**Early Closer Rules for 2026 Virginia Breeder's Fund**
**(updated 9/21/2026)**

## *ENTRY FEES*

Nomination, sustaining and declaration fees will be added to the final purse.

All Commonwealth bred early closer declaration fees must be paid when the horse is dropped in the box for its first elimination race or the horse will not be allowed to start.

All Commonwealth bred horses entered and drawn to post positions are required to pay the declaration fee. This fee is required even if a horse is scratched.

The declaration fee will not be refunded unless the horse dies between the time of the declaration to start and the start of the prep or elimination race.

When an owner(s) has outstanding debts owed to the Virginia Harness Horse Association, every horse owned in whole or part by that owner, shall be subject to be declared ineligible by the VHHA and the Virginia Racing Commission, until such time that the debt is collected.

An individual whose check for a sustaining payment, nominating payment or starting fee, is dishonored by the bank, will be reported to the Virginia Racing Commission for appropriate action. After any individual has issued more than one dishonored check, all future payments from the individual must be made by certified check or money order.

No partial payments will be accepted.

## *ELIGIBILITY*

Two and three year old trotters and pacers are to be raced at one mile. Colt and filly divisions will be separate.

To be eligible, all horses must be registered with the VHHA before closing of nomination. No exceptions.

All Virginia bred yearlings must be registered with the VHHA on or before May 15th of the yearling year. Yearling registrations must be accompanied by a yearling registration form and a check for the proper registration fee.

## *NOMINATION AND SUSTAINING FEE SCHEDULE*

Yearling payments of $25.00 per horse are due May 15th.
Two year old nomination payments of $200.00 per horse are due March 15th.
Two year old sustaining payments of $200.00 per horse are due May 15th.
Two year old declaration payments of $200.00 per horse are due before the start of the elimination race. Any horse that drops in the box must pay this payment even if the horse scratches from the race.

Three year old nomination payments of $300.00 per horse are due March 15th.
Three year old declaration payments of $300.00 per horse are due before the start of the elimination race. Any horse that drops in the box must pay this payment even if the horse scratches from the race.

Any two year old not properly registered with the VHHA as a yearling will require payment of the yearling registration fee and an additional fee of $100.00 due at time of two year old nomination payments.

Any two year old that missed the March 15th nomination payment, may supplement prior to the date of the sustaining payment (May 15th) by making the following payments: $200.00 nomination fee plus $200.00 sustaining fee plus $400.00 supplement fee for a total of $800.00.

If the two year old March 15th nomination payment is not paid (or supplemented as above prior to May 15th) the horse is not eligible to race as a three year old.

May 15th sustaining payments are not required for two year olds to remain eligible as three year olds.

A horse must have a charted flat line forty five (45) days prior to the start of each elimination race or final race to be eligible to race.

## *RACE FEES, PURSE SCHEDULE, RULES*

Two legs of eliminations will be held prior to the finals. Horses do not have to race in both legs of the eliminations but must compete in at least one elimination in order to compete in the finals. After paying the declaration fee, there will be no further fees for starting the finals

If more than eight (8) horses are entered in a division, there will be elimination races to determine the eight finishers. Points will be awarded based upon the finishing order. The eight horses with the highest number of points will advance to the finals. Points will be awarded as follows:

1st place- 50
2nd place- 25
3rd place- 12
4th place- 8
5th place- 5
6th place- 4
7th place- 3
8th place- 2

In the case of a tie in points, the horse that recorded the fastest time in the elimination races will be eligible to enter the final. In the case of horses tied in points that have recorded identical times, the eligible horse shall be drawn by lot.

The purse for elimination races is estimated to be $10,000.00. Estimated purses for finals will be $100,000.00 plus all nomination, sustaining and declaration fees.

Declaration fees for two year olds will be $200.00 per horse. Declaration fees for three year olds will be $300.00. All horses dropping in any of the eliminations or prep races must pay the declaration fee before the start of the race even if the horse scratches from the race. After paying the declaration fee, there will be no further fees for starting the finals.

All trainers or owners must notify the racetrack and the VHHA, at the time of declaration, of any conflicts which may necessitate racing horses as an entry.

In both the elimination races and the finals, all horses must have their noses on the gate at the start.

## *CANCELLATION CONDITIONS*

The VHHA and the Virginia Racing Commission reserve the right to cancel any and/or all races due to reasons beyond their control, or if it becomes impractical or undesirable to conduct said races. If an event is not raced, the VHHA responsibility and liability will be limited to refunding without interest, nomination and sustaining fees collected towards cancelled events that have not been disbursed at the time of cancellation. These monies paid will be refunded to the owners of all declared horses.

## *GENERAL CONDITIONS*

Races shall be provided for two and three year old Virginia bred Standardbreds.

There shall be races for colts and fillies in each of the trotting and pacing gaits.

Any name changes of foals must be reported to the VHHA and USTA.

Participants in the Virginia early closer races must be licensed by the Virginia Racing Commission prior to racing.

Failure to make payment required by conditions constitutes an automatic withdrawl from the event as stated in USTA rule 12 section 4.

Purse money divisions shall be:

5 horse field- 50% 25% 12% 8% 5%
4 horse field- 55% 25% 12% 8%
3 horse field- 60% 28% 12%
2 horse field- 65% 35%
1 horse field- 100%

Eligibility shall be defined by the laws of the Commonwealth, the regulations of the Virginia Racing Commission and the rules set forth by the VHHA.

In order to be eligible to race in the Early Closers, the horses entered must meet the following conditions:

Qualifying standards for two year old trotters- 2:10
Qualifying standards for two year old pacers- 2:08
Qualifying standards for three year old trotters- 2:08
Qualifying standards for three year old pacers- 2:06

If there is a track allowance posted by the judges at the track where a horse qualifies, this allowance will be accepted.

Any and all horse(s) nominated to the Virginia Early Closers that are found to be ineligible will not be refunded any monies.

Prior to racing in Virginia Early Closers, all horses must be microchipped as per USTA rules.

General race conditions established by the race secretary and the track must be adhered to as any other race.

A horse that tests positive for a prohibited substance in any leg of a series event (including early closer, late closer, Breeders Fund, and Sired Stakes) shall be ineligible to participate in any additional legs or final or consolation race of such series until the appeal regarding the positive test is resolved. If the appeal is resolved prior to the declaration for any leg or final or consolation race and the positive test is adjudicated false, then the horse shall be eligible to participate in such additional leg or final or consolation race of the series.

## *GOVERNING LAW*

Eligibility to participate in the Virginia Breeders Early Closers, as well as matters pertaining to racing therein, shall be governed by the law of the Commonwealth, regulations of the Virginia Racing Commission and the rules set forth by the VHHA.

Definitions, terms and conditions not otherwise covered, are governed by the rules and regulation of the USTA.

The Virginia Racing Commission and the VHHA reserve the right to amend, interpret and apply these rules as necessary to further the best interest of Virginia racing and to comply with the governing law.

The regulations of the Virginia Racing Commission are as promulgated by the Commission and are excerpted solely for the Commonwealth. Accordingly, if there should be any variance between an excerpt appearing above and any part of an official regulation, the official regulation shall control and neither the Virginia Racing Commission or the VHHA or any employees shall have any liability resulting there from.