

Tomorrow's stars stand out in the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals & the USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Finals.

Halie Robinson and Payton Potter displayed bright futures in major, jumper-oriented West Coast medal finals. Robinson took top honors in the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals – West. Potter did the same in the inaugural USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Finals West. Both took place Sept. 22-23 during Blenheim EquiSport's International Jumping Festival in San Juan Capistrano.



The third time in the top 10 of the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals - West was the charm for Halie Robinson. Having placed second and fifth in years past, Robinson rode with precision, consistency and previous experience that earned her the top call in this year's challenging four-phase competition.

USEF Talent Search judges, Andre Dignelli, of Katonah, NY, and Patricia Griffith of New York City, designed the courses with Anthony D'Ambrosio serving as Technical Delegate. Well-suited for their roles, Dignelli won the prestigious class in 1986, and has since taken countless riders to success at this level; Griffith was second under Dignelli's tutelage in 1998 and has been a part of Dignelli's Heritage Farm since 1997. D'Ambrosio has been a technical delegate as well as a course designer at venues all over the world.

Friday morning's flat phase asked riders to demonstrate knowledge of the elementary principles of dressage training as they affect a show jumper's performance. Divided into three groups, riders were tested with half-pass, counter-canter, flying lead changes and other exercises. The gymnastics phase asked riders to apply mastery of that flat work to jumping patterns, including the skills of shortening and lengthening the horse's stride while riding the track, which proved challenging for many.

Aboard Caracas 89, owned by Elvenstar, Robinson earned high scores in the competition's first two phases, the flat phase and the gymnastics phase. With her cumulative 217.5 score going

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into the jumping phase, she had 16-point lead, which helped her maintain a top position. However once the top four were named, they each started the Final Phase with a score of zero.



Jayne Omand, Emma Catherine Reichow and Natalie Dean joined Robinson in a work-off patterned like that used in the World Equestrian Games. The final four rode a shortened course on their own horse, then on each other's horses. After the 16 rounds were complete, all handled the questions asked on the different mounts without major fault. To all who watched, including the judges, Robinson dominated this phase.

"It's always nice when the winner is so obvious, even to the crowd," commented Griffith. Dignelli concurred: "Our winner was clear and away the winner. She rode beautifully throughout all phases: accurate and she has a beautiful style." An elated Robinson promised she'd be working on her pace. Currently studying abroad in Europe, she had flown home specifically for the Talent Search. She called Caracas 89 "the sweetest horse I've ever met and he tries his heart out no matter what." He's also a miracle. This was his third show back after having a 27-pound "artifact" tumor removed in February.

U.S. Show Jumping Youth Chef d'Equipe DiAnn Langer commented that riders ought to target the USEF Talent Search early in the year and tailor their practice and show schedule to prepare for its unique tests. She emphasized that the program is a prestigious step in the pathway of the sport's young athlete development program.

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USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal

Created as a stepping stone to the Talent Search, this class and final is patterned on that competition. The finals include a flat, gymnastics and jumping phase, and the final four work-off is a jump-off rather than a horse-swapping endeavor.

Scott Williamson and Troy Hendrix judged the three-phase class over Sept. 22 and 23, with the flat and gymnastics phases taking place on Friday, and the jumping phase on Saturday. Out of 16 starters, Payton Potter emerged victorious aboard her own horse, Pacord. Coming into the final day sitting fifth, the 14-year-old rider from Modesto earned the winning score in the third phase and topped the work-off of four to claim victory.



FEI course designer Anthony D'Ambrosio designed the gymnastics and show jumping tracks. Scores for each of the three phases were progressively weighted: 1, 1.5 and 2, respectively. Williamson and Hendrix evaluated equitation style and technical merit in all phases, and in the final jumping phases they also evaluated the execution of an efficient, well-ridden track. In Saturday's jumping round, one point was deducted for each second over the time allowed and four points for a rail down.

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After the three phases were complete, four competitors were within five points of the leader's score, and were asked to ride an additional work-off. Kate Abajian, 16, of Ladera Ranch, and Potter came into the work-off tied at 376 points each. Juliette Joseph, 14, of Del Mar, with a total of 374.5 points and Breanna Bunevacz, 13, of Valencia, with 373 points were sitting third and fourth.

Each were asked to ride a shortened course within a time allowed. First to go, Bunevacz rode a smooth track but finished with one time fault. Joseph had two rails within the time allowed. Potter chose to add a stride to the combination; she also finished with a single time fault in an otherwise well-ridden round. Determined not to go too slow, Abajian, who led the pack after the first two phases, rode forward throughout her track, moving up to the combination. That move proved costly as her horse Lambada moved up to quite a deep distance.

Abajian finished fourth overall, and Lambada was voted Best Equitation Horse by the judges. Joseph finished third, and Bunevacz finished in second place.

Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals - West

Place - Rider - Trainer(s) - City, State

1. Halie Robinson - James Hagman - Santa Barbara, CA
2. Jayme Omand - Kelly Van Vleck - Sacramento, CA
3. Emma Catherine Reichow - Harley Brown - Menlo Park, CA
4. Natalie Dean - Butch, Lu and Guy Thomas - Palo Alto, CA
5. Kaitlyn Lovingfoss - James Hagman - Canyon Country, CA
6. Natalie Templeton - Robyn Stiegler and Sophie Simpson - Silverado, CA
7. Gabriela Pattinson - Devon Gibson - San Juan Capistrano, CA
8. Christina Vail - Kelly Van Vleck - Sacramento, CA
9. Carolyn Salas - Butch, Lu and Guy Thomas - San Jose, CA

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10. Clea Caddell - Jill Humphrey - Carmel, CA

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1. Payton Potter - Pacord
2. Breanna Bunevacz - Hudson Bay
3. Juliette Joseph - Dante
4. Kate Abajian - Lambada
5. Emily Williams - Carlo
6. Alexandra Farfaras - Sir Dru
7. Amanda Calhoun - Quantum
8. Lilly Clarkson - Notorious
9. Hannah Gansert - Pius Luga
10. Tessa Darling - Prophecy

Report excerpted from press releases provided by Blenheim EquiSports and USHJA.