



USHJA Children's Adult Hunter Task Force Meeting Minutes

September 30, 2019, 3:00 p.m. ET via
Teleconference

Task Force Members Present: Tobey McWilliams (Chair), Otis Brown (Vice Chair), Jamie Gibson, Monica Hunt, Hunter Messineo, Kat Demas Mulkey, Sharon Stewart-Wells, Simone Starnes (8)

Task Force Members Not Present: (0)

Others Present: Jennifer Osterman (USHJA Assistant Managing Director of Sport Programs) (1)

I. Roll Call

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order and Ms. Osterman called roll. With 8 members present a quorum was met.

II. Discussion of the Child/Adult Hunter Championships

Ms. McWilliams had a conflict with the start time of the meeting, so Mr. Brown began the discussion of the Child/Adult Hunter Championships. He raised three options for the Task Force to review: to continue the championships in a modified way, create a new event for the Children's and Adult Hunter membership, or remove the program all together. Ms. Hunt spoke up that she believes the idea of the current program is a good but modifications to the specifications would make it work. Ms. Demas Mulkey referred to the feedback sent as materials on the Zone 4 championships and stated that all participants loved the program and believes it should not be removed and agrees that changes will be beneficial. Ms. McWilliams was able to get on the call and explained that she has received similar feedback on the championships throughout the year. A lot of her feedback provided that not a lot of members knew about the program. She also received feedback that a few of the championships went very well. Ms. Starnes agrees that modifying the championships would be favorable. She claims that the Zone 9 area is growing in both the jumpers and hunter championships, but the jumper championships are having more success.

Ms. Osterman provided the application numbers for the 2019 Zone 9 and 10 hunter championships: 27 total Children and 28 total Adult Amateur applications. She mentions that the location being combined with the jumper championships has helped spread the word of the program and increase participation.

The discussion shifted to ways the Task Force can increase awareness of the program

to members. Ms. Osterman spoke to an idea that she and Ms. Demas Mulkey had during the Zone 4 championships in Aiken about sending qualification letters regularly to riders who are eligible. Ms. McWilliams provided that we can include in the letter information on what the program is, what riders can get out of it, and what they can win in terms of sponsor awards and prize money. It was also noted to include the sponsor awards on the website to create incentive as well as recognize the sponsor's support.

Ms. Demas Mulkey brought forward an idea to utilize the Chefs d'Equipe who have volunteered to in 2019 to help inform other riders and trainers about the championship. The idea could include sending the volunteers flyers and information to hand out at their local horse shows and barns to help get more people involved.

Mr. Brown questioned whether the Task Force would like to see changes to the current program as opposed to creating something new. Ms. McWilliams emphasized that if the program does not improve, then it will get cut. She was encouraged that the new ideas to improve awareness will help but still needs more changes. Ms. Messineo expressed the concern that the changes need to be fairly drastic to keep the program. Mr. Brown suggested that we remove the restrictions for riders during the championships, including allowing professionals to ride the horses during the competitions. He also suggested that the West Coast championships have had a lot of success because the hunter championships are in conjunction with the jumper championships. Therefore, we should make it a priority to select hosts for the next year that are at the same location as the jumpers.

Mr. Brown also raised the idea of eliminated the team aspect of the championships. He expressed that due to the teams being decided at the rider meetings that it may lack comradery between riders. Ms. McWilliams suggested that the communication and promotion should encourage the team aspect more than it has been so in the past. Ms. Demas Mulkey does not wish to eliminate the team aspect, and she suggested that there is more effort to get the teams together the evening before the team event happens. There was negative feedback regarding teams being unequal numbers and having some teams of four riders and other teams of three riders. The teams of three are then in an unfair situation. Mr. Brown suggested that all we could make only teams of three to avoid the issue of some not having a dropped score. Ms. Osterman explained that the jumper championship experiences the same issue. She suggests an idea to randomly draw a rider on the team of three so that there score counts twice, for an opportunity for every team to have a dropped score.

Ms. Demas Mulkey informed the Task Force that while she was acting as Chef d'Equipe at the Zone 4 championships, she asked many of the trainers who had riders in the regular Children's and Adult hunter divisions but chose not to apply for the championships. Most of their responses were because they wanted their riders to be able to do the regular classes and classics for points. This raised the topic of removing the restriction of horses and riders not being able to compete outside of the championships. Removing the restriction would raise a question on equine welfare and not having horses jump too many times, and ultimately be at the discretion of the trainers. Ms. Osterman offered the suggestion of doing an overlay event with the regular horse show division. The team competition could be held separately and the

individual competition be held as an overlay so that riders can be in contention for the championship in addition to the regular division and classics. Riders would enter both the championships and regular classes, and there would be two judge's cards for the class running at the same time over the same course. Mr. Brown questions what competition management would think of this idea and where it would be placed in the schedule. The Task Force was in agreement to reach out to a couple show managers to get their thoughts on using an overlay.

Ms. Osterman provided the Task Force with the timeline for the 2021 specifications per the MOU with USEF. The Task Force will need to begin the process during October in order to go through the approval with Hunter Working Group and the Executive Committee. The 2021 specifications must be fully approved and published 60 days prior to the start of the 2021 qualifying period on April 4, 2020. It was confirmed that there cannot be any changes to the 2020 specifications.

Ms. McWilliams offered the idea to gather a list of trainers who have had riders compete in the championships and reach out to them for their thoughts on the program, any changes they wish to see, and other thoughts. Ms. Demas Mulkey recommended distributing an evaluation or survey for feedback. Ms. Osterman explained that it would not be difficult to formulate a Survey Monkey form to distribution.

The conversation moved to discuss the addition of Children's Ponies or 2'6" Children's and Adults. Ms. Demas Mulkey suggested that the addition of the 2'6" would allow riders to move up in the championship and participate for more than one year. Ms. There was discussion about the additions affecting competition management and was generally not viewed as an issue and have the potential to increase the participation. The Task Force also discussed about the additional heights and how it would affect the teams. Ms. McWilliams questioned if we would have separate teams for Ponies and 2'6" or combine them. Mr. Brown suggested that there be a minimum number of entries at each height, and if it is not met then they are combined with the 3' teams. The Task Forces also liked the idea that each team could have at least one rider from each height on a team and join them.

Ms. Osterman reviewed the changes discussed earlier to address in the 2021 specifications that included removing the jog, allowing riders to compete the championship horses in other classes, and allowing professionals to ride the championship horses throughout the event. The Task Force was all in favor of these changes.

III. New Business

No new business was discussed.

IV. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

V. Adjourn

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:02 pm ET.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Osterman
USHJA Assistant Managing Director of Sport Programs