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Galway Downs Welcomes New Course Designer

Temecula, Calif., Sept. 1 – Ian Stark, the three-time Olympic silver medalist from Ashkirk, Scotland, has taken over as the new cross-country course designer for the Galway Downs Three-Day Event, on Nov. 1-4. Stark has succeeded Michael Etherington-Smith, who's designed the cross-country course for both the November and March events at Galway Downs ever since they began in 1999.

Etherington-Smith has had to reduce his worldwide course-designing obligations because last spring he became the director of sport for British Eventing, the organization that oversees eventing in Great Britain. The influential and highly respected course designer is now creating the tracks for only the Rolex Kentucky CCI****, the Chatsworth World Cup-qualifying CIC*** in England, and the 2008 Olympics in Hong Kong.

Stark, 53, who won team silver medals at the 1984 and 1988 Olympics, the individual silver medal at the 1988 Olympics, and the individual silver medal at the 1990 World Championships, announced in April that the Rolex Kentucky CCI would be his final international competition. Robert Kellerhouse, the Galway Downs organizer, said that when he watched Stark ride Full Circle II to 11th place at Kentucky just after announcing his retirement, "it turned on a light bulb in my head."

Kellerhouse knows Stark well since he's been coming to Temecula for the last nine Januaries to teach a popular series of clinics to local riders. And he knew that Stark, who rode 17 different

horses to eventing's highest level (the four-star), has worked with Etherington-Smith in creating several courses. "Ian has incredible passion and energy, and he doesn't finish second at anything in life, so I knew he'd be a great fit for us," said Kellerhouse.

Said Stark, "The decision to turn from rider to course designer was not taken lightly. It seems like I'm giving up the pressure of competition to setting myself up in the firing line should the riders be unhappy with my course! I find the challenges ahead both exciting and scary, and I have no doubt it will certainly keep the adrenalin pumping!"

The Galway Downs Three-Day Event will offer both a CCI** and a CCI*, and Stark hasn't had a chance to fully analyze either course yet. He'll be coming to Temecula for the first time as course designer later this month, so he expects to make only minor alterations to the track and complexes Etherington-Smith has already installed. He and Kellerhouse expect to make more extensive alterations over the winter – the best time to build jumps in California – in time for next March's World Cup-qualifying CIC***, and the CIC** and CIC* that accompany it.

"Following on from the world's best course designer [Etherington-Smith] adds it's own pressure. I only hope I am up to the job!" admitted Stark with a grin. He added more seriously, "I hope that course designing will be my way of giving back to the sport that has been my life."

Some 114 horses started in the CCI** and CCI* divisions at the 2006 Galway Downs Three-Day Event, and Kellerhouse expects a similar-sized field this year.

General admission to the Galway Downs Three-Day Event is \$8 per day in advance, \$10 per day at the door. Patron tickets – which include parking, a program and a catered lunch with beer, wine or soft drinks – are also available.

To order patron or general admission tickets, or for more information on the Galway Downs Three-Day Event, visit their website (www.galwaydowns.com) or call 951-303-0405. To learn more about eventing, visit the U.S. Eventing Association's website (www.useventing.com).