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Headstart on the Jumping Athlete Pathway for contenders in Thermal.

The final set of 2017 USHJA Zone Jumper Team Championships wrapped up at the scenic HITS Thermal Desert Horse Park Nov. 12 with the Individual competition in the Zones 9 & 10 Jumper Team Championships. The competition ran Nov. 10-12 and offered team and individual competition for Jumper riders competing at 1.10/1.15m, 1.20/1.25m and 1.30/1.35m.

Friday kicked off the Championships with the official jog, a riders meeting, and a First Individual Qualifying Class, which is run under Table III with faults converted to seconds; riders' scores from this class act as their base score for the individual competition.



During the riders meeting, held in the HITS Thermal Platinum Club, sport leadership, including US Equestrian Youth Chef d'Equipe DiAnn Langer with a special guest appearance from U.S. Show Jumping Chef d'Equipe Robert Ridland, talked about the Emerging Jumper Rider Program and these Championships as the beginning of the Jumping Athlete Pathway.

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The Jumping Athlete Pathway is a joint USHJA-US Equestrian effort that identifies and nurtures Jumping athletes as they advance through the sport to enhance future success for Olympic and international teams representing the United States. The Emerging Jumper Rider Program uses the Zone Jumper Team Championships as an entry point to that pathway.

First Individual Qualifying Class

In the First Individual Qualifying Class, 1.10/1.15m Children's competitors went first, and Zone 10 picked up the top three spots with Amelie Bittar, 13, of Los Angeles, riding her own Beirut "B" to first place. Close behind Bittar was Trent McGee, 14, of Granada Hills, aboard his own VDL Garfield ES. Rounding out the top three in the class was Maud Christal, of Santa Barbara, riding her own Apache Van De Los.

Zone 10's Aubrie Munson of Los Angeles, dominated the clock aboard her own Jana Van't Kiezelhof in the Adult Amateur Jumpers. Zone 9's Kimberly Bruce of Turner, OR, rode her own Irco to second place just behind Munson, and Zone 10's Barbara Blasko of Fallbrook, and her own JF Justinian earned third place.

In the 1.20/1.25m Junior and Amateur Jumper Individual Qualifying Class, Zone 10 again took all three podium spots. Dylan Laiken, 12, La Canada, earned the top placing, followed by Claire Archer, 14, of Atherton, riding her own Zandigo, and Clea Caddell, 12, of Carmel, placed third with her own Waltraut.

In the 1.30/1.35m Junior and Amateur Jumper Individual Qualifying Class. Zone 10's Alyce Bittar, 16, of Los Angeles, riding Georges Bittar's Lara Croft B, garnered first place, followed by Zone 9's Rachel Long, 15, of Horseshoe Bend, ID, on Long Farms' Canek, and Zone 10's Maggie Kehring, 13, of Woodside, rode the Kehring Family's Cole Haan to third place.



Team Championships

Saturday marked the team competition, which is run as a Table II Modified Nations Cup format with two identical rounds. The Children's team competition saw six teams, five from Zone 10 and one from Zone 9. Zone 10 teams earned all three podium spots despite a great effort by Zone 9's team that landed them fourth.

In gold was Zone 10 Team 3: Amelie Bittar; Claire Williamson, 14, of Pasadena; Marielle Zoretic, 17, of Huntington Beach; and Trent McGee with Chef d'Equipe Hillary Ridland. In silver was Zone 10 Team 4: Maud Christal; Ryan Sullivan, 14, of Manhattan Beach; Danielle Sternberg, 16, of Yorba Linda; and Naomi Rubin, 16, of Portola Valley, with Chef d'Equipe John Charlebois. In bronze, Zone 10 Team 2: Mackenzie Kelley, 13, of Santa Rosa Valley; Keighley Bader, 14, of Reno NV; Erin Nichols, 13, Yorba Linda; and Catherine Nolan, 14, of San Diego, with Chef d'Equipe Francie Steinwedell Carvin.

The Adult Amateur team competition was close with a near jump-off for gold between Zones 9 and 10, and the tension was palpable as Monica Peck, Zone 10's final rider, walked into the ring. Luckily for Zone 10, Peck of Bakersfield, and her mount Cara B went clean to clinch the gold for Zone 10's Team 2, made up of Alexis Georgeson of San Francisco, Jerra Mays of Hemet, Aubrie Munson of Los Angeles, and Monica Peck, and led by Chef d'Equipe Meredith Herman.



In silver was USHJA Zone 9's Team 1 (Leslie Cox of Bainbridge Island, WA, Kimberly Bruce, Robin Tomb of Bend, OR, and Lisa Pleasance of Bend, OR, with Chef d'Equipe Katherine Wade-Easley), and Zone 10 Team 3 (Healy Henderson of Coronado, Emily Hartley of Huntington Beach, and Melanie Brooks of Rancho Santa Fe, with Chef d'Equipe Sally Hudson) rounded out the podium earning bronze.

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In the 1.20/1.25m Junior/Amateur section, USHJA Zone 10 Team 2 (Kaitlyn Lovingfoss, 15, of Canyon Country, Rachel Freer, 14, of Rolling Hills Estates, Shelly Wilson of Ventura, and Clea Caddell with Chef d'Equipe Sally Hudson) earned the gold, combined USHJA Zone 9/Zone 10 Team 3 (Virginia Bonnie, 12, of San Francisco, Tara Heffernan, 16, of Bellevue, WA, Susan Azad of La Canada, and Dylan Laiken, 12, of La Canada, with Chef d'Equipe Meredith Herman) came in silver, and Zone 10 Team 1 (Marnye Langer of Burbank, Lauren Craft of Fallbrook, Lexie Looker, 17, San Dimas, and Katie Browne, 15, of Montecito, with Chef d'Equipe Rob Gage) earned bronze.

The tough but fun competition continued in the 1.30/1.35m section with Team 2 Maggie Kehring, Claire Follmer of Westlake, and Alyce Bittar, led by Chef d'Equipe Tasha Visokay, earned gold medals. They were followed by a combined Zone 9/10 Team 1 (Simonne Berg of Tiburon, McKenna Norris, 17, of Sun Valley, ID, and Rachel Long with Chef d'Equipe Katherine Wade-Easley). In bronze was the Zone 10 Team 3 earned bronze (Sophia Siegel, 14, of Portola Valley, Romina Fimbres, 16, of San Ysidro, and Erin Murphy of Moorpark, with Chef d'Equipe Guy Thomas).

Individual Championships

The three-day championship culminated in the individual competition on Sunday, during which all of the individual medalists were awarded medals, numerous awards, and the title of Gold Star Emerging Jumper Rider, along with an invitation to attend one of the USHJA Gold Star Clinics featuring lead clinician Richard Spooner.

The Children's Individual Championship was both close and filled with careful, deliberate riding that resulted in the top three finishing with fewer than 4 faults. Amelie Bittar and Beirut "B" took gold without a single fault over the three days of competition. Their perfect score was followed closely by Maud Christal and her own Apache Van De Los with just 2.58 faults to take silver. In bronze was Naomi Rubin and her Win Vision with just 3.99 faults.

Bittar was excited for the win, "It's great! I like this system. It's really exciting. It makes me want to come compete as a team, and I just had so much fun."

The courses were designed by Olaf Petersen Jr., one of the top course designers in the world, and received rave reviews from competitors. "I loved the courses this year," continued Bittar.

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“They were great!”

In the Adult Amateur section, Melanie Brooks enjoyed the courses too and the opportunity to ride in the Grand Prix ring.

“The courses were really cool... I think for a lot of us we’d never ridden out there, so it was a bit of a learning curve,” she said. “And, everyone did really well. It was so fun, and it was nice to be in that big open ring.”

Going into the Individual Championship, Brooks knew it was going to be close.

“It’s amazing and I’m thrilled... I knew the time was tight but ultimately I just wanted to go clear and that was my goal and to stick to the numbers we’d talked about,” said Brooks who rode her own Vanotrouska to the gold medal.

Brooks has been riding since she was a child, starting in leadline, and now she shares her love of horses with her daughter Hannah Loly, who has had significant success in the show ring and competed at the FEI North American Junior and Young Rider Championship this year. Her daughter was excited for her mom’s accomplishment.



“It’s super exciting, and also it’s really relatable because I was in the same position as her I had one rail previously going into the final day [at NAJYRC]... but the person in front of me went clear and knowing she got to have that gold medal is so exciting!” said Loly.

Going into the final round, Emily Hartley and Kristy Miller’s Cosmo were tied with Brooks with 0 faults, both putting in flawless rounds over the previous two days, but an unfortunate rail put Hartley in silver. Aubrie Munson also picked up 4 faults in the final round but held her bronze

position aboard her own Jana Van't Kiezelhof.

The 1.20/1.25m Junior/Amateur section's final day filled with tough competition and unfortunate rails for some of the top riders. Clea Caddell who was sitting second headed into the final round put in a flawless round on her own Waltraut to land the gold medal. Kaitlyn Lovingfoss and her own Beau Beau moved up from fifth to silver by going clean as well. She was followed closely by Alexa Leong on her own Hertogin Ter Drie Leien who was previously sixth but only picked up 1 time fault in the final round to secure her bronze finish.

"I'm very thankful to everyone who helped me get here," said Caddell thanking her trainer and many other supporters. "I just think this is such a great opportunity. One of the problems with the Jumpers is that there aren't enough opportunities at the lower levels, whereas in the Equitation you have the 3 foot medals... regional medals, national medals. I think it's so wonderful that they're putting this program in place so that you don't have to be jumping 1.40m to do something exciting!"

Another Bittar Gold

In the 1.30/1.35m Junior/Amateur Individual Championship, the Bittar Family picked up another gold, as Alyce Bittar rode Georges Bittar's Lara Croft B to a 4 fault gold medal finish. She was followed by Simonne Berg on her own V Cantate in silver, and Maggie Kehring on Cole Haan in bronze.

Bittar credited her horse with the win, "She's a pro. She's so good. She performed really well."



"It's not a surprise; they have been really working hard for it," Georges Bittar said about his two daughters earning gold with both a father and trainer's pride. "They are very responsible. They

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take care of their horses, and they have a good work ethic. They are very serious about it. The horses love them, and it's no surprise because this is what they do and this is what they love and this is what they're passionate about."

All of the individual medalists are invited to participate in one of two Gold Star Clinics happening at the beginning of the 2018 competition year.

"We've seen a lot of very exciting riders at all of the Championships," said DiAnn Langer. "Most of all we've seen huge ambition and excitement to be involved in a championship that includes juniors and amateurs at these fence heights."

In addition to their spot at the Gold Star Clinics, Individual gold medalists received an EQUO Sun Shirt, the Official Sun Shirt of the USHJA Zone Jumper Team Championships, a pair of Professional's Choice Pro Performance boots, a cooler, a ribbon, and a gold medal.

USHJA extends special thanks to Tom Struzzieri and the entire HITS Thermal Desert Horse Park team for hosting the Championships. USHJA also thanks Zone 9 Chef d'Equipe Katherine Wade-Easley and the following chefs d'equipe for Zone 10: John Charlebois, Rob Gage, Meredith Herman Sally Hudson, Jill Humphrey, Peter Petschenig, Francie Steinwedell Carvin, Gary Stiker, Guy Thomas and Tasha Visokay.

Robert Gage, well known and accomplished Grand Prix rider, trainer and judge, had a front row seat to the championships, acting as both one of the team chefs d'equipe for Zone 10 and watching his girlfriend, Lauren Craft, compete as an Adult Amateur and earning team bronze. He was impressed with the Championship and appreciative of the opportunity it provides to riders at this level.

"Everything has gone exactly as you would expect and more," Gage said. "The jog was well organized. We had the riders meeting where they tell you everything you need to know with all the VIP people talking to these riders who don't generally interact with that level of officials. You've got one of the best course designers in the world doing the courses, beautiful jumps. The field has been immaculately prepared every day. From the jog to each event and having the stewards oversee everything so it runs just the way it's supposed to run.

"This has been such a special, important event for these riders, and [Craft] has had the time of

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her life.”

Press release provided by USHJA. For more information on the USHJA Zone Jumper Team Championships, visit www.ushja.org/ZoneJumper. For more information on the USHJA Emerging Jumper Rider Program, visit www.ushja.org/EmergingJumper

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