

Chasing

NATIONAL STEEPLECHASE ASSOCIATION | 400 FAIR HILL DRIVE, ELKTON, MD 21921

NSA returns to Colonial Downs

Steeplechase racing, a longtime Virginia tradition, will be a regular feature at Colonial Downs when the New Kent County track presents its inaugural meet under new ownership and management this summer, the National Steeplechase Association and Colonial Downs Group announced.

The remodeled and reinvigorated Colonial Downs will open its 15-date meet on Thursday, Aug. 8, and will race on a three-day-a-week schedule through Saturday, Sept. 7. Racing will be on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays with the exception of Labor Day week, when the schedule will be Monday (Labor Day), Friday, and Saturday.

Post time will be 5 p.m. each day with the exception of Labor Day on Sept. 2, which will have a 1 p.m. first post.

Steeplechase racing will be featured during each racing week. While subject to change, current plans call for two jump races each Saturday of the meet.

"The National Steeplechase Association Board of Directors and I are delighted to be a part of the inaugural meet of the new Colonial Downs," said NSA President Guy J. Torsilieri. "We have a very large constituency in Virginia, and there's great enthusiasm in the jump-racing community for returning to a tremendous facility."

"Colonial Downs welcomes the return of steeplechase racing to the Secretariat Turf Course, a 1 1/8-mile circuit that is—at 180 feet—the widest in North America," said Jill Byrne, Colonial's vice president of racing operations. "Jump racing has such a deep history in Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region, so we are thrilled to host a time-honored tradition as racing returns to the Commonwealth."

Jill has deep roots in both Virginia Thoroughbred racing and in steeplechasing. Her father, Peter Howe, trained Soothsayer, the Eclipse Award-



Steeplechase horses last competed at a Colonial Downs pari-mutuel meet in June 2013.

BETSY BURKE PARKER PHOTO

winning steeplechase horse in 1972, and 1976 champion older female Proud Delta, both for Marion duPont Scott's Montpelier.

Jill worked as an assistant trainer for her father as well as top trainers Scotty Schulhofer, John Veitch, and Patrick Byrne before going into broadcasting and eventually leadership positions at Churchill Downs and Breeders' Cup Ltd. She assumed her current position in February.

Colonial Downs had been a regular stop on the steeplechase circuit, both during its pari-mutuel meet and the Dogwood Classic jumps meet. The track opened in 1997 and held its first steeplechase races the following year. Jump racing was featured through the 2013 pari-mutuel meet and at the Dogwood Classic in 2014.

"I have no doubt that our horsemen will welcome a return to racing at Colonial Downs," said Bill Gallo Jr., the NSA's director of racing.

"It's a marvelous turf course, and we will provide competitive jump races for Colonial's on-track and simulcast fans."

Gallo will consult with Ms. Byrne and Allison De Luca, Colonial's new racing secretary, on developing a jump-racing program for the five-week meet.

The 2014 Dogwood Classic races were the final ones to be run on the Secretariat Turf Course, which now is being groomed for Opening Day on Aug. 8. In the interim years, pari-mutuel Thoroughbred racing in Virginia was kept alive by steeplechase meets, the Virginia Gold Cup in the spring and the International Gold Cup in the fall.

With the assistance of the Virginia Equine Alliance and the Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association, those two meets in The Plains offered a program of flat races to complement its usual jumps lineup.



Go Jump Racing!





Meet Craig Braddick, the newest race caller on the NSA circuit

by Craig Braddick

Let me introduce myself. I'm Craig Braddick, and I am going to be your race caller in 2019 at the Georgia Steeplechase, Fair Hill Races, and the Steeplechase of Charleston. Also, I will be doing color commentary for the Willowdale Steeplechase.

Track announcers have varied backgrounds. Tony Bentley is an acclaimed film and TV actor, and Will O'Keefe doubles up as a race-meet official and a member of the National Steeplechase Association's ratings committee. My background? I was born in Cambridge, UK, and always loved racing.

By the time, I was 8, I would turn the sound down on the TV and call the races into a tape recorder. As a teenager, I would go to racecourses and would use a spare commentary box to practice from.

Many of the race callers took me under their wing, and I learned to call with their guidance. When I was 15, I was proficient enough to call my first point-to-point, but at that time opportunities were very limited to progress. I moved to the USA in 2001 and about 10 years ago started calling at some flat race meets.

Last February, I heard of a new steeplechase in Georgia and contacted the chairman, Anthony-Scott Hobbs, offering my services as a race caller. My first day at Georgia was nerve-racking, but people said they enjoyed my calls. Later, Toby Edwards asked me to call at Charleston. I then found out several other



Craig Braddick

steeplechases were interested in my race calls.

Fair Hill Races is a meet with such traditions, as it's one of the jewels of American Steeplechasing. This year they celebrate their 85th anniversary. People will rightly have high expectations, and I feel very privileged to have been asked to call at such a prestigious venue with its storied history.

I use a different approach from most race

Courtney Reid departs for Breeders' Cup

Courtney C. Reid, who served as the National Steeplechase Association's manager of racing operations since February 2018, has resigned to become senior manager of racing operations for Breeders' Cup Ltd.

She began her new position on Feb. 19 at the

callers, as I try to tell the story of the race, explain the tactics, and comment on how the horses are jumping, but above all be accurate and engaging. I do several hours prep work the day before, and I truly consider it a profession.

If I can help draw people into the race and give some insight into what is going on, we can entertain and develop new steeplechase fans, too. In 2019, sports fans expect knowledgeable, thorough, and inclusive calling in every sport. I think it's part of a paradigm shift towards a newer way of doing things that still recognizes the sports heritage.

I live in Phoenix, Ariz., (currently calling races at Rillito Park in Tucson) but may be moving east later this year. I love to play golf and spend time with my 15-year-old rescue dog, Scooter. I also collect archive British TV, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s, and enjoy listening to BBC Radio.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has given me an opportunity and to the fans for their encouraging comments. Please come and say "Hello" if you see me at the races!

Lexington, Ky., headquarters of Breeders' Cup.

A native of Williamsburg, Va., she joined the NSA as racing operations coordinator in November 2015 after working for the Virginia Racing Commission.

National Steeplechase Association

400 Fair Hill Drive
Elkton, Md. 21921

Phone: (410) 392-0700
Fax: (410) 392-0706

Website: www.nationalsteeplechase.com
E-mail: info@nationalsteeplechase.com

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