



## Helmer Wins In And Out Of The Saddle At Capital Challenge

*Honoring a friend's memory is just as important as accolades in the arena for this 17-year-old.*

BY KIMBERLY LOUSHIN AND KIERAN PAULSEN

It's easy for juniors to get so caught up in winning blue ribbons that they forget there's more to life than jumping horses. But 17-year-old Maverick Helmer isn't one of those riders.

Two years ago, when close family friend Kendall Bayne passed away at 19 after a four-year battle with adrenal cortical carcinoma, Helmer took it upon himself to honor her memory by creating the Kendall Bayne Foundation.

The foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that raises money for

research at the Translational Genomic Research Institute; donates to First Descents, an outdoor adventure experience for young cancer patients; and established a scholarship in Bayne's name awarded to a Roanoke Valley, Va., high school senior.

"Kendall was amazing," said Helmer, Roanoke, Va. "She always exuded grace and positivity. For me she's the definition of beating adversity. Whether she was going through chemo or when she was going through her peak, she was always happy and really cheery. She

Maverick Helmer led the inaugural USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Finals—East from start to finish on Canterbury at the Capital Challenge Horse Show. SHAWN MCMILLEN PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

never let her cancer stop her or defeat her. Even to her last day she really was always very strong and very positive.

"She really did leave an indelible mark on the community, including myself. She could walk into the room with her smile and light up a room," Helmer continued. "That's why I started the foundation. I felt that that graciousness and beating adversity had to be emphasized and remembered."

Helmer takes his riding as seriously as his foundation work. He grew up under the tutelage of J.T. Tallon and Becky Andrews, and a couple of years ago they suggested he start riding with Timmy Kees. Last December, Helmer took it one step further and started training with Stacia Madden of Beacon Hill Farm.

"J.T. Tallon and Becky Andrews built a really good base for me that I think allowed me to develop as a rider, not only ability wise, but also mentally



and physically,” said Helmer. “I think they really laid down the foundation, and I owe most of my success to them just for starting me. The polishing end comes from Stacia, and she continues to improve my riding and ability.”

Helmer won the inaugural USHJA 3'3" Jumping Seat Medal Finals—East aboard Canterbury at the Capital Challenge Horse Show, held Sept. 29-Oct. 8 in Upper Marlboro, Md. He followed it up with a reserve finish in the Palm Beach International Academy North American Junior Equitation Championships the following day.

The 3'3" class is modeled after the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search with flat, gymnastics and jumping phases, skipping just the last horse swapping test.

“We thought it would be a great experience that my horse and I get into an environment that has some sort of stakes, so we can see how we’re feeling in terms of pressure and composure,” said Helmer.

It ended up being a perfect test, as Helmer led the class following the flat and gymnastics phases.

“I have always wondered what the [Talent Search] was like with the three phases and trying to keep that mentality through the three phases,” said Helmer. “Of course, for me going into the third phase being on top and the class going at 7 p.m., you have to be very focused throughout the whole day. I’d always wondered what that’d be like and the dynamic, and I really enjoyed it.”

**USHJA 3'3" JUMPING SEAT MEDAL FINALS**  
Upper Marlboro, Md.—  
Sept. 30

RIDER	HOMETOWN
1. Maverick Helmer	Roanoke, Va.
2. Rachael Davis	Woodinville, Wash.
3. Alexandra Worthington	Sombrero Beach, Fla.
4. Jordan Allen	West Bloomfield, Mich.
5. Annika Singh	Medina, Wash.
6. Sophie Gochman	Palm Beach, Fla.
7. Grace Pearson	Seattle, Wash.
8. Billi Brandner	Weston, Mass.
9. Charlotte Meyers	Scarsdale, N.Y.
10. Lily Walton	Shelbyville, Ky.

39 riders competed.

Since Canterbury, a 10-year-old warmblood of unrecorded breeding, lives at Beacon Hill in Colts Neck, N.J., Helmer runs at home to keep up his fitness. He’s completed several half marathons and is scheduled to run the Richmond Marathon (Va.) the weekend following the ASPCA Maclay Finals (Ky.).

“It really keeps me healthy and keeps me mentally strong and able to take a lot of the stresses from riding, from school, from the foundation itself,” said Helmer. “I can just let them loose through my running, so I come back each day with a clear head, able to think, able to master what I need to get done.”

**The Right Mare**

They say that first impressions are important, and for Henry Healy, partnering with Best Of Me depended entirely on a positive first ride.

It all started when his trainer Patty Rogers got a call from fellow trainer Liz Reilly who said, “Patty, get on the plane right now.”

Reilly had found a standout mare, so Rogers and Healy flew to Wellington, Fla., from Cincinnati to take her for a spin. They had a whirlwind day down south, flying in and back home in the same day, but at the end of the trip they knew she was the right fit for Healy.

“It was a long day, but it’s a lot of thanks to Liz Reilly,” said Rogers. “[Best Of Me] was just kind of behind the scenes, so we quickly scooped her up.”

Since Healy, 12, had only moved up into the children’s hunters the previous summer, and “Mimi” is just 7, trainer Jeff Gogul took the reins for a few months to give her some more experience.

“For such a young horse with such little mileage she always tries to win,” said Gogul. “Your job as the rider is to just stay out of her way. I’ve ridden a lot of nice horses, but she wants to win every class. She gives a great feeling.”

Healy’s competition debut on the Dutch Warmblood (Carambole—Jody Van Zas, Damiro) was at Country Heir I (Ky.) this June, and they came home with a championship ribbon.

“At the beginning it was a little hard because her jump’s really big,” said Healy. “I just feel like she has so much more experience now that Jeff’s been



Spending time in the barn getting to know Best Of Me helped Henry Healy top the WCHR Children’s Challenge at Capital Challenge. SHAWN MCMILLEN PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

showing her, and I feel a lot more comfortable with her now.”

But it wasn’t just professional rides that helped turn Mimi into a winner. Even when Healy wasn’t riding her, he spent every day at the barn, bonding with her.

“Henry is one of the hardest working kids on the grounds,” said Rogers. “He rides every day. He tacks his own horses at home; he takes care of them. He’s a really hard working kid.”

His efforts paid off when he took home the children’s hunter, 14 and under, championship with Mimi on their way to the grand children’s hunter title. To wrap it up, the pair topped the WCHR Children’s Challenge, and Healy won the Stewart-Warner Children’s Cup and was named Best Children’s Hunter Rider.

“It feels really nice,” said Healy. “Mimi’s a really good girl. We haven’t had her too long, and she’s really young. I’m just really proud of her. It means a lot because it means that I put a lot of work into it, and it means that I have to trust my horse and trust their ability, so it feels really good.”



Augusta Iwasaki swept the large junior hunter, 15 and under, division riding Small Affair (pictured) after she won the Taylor Harris Children's National Medal Final on Vanderpump. KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO

## Iwasaki And Small Affair Sweep Junior Hunters

At 13, Augusta Iwasaki boasts a show record that most professional riders would covet—this year alone she won top honors at the USEF Pony Finals (Ky.) and the Platinum Performance \$100,000 Hunter Prix (N.Y.) before dominating the junior hunter rankings at Capital Challenge.

But under the ribbons, medals and championship coolers Iwasaki is as normal a 13-year-old as possible. Her favorite subject in school is math, she loves reading fantasy series like *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson And The Olympians*, and during her extensive travels she catches up with Netflix shows like “The Flash.”

“I finished all 12 seasons of ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ in like a month,” Iwasaki admitted. “I’m not even sure how I did that.”

Iwasaki partnered with Small Affair

## ► Tidbits

► **EMMA KURTZ** is no stranger to winning at top horse shows across the country, but there’s one thing that’s eluded the 17-year-old: a win in a major equitation final. So it was particularly gratifying when she rode Betsee Parker’s Carl to the win in the Palm Beach International Academy North American Junior Equitation Championships.

“This is my first major finals win, and it feels amazing,” said Kurtz, Lebanon, Ohio. “I’ve worked so hard to get here, and my whole team has worked so hard to get me here. It’s amazing to not let them down.”

► **GRACE DEBNEY** knows a little bit about dedication to a sport. Her hometown of Hampden, Mass., is a seven-hour drive from her trainer Stacey Weiss, whose Shadow Ridge Farm is based in Westminster, Md. During the week she rides with long-time trainer Leslie Lopardo, and she and her mom, Karen, make the trip south every weekend to lesson and show with Weiss.

“Her mother is devoted,” said

### PALM BEACH INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY NORTH AMERICAN JUNIOR EQUITATION CHAMPIONSHIP Upper Marlboro, Md.—Oct. 1

RIDER	HOMETOWN
1. Emma Kurtz	Hudson, Ohio
2. Maverick Helmer	Roanoke, Va.
3. Emma Wujek	Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich.
4. Elli Yeager	Westlake Village, Calif.
5. Alexandra Worthington	Sombrero Beach, Fla.
6. Cooper Dean	Fayette, Ala.
7. Madison Goetzmann	Skaneateles, N.Y.
8. Coco Fath	Fairfield, Ct.
9. Haley Redifer	Barboursville, Va.
10. Adam Edgar	Leesburg, Va.

108 riders competed.

Weiss. “She makes it happen. They know it’s a family thing. You’ve got to be in it. Leslie Lopardo does all our homework at home. She’s awesome.”

Grace topped the WCHR Pony Challenge aboard **STORYTELLER**, a 14-year-old German Sport Pony. Debney, 13, just paired up with the pony last November.

“He’s funny in his stall,” said Debney. “He’s super sweet but comes across as being kind of mean. He’ll pin his ears at you if you don’t have a treat.”

► **STELLA WASSERMAN** rode veteran campaigner **BOSS** to the WCHR Low Junior Challenge championship after only a month together. The win also cemented Wasserman’s spot at the top of the WCHR low junior national rider standings.

“I was super nervous because I was [coming in as] champion [in the national standings],” Wasserman said. “I felt like all the pressure was on me. My trainer kept telling me there was no pressure. That helped a lot.”

Boss (Samba Hit II—Vulana D) helped calm his young rider’s nerves too. The 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding has competed with John French and Hunter Siebel and has confidence and experience to spare.

“This is the best I’ve ever done at Capital Challenge,” Wasserman, 12, Beverly Hills, Calif., said. “I’m just thankful for Boss. He’s the best. He’s just how I like to ride; he’s forward and finds the distances. He’s a really good boy, and he knows his job.”



to win the large junior hunter, 15 and under, championship; the grand junior hunter championship; the Best Junior Hunter Rider award and the WCHR Junior Challenge.

Small Affair is a champion in his own right, and his accolades include three WCHR Professional Challenge wins with John French. Lyn Petersen's 14-year-old Selle Français gelding (Elf D'Or—Eva De Fontenay) has been one of Iwasaki's rides for almost two years. Their partnership wasn't always easy; Iwasaki said it was intimidating at first to take the reins of such a prolific winner.

"The more I got to ride him the more I realized that I do best when I just go out there to have fun," she said. "He's just so much fun, and it's really nice to have a horse where you can feel how well he jumps and how hard he tries."

Iwasaki mostly flats Small Affair at home in Calabasas, Calif., and she still finds time to ride plenty of ponies. She schools over fences on her equitation horse, Vanderpump, an 8-year-old warmblood gelding of unrecorded breeding. That practice paid off when Iwasaki captured the Taylor Harris National Children's Medal Final as well.

"I worked all year to be able to do the class, and it was a really nice course," she said. "My horse was absolutely amazing. It was incredible to be able to compete at that level. I have to think a little bit more about the courses [in equitation]. It puts me to work a little bit." 🐾

**TAYLOR HARRIS  
INSURANCE SERVICES  
NATIONAL CHILDREN'S  
MEDAL FINALS**

**Upper Marlboro, Md.—Oct. 1**

RIDER	HOMETOWN
1. Augusta Iwasaki	Calabasas, Calif.
2. Breanna Bunevacz	Valencia, Calif.
3. Dominika Silvestri	Andover, Mass.
4. Sydney Degrazia	Rochester, N.Y.
5. Tessa Brown	Jamica, Vt.
6. Annika Singh	Medina, Wash.
7. Kate Abajian	Ladera Ranch, Calif.
8. Isabella De Sousa	Lexington, Ky.
9. James Faloni	Essex Fells, N.J.
10. Avery Glynn	Penngrove, Calif.

40 riders competed.

► **Capital Challenge Junior**

**Upper Marlboro, MD—Sept. 29-Oct. 8.**  
**SMALL JR. HUNTER, 15 & UNDER CH:** Dominik, Gochman Sport Horse LLC.

**RES:** MTM Fashion, MTM Farm.  
**SMALL JR. HUNTER, 16-17 CH:** Akinda, Hillside Farm LLC.

**RES:** Cheveaux, Emma Weiss.  
**LARGE JR. HUNTER, 15 & UNDER CH:** Small Affair, Lyn Pedersen.

**RES:** Casallo, Erin McGuire.  
**LARGE JR. HUNTER, 16-17 CH:** Due West, Popish Farms LLC.

**RES:** Dedication, Betsee Parker.  
**LOW JR. HUNTER, SEC. A CH:** Q-Pid, Whitney Sinclair.

**RES:** Valentine, MDHT Equestrian LLC.  
**LOW JR. HUNTER, SEC. B CH:** Boss, Laura Wasserman.

**RES:** Kingston Lane, Sofia Roberts LLC.  
**CHILDREN'S HUNTER, 14 & UNDER CH:** Best Of Me, Blue Mountain LLC.

**RES:** Wiser, Ceil Wheeler.  
**CHILDREN'S HUNTER, 15-17 CH:** Cassino, Joey Rose LLC.

**RES:** Memorable, Over Fences Farm LLC.  
**CHILDREN'S PONY HUNTER CH:** Cacique, Joey Rose LLC.

**RES:** Hillcrest Leading Lady, First Blue LLC.  
**SMALL PONY HUNTER CH:** IParty, Alexa Lignelli.

**RES:** Brownland's Mr. Mack, Sofia Roberts LLC.  
**MEDIUM PONY HUNTER CH:** Anisette, Hannah Hoch.

**RES:** Denmark, John Skinner.  
**LARGE PONY HUNTER CH:** Storyteller, Grace Debney.

**RES:** Benetton, Stella Wasserman.  
**EQUITATION, 12 & UNDER CH:** Mimi Gochman.

**RES:** Avery Glynn.  
**EQUITATION, 13-14 CH:** Ellie Ferrigno.

**RES:** Natalie Jayne.  
**EQUITATION, 15-YR.-OLD CH:** Paige Matthies.

**RES:** Madeline Schaefer.  
**EQUITATION, 16-YR.-OLD CH:** Emma Kurtz.

**RES:** Nina Columbia.  
**EQUITATION, 17-YR.-OLD CH:** Haley Redifer.

**RES:** Cooper Dean.  
**EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, JR. HUNTER Tie:** Mayfield, Strasburg Morin Inc. & Akinda, Hillside Farm LLC

**EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, LOW JR. HUNTER:** Q-Pid, Whitney Sinclair.  
**EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, PONY HUNTER:** Anisette, Hannah Hoch.

**EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, CHILDREN'S HUNTER:** Greystone's Star Briht, Alexandra Sica.  
**GRAND JR. HUNTER CH:** Small Affair, Lyn Pedersen.

**HIGH-POINT JR. HUNTER, 15 & UNDER:** Small Affair, Lyn Pedersen.  
**HIGH-POINT JR. HUNTER, 16-17:** Akinda, Hillside Farm LLC.

**BEST JR. RIDER:** Augusta Iwasaki.  
**GRAND LOW JR. HUNTER CH:** Q-Pid, Whitney Sinclair.

**HIGH-POINT LOW JR. HUNTER:** Q-Pid, Whitney Sinclair.  
**STEWART-WARNER JR. CUP CH:** Emma Wujek.

**GRAND CHILDREN'S HUNTER:** Best Of Me, Blue Mountain LLC.  
**BEST CHILDREN'S HUNTER RIDER:** Henry Healy.

**STEWART-WARNER CHILDREN'S CUP CH:** Henry Healy.  
**GRAND PONY HUNTER:** Anisette, Hannah Hoch.

**BEST PONY RIDER:** Caroline Signorino.  
**STEWART-WARNER PONY CUP CH:** Caroline Signorino.

**GEORGE MORRIS EQUITATION CH:** Emma Kurtz.  
**BEST EQUITATION RIDER:** Emma Kurtz.

**EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, EQUITATION CH:** Paige Matthies.  
**BEST MEDIUM JR. JUMPER RIDER CH:** Mimi Gochman.

**BEST LOW JR. JUMPER RIDER:** Anna Athey.

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