

## **Varsity Equestrian National Championships Scheduled to Begin Thursday**

**WACO, Texas** — The seventh annual Varsity Equestrian National Championships are slated to begin on Thursday, April 17, at the Heart O' Texas Fairgrounds.

For the second straight year, the varsity collegiate riding national championships are being hosted by Baylor University. Baylor is in its third year as a fully funded varsity program after the university's athletic department picked up the sport in the spring of 2004.

South Carolina enters the show as the defending overall national champion. The Gamecocks won their first national team title in 2005.

Varsity equestrian is divided into two areas: hunter seat and western. The University of South Carolina has won three straight hunter seat national team titles while Texas A&M is the defending national western champion.

Each of the two divisions has a 12-team seeded bracket similar to that of the NCAA basketball championships. Teams are seeded from one through 12 and placed accordingly into the bracket. Oklahoma State is ranked No. 1 in the hunter seat bracket while TCU is ranked at the top in the western bracket.

The unique thing about collegiate riding is that all riders compete on unfamiliar horses. Each rider is afforded only four minutes in the warm-up pen on the unfamiliar horse before competing in front of the judge. Each rider competes in a head-to-head match-up against a rider with the school they are paired up against.

Texas A&M won the inaugural national title in 2002. The University of Georgia won the next two titles in 2003 and 2004.

For the first time in the competition's history, individual national championships will be contested. Four riders were chosen in each event to compete for individual honors. Competing in each event and listed in order of seed include: Equitation Over Fences – Nicole Brown (Baylor), Kristin Terebesi (South Carolina), Lisa Wells (Fresno State), Ally Blais (Oklahoma State); Equitation – Haylie Jayne (Georgia), Bailey Mahoney (Oklahoma State), Kristen Terebesi (South Carolina), Rebecca Rifkin (Auburn); Reining – Sarah Locker (Georgia), Leah Kuehn (Oklahoma State), Julie Gibbs (Auburn), Lydia Placzek (South Dakota State); Horsemanship – Kindel Huffman (TCU), Caroline Gunn (Texas A&M), Stephanie Sanders (UT Martin), Laura Upton (Georgia).

The Varsity Equestrian National Championships will begin on Thursday at 8:30 a.m. and continue through Saturday afternoon.

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