

Chasing

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

Timber classics: A repeat victory, a '60 Minutes' feature, an upset

The spring season's two richest timber classics produced a repeat winner in the \$100,000 Virginia Gold Cup, a segment on CBS's "60 Minutes" focused on the \$100,000 Maryland Hunt Cup, and an upset winner in the crowning race of the Maryland timber triple crown.

The repeat winner on May 6 was Irv Naylor's Ebanour, who also provided Virginia Gold Cup doubles for trainer Cyril Murphy and jockey Gus Dahl.

Irish-bred Ebanour had won the 2016 Gold Cup on turf rated as soft, and he had to contend with more soft turf for its four miles in the 2017 edition. But he handled the going well despite wearing a coating of mud resulting from a last-to-first move that carried him to a 1 1/2-length victory over Bruton Street-US's Lemony Bay, winner of the My Lady's Manor on April 15.

Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe and his wife, Dorothy, presented the Gold Cup trophy to Diane Naylor, Murphy, and Dahl.

The "60 Minutes" feature on April 23, six days before the Hunt Cup, focused on 2016 winner Senior Senator, who was claimed from a Penn National Race Course claiming race by Blythe Miller Davies and transformed into a timber winner by her husband, trainer Joe Davies, for owner Irvin "Skip" Crawford.

Also featured in the extended feature was Louis C. "Paddy" Neilson, who articulately described the passion that drives Hunt Cup participants to attempt the testing, four-mile race over 22 fences.

Derwins Prospector, described as a longshot by owner Gerry Brewster, survived the distance, the fences, and a head-to-head stretch battle to win the Hunt Cup by three-quarters of a length over Bruton Street-US's Drift Society. Senior Senator, the 2017 Grand National winner, fell at the third fence.



Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe and his wife, Dorothy, presented the Gold Cup trophy to Cyril Murphy, Diane Naylor, and Gus Dahl.

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Derwins Prospector and Drift Society battled to the finish in the Hunt Cup.

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Challenges enliven spring racing

Challenges—offers of cash bonuses for winning two specified races—have added new interest and excitement to the National Steeplechase Association racing season.

The TVV Capital Iroquois-Cheltenham Challenge began with last month's Calvin Houghland Iroquois (Gr. 1) and continues with the Stayers' Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival next March. It's worth \$500,000 to any horse that wins both three-mile races.

In honor of its 25th anniversary, the Willowdale Steeplechase offered the \$100,000 Willowdale Steeplechase Challenge to a horse who wins the 3 1/2-mile Mother's Day race and the four-mile Pennsylvania Hunt Cup in November.

Both challenges pose unique challenges. The Iroquois-Cheltenham Challenge has timing issues. The Cheltenham Festival precedes the start of the National Steeplechase Association season, and the Iroquois Steeplechase on the second Saturday in May is beyond the end of the overseas jump-racing season.

Also, there are issues of luck. Irv Naylor's Rawnaq, the 2016 Calvin Houghland Iroquois winner, was preparing for the Stayers' Hurdle but sustained a soft-tissue injury only days before he was awarded the Eclipse Award as the 2016 steeplechase champion.

Nichols Canyon, third in last year's Calvin Houghland Iroquois, won the Stayers' Hurdle but sustained a shipping injury en route to the United States and missed an opportunity to compete for the \$500,000 bonus. He would have been a heavy favorite to take away the prize.

"We are really, really disappointed not to be able to contend the race, particularly due to the international aspect and the very generous



Nichols Canyon paraded in the paddock at the 2016 Iroquois Steeplechase before finishing third in the Calvin Houghland Iroquois (Gr. 1). Caretaker Rachel Robins led Nichols Canyon and jockey Ruby Walsh toward the start.

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bonus offered," said Nichols Canyon's trainer, 10-time Irish champion Willie Mullins.

Iroquois Steeplechase Chairman Dwight Hall also expressed disappointment, but he saw it as an opportunity for the American-based horses in his meet's signature race.

Hall expressed his gratitude to owners Andrea and Graham Wylie and Mullins' team for their commitment to the Iroquois-Cheltenham Challenge and to international jump racing.

The Willowdale Steeplechase and the Pennsylvania Hunt Cup have differences beyond distance. The Willowdale Steeplechase is limited to amateur jockeys, while professionals traditionally have been permitted to ride in the Pennsylvania Hunt Cup.

Proximity is hardly an issue for the Willowdale Steeplechase Challenge. The Willowdale course in Kennett Square, Pa., is only a few miles from the Pennsylvania Hunt Cup course.

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