



NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2008

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VIRGINIA GOLD CUP SALUTES A SPECIAL HORSE

The "Seabiscuit" of the Gold Cup Returns

Warrenton, Va.-- On Saturday, May 3rd approximately 45,000 spectators will gather at Great Meadow for the 83rd running of the Virginia Gold Cup. This year's race will commemorate the remarkable career of Saluter, the horse who retired from steeplechase racing after winning the Virginia Gold Cup Timber Stakes six consecutive years and retiring the beautiful Gold Cup trophy.

"We are delighted to have Saluter at this coming Virginia Gold Cup for one last visit at the age of 19 and pay tribute to the bronze statue of himself," states Dr. William Allison, Virginia Gold Cup race chairman. "This is truly a remarkable horse and once was a super athlete. He has so much heart, he's truly our equivalent to Seabiscuit."

Often referred to as a "wonder horse", Saluter's career certainly didn't start out as much. He was sent to trainer Jack Fisher at the age of four after a dismal record at the flat track and an equally dismal start over hurdles with his former owner.

Fisher offered to market Saluter as a field hunter and purchased him for \$2,500. "I didn't like him," Fisher admits, "he didn't seem to have much talent and he wasn't a very good jumper." The horse also continued to pull various antics including throwing Fisher on the way to the start of his first steeplechase in Avon, NY. However, Saluter won that race and caught Fisher by surprise with his unique ability to move out toward the end of the race.

In the spring of 1994, owners Mr. and Mrs. Henry Stern and Jack Fisher decided to take a chance on the five-year old and entered him in the Virginia Gold Cup. Saluter was the youngest Virginia Gold Cup winner since 1953. While the International Gold Cup (held in October at Great Meadow) eluded him, Saluter posted wins at many other race meets including the Middleburg Hunt Cup, Radnor Hunt Cup, Virginia Hunt Cup, St. James Hunt Cup, and the Marlborough Cup in Wiltshire, England in 1997.

In 1997, Saluter's Marlborough Cup win in England was an exceptional triumph. The horse, having just come back from an injury, won the 1997 Virginia Gold Cup. That year, the World Timber Championship was established and offered \$100,000 to any horse consecutively winning the Virginia Gold Cup and England's only timber race, the Marlborough Cup. After a long, traumatic flight over, Saluter galloped to victory.

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“Around the barn, he has always been just a regular horse,” Fisher explains and then points out the “love-hate” relationship the two have always had. “It was like this on the course too,” says Fisher, “I’d ask him to move out and he would sort of snarl for a while, then when he was ready to move ahead, he’d go. And boy, did he move ahead!”

Saluter broke many records. Between 1994 and 1999, he won the Virginia Gold Cup six times and he won the International Gold Cup in 1998 and 1999. His wins were always impressively come-from-behind dramatic with screaming fans packing the rails to see him run.

“He certainly drew a crowd,” states Allison, “Saluter brought renewed interest to the sport of steeplechase racing and the Virginia Gold Cup.”

Saluter remains close to the hearts of many Virginia Gold Cup fans. A permanent statue was erected beside the Great Meadow Race Course last fall. On May 3, Jack Fisher will bring his old friend back for one more look at the course where history was made. The Virginia Gold Cup and Great Meadow will acknowledge Jack Fisher and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Stern for their contributions to the sport. Maybe more importantly, they will honor a remarkable horse. “I truly believe that he is a once-in-a-lifetime horse,” says Fisher.

The Virginia Gold Cup Races take place on Saturday, May 3 at Great Meadow in The Plains, Virginia. The setting is truly spectacular in the heart of Virginia horse country. Event gates open at 10 am with pre-race entertainment starting at 11 am including terrier races, the Junior Field Master Chase for young riders, and the Blackwater Parachute Team with the National Anthem being sung by former American Idol contestant, Travis Tucker. The first of six horse races gets underway at 1:30 pm. General admission car passes are \$75 in advance, \$85 the week of the race (allows entry of car and up to 6 occupants) or buy a bus ticket and let Virginia Gold Cup do the driving.

For more information on the Virginia Gold Cup Races please call 540-347-2612 or visit the web site at www.vagoldcup.com.

The Virginia Gold Cup Races are presented by Galen Capital Corporation with race sponsorship support from Blackwater Worldwide, Infinitive, Novo Nordisk, Creighton Farms, and Porsche Cars of North America. Race day activities are underwritten by The Virginia Lottery, Proskauer Rose, LLP, Watson Wyatt Worldwide, NTRC, Farm and Ranch Magazine, Horton Truck and Trailer, Vineyard Vines, and Capital Party Rental. Official providers of the Virginia Gold Cup Races are Grand Cuisine, Bonterra Wines, Coca-Cola, Dogtopia, Finlandia Vodka, Jack Daniels Tennessee Whiskey, Little Black Dress Wines, Miller Brewing Co., Woodford Reserve Bourbon and Professional Grounds.

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