

## A BACKSTAGE PASS: THE YOUNG RIDER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

By Zoe Bruno



The Mentorship Program participants with the ground jury, TD and show jump course designers.



TD, Ataide Pereira, explains the jog protocol to Lexie Priest.



Helen Christie, ground jury member, works with Zoe Bruno.



Cross-country course designer, Ian Stark with Emma Keahon.

This summer I had the opportunity of traveling to Montana to participate in the Mentorship Program during the Adequan/FEI North American Junior & Young Rider Championships. This program gives young riders the opportunity to learn from experienced equine professionals over the course of the competition. Each mentee gets assigned a mentor who they shadow throughout the week. Mentors often consist of the president of the ground jury, technical delegates (TD), FEI treating vets, course designers and FEI stewards. I was lucky enough to have the chance to work with more than one official, so I got to experience multiple perspectives.

The other mentees, Emma Keahon (Area II), Lexie Priest (Area VII) and I all arrived late on Monday evening and by Tuesday morning we had all split up to find our own mentor and begin the week. Even though cross-country day was not until Saturday, the course designer, ground jury and TDs began walking the courses and discussing them on Tuesday. That day we all walked the CICOY2\* course with the TDs and ground jury and looked at the CH-J\* course with the course designer. Walking the courses with different officials was very interesting. Each official looked at something different on the courses. The course designer looks at things like striding, lines and how the course flows together while the TD makes sure it is the correct length and that the jumps are the appropriate height and width. The ground jury looks at how fair the courses are, the actual jumps and other things that could spook or distract the horse. All of them look at the course to make sure it is as safe as possible no matter what level.

Wednesday and Thursday were both very interesting because we got to sit in the judge's box during dressage, which meant that we got to watch the dressage tests while listening to the judge's comments and feedback. The other mentees and

I rotated around the three boxes so we could hear the different feedback from each of the three members of the ground jury, who were also the judges. By the last few dressage tests I had an idea of why the judge gave the rider the score that they did and what they were looking for in each movement depending on the level.

Saturday was cross-country day and believe it or not, it was probably the most laid back day. My mentor, Wayne Quarles, who was the president of the ground jury was in the control box pretty much all day, so I rotated between each member of the ground jury throughout the day. If everything runs smoothly, the ground jury stays pretty relaxed while keeping an eye on the safety of the riders and course. Throughout the day my mentor and I drove around the courses and watched the rides.

In the last phase, show jumping, the officials all walk the courses to make sure it was safe and fair. They discussed the course and the height and width of the jumps as well as how spooky some of the jumps can be while taking into account variables like the sun and outside distractions.

Overall, this was an amazing experience for me, and I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity! Throughout my week at Rebecca Farm I learned so much I could barely fit it into this article! The NAJYRC Mentorship Program is an amazing opportunity for young riders to learn about and understand a whole new perspective and side of FEI competitions. I encourage anyone who is interested in this program to apply for an amazing experience! I can't thank the program's founder Vicki Howard-Fine enough, not only for making my time at Rebecca Farm the experience of a lifetime, but for all the love and support she pours into this program! I will definitely take every bit of the knowledge I gained from this amazing experience throughout the rest of my riding career!