



NEWS

Better Business with Malvern: The Shows Must Go On – Behind the Scenes with Horse Show Management

OCTOBER 22, 2020 by [HILLARY DOBBS](#)



As 2020 has progressed, the equestrian community has worked hard to address the new challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Horse shows are a crucial part of the industry and returning to the show ring was of paramount importance for everyone involved. For horse show organizers, there were many challenges presented with the new regulations that need to be followed to protect the health and safety of staff and exhibitors. Hillary Dobbs of [Malvern Bank](#) had the opportunity to speak with Oliver Kennedy of the Capital Challenge Horse Show and Split Rock's Derek Braun, who each had to pivot their plans for 2020 while still creating successful competitions to keep our industry moving forward.



Oliver Kennedy – Capital Challenge Horse Show (CCHS)

Q: Why was Capital Challenge moved to the World Equestrian Center?

A: I was working in Kentucky judging and announcing at the Kentucky Summer Series when the USEF Pony Finals was cancelled. With that change in my schedule, I decided to go with my wife to the World Equestrian Center (WEC) in Ohio to watch our barn compete. At that time, Capital Challenge was still on track to run at the Upper Marlboro venue. We had already received our approvals from the Maryland State Department of Agriculture and from Prince Georges County and



there was just one final step and that was to have the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commissions (MNCPPC) approval. We all thought this would just be a formality, but it turned out it wasn't. After they did a site visit the MNCPPC decided that the way to cut the number of people on the grounds was to cut the number of horses allowed in half. That made it financially impossible to run the show without major losses. So it was time to regroup. WEC had been a major sponsor of our show for more than 6-years and while I was at the show, I walked the entire grounds and thought we could make things work and move CCHS for a year. After I made that decision, I found TJ Campbell, the facility manager, and asked him if they would reopen for the two weeks and let us rent WEC and run our show. Two days later, our manager, JP Bordeleau, and I walked the grounds with TJ and I went to work to get permission from the USEF to make the temporary move to Ohio for 2020. The entire team at WEC made a herculean effort for us to be there and it was something that I will never forget.



Schuyler Dayner at Capital Challenge. Photo by: JUMP Media

Q: What was the biggest concern when moving the show to a new venue?

A: Making the decision to move and run was the single scariest decision I have ever made in my life! I was literally betting the farm on this one decision. Running an event during the pandemic was a

risky proposition because there were so many more things that are totally out of your control. At any moment we could have been shut down by the state or local governments, the USEF, or a new travel restriction. I will say I had a lot of sleepless nights worrying about every scenario that could happen.

Q: Why did you work so hard to ensure that it ran?

A: CCHS has survived a lot of crazy things over our 27-years. The terrorist attacks on 9/11/2001, two hurricanes, a tornado, the DC Beltway Sniper, and an Anthrax scare just to name a few. My mentality has always been to keep going forward. I was not going to let the pandemic ruin the year-end finals for so many exhibitors who are loyal to our event year after year.

Q: What particular changes or adaptations made to the spectator, exhibitor, and sponsor experiences this year?

A: The CCHS has always been known for our exhibitor and sponsor hospitality. Unfortunately, that was one thing we had to give up for this year for the safety of our exhibitors.

Q: What does having CCHS and these major events still run in a turbulent year mean for the sport and the industry?

A: Keeping events like CCHS going gives all the sectors of the equestrian industry hope of a return to normalcy and also keeps the people in the industry working. It allows the trainers, exhibitors, grooms, vendors, service providers, judges and other show officials and staff to make a living.

Derek Braun – Split Rock Jumping Tour

Q: . How have Split Rock Jumping Tour plans changed in 2020 since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

A: Our plans throughout our year have dramatically changed! We have had four events cancel for one reason or another beginning with the Kentucky Invitational in April and ending with our CSI4* World Cup qualifier in Fort Worth in December.



Derek Braun

Q: What has been the biggest highlight of the 2020 competition? Biggest struggle?

A: Our biggest highlight so far has been being able to still accomplish successful events given the uncertainty of the times. That also goes along with the greatest struggle, which was not knowing exactly which events will be affected by the pandemic or not and making the right decisions for our company and our exhibitors.

Q: Were there any special adaptations SRJT made for the attendees' experience?

A: There have been many changes to the entire experience, specifically the sponsors have not been able to capitalize on the networking opportunities. However, we have seen a HUGE increase in social media presence, which has translated into positive activations for all of our sponsors.

Q: Do you foresee any short or long-term adaptations going forward that competition management teams may need to make the “new normal”?

A: I think the new procedures and protocols will always be in the back of all competition management's minds now. Certainly some of the procedures will be implemented long term. I do think there might be less events moving into the future. Whether it be because of loss of funds to continue to operate or just the sheer uncertainty of what the future holds. I think the management teams that are truly in it for the benefit of the sport and have been able to mobilize their teams and pivot their strategies, will survive the long haul.

Q: What does the 2021 SRJT look like compared to 2020?

A: 2021 for SRJT looks very different! We plan to have from seven to ten events in 2021 and up to four of those events will include hunters for the very first time! My team is extremely excited to make a big splash in the hunter world and continue to provide a better product for everyone.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of horse show management teams, top competitions like Capital Challenge Horse Show and Split Rock Jumping Tour are adapting to the times and pushing on for the benefit of the sport. We look forward to these horse shows year in and year out, and we thank the show management teams for their perseverance and all their hard work in 2020!

Find out how [Malvern Bank](#) can “follow you” to the shows on your competition calendar with its mobile apps and remote banking access for your personal and equestrian business accounts.



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