

Chasing

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

NSA introduces a new race, Ratings Handicap, to America

The National Steeplechase Association introduced a new race to American racing --the Ratings Handicap--this past spring, and it has proved to be a valuable addition to the lineup of races available for both race meets and racetracks.

The Ratings Handicap was instituted at the suggestion of the NSA's Promotion and Growth Task Force as a strategy to provide more racing opportunities for horses after they collect their maiden victories. A staple of jump racing overseas, the Ratings Handicap is especially popular with owners who do not wish to risk losing their horses in claiming races.

"The Ratings Handicap has caught on with our horsemen," said NSA Director of Racing Bill Gallo Jr. "It will in time affect claiming races and starter handicaps in a positive way, but it will not eliminate maiden claimers."

The Promotion and Growth Task Force responded to the results and comments in an owner survey conducted late last year, said Bill Price, chairman of the Promotion and Growth Task Force, a horse owner, and co-chair of the Queen's Cup, where one of the first Ratings Handicaps was held on April 25.

"The survey results clearly indicated that current owners wanted a new race that would not put their horses at risk of being claimed. That's understandable because many owners have homebreds who are part of the family. The Ratings Handicaps provide new racing opportunities and keep horses in the hurdle game longer," he said.

In addition to the Queen's Cup, Ratings Handicaps have been run at the Atlanta Steeplechase, Iroquois Steeplechase, Fair Hill Races, and Parx Racing.

The starting point for the Ratings Handicap is a numerical rating for every horse in training who has won over hurdles. Under Gallo's supervision, the ratings were assigned by Joe Clancy, editor of the *Mid-Atlantic Thor-*



Irv Naylor's *Charminster* and Carol-Ann Sloan, right, defeated *Tempt Me Alex*, ridden by Bethany Baumgardner, by a nose to win the *Bright Hour*, a Ratings Handicap, at Iroquois.

TOD MARKS PHOTO

oughbred and a member of the Promotion and Growth Task Force; chart caller Martin Chamberlin; and race caller Will O'Keefe.

In all, ratings have been assigned to 148 horses, with reigning Eclipse Award champion *Demonstrative* atop the list at 158. The list extends to horses with ratings of 90.

The ratings form the basis for developing races for horses within a certain ratings range. For instance, the \$35,000 Parx race was open to horses with ratings between 90 and 124.

Weights are based on the ratings, with the top-rated horse carrying 158 pounds and all others in the field weighted according to their ratings down to 140 pounds.

The Ratings Handicaps have produced some close results, with the closest finish a nose. Field sizes have grown steadily, with 12 horses entered for the Parx race on July 14.

Gallo said he expects to be able to write races for more ranges of ratings as more horses score their maiden victories and become eligible to be rated.

He noted that the Ratings Handicap system will change how weights are assigned for all handicap races. Although it was not an effect that he initially expected, he now will use the ratings to determine weights for races such as the New York Turf Writers Cup (Gr. 1) at Saratoga.



Riders in an Amateur Riders Club of America race at Penn National Race Course in May assembled with Donald Yovanovich, left, a director of FEGENTRI, the ruling body of world international amateur racing, and Duncan Patterson, ARCA's president and chairman of the Delaware Thoroughbred Racing Commission.

HOLLYWOOD CASINO AT PENN NATIONAL PHOTO

Steeplechase participants provide strong foundation and international flavor for Amateur Riders Club of America

After misfortune in April, Bethany Baumgardner had a memorable month of May.

She rode Imperial Way to a first-place finish in the Maryland Hunt Cup, but they were disqualified when weights fell out of her saddle pad at the 19th fence on April 25.

Baumgardner's fortunes turned around in May with her first stakes victory, in the Radnor Hunt Cup (on a disqualification), and a trip to Oslo, Norway, with fellow jump rider Sarah Shaffer to participate in an international amateur race on the flat.

For years, participants in the steeplechase sport have been the foundation of amateur race riding through the Amateur Riders Club of America. Organized in the mid-1980s by renowned *Daily Racing Form* caricaturist Pierre Bellocq (PEB), ARCA has included more than 120 National Steeplechase Association licensees since 2000, and approximately half of them have ridden over fences.

The Maryland Hunt Cup is but one example of the extensive crossover between steeple-

chase racing and international amateur racing. In addition to Baumgardner, the field included ARCA members Eric Poretz (third), Shaffer (fourth), and Annie Yeager.

Two weeks later at the Iroquois Steeplechase, ARCA members had a one-two-three finish in the Bright Hour Ratings Handicap. Carol-Ann Sloan rode Charminster to a nose victory over Tempt Me Alex with Baumgardner aboard, and Keri Brion was third aboard One Giant Step.

In addition, jump rider Zoe Valvo has frequently traveled overseas to participate as ARCA's representative in races sponsored by the International Federation of Gentlemen and Lady Riders (FEGENTRI), and Lia McGuirk, who rode 2013 My Lady's Manor winner Moonsox in her first sanctioned start, also has ridden in ARCA races. FEGENTRI sponsors about 60 races a year.

In early June, ARCA organized international races for the Ladies Division at four Mid-Atlantic racetracks, with strong involvement

by American jump riders. Anna Carrow, who formerly worked for Racing Hall of Fame trainer Jonathan Sheppard, won the race at Delaware Park on June 8.

Baumgardner had a second at Pimlico Race Course on June 4, and Shaffer finished second at Parx Racing on June 7. Penn National Race Course also hosted an amateur ladies race.

Donald Yovanovich, an NSA director who serves as ARCA's executive director, said he also depends heavily on steeplechase owners and trainers to provide the mounts for the international amateur races. For example, Debra Kachel's Hooping won the Parx race for trainer Ricky Hendriks.

The ARCA races provide a unique opportunity for steeplechasing's amateur jockeys, said Yovanovich, the first American to serve on the FEGENTRI board of directors. "ARCA is not just for riding races at the racetrack. It is about learning how to ride with confidence, honing skills, developing a sense of pace, and good horsemanship," he said.

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