

The Iroquois: America's Premier Amateur Steeplechase

Ralph Ballou

Tennessee State University

On the second Saturday in May the hillside at Percy Warner Park is thronged with people gathered to watch the annual running of the Iroquois steeplechase and other races. This year marks the 49th anniversary of the first race.

The course was developed after two men took an early morning ride in a public park and discussed the site as a suitable place for a steeplechase course. Through subsequent contacts with a newspaper publisher who had Washington connections the WPA constructed the Course which was laid out by Will DuPont Jr.

On May 10 the first running was held and with the exception of 1945 the race has been held yearly. The purse has grown so that it is now 100,000 and the race is the finest amateur race in the United States.

The race is the focal point of a social weekend which concludes with a Hunt Ball. The proceeds of the race go to a local charity, the Children's Hospital of Vanderbilt. In 1991 this race will celebrate its fiftieth diamond anniversary. Because of its success, in the fall, a Royal Chase is held.