

“Course drift,” new Modified division & safety are focal points of national eventing meeting: Area VI Annual Meeting & Awards Banquet coming to Fresno Feb. 17- 19.

by Chris Scarlett, Area VI Chair

The U.S. Eventing Association convention was a successful look at the adult amateur and the important part they play in the continued growth of eventing. Course drift, the addition of the Modified division and, as always, what we are doing to make the sport safer were some of the subjects discussed.

The meeting took place in Florida last month.

There are two schools of thought in the discussion of course drift. One side has the opinion that the entry levels of eventing, Beginner Novice and Novice, should be fun, uncomplicated and lead the competitor to a rewarding successful conclusion that leaves them wanting to do more. The other school of thought is that the courses should be training the horses, encouraging boldness and challenging riders, so that the idea of moving up seems possible and we are producing more capable upper level horses and riders. This is a complicated question but one we would like to find the balanced answer to. How do you feel about “course drift?”

One other way to improve riding and encourage competitors to move up is the addition of the Modified level between Training and Preliminary. The requirements are as quoted from the updated rules:



MODIFIED - The Modified Level is for the training level horse with the intent on progressing to the Preliminary level. The dressage may include medium paces at trot and canter, as well as the introduction of leg yielding, and changes of lead through trot. The cross-country course should introduce tests of accuracy, agility and boldness, control, judgment and jumping ability. Combinations should be more complex than training but still be obvious and inviting to the horse. Obstacles should now involve angled lines, corners, varied terrain and combinations with water or narrow fences. The show jumping course shall include two doubles, or a double and a triple combination. If a triple combination is used, it should be in the second part of the course and with only one oxer. It should be more technical than the training level with any related jumps on five strides or more.

Safety

The USEA has taken many approaches to making our sport safer from educating instructors and officials to researching horse welfare and jump construction. The USEA has upped the ante with education with the Roger Haller Education Fund. I would ask all of Area VI to contribute to this tremendous cause in the name of one of the organization's exceptional officials. One hundred percent of these funds will go to educational programs such as the Education of Eventing officials, Officials Advancement program and the Instructor Certification Program. All of these programs are designed to stimulate the younger generation of eventers to step up to the plate and assume responsibility for advancing the sport.

Educating ourselves about the sport is everyone's responsibility. Sam Watson took that responsibility for his own success and developed Equiratings. By collecting eventing data over the years and the creation of algorithms, Equiratings has made it possible to predict outcomes and improve performance for individuals in the sport.

Learning to fall is something that we hope we learn before we need it but many times we learn from our fall. Danny and Keli Warrington, a steeplechase rider and gymnast, brought LandSafe.com to the convention and gave attendees the chance to learn to fall. LandSafe is a teaching process using mats and a mechanical horse that provides a safe way for riders to learn to fall. I encourage you to check out their site. There may be an opportunity to learn from them in Area VI.

The keynote speaker needs no introduction. William Fox Pitt spoke candidly about his fall at Lion last October and about his long and difficult recovery. It hit home the point that it is a risk sport and, even with experience and preparation, things will happen. One statement that stuck

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with me was that he “had already had 20 penalties and normally he wouldn’t have continued, because what was the point?” Yet he did and had the fall. We need to weigh the risks with the outcome.

Finally, one meeting called “Let’s Talk” was an open session moderated by Peter Gray. The panel consisted of riders, officials, course designers, amateurs and professionals. The floor was opened up to discuss the issues already mentioned.

The dialogue was fruitful. Competitors were reminded to use their rider reps and event evaluation forms more frequently when they had concerns. The big take home message for everyone involved in the sport, whether official, competitor or volunteer, was to treat each other with respect and keep an open mind during discussions.

Locals In National Spotlight

Area VI did very well on the National stage! We are proud to congratulate:

- Beginner Novice Master Rider - Elisabeth Mehner
- Training Master Amateur Rider - Ruth Bley
- Preliminary Amateur Rider - Ruth Bley
- Preliminary Horse of the Year -- Get Rowdy, owned by Team Express Group and ridden by Heather Morris
- Intermediate Adult Amateur Rider - Ashlyn Dorsey
- Frankie Theriot Stutes received the Col. Allen D. Smith Memorial trophy for the USEA Overall Adult Amateur, sponsored by Stackhouse Saddlery
- Mackenna Shea was the recipient of the “Little Becky,” the Rebecca Broussard National Developing Rider Grant
- Madison Tempkin was presented with the Amy Tryon Grant
- Mia Farley won the Seema Sonnard Grant

We are looking forward to honoring these and other Area VI competitors in Fresno at the FCHP International Horse Trials on Feb. 18 at 6pm. If you have had a busy, successful year of competition you should check your placing on the Area VI leaderboard at AreaVI.org to see where you stand. If you were a winner last year and have one of the many trophies, please plan to bring it to Fresno or return it to 516 West Shaw Avenue, Suite 200 Fresno, CA 93704.

The banquet will also include a celebration of the competitive year had by Lauren Billys, Bunny Sexton and Tamra Smith. This panel of four-star riders will be moderated by Rodney Powell,

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Badminton winner and former USEA team member. The dinner is also a great time for bidding on a wide variety of useful and fun items in support of our Adult and Young Rider programs.

Finally, if you are spending the weekend or are a horse lover from the area, we will be screening Harry and the Snowman on Friday night, Feb. 17, and we welcome everyone to come and join us.

Keep checking www.AreaVI.org for the latest news!