Early Closer Rules for 2026 Virginia Sired Stakes Program

Updated 9/22/2026

ENTRY FEES

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

All Commonwealth bred early closer declaration fees must be paid prior to the eliminations 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 at the track. 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

To be eligible, all horses must be sired by a stallion that was registered with the VHHA and stood in the Commonwealth of Virginia during the breeding year.

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 nomination 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 $100.00 per horse are due March 15th.
Two year old sustaining payments of $100.00 per horse are due May 15th.
Two year old declaration payments of $100.00 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 $200.00 per horse are due March 15th.
Three 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.

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: $100.00 sustaining fees plus $400.00 supplement fee for a total of $500.00.

If the two year old March 15th sustaining 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 box closing for each elimination and finals races to be eligible to race.

RACE FEES, PURSE SCHEDULE, RULES

Elimination races will be held prior to the finals. Horses must race in the elimination races in order to compete in the finals.

If more than eight (8) horses are entered in a division, there will be elimination races to determine the eight finishers to compete in the finals. Finishers will be decided as follows:

If there are two elimination races in a division, the top four finishers from each race will compete in the finals.

If there are three elimination races in a division, the top two finishers from each race will compete in the finals. The two fastest times of the remaining horses, will also compete in the finals.

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 $100.00 per horse. Declaration fees for three year olds will be $200.00 per horse. All horses dropping in any of the elimination 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 Sired 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 withdraw 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 Sired Stakes program, the horses entered must meet one of 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 Sired Stakes program that are found to be ineligible will not be refunded any monies.

Prior to racing in Sired Stakes program, all horses must be tattooed, freeze branded or microchipped.

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.

BONUS PAYMENTS FOR FOALS BRED IN 2022, 2023 and 2024

Once the foal has met the qualifying standards set for the age and gait as noted above, bonus payments will be issued as follows:

Stallion Owner receives $1,500.00
Breeder receives $1,500.00
If the mare and foal are domiciled in Virginia for the entire foaling year the mare owner during the foaling year receives $1,500.00

Bonuses will be paid one time as either a two year old or three year old at the end of the calendar year. Qualifying Certification form must be submitted to the VHHA. All payments are subject to change based on available funds.

BONUS PAYMENTS FOR FOALS BRED STARTING IN 2025

Bonus payments will be made based upon purse payments received in the Sired Stakes elimination races and the final races. Bonuses will be paid at the end of the calendar year.
Stallion owners will receive 15% bonus
Breeders will receive 15% bonus
All payments are subject to change based on available funds.

GOVERNING LAW

Eligibility to participate in the Sired Stakes program, 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.