

# Chasing

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

## NSA's focus on jockey safety targets concussion prevention

When a jockey parts company with a mount, no longer is it a matter of the rider getting up and preparing for the next race.

A fall or lost rider in a sanctioned National Steeplechase Association race triggers an immediate evaluation by a trained physician, who looks at not only potential physical injury that might keep the rider from performing properly but also administers a cognitive test to protect against concussion.

The concussion testing and detailed medical emergency procedures are only two of the many protections mandated by the NSA Board of Directors, which regards the safety of horse and rider as its top priority.

The NSA board's work is guided by the Steeplechase Safety Committee, instituted by the NSA board in 2012 and headed since its founding by R. Reynolds Cowles, D.V.M., the immediate past president of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Through many initiatives, the committee looks at all aspects of the sport and recommends improvements to the Board of Directors.

The NSA has been a leader in Thoroughbred racing and all sports in protecting its participants—the jockeys in this case—from the short-term and long-term effects of concussions. With financial assistance from the National Steeplechase Foundation, the NSA launched baseline cognitive testing of its jockeys beginning in 2013.

The NSA effort drew from the experience of the British racing industry and has been a model for flat tracks and other racing organizations. Subsequent to the NSA's initiative, other professional sports organizations have begun concussion-testing procedures as concerns over



Senior Steward Gregg Morris  
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the long-term effects of head injuries have grown.

The concussion-prevention process begins with baseline testing of the jockeys. For the convenience of the riders, four locations were established for administering the tests: the National Steeplechase Museum in Camden, S.C.; the Iroquois Steeplechase in Nashville, Tenn.; the Virginia Gold Cup in The Plains; and the NSA headquarters in Fair Hill, Md.

While the baseline test is crucial for evaluating the effects of concussion, the sport lacked an adequate sideline test to be used immediately after a fall or lost rider. Again drawing on the experience of British racing, the NSA included three brief cognitive questions in its post-fall assessment form.

Any abnormal answers or other suspicion

of a concussion on the part of the examining physician then triggers an immediate and more comprehensive concussion screening, which includes memory, balance, and vestibular function.

Before the jockey can ride again, both the physical and cognitive aspects of the evaluation must be passed. If the jockey requires follow-up care, the NSA office provides the rider with information on regional centers that specialize in concussion treatment.

The race meet physician must submit a form on each rider after a mishap. The medical-evaluation form is only one aspect of a comprehensive medical-emergency plan developed last year by a Safety Committee task force headed by Gregg Morris, a senior steward and medical professional.

In addition to supporting the baseline concussion testing, the National Steeplechase Foundation instituted in 2014 a helmet-replacement program under which a rider who sustains a fall in a race can obtain a new helmet free of charge.

Because the helmet may be compromised in a fall, the NSA recommends that its licensed jockeys have two helmets available at every race meet.

Through the Safety Committee, the NSA board is continually evaluating initiatives to protect both the riders and the horses. The Safety Committee regularly examines the National Fence and has recommended enhancements such as sight lines for the fences and firmer foam rolls on the takeoff sides of the fences. Also, the Safety Committee has recommended the use of running rails at some meets to guide horses through turns.



Go Jump Racing!





## Saratoga stakes kick off battles for jump-racing championships

Steeplechase racing began its annual visit to Saratoga Race Course in late July, and the results of the track's jump stakes races will be the first rounds of the battles for the 2018 titles, especially in the championship and novice divisions.

Monmouth Park also will stage jump races in August, with a \$30,000 maiden hurdle and a \$35,000 allowance hurdle scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 9.

The championship division had its first Saratoga test in the \$175,000 A. P. Smithwick Memorial (Gr. 1) on July 26, and the sport's top contenders were to line up four weeks later for the historic New York Turf Writers Cup Handicap (Gr. 1), which also carries a \$175,000 purse.

The Smithwick Memorial was at 2 1/16 miles, and the New York Turf Writers will stretch out to 2 3/8 miles on Thursday, Aug. 23, for the New York Turf Writers.

With championship-division leader Zanjabeel taking a break over the summer, other members of the division will have an opportunity to make inroads on Rosbrian Farm's and Wendy and Ben Griswold's five-year-old, the easy winner of the \$200,000 Calvin Houghland Iroquois (Gr. 1) on May 12.

Also among the division's leading contenders is Robert Kinsley's Modem, who is no stranger to the New York Racing Association tracks. Last season, he finished second in all three NYRA Grade 1 jump races, adding a place in Belmont Park's Lonesome Glory Handicap after the two Saratoga races.

Trained by Elizabeth Voss, Modem also finished second in the 2017 Grand National (Gr. 1) and was second to Zanjabeel in the Calvin Houghland Iroquois on May 12.



Hudson River Farms' Iranistan, undefeated in his three jumps starts, handily won the Marcellus Frost Champion Hurdle at the Iroquois Steeplechase.

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Moving into the championship division is Magalen O. Bryant's homebred Personal Start, who won the Carolina Cup for novices before taking the Virginia Gold Cup's David Semmes Memorial (Gr. 2) for trainer Richard Valentine.

Saratoga also offers two stakes opportunities for jump racing's rising stars in the novice division. The Jonathan Kiser Novice Stakes was run in July, and the Michael G. Walsh Novice Stakes will be raced on Wednesday, Aug. 22.

This year's edition of the Walsh will be in memory of Charles T. Colgan, the retired National

Steeplechase Association executive vice president who was the late Racing Hall of Fame trainer's son-in-law. Colgan died in January.

New York-based Hudson River Farms has the year's top novice, Iranistan, who has never been headed in his three jump starts. The four-year-old from Jonathan Sheppard's stable skipped the maiden division, won a Carolina Cup allowance hurdle by 11 1/2 lengths before another double-digit score in a Middleburg Spring allowance, and notched a six-length victory in Iroquois' \$100,000 Marcellus Frost Champion Hurdle.

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