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

Large crowds and competitive races kick off record spring schedule

The 2018 National Steeplechase Association kicked off in March with large crowds and competitive racing under bright skies in South Carolina.

The Aiken Spring Steeplechase and Carolina Cup Races traditionally launch the NSA season, which this year is likely to offer record spring purses exceeding \$2.8-million.

Aiken Spring welcomed spring with its March 24 meet at Bruce's Field. Always a sellout, Aiken Spring served up six races, four over hurdles, while its capacity crowd enjoyed the racing and temperatures in the 70s.

The meet's traditional feature race, the Budweiser Imperial Cup, this year was a ratings handicap for horses ranked at 110 or lower. KMSN Stable's Able Archer proved much the best in a field of seven and triumphed by 10 1/2 lengths under 2016 champion jockey Kieran Norris. Racing Hall of Fame member Jonathan Sheppard trained the winner.

The action shifted on March 31 to Camden's Springdale Course for a record-smashing 84th edition of the Carolina Cup Races. The spring fixture offered a record \$325,000 in purse money and was keyed by the meet's richest-ever race, the \$150,000 Marion duPont Scott Colonial Cup (Gr. 1).

Formerly run in the fall, the Colonial Cup added an early top-ranked race to the spring schedule. The spring's other Grade 1 race is the \$200,000 Calvin Houghland Iroquois at the Iroquois Steeplechase on Saturday, May 12.

The Colonial Cup, shortened to 2 3/8 miles, attracted a competitive field of established stars and promising newcomers from the novice ranks. Stonelea Stables' Balance the Budget,



Stonelea Stables owner Robert Bonnie and trainer Julie Gomena greeted jockey Mark Watts and Balance the Budget after the nine-year-old cruised to a front-running victory in the \$150,000 Marion duPont Scott Colonial Cup at the Carolina Cup Races.

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always dangerous on firm footing, burst away to a yawning early lead and came home to a 6 1/4-length victory under Mark Watts.

A nine-year-old by Bellamy Road, Balance the Budget is trained by Julie Gomena, wife of Stonelea owner Robert Bonnie. He scored his second consecutive graded victory, after a front-running score in the International Gold Cup's

David L. "Zeke" Ferguson Memorial (Gr. 2) last October.

The Colonial Cup's \$90,000 first-place purse put Virginia-based Gomena atop the trainer standings by purses through the season's first two weekends. Sheppard led the trainer standings by wins with four. Jockeys Jack Doyle and Gerard Galligan had two wins apiece.



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A message for 2018 NSA season: “Mutual professional respect”

Jack Sanford Jr. noted that he was not in his accustomed place in the jockeys’ room. A Charlottesville, Va., business executive who has served as a steward for 30 years, he is accustomed to being on the periphery, listening to race officials address the jockeys before their races.

But Sanford has a new role, as a member of the National Steeplechase Association’s Stewards Advisory Committee (SAC), on which he now serves with Chairman Dwight Hall and Duncan Patterson.

On March 31, he was standing in the center of the jockeys’ room at the Carolina Cup Races in Camden, S.C. Asked by Hall to speak before the races, he had a respectful audience that, when he completed his brief remarks, applauded him.

His message was for the jockeys and for all members of the steeplechase racing community: owners, trainers, and officials as well.

He distilled his message into three words: Mutual professional respect.

Most members of the steeplechase community live by those three words, but there are occasional lapses when, as occurs in any sport, emotion gets the better of good sense. To address the lapses, the NSA has adopted a Code of Conduct that states:

“As a condition of license all NSA licensees are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the best interests of racing. Any conduct deemed to be detrimental to the sport, the NSA, or the individual race meets and their representatives will subject the offender to a fine or suspension, or both, in accordance with the NSA Rules of Racing.”

“This policy should act as our guide, not as our hammer,” Sanford said. “Remember every participant in this sport is licensed, every single



Jack Sanford Jr., a longtime steward and the newest member of the Stewards Advisory Committee, addressed the jockey colony at the Carolina Cup Races on March 31.

BILL GALLO JR. PHOTO

owner, every trainer, and every jockey. We, the SAC, serve at the pleasure of the Board, and the president is here in the room with us, and the Stewards serve at our pleasure. Every race meet is sanctioned. So we are all tied together for the best interest of racing.”

He said the purpose of the code “is to remind ourselves constantly of how we as a major sport expect our participants will be treated. We should be mindful and cognizant to treat our volunteers, our race sponsors, our owners, our racing public, and most especially each other politely and

professionally.”

He emphasized that those participants in jump racing make it all possible. “Remember we are putting on a show every weekend for them, we are under a microscope of sorts, and we want to put our best foot forward so they will continue to support us by buying tickets, getting new sponsors, and raising our purse structures.

“Without the support of all those folks outside the jockey’s room, we would not have a reason to be here on any Saturdays going forward,” Sanford said.

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