

# ***Virginia Horsemen's Benevolent & Protective Association***

## Racing Schedule Change

Summer racing at Colonial Downs in New Kent, Virginia begins on Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, one week earlier than previously announced. The VHBPA and track management decided to start the meet on the Friday before the June 6<sup>th</sup> Belmont Stakes because Pimlico's shortened 2009 meet ends on May 23rd. With no Pimlico overlap Colonial's management hopes to draw a big crowd for opening weekend.

Colonial's 40 day meet will end on Tuesday, July 28<sup>th</sup>, just prior to Saratoga's opening later in the week. (Swapping a hot week in August for a milder one in June was also a factor in Colonial's early start.) As usual racing will be Friday through Tuesday, with an evening post time during the week and an afternoon post on weekends. Steeplechase races will be carded on alternate Sundays.

Because of the early start Colonial's huge turf course may not be ready for racing during the first week or so. Its Bermuda grass surface requires a good stretch of hot weather to mature. For that reason more dirt races will be carded at the start of the meet. But by season's end track management expects 80% of the races will have run on the turf.

To encourage horsemen to bring their dirt runners to Colonial the VHBPA will again run its popular "down and dirty" trainer bonus program. Trainers in dirt races with claiming prices of \$10,000 or less will receive the following awards from the VHBPA: \$200 (win); \$100 (2<sup>nd</sup>); \$75 (3<sup>rd</sup>); and, \$50 (4<sup>th</sup>-last). Last year nearly \$20,000 was given out to trainers.

Colonial's stable area will open to horsemen on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Stall applications are on the Colonial Downs website, [www.colonialdowns.com](http://www.colonialdowns.com). Approximately 1000 stalls are available. Training hours are from 6 a.m. until 10 a.m., with a half hour harrow break at 8 o'clock.

All owners and trainers must be licensed before a horse will be permitted to race during the meet. A completed application and full payment of the license fee to the Virginia Racing Commission is required, though a 30 day allowance will be granted to complete fingerprinting. But all purses will be held until the process is complete.

Unlike prior years the VRC will not automatically send out license renewal notices. It is up to owners and trainers to note their Virginia license expiration dates. Renewal applications can be printed from the VRC webpage, [www.vrc.state.us](http://www.vrc.state.us).

## Purses

Unfortunately Virginia racing is not immune to the sagging economy and the nationwide decline in wagering on horse racing. Handle at Colonial's eight off track betting shops is down about 12%, though that decline is offset somewhat by increased on-line wagering through four companies licensed in Virginia to accept internet and phone wagers (TVG, YouBet, XpressBet, and Twin Spires). Revenue from both sources funds the Virginia horsemen's purse account.

None the less despite otherwise poor economics overnight purses at Colonial's meet this summer should be slightly higher than last year because stakes purses are being cut at the VHBPA's insistence. The Virginia Derby (Gr. 2) remains at \$750,000, but other major races like the Colonial Turf Cup (Gr. 2) and the Virginia Oaks (Gr. 3) will have reduced purses. The savings will shift to overnight races, which are expected to average \$159,000 on a daily basis. Last summer's overnight average was \$153,000. Together with stakes races the daily average this year should be more than \$212,000.

The standard purse distribution system, which starts with a 57% share for the winner and pays through sixth place, will also be modified at the VHBPA's request. Under the new formula purse money will be distributed to all finishers. For example, in an eight horse race the split will be: 58/20/10/6, with 1.5% for 5<sup>th</sup> through last. Under that formula even in a low level \$10,000 claiming race the last place finisher receives \$150. That at least covers jockey fees.

## Entries

On an experimental basis for at least two weeks Racing Secretary Tyler Picklesimer will implement a new system for taking entries and naming riders. Closing dates will be listed at the top of each race page in the Condition Book. Entries will not close before 10 a.m. However, riders must be named by closing time. The VRC stewards reserve the right to name substitute riders.

Scratches will be made off the race day program and are irrevocable. With the stewards' permission trainers may scratch down to eight betting interests by 9 a.m. on race day. After that time scratches are limited to the horse's physical condition. Horses scratched for a physical reason cannot be reentered until at least three racing days later. They must also be off the Veterinarian's List.

This summer the Racing Secretary will meet informally on a weekly basis, possibly at lunch or dinner, with the VHBPA's Executive Director as well

as owners and trainers to discuss the new entry system and any other concerns or suggestions affecting racing. Interested parties may check with the VHBPA office, next to the VRC Licensing entrance, for meeting details.

### Medication Rules

The VRC modified its rule on prohibited levels of phenylbutazone in post-race blood tests. The previous standard of 5 micrograms per milliliter of plasma has been lowered to 2 micrograms, which brings Virginia in line with medication rules in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Most other racing jurisdictions, including West Virginia, Kentucky, and Florida, still use a 5 microgram standard.

The VRC stewards will impose progressive penalties on trainers for phenylbutazone positives, depending on quantified levels of the medication found in test samples. They are: (1) verbal warning (levels above 2 mg. but below 2.6 mg.); (2) \$500 fine (2.6 mg to 5 mg.); and, (3) \$1500 fine and loss of purse (above 5 mg.). The penalties increase for repeated violations within a 365 day period, including violations in other jurisdictions.

The VRC's medication rules continue last year's revised ban on all anabolic steroids except for trace amounts, having no pharmacologic effect on race day, of four therapeutic drugs (stanozolol, boldenone, nandrolone, and testosterone). During Colonial's 2008 meet there were no anabolic steroid positives found in post race testing.

Because withdrawal times vary for those four substances the VRC will again offer free pre-race testing for horses stabled at Colonial Downs and those stabled elsewhere who wish to race in Virginia. Trainers can make testing arrangements with Dr. Rich Harden (804) 966-7409.