

Katie Johnson Claims her Second Gold Medal at 2008 NAJYRC
Jennifer Brannigan in the Lead in the CCI Division**

Parker, CO—August 2—Competition continued today at the CN North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (NAJYRC) at The Colorado Horse Park Presented by Gotham North. In young rider dressage, Katie Johnson impressed judges and spectators with a 69.05% to claim the gold medal in the young rider individual test. Johnson was also on the gold medal winning Region VII team on Thursday. Jennifer Brannigan held on to her lead in the CCI** division after turning in a clear round over David O'Connor's cross- country course.

Dressage

After adding an individual gold medal to her team gold in the young rider dressage division, an emotional Katie Johnson couldn't hold back tears of joy. "It hasn't sunk in yet," she said. "I came here hoping to be in the top ten." The El Cajon, California resident said she was in a state of disbelief because she has only been partnered with her horse for three months. Johnson leased Millenium, a 14-year-old Dutch gelding by Inspekteur, with the intent of qualifying for NAJYRC, a goal that eluded her last year. Johnson has nothing but praise for her partner, who is owned by Pam Schachter. "I love him. He works so hard," Johnson said. "He's so honest. He went out there today and tried his gosh darned hardest."

Although Johnson also enjoys snowboarding and wakeboarding, she's committed to her riding career. "This is what I want to do," she said. Johnson trains with her mother Elizabeth Johnson, as well as Debbie McDonald.

Another Region VII team gold medalist earned the individual silver. Brianna Dutton, Tracy, California, received a 68.45% from the judging panel: Michael Poulin, Joaquin Orth, Janet Foy, Marian Cunningham and Lorraine Stubbs (E, H, C, M, B, respectively).

"It's surreal," she said of her second medal aboard Tibet, an 8-year-old Dutch gelding by Idocus. With her trainer Nadine Pestana's help, Dutton has brought Tibet from first

level to young riders in two short years. “He really likes working,” she said of the flashy gelding that she describes as a goof with a big personality. When Dutton’s not riding, she is a biology major at St. Mary’s College in California and hopes to become a chiropractor.

Finishing with a 67.9% and the bronze medal, Chelsea Pederson has thoroughly enjoyed her NAJYRC debut. “I’m so glad I got to come and be a part of it,” the 20-year-old Gig Harbor, Washington resident said. She has been partnered with her nine-year-old Hungarian Warmblood, H.S. With Honors, by H.S. Wistar, for four years. “We’ve got such a great bond going,” she said. With trainer Erin Jorgensen Pederson works a lot on basics, but she also includes time outside the arena and trail rides.

Although all three individual medalists were first time NAJYRC competitors, they have found the other riders and other disciplines very welcoming and fun to be around. “It’s so great to be here with people as focused as you,” Dutton said. “It’s the best show I’ve ever been to.”

Eventing

Jennifer Brannigan and her mount Cooper led the CCI** after the dressage phase. They held on to their lead with a clear round cross-country today. “I handle pressure really well. I just go out and ride hard,” Brannigan said. “This horse always steps up to the plate. He is awesome for a seven year old. I feel so lucky to ride him and so thankful to my mom and my grandfather for giving me the opportunity to have this horse.”

Jennifer is not feeling the pressure going into the stadium-jumping portion of the competition either. “My horse has only had two rails in his career and they were both my fault. He is a lovely horse that tries in every phase,” she explained. Brannigan cites her work with Mike Winter for really helping bring Cooper along. “Working with Mike has helped a ton. The horse has really flourished with Mike’s help.” Brannigan rides for Area VI, currently in the lead for the team gold.

Karen Shull moved from fifth place to second place in the CCI** after the cross-country. Karen, 19, rode Just My Style for Area I, IV & V and put her thirteen years of experience in the saddle to use on the cross-country course. “Going into cross-country I just thought I would try to give my horse the best ride I could,” said Shull. This is her first year competing in the championships but she has groomed twice before at NAJYRC. “I’m having a lot of fun.”

In the CCI* competition, Jessa Lux and her team, Area IV, are hoping to continue their lead tomorrow in the stadium-jumping phase. “The pressure is definitely on, more so for my team than for me. I would love to put in a good ride for them and win the team gold,” she said. Lux was tied for first with Benita Strini from Area II after the dressage. Lux continued, “My coach, Jonathan Holling really helped me get the test I needed.” She is now solidly in first place after the cross-country. Jessa and her mount Car Tanga, who is by Highland’s King and out of Gypsy Glen, are competing in their first NAJYRC. “It is an amazing experience. It feels like I am in the big leagues. It is crazy to be around all these amazing riders, horses and coaches.”

Marissa Wolfe and The Maestro moved from third to second place after the one star cross-country phase. The pair’s first experience at NAJYRC has been well worth the effort. “I’m overwhelmed, it is so much fun. I am making friends with people I would never have met if I hadn’t come here.” Wolfe put in many hours to prepare for the heat of Colorado. She explained her strategy: “I started training about three months ago. We galloped twice a week and had a dressage and jumping lesson twice a week. My horse only got one day off and we would ride at 1:00 or 2:00 [in the afternoon] so it would be the hottest time of the day. Where I live [in Canada] it doesn’t get that hot, so we wanted to prepare for the heat.” Hannah Ross and Fantasia are tied with Wolfe for second place.

Course builder Greg Schlappi, who has built courses at Rubicon Horse Trials in Virginia and at previous North American Young Rider Championships at Tempel Farm in Illinois, was very pleased with the course and the riders. “It was lovely,” he said. “I was surprised at how nice the field of horses were. This field was the best I’ve ever seen

at the NAJYRC. They really handled the course well.” Schlappi also praised the officials, like Anne-Mette Binder, that have traveled from around the world. “They are a real class act,” Schlappi said.

Show Jumping

Canadians claimed the top four positions in the 1.4-meter young rider farewell, with two riders advancing to the jump-off. Both posted double clear rounds, but it was Alberta’s Brie Etcheverry with Capitan who claimed first place by finishing more than two seconds faster than British Columbia’s Jean-Nicholas Goyette.

In the 1.3-meter junior farewell México’s Miguel Angel Iglesias jumped a double clear to take home the blue ribbon.

Reining

Team USA and Team Canada enjoyed a schooling day with the individual medal finals being scheduled for Sunday.

The North American Junior and Young Rider Championships are the premier equestrian event in North America for riders age 14-21. Run in a format similar to the Olympic Games, the Championships feature riders competing for team and individual medals in the three Olympic disciplines of show jumping, dressage and eventing, as well as the western discipline of reining, which was added to the schedule this year. Visit www.youngriders.org for complete results, schedules and more.