

YOUNG RIDER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM:

An Experience From The Other Side

BY LAUREN KANNALLY



VICKI HOWARD-FINE PHOTO

The Young Rider Mentorship Program participants with cross-country course designer Ian Stark.

When people think of an event, the first thing that comes to mind are the horses and the riders competing in it. People often fail to recognize that there is an entire other side to the horse industry, which consists of organizing and running the events for the competitors. In order to put on a successful event, let alone the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships (NAYC), a large number of people is

crucial, each individual with his/her own specific job. Each of these jobs requires an unimaginable amount of time, hard work, precision, and diligence. The Young Rider Mentorship Program, founded by Vicki Howard-Fine, provides a behind-the-scenes perspective, allowing protégés a chance to work with the officials who are responsible for running these competitions smoothly. This includes, but is not limited to the

technical delegates, chief stewards, veterinarians, ground jury members and course designers. This perspective gives people a head start in their journey to becoming a future event official.

The Mentorship Program this year opened my eyes to a completely different side of eventing. As I worked with the various officials, I gained an insight and a deeper understanding as to what the officials' jobs were and how each job plays a role in the event itself. Prior to this program, I always knew that running an event required many helping hands, but it wasn't until now that I realize how complex it actually is.

While I did work with many people throughout the week, I spent the majority of my time shadowing the cross-country course designer, Ian Stark. As soon as I met Ian on the Tuesday before the competition began, myself, along with fellow protégé Chantale Vachon, jumped into his golf cart and headed out to the cross-country course where he immediately put us to work. We began by helping him trim trees that were framing the different jumps and we drove around the course, examining the different jumps to be sure that they were all correctly placed and decorated. The technical delegates for both the NAYC and the three-star course would often come to Ian with questions and things that they wanted him to double check on the course. It was extremely interesting to listen to the technical delegates' points of view on certain fences and compare them to that of Ian's. Possibly the most fascinating thing about being with Ian all week was listening to his reasoning behind why he does what he does on the course. There was not one jump that wasn't strategically placed, colored and



NEKI HOWARD-THE PHOTO

Inspecting the show jumping course with the ground jury.

shaped. Ian had been working on the cross-country courses since he was at Rebecca Farm last year, and the final result made that very evident; the courses were beautiful.

Later in the week, a few of the protégés were even able to accompany Ian as he walked the course with a few of the three-star riders. Just by being there and listening, we were able to gain an understanding of the difficulty of the course, and we knew exactly what he was hoping to see when people rode it. It was a true test of horse and rider. Being able to watch the competitors ride through the different questions, while knowing exactly how those questions were intended to be ridden, was captivating. Throughout the week, Ian was always willing to further explain anything that I didn't fully understand, and I can't thank him enough for taking me under his wing.

On the Wednesday before the dressage began, the horse inspections/jogs took place. During this time, I, along with the three other protégés,

stood near the ground jury, which consisted of Jo Young, Judy Hancock and Bobby Stevenson, as well as the vet, Yves Rossier. We intently listened to their comments on each horse that was presented to them. As each horse jogged, the four of us discussed what we saw, and it was interesting to see whether or not it was similar to the thoughts of the ground jury and vet. At the end of the jogs, we were able to meet with the ground jury and further review what we had seen. Jo explained to us why they held the horses that they did and she clarified their reasoning for eliminating the horses that they did.

The following two days were full of the CCIJ* and CICOY2* dressage for the NAYC. As a part of the Mentorship Program, the protégés were fortunate enough to sit with the ground jury in the judge's boxes. Just listening to the judges' comments was an experience in itself. It caused me to begin to look for things that I usually wouldn't even think to consider while watching a

dressage test. It gave me a better idea as to what the judges are actually looking for when they are watching a test, and it amazed me how quick they were to notice something that I would usually miss. Their quick thinking, paired with their thoughtful comments, gave me a whole new sense of respect for the people that were scribing for them. That can be a hard task!

It was also very interesting to sit in all three judges' boxes. Not only did it provide an insight into the differences between the judges and their techniques, but it made me realize just how critical a role the position of the judges' boxes actually plays. For instance, at H, when the horse is going away from you, Bobby was saying that you really can only judge the straightness of the horse. On the other hand, while judging from B, you can see the quality of the horse's movement, but it is difficult to see the straightness.

While in the judge's box, Jo Young made it a point to go out of her way to ensure that we were learning as →



Lauren Kannally with Ian Stark.

much as possible. In between rides, she would give me a question to consider, and by the end of the next ride, my answer would have to be prepared. Even if I was completely wrong, Jo would let me answer, and then she would proceed to explain the correct answer to me, making sure that I understood what she was saying and why she was saying it. She also stressed to us the importance of the basic training pyramid. When she is judging dressage, not only is she judging the accuracy and quality of the test, but she is judging whether or not the horses have been correctly trained. Because of her, I don't think I will ever forget the training pyramid! (Rhythm, relaxation/suppleness, contact, impulsion, straightness and collection.)

In addition, one other thing that resonated with me on the dressage days was each judge's attention to the safety of the rider and the horse. They made sure to mark down any horses that they wanted to monitor after the jogs, and they watched these horses throughout the entire competition. Any time that they saw these specific horses go, they paid particular attention to the soundness of the horse. It was obvious that their main priority was the safety

of the rider and the horse. The judges are truly there to help and to ensure that the riders and horses have the best experience possible.

Saturday was cross-country day, both the most exciting and hectic day of the event. In addition to spending the majority of the day with Ian and watching the jogs with the ground jury and vet, I got to spend some time in the vet box with Dr. Debbie Williamson. Despite my time there being short, it was one of the

highlights of my week. I helped Debbie do the initial checks on the horses coming in from cross-country. I was responsible for scribing and doing an overall evaluation of the horse, which included looking for lost shoes, spur rubs and any signs of blood or injury. I loved working in a chaotic environment where I was required to be quick and efficient. Veterinary care has always fascinated me and this experience further cemented my passion for it. It opened a door for me where becoming an FEI veterinarian was a possibility. It would allow me to combine two things that I am very avid about: veterinary care and eventing.

We also worked with Chris Barnard and William Robertson to help set the NAYC and three-star show jump courses. Both Chris and William are amazing teachers and did a great job of thoroughly explaining why they set fences the way they do. They described to us how particular combinations ride differently, so they set them up in certain manner in order to ask the horse and rider specific questions. As Chris mentioned, eventing is an old military sport, and the purpose of show jumping was to show that the horse could come back after a

day in battle (cross-country) and be adjustable/rideable. Chris takes that into consideration when designing his courses; he wants to make them challenging in order to prove whether or not the horse is capable of doing what the phase was originally designed for them to do.

The following day, we walked the courses again with Chris and William, but we were also joined by the ground jury and technical delegate, who were there to be sure that all the rules were being followed. All the while, Ian wheeled the course in order to determine the allowed time for the courses. Ian explained that it's good for him to walk the show jump course in order to prevent an imbalance in the competition. It's preferred that the difficulty of the cross-country course relatively matches the difficulty of the show jump course. Once again, it never ceased to amaze me how much energy, time and the number of people it takes to create something that can be ridden.

Throughout the week, we were also able to spend some time in the control center, meet with the head EMT paramedic and attend the Chef d'Equipe meetings. All of this gave us an even deeper sense of what goes on behind the scenes. The amount of planning and preparation that it takes to organize an event is overwhelming, and I am extremely grateful for everyone who has played a role in doing so.

By the end of the week, I was extremely exhausted and a little sunburnt, but I wouldn't have traded a single second of it for the world. I was overloaded with a wealth of information, and I will be happy even if I am only able to retain half of it. My appreciation for any and everyone who aids in running an event has risen to an entirely new level. Along with the other protégés, I was able to make connections and memories that will last a lifetime. The experience exceeded my expectations, and I had set the bar pretty high. The Young Rider Mentorship Program is one of a kind, and it revealed many new ways to remain involved in upper level eventing. I encourage anyone who shows even the slightest bit of interest in becoming an official to apply for it next year. I promise, it will be worth it. ➔

MY MENTORSHIP MEMORIES


BY OLIVIA CRESPO

I first heard of the Young Rider Mentorship Program at the United States Pony Club annual meeting in Louisville, Ky. from our alumnus Rob Burk. It is to him, and Pony Club that I owe thanks for exposing me to this amazing program. Being able to experience the NAYC at Rebecca Farm this summer was an absolute pleasure. As a mentored athlete this past week, I had the opportunity to experience the amazing sport of eventing from behind the scenes. Watching FEI stewards and FEI veterinarians perform in-barn checks, attending horse inspections, apprenticing in the dressage judge booths at 'C', 'H' and 'B' and interacting with professional officials from around

the world has given me a deeper understanding of eventing as a whole. Above all else, my most memorable, and my all time favorite experience of the week, was working alongside Chris Barnard in the show jumping arena.

Chris is an 'R' Eventing Show Jumping course designer, he has designed courses for Rebecca Farm and NAYC for the past two years and had graciously agreed to work with the Mentorship Program athletes this summer. Not only did Chris help me and the other protégés understand the difficulty and tests of show jumping as the third phase of eventing, but he also shared his abundant knowledge of course designing; why he chose a swedish oxer for fence three in the

three-star, and a triple combination for fence four of the NAYC CCIJ*. Above all else, Chris was an amazing teacher and made every minute spent with him and his "sidekick," William Robertson, enjoyable and worthwhile.

Without the Young Rider Mentorship Program, speaking on behalf of myself and the other three lovely ladies accompanying me, I would have never experienced eventing in this spectacular way. Alongside the experience and learning, I have discovered my creative interest in course designing! No matter what, whether in the show ring or behind the scenes, eventing will continue to be my passion that I will always hold on to. 

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