



# MONDAY REPORT

A weekly report from the National Steeplechase Association

Monday, May 6, 2019

## Andi'amu triumphs in Va. Gold Cup

Ballybristol Farm's Andi'amu always has been a prized and proficient member of Leslie Young's stable. He had placed in a Grade 1 race, the three-mile Calvin Houghland Iroquois (Gr. 1), as recently as two years ago.

But he wasn't winning for the racing operation of Chicago-area owner Thomas J. Collins, and winning pays the bills. So the Unionville, Pa.-based trainer took the French-bred on a new path starting last year.

She intended to make him into a timber horse, but with an intermediate step, in steeplethor races. The strategy has worked marvelously and was capped by Andi'amu's stirring three-length victory in the \$100,000 Virginia Gold Cup on Saturday. The four-mile timber classic was Andi'amu's fourth consecutive victory.

The four wins have been at Middleburg Spring's Glenwood Park and the Virginia Gold Cup's Great Meadow Race Course. First up in April 2018 was a victory in Middleburg Spring's steeplethor, the Alfred M. Hunt. Two weeks later, he won the Virginia Gold Cup's Steeplethor Stakes. His two wins in two 2018 starts yielded earnings of \$36,000.

This year's program so far has been two races within two weeks at Middleburg and The Plains. Andi'amu took on a strong field for the Middleburg Hunt Cup, set most of the pace, and won by 5¼ lengths under Jack Doyle. In their wake was two-time timber champion Doc Cebu, who had dislodged his jockey, Hadden Frost, two fences from home.

Doc Cebu, trying four miles for the first time, was the obvious favorite in the Virginia Gold Cup, but he was not a factor after stumbling three fences from home and nearly tossing Frost for a second time. The decisive factor in the Virginia Gold Cup was that, when challenged by Le Chevalier two fences out, Andi'amu's speed proved decisive.

"He doesn't have the timber miles of the others, but he still has that Grade 1 speed," Young said. Doyle used Andi'amu's speed judiciously, while Doc Cebu was less than judicious with his energy.

Doyle allowed the nine-year-old to break easily and set the pace under light restraint over the first several fences. Doc Cebu was clearly unhappy with Frost's restraint and had his neck bowed through the early fences as Andi'amu



Tod Marks

Andi'amu led Le Chevalier to the finish line in the \$100,000 Virginia Gold Cup.

showed the way and even after Frost allowed him to take the lead for a few fences.

Andi'amu took back the lead after a mile and continued to jump well while showing no signs of impatience. He set a solid pace with Irv Naylor's Super Saturday and Doc Cebu in his wake. Michael A. Smith's Le Chevalier, trained by Julie Gomena and ridden by Kieran Norris, began to advance toward the leading trio after three miles, and he launched a serious challenge three fences out, just as Doc Cebu eliminated himself from the race with his stumble.

Norris pressed Le Chevalier toward the leader over the final two fences and drew closest at the last, but Andi'amu's speed allowed him to open up in the stretch and win by three lengths. Kathy Neilson-trained Super Saturday finished third, another 15 lengths back, and Doc Cebu was

fourth, three lengths farther back.

Andi'amu ran the four-mile distance over 23 fences in 9:12 2/5 on a Great Meadow Race Course rated as good.

### Winterthur cancels

Exercising an abundance of caution to protect horses and jockeys, the Winterthur Races committee and the meet's stewards decided to cancel Sunday's races because of heavy overnight rains that continued through the morning at the course near Wilmington, Del.

**Go Jump Racing!**



## Virginia Gold Cup



Tod Marks

With little urging from Ross Geraghty, Rosbrian Farm's Optimus Prime drew away to a dominating 8¾-length victory in the \$75,000 David Semmes Memorial (Gr. 2).

### Optimus Prime opens 2019 season with easy Semmes Memorial win

Ricky Hendriks has been in the horse business long enough to know that Murphy's Law applies. What can go wrong often does go wrong.

So he had the usual butterflies when saddling Rosbrian Farm's Optimus Prime for the Virginia Gold Cup's \$75,000 David Semmes Memorial (Gr. 2) on Saturday. With the French-bred at odds-on, he shouldered the additional weight of a lot of bettors' dollars.

"You never know, with a long layoff and a short field," Hendriks said. In the end, he had little reason to worry. Optimus Prime was thoroughly professional and easily won by 8¾ lengths over Irv Naylor's Sempre Medici, who had set the pace until just after the second-to-last fence, where Optimus Prime asserted himself and put away his opponents.

Ross Geraghty, astride his regular mount, only signaled Optimus Prime to run leaving Great Meadow Race Course's far turn and then barely moved his hands as they pulled away to victory.

At 4-5 when the field of six went to the starter, Optimus Prime offered a lot to like. His most recent start, six months earlier, was at Great Meadow, where he had won the David L. "Zeke" Ferguson Memorial (Gr. 2) by 18 lengths.

His debut in America last summer was a 1¼-length victory in Saratoga Race Course's New York Turf Writers Cup Handicap (Gr.

1). He currently is the highest-rated horse in training.

Graham Watters moved Sempre Medici to the front at the start of the 2 1/8-mile Semmes Memorial, with The Fields Stable's Grade 1 winner Portrade several lengths behind him and Optimus Prime another 1 ½ lengths farther back.

They maintained that order until Portrade began to tire after 1¼ miles and Optimus Prime moved into second. Still, with about six furlongs remaining, Sempre Medici continued to jump well and held a four-length lead.

Then Geraghty asked Optimus Prime for a little more, and the race soon was decided. Optimus Prime was on even terms at the second-to-last fence and well in charge at the last. Sempre Medici kept pace early in the run-in, but Optimus Prime opened up late with no urging from Geraghty.

Straylight Racing's Invocation closed ground from the back of the six-horse field to finish third, 18 lengths farther back. Harold A. "Sonny" Via's Hinterland picked up fourth money.

Optimus Prime won in 4:06 flat on good turf.

Off to a slow start this spring, Hendriks gave credit to his Morning Star Farm crew. "They did a great job of getting him ready for this race," he said.

### Mitchell remains in top jockey spot with three wins

Michael Mitchell went on a tear at the Virginia Gold Cup and widened his lead in the jockey standings with three consecutive victories from his four mounts on the Saturday program.

He, Jack Doyle, and Sean McDermott had been tied with five wins apiece, while Mitchell led the standings by purse earnings after winning the \$100,000 Queen's Cup MPC 'Chase on Gibralfaro a week earlier. With the conclusion of the Virginia Gold Cup's six jump races, Mitchell leads with eight wins, Doyle has six, and McDermott is unchanged at five.

Despite Doyle winning the \$100,000 Virginia Gold Cup aboard Andi'amu, Mitchell was the top earner for the day with \$66,750 and increased his season-leading total to \$241,900.

Two of Mitchell's wins were for Jack Fisher, who continues to draw away in the trainer standings, and two were for owner Gil Johnston.

Mitchell struck first in the \$40,000 Steeplethon Stakes with Mrs. Johnston's Days of Heaven, who was well back in the early going of the three-mile race in which Kinross Farm's Just Wait and See set most of the pace. Donna Rogers' Dapper Dan joined the leader in the final six furlongs, and Mitchell moved Days of Heaven approaching the stretch run.

Days of Heaven seized the lead after the final obstacle and won by 2½ lengths over Dapper Dan. Just Wait and See finished third, another 8¾ lengths farther back. Days of Heaven, who had won Middleburg Spring's steeplethon two weeks earlier for Fisher and Mitchell, ran the distance in 6:12 on turf rated as good.

Mitchell took a similar path in the following race, a \$25,000 ratings handicap, with Mrs. Johnston's Ack Feisty, trained by Neil Morris. Ack Feisty moved before the second-to-last fence, took the lead at the last, and won by four lengths over Woodslane Farm's Pick Em. Ack Feisty ran the 2 1/8-mile distance in 4:12 2/5.

The English-born jockey completed his triple in the next race aboard Woodslane's Other Cheek for Fisher in the \$40,000 Virginia Equine Alliance maiden hurdle. Rashford's Double set the pace and held on gamely but was unable to hold off Other Cheek, who won by a half-length. Other Cheek won in 4:22 3/5.

The day's other jump race, another Virginia Equine Alliance maiden hurdle, was won by Buttonwood Farm's first-time starter Clondaw Camp, who drew off by 7¾ lengths. The four-year-old ran the 2 1/8 miles in 4:19 2/5. Trained by Jonathan Sheppard, he went off at 17.70-1.



## Next Up Iroquois, Willowdale offer rich weekend

The Iroquois Steeplechase and the Willowdale Steeplechase on Saturday and Sunday, respectively, offer the richest weekend on the National Steeplechase Association's spring calendar.

Two champions owned by Bruton Street-US, Scorpiancer and Moscato, are among seven nominees for the \$150,000 Calvin Houghland Iroquois (Gr. 1), the keynote race of the 78th annual Iroquois Steeplechase at Nashville's Percy Warner Park.

The Calvin Houghland Iroquois is the year's first Grade 1 race and the richest race on the spring schedule. The Iroquois meet also will feature the \$100,000 Marcellus Frost Champion Hurdle for novices and the \$50,000 Margaret Currey Henley for fillies and mares.

Purses for the meet total \$450,000, plus a \$10,000 bonus if the winning rider of the \$35,000 Bright Hour ratings handicap is an amateur. First post time is 1 p.m. CDT.

At three miles, the Calvin Houghland Iroquois is America's longest hurdle race, and it poses a question that Scorpiancer has answered successfully. Trained by Jack Fisher, he won the spring classic by 16 lengths in 2017 and subsequently was voted that year's Eclipse Award as North America's champion steeplechase horse.

He missed the remainder of the 2017 season and all of 2018 before coming back last month in Middleburg Spring's Temple Gwathmey Handicap (Gr. 2), in which he was pulled up.

The Temple Gwathmey was won impressively by Moscato, also trained by seven-time champion trainer Fisher. He too has won at Percy Warner, taking a \$50,000 allowance hurdle by 6½ lengths in 2017, and was the year's leading novice. He also missed the 2018 season and came back with a 3½-length victory in the Temple Gwathmey on April 20.

The second-, third-, and fourth-place finishers


from the Temple Gwathmey--Belisarius, Jaleo, and All the Way Jose, respectively--also were nominated to the Calvin Houghland Iroquois, as was Queen's Cup MPC 'Chase winner Gibralfaro.

The Frost nominees include two intriguing newcomers from overseas, Irv Naylor's Chief Justice and Hudson River Farms' Winston C.

The Fields Stable's Sarah Joyce was nominated to a shot at a third consecutive victory in the Margaret Currey Henley.

The 27th annual Willowdale Steeplechase, always a popular event in Kennett Square, Pa., will feature the \$35,000 Willowdale Steeplechase over the steeplechase course. First post time for the Mother's Day program is 1:30 p.m., and purses will total \$105,000.

Among the 12 nominees to this year's edition of the Willowdale Steeplechase are Monstaleur and Grand Manan, the 2016 dead-heat winners.



## STEEPLECHASE STANDINGS THROUGH MAY 6

OWNERS BY EARNINGS						JOCKEYS BY WINS					
	Sts	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings		Sts	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings
Bruton Street-US	13	2	3	3	\$113,800	Michael Mitchell	22	8	3	3	\$241,900
Mrs. S.K. Johnston Jr.	13	5	1	3	105,700	Jack Doyle	26	6	2	2	184,800
Irvin L. Crawford II	2	2	0	0	90,000	Sean McDermott	26	5	2	7	136,700
Irvin S. Naylor	18	3	3	1	85,600	Richard Boucher	9	3	1	0	46,200
Ballybristol Farm	3	2	1	0	81,600	Eric Poretz	8	2	3	1	110,900
Riverdee Stable	3	1	0	1	67,000	Hadden Frost	7	2	1	0	44,500
Rosbrian Farm	9	1	2	0	60,050	Aaron Sinnott	9	2	1	0	19,950
DASH Stable	3	1	1	1	38,900	Barry Foley	19	2	0	3	41,150
Woodslane Farm	6	1	2	0	35,600	Kieran Norris	20	1	5	2	74,350
Upland Partners	3	1	0	0	33,000	Willie McCarthy	17	1	4	2	58,000

TRAINERS BY WINS						HORSES BY EARNINGS					
	Sts	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings		Sts	1st	2nd	3rd	Earnings
Jack Fisher	40	13	6	5	\$409,150	Senior Senator	2	2	0	0	\$90,000
Katherine S. Neilson	21	4	3	4	111,800	Andi'amu (Fr)	2	2	0	0	78,000
Leslie F. Young	11	4	2	2	111,300	Gibralfaro (Ire)	1	1	0	0	60,000
Jonathan Sheppard	19	4	1	3	84,300	Optimus Prime (Fr)	1	1	0	0	45,000
Lilith Boucher	6	3	1	0	45,400	Moscato	1	1	0	0	45,000
Joseph G. Davies	13	2	2	1	113,500	Days of Heaven (Fr)	2	2	0	0	36,000
Ricky Hendriks	27	2	4	3	101,850	Mystic Strike	1	2	0	0	33,000
Neil R. Morris	15	2	2	3	52,150	Storm Team	2	1	0	1	31,000
Julie Gomena	20	1	5	1	58,050	Ice It	1	1	0	0	30,000
Todd Wyatt	9	1	1	3	29,500	Corky Lemon	2	1	0	0	24,600