

I think you are.

No, what I want is for us to have a conversation because, again, I...

But would you like it that nobody rode a horse?

I would love us to stop using animals anywhere that we don't.

But cars are okay.

I mean, I think if we get into the overall system, there's so many things that need to change, you know, particularly when we start thinking about the climate crisis.

But basically, wild is where you want to be.

So we'd have wild horses.

You wouldn't ride them.

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No.

Presumably, you'd have wild dogs.

You wouldn't put them on leads or harnesses.

Again, I think that's a totally different situation.

And I think we're getting...

Why?

I'm just trying to understand.

I'm just trying to follow your...

I think we're both trying to follow your logic through.

The future that I would love to see, that I think most people would want to see, is one where we don't have animal suffering, where we don't have animal exploitation.

And that's companionship as well, presumably, is it?

That's not what I'm saying.

But I think any situation where we're putting animals in a situation where they are in danger, where they are suffering, where they're potentially going to be killed, or will definitely be killed, when we don't need to, and when actually the alternative is not only better for those animals, but actually better for us, for our planet, for our children, why would we not do that?

Claudia, thank you so much.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

Thank you very much.

I for one would love to see elks and beavers.

Right.

I mean, fascinating to listen to two very different viewpoints, although I kind of didn't think that they were being wildly unreasonable on either side, actually.

I thought that there was, you know, Ed made really good points about what on earth you do with these horses.

But you could see the idealistic view that wouldn't it be great if we could re-wild the countryside, we didn't eat meat, we didn't do this, and Britain would look a very different place.

I'm kind of torn between what is practically possible, and if you wanted to start a conversation, you've started it.

But this is a conversation that is going to run for decades.

There's not going to be a sudden move that says, right, we're going to ban horse racing tomorrow.

Look, I think things have shifted.

And dare I bring in at this point the Overton window, but I do think it's relevant that when we grew up, the vegetarian was the really odd person at the table, right?

Oh my God, they're vegetarian.

Now, if you find any group of people, there's more likely to be a non-meat eater or a flexitarian or a vegan or whatever it is.

And I think that actually what both Claudia and Ed showed us was that things are changing when we were growing up.

They didn't have bear baiting in England, I'm glad to say, not that old.

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But there was still quite a lot of bullfighting in Spain, that's pretty much been wiped out in our lifetime.

I went to bullfighting.

Right.

When I was a kid and we went to Spain on a package holiday, it was part of what you did.

You went to see a bullfight.

And I think the other thing that's changed is the transparency, the knowledge of what actually happens on the racetrack.

Because the official version of events is when a horse falls, a screen goes up around the horse and the rest is left to the imagination.

This time around, there was somebody taking a video.

There was social media that made us much more aware of what happened at that precise moment.

And I think the way these videos travel, and we don't know whether it was somebody in the crowd, whether it was actually a protester who'd got themselves into the crowd, but clearly somebody wanted us to know about what actually happens in those few seconds where everything is made palatable to the people who are watching on television or watching in the grandstand itself.

And we understand that it is for the horse's welfare and that people don't want to try and revive a horse with a broken leg and all the rest of it.

But what happens essentially is pretty brutal.

And I do have this weird thing.

I always say it at home.

I say, the animals will rise up.

That's my thing.

They will rise up and they will know whether we treat them well or badly.

I look at my dog in the morning who really never ever wants to go for a run before about midday.

And I sort of think, oh my God, am I exploiting?

I was sort of joking a bit, but not entirely.

Am I exploiting the dog by dragging him out and saying, sorry, it's time for a run.

It's time for a walk.

Will we get to a point where even that engagement with animals that have no choice is seen as absolutely horrific?

I don't know, actually.

When I take my dog out, he really needs to go out and I think he's probably quite grateful.

But we just...

Yes, we have different dogs.

No, but we just amble along the road and gently potter up some hill and look at the view and then we come down again, whereas you obviously have to run everywhere.

I have a whippet.

You have a whippet.

You look at a whippet and you think, what an athletic being.

I'm sure he loves to run.

He doesn't.

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Anyway, the conversation is part of a bigger thing, which is where we stand in terms of exploitation, choices.

Do we ever actually ask animals what they want?

And we're really going to start having that conversation without looking absolutely batshit crazy and a bit soppy.

Is that where we're going?

That's the question.

In a moment, though, we're going to be back with more prosaic matters and Rishi Sunak and the way he has filled in the form on members' interests and why potentially he might be in a bit of hot water.

That's to come.

This is The Newsagents.

Come back and some news that has been emerging during the course of today is that Rishi Sunak is being investigated by Parliament's standards watchdog over potentially having failed to declare an interest.

Now the interesting question, I don't think, relates to Rishi Sunak himself.

It relates to his wife and the fact that she potentially could have been a beneficiary as a result of her shareholding she has in a childcare company.

And of course, one of the big features of the budget was to encourage greater access to childcare where childcare companies would presumably benefit.

And I think the interesting thing about this story is that he was actually asked about it specifically three weeks ago.

There's a conversation with Adam Biancov, who's the political editor of Byline Times, where he says, why didn't the Prime Minister declare his wife's shares in a childcare agency when asked if he had any conflicts of interest yesterday?

And the press secretary says, I don't think he was asked specifically.

And the journalist says, he was asked if he had any conflicts of interest.

He didn't mention it.

And then the press secretary says, well, he has mentioned it to the Cabinet Office and has declared it and that is that.

And the journalist says, we didn't get to see it and MPs didn't get to see it.

So there is something it sounds like just reading through the transcript, this interview that has got lost between what he did say, who he said it to, and why he didn't make that clear at the time just after the budget.

And before we have a fanfare of Trumpets, I should say that Lewis has joined us in the studio to make sense of some of this.

What do you make of it?

What happened to that fanfare?

I thought we agreed.

You're not going to get one.

Right, okay, fine.

Well, in that case, I'll just say this.

Just add to what Emily was saying there.

He was also asked about it at a liaison committee of the House of Commons.

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This is a committee where all of the chairs of the Select Committee Gorilla Prime and Assistant was a few weeks ago.

He was asked directly about it by the Labour MP, Catherine McKinnell, and Sunak said that all of my interests are declared in the proper way.

Now it would seem that there is at least the possibility that he has not done so here, because the relevant bit of the rules is this.

Members must always be open and frank in declaring any relevant interest in any proceeding of the House or its committees and in any communications with ministers, members, public officials or public office holders.

And on the commissioners' website today, they are emphasising that question about whether there has been that openness and frankness.

So we don't have many details about it, apart from, as John has already said, relating seams to the Prime Minister's wife's interest in his childcare company.

But look, I think what could happen from this, if he hasn't been as transparent as he should be, if he hasn't followed the letters of the rules, he might get a slap on the wrist from the House.

You know, this will then be investigated by the commissioner and so on, potentially referred to the Standards Committee or the Privileges Committee, which is investigating Boris Johnson, of course.

I don't think there will be any sense, really, that there will be a really significant sort of punishment or sanction for this, but I think what it does highlight again is this kind of is what happens when you have a super, super rich Prime Minister.

We've never had anyone.

I mean, people often think that, you know, Prime Ministers are really rich by comparison to, you know, many ordinary people.

They are pretty well off and they often become very well off after they leave office.

But we've never had a member, not in the modern period anyway, not since Universal Suffrage, where we had a Prime Minister who is a member of the uber, uber elite, the global elite in a way that Rishi Sunak is, and his wife is in particular.

And so I suppose it's just inevitable when you have that many commercial interests, your fingers in so many pies, that it's kind of inevitable at some point, a government and a Prime Minister is going to legislate or is going to govern with regards to one of these things.

So this will just potentially come up again and again.

Yeah.

So actually, what you're saying is not that he's broken his golden rules on trying for transparency or trying for property, but just that if you have a lot of money and a lot of investments and a lot of shares, you're just saying it's carelessness.

Well, your family does.

Your family does.

You just lose track of what you've invested in today or last week or last month.

Quite frankly, yes.

Yes.

But I think it's important to kind of have the conversation that we had before we sat

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down, recorded all of this, is that, you know, we were saying, well, should we be junking the whole episode today and just doing this?

And it doesn't seem to be on the face of it, an egregious, deliberate, conniving break of the rules where you think, oh my God, look at the skull-duggery, that maybe we might have seen a little bit in the past couple of years.

It seems to me more kind of complicated.

Who might you be thinking of?

No, I'm not naming any names at all.

I mean, I think we shouldn't underestimate how shocking this still will be for a lot of people.

But the blunt facts, which is that his wife owns shares in a company that could be profiting from the policy, then that doesn't sound great.

It doesn't pass, as we'd say, the smell test.

If you imagine the opposite, that she sold off her shares just before this policy came in, you'd just write a different set of headlines that could be equally awkward, I guess, for a prime minister.

But it's about obeying the rules, isn't it?

Fundamentally, it's about getting the rules right.

It's about obeying the rules, but also for Sunak, politically, it is going to be really important.

If this was carelessness, it is going to be really important for him to ensure that stuff like this doesn't happen and doesn't happen repeatedly.

Why?

Because we know that, frankly, his wealth and his wife's wealth is a real political frailty for him.

It's a real political vulnerability.

And one we will be hearing more about from the Labour Party is the election draws closer.

This guy doesn't understand you.

This guy doesn't have a clue.

This guy's got a house in California.

His wife is a multi-billionaire, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and we know politics is going to get dirty.

We'll hear that more.

He's got to do everything he can to try and mitigate that and not just score our own goals like this, which, yeah, OK, it's a technicality, fine.

People won't pay that much attention, but it just gets people like us talking about the Sunak wealth, which is magnificently large by British political standards.

You sound almost quite admiring.

Jealous, perhaps?

But it's also that thing that you sense that Rishi Sunak senses it's awkward.

You know, when he was asked about private health care, he kind of bristled.

He hates talking about it.

He hates talking about all of that stuff.

And if you are a bit careless in some of the answers you give, it may not be a hanging

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offence, but in political terms, it still does damage.

And like I say, there's going to be a lot of things that sooner or later, journalists, people like us will be drawing back to looking at, and it will be hard, I think, to find in a lot of cases, I'd say, areas of government policy where in some way maybe you can't draw a link back to the Sunaks and how much wealth they have, how many interests they have. And just to go back to the press secretary and the responses that they gave three weeks ago, this is what they said.

He has followed what is expected in the ministerial code in relation to his interests to the letter. So on record to a journalist, you've got somebody saying he followed it to the letter, you've now got an investigation.

So either way, you have a problem between what was said at the time and what is clearly emerging as the case today.

And in a moment, we'll be back on territory where Rishi Sunak would prefer to be, maths. This is the news agents.

Welcome back.

Rishi Sunak started the morning, however, not talking about his own finances, but talking about other numbers, and it's the numbers that he kind of wants all our young to be doing better and for a bit longer.

And that's maths.

And he made very clear that he's not actually trying to get everyone to sit A level maths until 18, but he does want to work on something that stops us being the outlier in the developing world, which is the one country where we just stop any kind of maths at 16.

And as a result, actually are probably more enumerate as adults, and I fit into that category sadly too easily.

And we see less inherent worth and need in having that grasp of maths.

There's two things going on here, and we're going to look at both a little bit.

One, is it actually feasible?

They started this conversation in 2015.

We still don't actually have enough maths teachers in our schools.

We still have teacher strikes and people telling you that they don't get paid enough to want to join the profession, let alone try and recruit new ones.

And the other is, is it desirable?

Are we snobby actually about the way we think of maths in this country, that somehow it's not beautiful, it's not artistic, it's not gracious, it's none of the things that we attribute to so many other areas of our culture, and maybe that does have to change.

And like Emily Maitlis, I would class myself as numerically challenged.

I scraped through my exams in maths, but it was always a slog.

And I think Rishi Sunak is probably right when he says that there is an anti-maths mindset in the UK, and it does seem a peculiarly British problem, that if you look in India or if you look in Singapore or you look in China or Japan or a number of other countries in Europe as well.

I mean, go to France where a lot of the people who go on to high office have trained as engineers, have done all that rather scientific work, and that is seen as essential, whereas we seem to venerate arts graduates, unless so, mathematicians.

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So what do you do about it, and how do you change something that seems to me to be so culturally ingrained?

And joining us now, we're terrifically pleased to say is Bobby Siegel.

You came from being a maths teacher, you shot to fame on University Challenge, I know you're a national numeracy ambassador, you're author of Life Changing Magic of Numbers, and you were also at Lehman's.

I was a trader, yeah.

If Rishi Sunak was looking for somebody to extol what he was talking about, which is essentially pushing maths into all our curriculum past the age of 16, right up to 18, he couldn't actually do better than you as an enthusiast, right?

Obviously, I appreciate the intrinsic beauty of maths, where humans explore subjects purely for the sake of it, like why do we do poetry, why do we do music, but I also acknowledge that for many people, it's about the practical side of maths, the numeracy.

So it's trying to find a balance where you give people the opportunity to explore the beautiful side of mathematics, like prime numbers, but at the same time, acknowledge that some people, they might think it's not for them, but they need to be numerate.

Let us play you a clip, we had James Norton, the actor, on the news agents back in February, and he was predominantly talking about Happy Valley, but when we asked him how you get into acting or how you sort of get more people into the creative industries, he had this message for Rishi Sunak.

You don't follow Rishi Sunak's advice and make everyone take maths through to A level, and you nurture arts and humanities all the way through school and allow kids to take on courses which aren't necessarily as practical and vocational, and so that's the most important thing is school.

So there will be some people who think, look, we've now got this Goldman Sachs prime minister, he's all about numbers, he's all about the spreadsheet, and he's in danger of losing all the other beautiful things by just promoting maths.

So I think this is where, if I were critiquing the prime minister's policy, rather than just looking at extending maths beyond 16, because the reality is, if you're not passing maths at 16, that's one third of our country, what is two more years going to do to change attitudes? I think actually the investment and the time and the energy needs to spend a younger age at primary school when they're five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, then actually you can change those attitudes.

He talked about what would you be doing with kids that were five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten?

So I think it's trying to show maths in the real world.

The more you can show young people it's connected to the real world, the more likely they're to buy into it.

But Bobby, isn't there a problem?

Not many people choose to become a maths teacher to pass this on, because if you are good at maths, it's the passport to one of the really high-paid jobs.

If you are a mathematically inclined graduate, you can be drawn to the city.

But again, one of the reasons I changed careers was because that connection I had with people when educating and giving them an idea was invaluable.

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And I think people that joined teaching, they're not going to have Maserati's and Ferraris, but they joined because they really want to help young people.

But obviously there's something going wrong in our state system where people they joined, they don't stay in teaching.

Money is part of the issue.

Obviously it would be negligent to say it isn't.

But there are other things like working conditions, like for example, off-stead.

We recently had the death of a head teacher.

Obviously schools need to be accountable.

They should be aware of monitoring them, but off-stead, for example, is one thing that many schools feel is like this Damocles sword hanging over them.

That excessive accountability.

Do you feel that?

Yeah, we do.

Yeah.

Because in fact, many times you're teaching lessons and sometimes think, oh, what would off-stead say?

Rather than, how would my young people enjoy it?

And you change what you do as a result.

You do, sadly.

Yeah, you do.

I do.

And I think a lot of teachers feel that same pressure.

And how do you change that?

Because, I mean, what you're arguing, it seems to me, is that there need to be cultural changes right the way through from the age of five onwards, essentially, and also in the way that teachers are judged.

Yes.

I think it's a combination of two.

So from the teachers are being judged, one, okay, as I said earlier, you need a way of monitoring schools, but currently with off-stead, again, as a teacher, that's the biggest thing that we think about, off-stead, that threat.

The reason off-stead is sort of not seen positively in the profession is there's those four words, are you outstanding, good, requires improvement, et cetera.

And schools are just judged by those one word, summary sentences.

And I think we need to give parents and communities more trust and say, actually, we can write a more detailed statement and maybe get rid of the words.

Can I just get back to the maths teacher specifically?

Do you think you need to be good at maths, to be a maths teacher, or do you think the opposite is true, that if you get people who actually didn't find maths very easy or had to be sort of encouraged into it, they're going to help more kids understand the concepts better?

You know, I actually think the latter, people that actually struggled with maths, make better teachers because teaching is not necessarily about having, obviously, there are some people

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that are brilliant mathematicians, that are also brilliant teachers, but I think the best teachers are the ones that had struggle in the subject.

I'll give you one quick example.

In Australia, probably the most prominent public maths teacher is a man called Eddie Wu.

I think his parents originally from China or Malaysia, actually at school, what he was quite good at was English.

So he applied to become an English teacher, but they were told, actually, there's far too many applicants, Eddie, you should apply to do maths, teaching.

And he's like, actually, I can't do maths.

He'd fail maths, but he'd retrained, became a maths teacher, and now he's a brilliant teacher.

But the reason is that he struggled to do maths.

So I think there's an argument for saying the best teachers are the ones that have struggle in the subject when they were learning themselves.

Can we end?

Yeah, I've got a question.

You did start by saying there is a beauty, there is a philosophy, there is something quite magical about maths.

And so just to give our listeners who actually do find maths quite magical, their conundrum.

I go out in the rain.

I'm going to walk 100 yards or I'm going to run 100 yards, which will make me wetter, which will keep me drier.

And what is the maths of that?

Gosh, put me in the spot here, so 100 yards.

Most people would think you're covering the same distance.

In less time.

In less time.

So therefore, you would think it should be, if you go quicker.

You'll stay drier.

You'll stay drier, it should be.

But it's one of the things, I'll hand up, I've heard someone mention this sort of a puzzle before and they said the opposite is true by running, for some reason you have, you expose yourself to more rain.

So there's a speed distance time.

Talk us through it as you're taking.

Gosh, this is the, putting me under pressure.

So we've got 100 yards.

Well the wider surface area, because you're bringing your legs up as you run, whereas as you walk, your legs are staying down.

Okay, so that's a surface area.

This changes the question from pure maths to physiology and engineering.

Is that allowed?

The real world is messy.

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One of the things I'll say is, one thing is, people like myself, mathematicians, we should feel okay in admitting mistakes.

Or like I did a celebrity pointless recently and I made a mistake where I think I said, three squared is 27, which is, three squared is nine.

And Richard also, he made the edit and I got some tweets saying, I thought, well, he's a genius.

It's clearly an idiot.

And I think people that are good at maths, should feel comfortable admitting mistakes or admit feeling they're under pressure like this question here.

I'm struggling.

I think, again, I've heard this puzzle, but it didn't quite make sense initially to me.

I'll tell you what, we'll leave it and why don't you send us a voice note?

I will do a voice note.

If it comes to you after however long or short you want to spend.

Thanks so much for joining us, Bobby.

It was a pleasure.

It was really nice having you in.

Thanks, Bobby.

So, depending on how long it takes, Bobby will either add his response, his mathematical solution, into the end of this podcast or maybe we'll bring it to you in a month's time.

And I don't think it's about maths.

I think it's about psychology.

I think it feels better to run in the rain, to get out of it more quickly than it does to walk in the rain and just think, I'm getting soaked here, going slowly.

So does that mean you don't need maths at all?

You just need the mindset for actual...

I just need...

Not getting wet.

I just need the idiot's mindset that I most certainly have in these situations.

It's like having directions of where you're going in a car.

You just put your foot on the accelerator.

It doesn't matter in which direction because you think you're going places.

Why would you look at a map first to work out where you're going?

And that, as we say, is the man's answer to not ever asking for direction.

We'll see you back tomorrow in the sunshine, hopefully.

Again, bye.

Bye.

To minimise getting wet in the rain, logically, running gets you less wet because the amount of time you're spending in the rain is reduced.

So that's quite simple.

But the mathematician from Harvard, David Bell in the 70s, actually tried to come up with a mathematical model to understand this.

He tried to think about rain falling at a vertical speed and depositing water on a particular rate.

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But also, you need to consider wind as a factor.

But ultimately, he found that it doesn't really make much of a difference how fast you run because he found that even if you run at Usain Boltz speed, his formula shows that you only get less wet by about 10%.

So actually, walk or run doesn't really matter.

Usain Boltz has been a global player, original podcast, and a Persephoneka production.