

Group releases statement on Red Hills Horse Trials

USEA Professional Horsemen's Council comments on recent tragedies.

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Darren Chiacchia pictured above at the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event, was severely injured at the Red Hills Horse Trials this year.

The Red Hills Horse Trials in Tallahassee, Fla., March 14-16, was marked by tragedy after two horses died and one rider was seriously injured. The United States Eventing Association's (USEA) Professional Horsemen's Council released a statement on April 2 regarding the incidents. Here are the comments in full:

"In light of recent comments in a variety of formats and settings, the Professional Horsemen's Council would like to weigh in on the recent events at the Red Hills Horse Trials. As many readers know, at the horse trials there were two equine fatalities and one rider was seriously injured. Though each of these incidents is tragic, it is the position of the Professional Horsemen's Council that each incident needs to be considered in context.

With regards to the injuries sustained by Darren Chiacchia, who is in fact chair of the Professional Horsemen's Council, the PHC wishes him a speedy and full recovery. It is encouraging to us to know that he is surrounded by so many friends and family members. We hope and pray that his native physical strength and athleticism, coupled with world class medical care, will see him through. But we also feel strongly that Darren would be the last to point a finger with regards to his fall. All of us who pursue eventing at the professional level accept that our job is a dangerous one. We plan to have the right horse with the right preparation at the right level. But we all live with the potential for injury every time we get on a horse, be it at home for a hack or in the thick of competition.

With regards to the death of each horse, the PHC defers to the veterinary experts. FEI Veterinary Delegate Dr. Jim Hamilton, who served at Red Hills, as well as independent veterinary specialists consulted by the PHC, has confirmed that both horses died as the result of a massive internal hemorrhage. While the pathology investigation into the cause of death continues still, each veterinary specialist consulted has consistently expressed that neither exertion nor course design were factors in the fatalities. Each has consistently expressed that while there are several physiologic mechanisms whereby hemorrhage can take place, this type of hemorrhage is impossible to foresee and impossible to prevent. Further, veterinary specialists consulted have indicated that this type of catastrophic blood loss is impossible to treat. According to the same veterinary specialists, there was no way to know prior to the fatalities that either horse was at risk and no way to treat either horse once the hemorrhaging began.

To touch on the third topic that has been raised following Red Hills, the Red Hills course designer, Mark Phillips, who originally brought European standards and quality to American eventing in the early 1990s, is one of the top course designers in the world. At Red Hills, riders were in the whole confident in Mark's design. The Rider Representative, Karen O'Connor, has stated that the majority of the feedback she received from other riders prior to the start of cross-country was positive. On an additional note, it is worth observing that the Omnibus listing for the Red Hills Horse Trials describes the cross-country courses as "difficult, technical, challenging courses." No one should go there expecting less.

In summation, the Professional Horsemen's Council views the incidents at Red Hills as a terrible, unfortunate series of accidents. We wholeheartedly support increased funding and research into equine health, will press for alternative construction methods to make cross-country riding safer, and encourage riders and course designers to work together to improve our sport. As professionals in eventing, we will lead that process."

[Click here for information on past news involving the Red Hills Horse Trials >>](#)

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