

VIRGINIA GOLD CUP RACES SATURDAY JUNE 27

The Virginia Gold Cup Races at Great Meadow near The Plains has been a festive occasion with the races only a part of the many activities. This meet usually has the largest attendance in Virginia, but enter the Corona Virus in 2020 and all of this changes. The Virginia Gold Cup Races had to be postponed to June 27 with no spectators. I think most of you know that I do the race call at the Gold Cup, and on many occasions, I have said that “the fans go wild.” This year I was tempted to say that the fans didn’t go wild because there were no fans. What has the world come to?

Al Griffin, Will Allison and their team did a great job jumping through hoops and being able to hold ten races. The Virginia Equine Alliance had a big role in raising purse money. All of their work allowed the show to go on.

There are certain things that the Pandemic could not stop, and heading that list was trainer, Jack Fisher’s incredible success in saddling winners of the Virginia Gold Cup. Fisher has trained eleven winners of this classic four mile timber race, and he was looking to get his twelfth win with Charles C. Fenwick, Jr., Michael Hankin & Charles Noell’s Doc Cebu (Michael Mitchell). He had been a good second in the Middleburg Hunt Cup to Ballybristol Farm LLC’s Andi’amu (Thomas Garner), and he has also had success at Great Meadow having won the International Gold Cup in 2017 and 2018. Last year’s Virginia Gold Cup winner, Andi’amu was coming off a win at Middleburg Spring and would have been the favorite with Doc Cebu the second choice if wagering was allowed. In the race, Sheila Williams and Northwoods Stables’ Storm Team (Sean McDermott) and Andi’amu made the running. As the field started the second time around, Storm Team went off course and Andi’amu followed. That left Doc Cebu and Hudson River Farms’ Codrington College (Darren Nagle), who took turns on the front end until they approached the last fence. At this point Doc Cebu found a different gear and romped home alone beating Codrington College by 12 ¼ lengths. Irvin S. Naylor’s Super Saturday (Gerard Galligan) was third.

The co-featured race was the David H. Semmes Memorial Hurdle Stakes, and Jack Fisher trained Bruton Street-US’ Snap Decision (Sean McDermott), who had been the NSA’s novice hurdle champion last year. In the race he came from far off the pace, rallied to jump the last hurdle with the lead and won handily by 4 ¼ lengths. This was his fourth straight win and he looks as if he might challenge for a season end title. Irvin S. Naylor’s Chief Justice (Barry Foley), who had prepped in a winning effort in the training flat at Middleburg was second. He ran another good race but was no match for the winner. Ditto for Sharon Sheppard’s Redicean (Thomas Garner) who was third.

Jack Fisher had a grand slam winning two more races. He won the Four-Year-Old Maiden Hurdle Race and one division of the Waiver Maiden Claiming Hurdle Race. In the Four-Year-Old Race Robert V. LaPenta’s Fast Car (Michael Mitchell) and Buttonwood Farms LLC’s Baltimore Bucko (Gerard Galligan) were reserved off the early pace but they both rallied around the last turn and dueled most of the final quarter mile. Fast Car proved best in the run to the finish and prevailed by ½ length. Baltimore Bucko was making his first start in any kind of race. His trainer

Jonathan Sheppard has always been a master in turning out first time starters. Riverdee Stables' Twenty Years On (Sean McDermott) had led on the backside but was not able to stick with the top two but stayed for third.

In the first division of the waiver maiden claiming hurdle race trainer Jack Fisher and jockey Michael Mitchell collaborated to get a narrow victory with DASH Stables's Shark Du Berlais. Beverly Steinman's Be Somebody (Barry Foley) shared the lead with Shark Du Berlais approaching the second last hurdle. These two battled over the last hurdle and to the finish where only a nose separated these two with Irvin S. Naylor's Tricked Up (Skylar McKenna) third after leading with a quarter mile to run. This was Michael Mitchell's fourth win.

Leslie Young saddled a pair of winners with Mrs. S. K. Johnston, Jr.'s Emerald Rocket (Thomas Garner) taking the first division of the Virginia Equine Alliance Maiden Hurdle Race, and Ballybristol Farm LLC's Mercoeur (Thomas Garner) was victorious in the Steeplethon. In the maiden race Emerald Rocket stalked Irvin S. Naylor's French Light (Darren Nagle) and Beverly Steinman's Deposit (Barry Foley) until they turned for home. Deposit started to tire leaving Emerald Rocket and French Light to duel to the finish where Emerald Rocket proved best over French Light by ½ length. River Dee Stable's Lemonade Thursday (Michael Mitchell) was third. In the Steeplethon, Mercoeur was never far from the early leader and sole possession of the lead the final three furlongs. Straylight Racing LLC's Invocation (Sean McDermott) closed well but fell short by 6 ½ lengths. Andrew Takacs' Pac Yer Tack (Gerard Galligan) came in third.

The second division of the Virginia Alliance Maiden Hurdle Race went to Riverdee Stable's Lonely Weekend (Michael Mitchell). Lonely Weekend was reserved in the early going, started making up ground on the backside the last time around, led over the last two hurdles and won going away. Beverly Steinman's Princeville threatened at the last fence but didn't sustain his rally and was beaten by 2 ¾ lengths. Clarke Ohrstrom' Mr. Bridger (Kieran Norris) got up for third.

Novice rider, Elizabeth Scully won her first sanctioned race over fences on Irvin S. Naylor's Elucidation in the ratings handicap hurdle race for horses rated 125 or lower. Elucidation was not hurried in the early going, but made up ground and got in the hunt around the last turn. He was in pursuit of Silverton Hill, LLC's Bodes Well (Sean McDermott), who led over the last fence. In the stretch he could not hold off Elucidation, who won by 1 ½ lengths. Jonathan Sheppard and Steven Poorman's Hepcat (Gerard Galligan) rounded out the top three.

In the ratings handicap for horses which are rated 115 or lower, Eve Ledyard's Go Get the Basil (Gerard Galligan) came from off the pace, launched his rally around the final turn and got up in the final strides to win over Leipers Fork Steeplechasers LLC's Court Ruler (Thomas Garner). Petticoats Loose Farm's Gaye Breeze (Michael Mitchell) closed well to finish third. Jonathan Sheppard was the winning trainer.

Diana Gillam's Elmutahid (Bernard Dalton) is trained by Diana's father, Jeremy Gillam. Elmutahid is a ten-year-old maiden, and a horse breaking his maiden at this stage of a horse's career doesn't happen often. He defied the odds and not only won but romped home alone by 14 lengths in the waiver claiming hurdle race. Elmutahid went to the front with one more time to go and steadily improved his position. Rosbrian Farm's Good and Proper (Archie MacAuley)

and John Greene's Mr. Haire (Thomas Garner) finished second and third but were no match for the winner. The Gillam's were awarded for their perseverance.

The Board of Directors of the Virginia Equine Alliance is made up of David Ross (HBPA), Scott Wogen (VHHA), Will Allison (Va Gold Cup) and Jill Gordon-Moor (VTA), They deserve a huge thank you from the steeplechase community for helping to make the Middleburg Spring Races and the Virginia Gold Cup Races possible. Without them there would not be any sanctioned racing in Virginia this year. The VEA Board recognizes that this year has been very challenging for everyone in racing and breeding, and the Board is dedicated to help all aspects of the industry. The Board is supplementing purses at the Shenandoah Downs harness meet later this year. In addition, the Fall National Steeplechase Association meets in Virginia will have VEA funding available to offset the loss of sponsors and spectators should they race.

The Virginia Equine Alliance is dedicated to promoting, sustaining and expanding thoroughbred and standardbred racing and breeding in Virginia. Their commitment to the sport makes racing possible despite the Covid-Pandemic. On behalf of the Virginia Steeplechase Association I extend a heartfelt thank you to the Board of the VEA.