HONG KONG STEWARD GETS A TASTE OF SYDNEY RACING

A YOUNGER GENERATION OF STEWARDS WILL BE BENEFICIARIES OF A RACING NSW-HONG KONG JOCKEY CLUB EXCHANGE AGREEMENT

WORDS: **RAY HICKSON** IMAGES: **BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS**

A growing connection between Racing NSW and Hong Kong stewards has given Justin Ho experience he could never get at home.

And it means a number of young local stewards will have a similar chance to increase their knowledge base by spending time in Hong Kong over the coming 12 months.

Justin Ho is a member of the Hong Kong stewards panel under Marc Van Gestel, former Racing NSW chairman of Stewards, and he completed a two-month stint as part of the panel officiating on San Domenico Stakes Day.

Back in 2021 he became the first Hong Kong steward to chair an Australian race meeting, at Port Lincoln, during a previous visit and he's chaired meetings at Grafton, Kempsey and Gosford in the past couple of months.

"Due to the set up in Hong Kong only Marc Van Gestel, the chairman, runs race meetings so the purpose is to be exposed to being in that chair. To run race meetings," Ho said.

"It helps the younger generation of officials in Hong Kong to be exposed to things we aren't normally.

"Working a race meeting is something I enjoy but being in that chair is something different.

"There's the added responsibility and it's a challenge I enjoy. It's something I want to do."

Racing NSW steward Liam Martin has already spent time in Hong Kong as part of this stewards' exchange and it'll be the turn of

Justin Ho with Racing NSW Senior Steward Steve Railton

Hong Kong Steward Justin Ho: "Having the opportunity to work in Australia you get to see a variety of racing"

Jack Marshall, Reuben Loughlin, and Sean Knight in the near future.

The Hong Kong panel consists of five stewards headed by Van Gestel, with Terry Bailey as deputy, another ex-RNSW steward Troy Vassallo is a member and Ho is one of two more.

There are three cadets. Earlier this year Thomson Hui, one of the cadets, also took part in the exchange.

"I was a cadet for seven years before being promoted to a fully-fledged steward," Ho said.

"The biggest difference in terms of stewarding is the makeup of the panel. You have to wait but at the same time you can gain the experience for yourself for when the opportunity comes.

"Being in the chair we have to consider more things than just being a member of the panel.

"Having the opportunity to work in Australia you get to see a variety of racing.

"There's so many meetings during the week and with the range of jockeys, trainers, horses, races, you're exposed to many different things."

> **"Working a race meeting is something I enjoy but being in that chair is something different.**

Ho's path into horse racing came out of a love of sports, he's a big fan of soccer, and the biggest sport in Hong Kong is horse racing.

He has a degree in management and a law degree and while the latter ultimately wasn't for him, he was able to find a job at the HKJC before becoming a cadet.

"My dad is a solicitor so there was always some pressure to go on to do law and follow his footsteps," he said.

"I did (law) for a post graduate degree and did some work experience with barristers and solicitors and worked out it wasn't really for me.

"Before I started as a steward I worked for the club in finance so everything worked out for that position. It fits everything I want to do."

We can't have a Hong Kong steward visiting without asking about their superstar and TAB Everest favourite Ka Ying Rising and whether there are any chinks in his armour.

He'll be Sydney bound after he runs at the opening meeting of the Hong Kong season on Sunday and Ho said when he races he brings a new level to any race meeting and hopes Sydney experiences the same.

"Whether it is Golden Sixty or Romantic Warrior, racing fans turn up and back those horses," he said.

"There's an extra level of atmosphere when those horses run around.

"Just from a personal perspective what type of going (the Everest) is going to be run on is the biggest question mark.

"We have seen Ka Ying trial in Hong Kong in difficult conditions and still perform very well." ***RNSW***