



Jessi Hart with her mentor, NAJYRC cross-country course designer David O'Connor. PHOTO COURTESY OF JESSI HART

INSIDE THE NAJYRC MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:

YOUNG RIDERS EXPLORE
UNMOUNTED CAREERS
IN THE SPORT

BY EMILY MACAULEY AND JESSI HART

The NAJYRC Mentorship Program allows young eventers with aspirations of becoming officials in the sport to learn alongside FEI officials throughout the week at the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships.

The Young Rider Mentorship Program, established in 2008 by Vicki Howard-Fine, provides aspiring judges, technical delegates (TDs), course designers, veterinarians, and organizers the opportunity to participate and learn behind the scenes of a large scale FEI competition. Participants must apply for the program and may not compete in the event that same year. Those selected are

assigned an event official to shadow as well as assist volunteers with tasks that help the horse show run smoothly.

Although the Mentorship Program is designed for event riders, the “protégés” get to meet competitors and officials in other disciplines, like dressage, show jumping, and endurance, since NAJYRC is multi-disciplined. While the Program experience is slightly different for each individual, all of this year’s protégés got to meet with and interview the international eventing ground jury, measure and review the cross-country course, and sit in a judge’s box during the eventing dressage competition. It is a week full of fun and learning, and we are grateful to have the written perspectives of their experience from two gallant participants.

EMILY MACAULEY, AGE 19, AREA VIII

After a crazy, amazing week spent at the beautiful Kentucky Horse Park (KHP) for NAJYRC 2014, I am happy to be back at home recovering and trying my best to process all that I learned over the five days of eventing competition. I was blessed to be chosen as a participant in the NAJYRC Mentorship Program this year.

I am a pre-med student at Grand Valley State University. I have evented an assortment of horses growing up, eventually competing at Young Riders in 2013 and moving up to Intermediate this spring. While competing has, and always will be, a passion of mine, I knew that it will be near impossible to continue to compete at the upper levels through school due to time and finances. With that being said, I also knew that I would most likely go crazy if I had to completely withdraw myself from the sport, so I decided last winter that I would start the training process to becoming a certified judge and licensed official. This was the best way I could think of to give back to the sport that raised me.

When my Young Rider Coordinators, Lizbeth Estes and Nanette Eichell, contacted me this spring to tell me about this

great program, I was so excited. It was obviously a once in a lifetime opportunity to shadow and learn from the ground jury, stewards, and course designers for an FEI event. I worked hard to create a detailed résumé and submit an application that reflected my love of the sport.

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I was chosen to participate along with four other girls from across the country. Each of us was assigned a specific mentor, and I was assigned Annabel Scrimgeour, President of the Ground Jury. I am so thankful she was my mentor! She was hands down the kindest, most patient, most hilarious,

and most encouraging official I have ever met. She flew over Tuesday night from Great Britain, and I met her Wednesday morning before the First Horse Inspection. I was shocked she was so excited to have a personal Young Rider protégé to teach over the week. Here I was, just hoping I would not get in her way, and she put me in her shoes and explained her thinking in every situation that presented itself. Right away, she gave me a clipboard, order of go, and a pen and told me to make note of anything and everything I see with each horse during the jog. Afterward, she met with me to go over every comment or question I had.

I attended all of the rider and Chef d’Equipe meetings the rest of the day, always sitting beside Annabel and listening in on the ground jury’s discussions before and after. I was also able to go out with David O’Connor to help measure the cross-country courses in order to determine the final optimum times. Riding with David in the golf cart may or may not have been more harrowing than actually riding the course. We even went off-roading down into the *Head of Lake* to ensure an accurate map (I should have worn my helmet!).

While dressage day usually seems to drag on and the tests never end, it was the opposite feeling from inside the judges’ tents on Thursday. The five protégés divided themselves between the three members of the ground jury which included Annabel, Seppo Laine (FIN) and Gretchen Butts (USA). We rotated every ten or so tests so we could learn from each of them. All three judges were so great about reviewing each ride after its completion, whether that be the overall connection and impression of a lovely test or delving into the problems and explaining why they were occurring, why they scored them the way they did, and what the rider should go home and practice in order to lower their score. Annabel was skilled enough to even make side comments to me between scores and never get behind!

If you are serious about eventing, peek in on these secrets and improve your performance in all phases!



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At one point, Annabel gave me a bunch of extra two-star tests and sent me over to the neighboring empty tent with my trusted fellow Michigan protégé and scribe Lindsay Henderson to score the last group of tests by myself! The first one was a train wreck as I was a bundle of nerves. After missing at least five movements, I just threw my hands up and said, "Oh, just give them all sixes!" Once I took a deep breath and carried on, I found a nice rhythm and balance in my scores and received some great feedback when Annabel and I reviewed them after the division was finished. She told me to not be so afraid to give out eights when they are well-deserved but also to stop giving out pity points when the horse is acting up.

Seppo took the time (in his famous bright blue blazer) to go back to the basic dressage pyramid of training. He showed us where some of the problems seen in the ring related to the basic steps in the beginning of

the horse's training and the rider's understanding of true connection. It was eye-opening to take these upper-level pairs and break them down into such simple ideas. The day flew by, and after watching 50+ one-star tests, it felt like I had seen maybe 15. The mental exhaustion did not hit me until later when I started trying to review what I had learned. Who knew sitting around in a shaded tent could be so draining!

Friday was a sort of field trip day for the protégés as the eventers did not compete. We sat in on the safety meeting and met with the Safety Tech team, led by Chief Medical Officer Jerry Clemmons, who stayed busy covering all of the riders and spectators for NAJYRC along with the 4,000 Pony Clubbers who were also flooding KHP all week. After that, we were treated to a tour of the Hagyard Veterinary Hospital as well as a tour of Central Kentucky Riding for Hope, a therapeutic riding center which is based in the back of the Horse Park,

to learn more about those amazing programs. We also got to catch the end of the endurance race that had begun in the wee hours of the morning. All five of us were quite uneducated about the sport of endurance, so the head vet was kind enough to explain it before we scattered to the riders' tents to congratulate them and learn more about endurance through their eyes. It was nice to be able to venture out across the Park that day to learn about numerous other things that were happening besides eventing!

Then came the most exciting day! The protégés stuck with their respective mentors during the morning for all of the cross-country trips, which meant I got to stand in the control tower with Annabel, the controller, the scorer, and the announcers. There were walkie-talkies everywhere! It was hard to focus on one conversation at a time as all eight channels were being used all morning. Annabel, Gretchen, and Seppo spread out so that they could see the beginning, middle, and end of the course, and I listened as the ground jury discussed every single pair and their way of going as they attempted David's course.

We had walked both the one- and two-star courses on foot previously, stopping at every question in order to study and discuss it. I learned so much about course design and how minor adjustments can greatly affect the level of the question due to how it changes the way the horse sees it. They were always striving to make the question clearer to the horse and therefore safer for the rider.

Yet, on Saturday, the ground jury discussed less about how every single fence rode and rather their general impression of each pair's safety, competence, and the horse's fitness and soundness. I never knew how closely the ground jury watched every pair and remembered their dressage tests from two days before. They connected the pair's flatwork, the horse's jog, and now their way of going around cross-country into one picture. Their number one priority on Saturday was the riders'

and horses' safety and following FEI rules, keeping in mind the field is all young riders. Annabel took the time to comment on each horse's gallop and way of jumping to me, as well as each rider's position and effectiveness to each question.

Sunday was an early morning as we had to meet before the jog to review how each pair looked on course, and the judges mentioned any horses they wanted to watch closely due to their jog on Wednesday or their rides the previous days. Once again, I was able to pretend like I was important with my handy dandy clipboard and scribble gibberish when I saw the ground jury writing notes and I saw nothing. Annabel thought that quite hilarious when she took a peek at my sheet and saw random, very official-looking scribbles.

The protégés walked the show jumping course with Course Designer Richard Jeffery before the final phase began. We gained insight in to why he put every fence where he did and what he intended to ask the horse and rider at each obstacle. We then re-walked the course with the ground jury to get the official nod of approval that it was open for walking. During the final phase, I once again sat in the control room with Annabel, this time located in the Rolex Arena tower. She manned the buzzer and said "clear 4...clear 5..." for every rider as Seppo manned the timer and Gretchen served as an extra set of eyes on the rider. The announcer, controller, and scorer were also present.

Just like the previous days, I was privy to endless comments and stories from Annabel and her fellow jury members over the course of the morning. Sadly, all three had to take off immediately after the awards were over to catch their flights back home, so I hurriedly thanked them and handed out my gifts and cards to the officials that had kindly taught me about their roles. I even ensured Annabel brought home a gaudy American flag t-shirt. Then I went home absolutely exhausted.

Looking back, while I may have looked like a crazed stalker all week, I was so glad I took full advantage



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of this unique opportunity that the Mentorship Program opened up for me. From watching the jogs through the jury's eyes, inspecting the courses, and attending every meeting, it was a week that taught me more than I had ever expected. I realize now how naïve I was about the "other side" of the sport. I never imagined that there was so much going on behind the scenes when I competed last year. My appreciation of the sport and the hard work of the officials has risen to a new level.

I encourage every young rider who is interested in the official side of the sport, no matter what level of competition you have ridden, to apply for the 2015 NAJYRC Mentorship Program. It is a great way to represent your Area in a different way than riding. For me, personally, being part of the program and an honorary member of the FEI ground jury has increased my appreciation and fascination with the technical and official side of eventing, which will help me become a stronger, more

competent official in the future. I am so thankful to have been selected for this incredible experience.

JESSI HART, AGE 18, AREA V

When I applied for the Mentorship Program, I did not know what I was getting into. After some research I had an idea of what was expected of me, but I did not fully understand the magnitude of this great opportunity until later. The moment I set foot on the grounds of the Kentucky Horse Park, I realized that I knew very little about the horse world. Walking away from the Mentorship Program several days later, I had gained invaluable knowledge and loved every minute of my experience.

The protégés all met with the Program's founder, Vicki Howard-Fine, on Tuesday and the week began. A couple of us helped Dr. Chris Newton of Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital with the in-barn inspections, while the remaining protégés went with the course designer, David

O'Connor, to finalize cross-country specifications and finish the course map for the CCI1*. Later, two of the protégés had an opportunity to meet the Chief FEI Steward, Karen Winn; she explained to us what her job entails and how she keeps the welfare of horse and rider in mind when monitoring warm-up rings. From there we all attended the mandatory eventing Chef d'Equipe meeting and watched the draw that determined order of go.

The second day, we met as a group and were introduced to the ground jury and TDs, which included representatives from the United States, Great Britain, Finland, and Brazil; each of these officials brought a new perspective, approach, and experience to Young Riders. From here we left to walk the CCI2* course with the ground jury. We evaluated each jump, keeping in mind how the horses and riders would perceive it, discussing how different plants, decorations, and jump placement



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affected the depth perception and pace of the athletes. We also learned how to make the same jump a one-star or three-star question simply by changing the decorations or jump placement.

Throughout the course walk we came across different types of frangible technology and learned how they applied to oxers, verticals, and even the ditch and brush. One type we learned about is the MIM, which is a type of frangible pin or clip that allows the jump to disassemble safely but also be easily reconstructed so the competition can resume quickly. After we finished the walk, we dashed to the First Horse Inspection.

On Thursday, we shadowed the ground jury during all 61 dressage tests. During the breaks we discussed the scores as a group and asked the judges questions. This day proved the most educational but also the most mentally exhausting.

The following day, Vicki set up for us to meet the safety coordinators and safety team. With the Pony Club Championship competitors, the Young Riders participants, and the families of each on grounds, the safety team had their hands full. From Band-Aids to golf cart accidents, the safety team handled it all. Later we attended the safety meeting to organize vets, ambulances, paramedics, and emergency procedures for the upcoming cross-country day.

Later, “the manatees” (that’s the pet name given to the protégés by several staff members) received a quick tour at the Hagyard Medical Institute. After the tour, we hurried over to the endurance finish line just in time to watch Morgan Watson finish the final vet inspection to win the endurance race. As a group, we chatted with a few competitors after they cleared the vet check; I learned so much about this understated sport and now have a true respect for the dedication, horsemanship, and hard work of the horse and rider.

What is day five? Cross-country day! I looked forward to this day all

week because this was the day I was scheduled to be with David O’Connor, Aaron Rust, and the lovely Joanie Morris. This day proved the most exciting of the entire week. We drove around the course before the first horse entered the start box checking the flags, numbers, and marked road crossings. Afterwards we watched and waited, ready to answer any calls on course. The four of us checked every fence after a fall, regularly inspected the frangible jumps, monitored technical questions, and even waded into the *Head of the Lake* to make certain of safe footing.

Later, I moved to the control tower to watch the remaining two-star riders run cross-country. From the tower, I witnessed what you might think would be chaos central. There is the President of the Ground Jury closely monitoring every ride, the announcer communicating with jump judges and announcing simultaneously, and the scorekeeper maintaining the online scores. Yet, control turned out to be quiet, professional, and well-handled.

The final day of the busy week concluded with show jumping and the medal ceremonies. After a course walk with the TDs, ground jury, and the fabulous course designer, Richard Jeffery, we sat with USEA President Diane Pitts in the Rolex Arena and watched the riders navigate the difficult course.

Throughout the week I offered my spare time to the busy ladies in the show office. I enjoyed helping organize, alphabetize, and sort papers, passports, vet reports, et cetera, and they were relieved that their check list was a bit shorter. When I was not helping in the office, I meandered the barn aisles or inspected warm-up rings with the stewards, who were eager to share their knowledge. The final activity in which I participated was the medal ceremonies. I enjoyed watching Young Riders receive medals and awards in a sport to which they dedicate themselves.

My week at NAJYRC was an amazing experience. I worked alongside

influential officials and legends in eventing, and it opened my eyes to the many job options available to anyone dedicated to this amazing sport. I have a deeper understanding for the inner workings and organization required to put on an event and a new found respect for the officials and the time and effort they dedicate to make shows safe and enjoyable.

I desire to stress three main points to everyone considering applying for the Mentorship Program. The first is to keep in mind that the Mentorship Program is not for those who are dabbling in horses temporarily. This opportunity is meant to expand one’s view on careers in the horse industry through administrative and official roles while opening doors and establishing relationships for the future.

My second point is relative to the first; this role requires dedication to excel. Before arriving in Kentucky, all the protégés researched and prepared for work with each assigned mentor. In addition to all the preparation, we are volunteers that require a helpful, upbeat personality, even when the weather is 55 degrees and pouring rain. The protégés are present to help and learn.

My third tip is to think outside the box. Although I prepared many questions, I remained open to questions that arose from observation. The best minds not only question when and where but also how and why in order get a deeper understanding.

To finish, I want to thank everyone who participates in the Mentorship Program as a mentor. Planned or unplanned, your efforts are appreciated. Thank you! Also to “Mama” Fine: you are a fabulous person and I am so glad you went out on a limb to establish this great program. You only want the best for all of us, and we all love you!

Editor’s Note: The USEA is working to establish a dedicated web page on www.useventing.com that gives more information about the NAJYRC Mentorship Program and how to get involved. 🐾