

2017 USEF YOUNG RIDERS I N V I T A T I O N A L

JUDGES:

LISA CUNNINGHAM WALLER, USA • LEWIS MCKIM, CANADA • JACO JONKER, SOUTH AFRICA

PHOTOS BY SARAH BENNETT AND MORGAN KING

O

n the Monday before the start of the Pro-Am show, competitors in the 2017 USEF Young Riders Invitational began practicing in Perry. Three teams, hailing from South Africa, Canada and the United States, set their sights on the prized gold medal. Practice

rolled over into Tuesday as well, and

the quest for victory began Wednesday. Teams were divided into Junior and Senior Three-Gaited and Five-Gaited teams for a total of four titles in reach.

Team USA divided into the Stars and Stripes teams. The Stars team consisted of the Junior Three- and Five-Gaited teams. Coaches for this team were Avery Bul, Scott Matton and Michelle McVey Haisch. The Stripes team, Senior Three- and Five-Gaited teams, were guided by coaches Devon Garone, Kristin Logan and Christy Parker. Three-Gaited riders for the Stripes team were Frannie Gefke, Brooklyn, Wisconsin; Raven Gropp, Augusta, Georgia; Jacquelyn King, Tyler, Texas; Joseph Plunkett, Tucson, Arizona; Nicole Rodriguez, Grand Blanc, Michigan; and Victoria Walz, Rancho Santa Fe, California. Five-Gaited riders for the Stripes team included Emily Hopp, Bellevue, Nebraska; Matt Huke, Westfield, Indiana; Anne Pateman, New Orleans, Louisiana; Holly Sarette, Goffstown, New Hampshire; Lindsay Slemmons, Birmingham, Alabama; and Jade Woods, Altoona, Iowa. The Stars' Three-Gaited riders were Grace Allison, Ringoes, New Jersey; Michael Arquilla, Woodridge, Illinois; Lora Becker, Sac

City, Iowa; Ellie Grosspietsch, Cross Plains, Wisconsin; Audra Lee, Binghamton, New York; and Hallie Ricci, Allentown, New Jersey. The Five-Gaited Stars team consisted: Cecelia Bolka, Dayton, Ohio; Ainsley Budzinski, Mukwonago, Wisconsin; Madison Kobylski, Asbury, New Jersey; Olivia Schumacher, Sergeantsville, New Jersey; Téa Snider, Carmel, Indiana; and Madeleine Wood, Edmond, Oklahoma.

The Monday and Tuesday of practice were dedicated to the horses the riders who would show on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively. With little time under their belts, the riders looked poised and confident on their mounts, as if they were riding their own show horse. Each team brought their A-Game. Team USA scored an impressive three gold medals: Junior and Senior Three-Gaited, and then a tie with South Africa for the Junior Five-Gaited. The South Africans were gold medalists in the Senior Five-Gaited, with team USA leaving with silver.

The Young Riders program is an incredible experience for all involved, and every one of the riders was excited to be there. Participants made lifelong friendships with new people from other countries and enjoyed quality time with friends they already knew. Emily Hopp, who was part of the Senior Five-Gaited team, stated, "It is such an honor to be on the team and compete with such talented riders." Her mother, Merrell Magelli, noted just how much camaraderie there was among the riders, saying, "Everyone knew what their job was on the team. They had to be a team rider." There is no "I" in "team" and Team USA exemplified that mindset. They should be incredibly proud of their accomplishments.



