

YOUNG GUNS! PROFILING DANNIE MURPHY

*A Special Mare Helped Carry
Dannie Murphy to NAYC Gold*
By Molly Sorge

Dannie Murphy had dreamed of representing Canada at the Adequan® FEI North American Youth Championships, but it wasn't until a very special horse came into her life that her dream became a reality.

In March, Isabeau de Laubry, an 11-year-old Belgian Warmblood mare (Cardento x Chin Chin) with a winning record up to the five-star grand prix level with Brazilian rider Marlon Zanotelli, joined Murphy's string. A short five months later, Murphy, 19, was jumping for Canada on the Young Rider team and winning team gold at the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships, presented by Gotham North, held at Old Salem Farm in North Salem, NY, from August 1 through 4.

Murphy and "Isabeau" placed third individually in the first qualifier and chalked up essential scores of one time fault followed by one rail in the two rounds of team competition to help Team Canada take gold.

"It was a big deal for me because it was the first time that I had the opportunity to ride on a team," said Murphy. "It's always been a goal for me since I first started the jumpers; I've wanted to go to NAYC. I didn't really have a horse before to go with, but this year I bought Isabeau. She definitely taught me a lot and gave me the chance to go."

She and Isabeau finished the NAYC Young Rider individual competition in fifth place overall.

"On the first day, I was a little nervous but [trainer Ilan Ferder] just told me, 'You can do it, so go do it,' and we went in and jumped clear," Murphy said. "That gave me a real confidence boost for the following days. I really enjoyed being on a team and getting to compete with a team. It was a really cool experience to be around a bunch of Canadians who were really cheering each other on."

The Mare That Made It Happen

Murphy describes Isabeau's presence in her life as "a dream come true." She'd tried the gray mare with a distinctive splash of brown hairs on her right shoulder in December on a horse-shopping trip to Europe but at that point, Isabeau didn't fit the bill. Murphy was looking for a two-star horse, and Isabeau was a confirmed five-star veteran.

Murphy had spent most of her burgeoning career bringing younger horses along through the levels instead of showing made horses, so buying Isabeau would be a deviation from that plan.



Dannie Murphy and Isabeau de Laubry were still getting to know each other when they placed third in their first FEI-sanctioned event, the CSI2* Under 25 Grand Prix, at the Longines Masters of New York.



Good friends Dannie Murphy (left) and Mackenzie Wray celebrate their team gold medal with Ilan Ferder, who stood in for regular trainer Erynn Ballard while she was preparing for the Pan Am Games.

“She was out of my league at that time,” she said. “She had a ton of experience. Then the deal with the two-star horse I’d tried fell through, so I was begging my mom to consider Isabeau.”

In March, Murphy’s mother, Martie, decided to surprise her and buy Isabeau.

“I didn’t think I’d be lucky enough to get her but it kind of all worked out,” Dannie said. “Mom kind of surprised me. It took a long time, but it was definitely worth the wait.”

“She has quite a bit of blood, which I like,” continued Dannie of Isabeau. “When I’m cantering up to a big oxer, I love that she’s always wanting to take me. She has the best personality; she always puts in 100 percent. She’s just a dream. I love her.”

“The sun and moon and stars aligned for her to get Isabeau,” said Canadian Equestrian Team veteran Erynn Ballard, who has been training Dannie since 2011. Ballard was preparing to compete for Canada at the 2019 Pan American Games in Lima, Peru, during the NAYC, so her business partner, Ferder, helped Dannie at NAYC.

“One hundred percent, Isabeau changed Dannie’s life,” Ballard said.

Dannie showed Isabeau at one show in Wellington, FL, after the Winter Equestrian Festival concluded, and then headed straight to the Longines Masters of New York in April where she made her Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) debut competing in the two-star division. Dannie placed third in the CSI2* Under 25 Grand Prix and Ballard remembers that success as opening Dannie and Martie’s eyes to the future possibilities with Isabeau.

Over the summer, Dannie and Isabeau cemented their partnership at shows at the Caledon Equestrian Park (ON) and Spruce Meadows (AB), jumping in Under 25 and 1.45m classes, before heading to NAYC.

As a result of their performance at NAYC, Dannie and Isabeau were named to the Canadian Team for the upcoming FEI Youth Nations’ Cup Final in Opglabbeek, Belgium, on September 26. Canada earned an invitation to participate in the FEI Youth Nations Cup Final thanks to its team gold medal in the Young Rider division at NAYC.

Following The Plan

Joining Dannie both on the gold medal-winning Canadian Young Rider NAYC team and the Canadian team for the upcoming FEI Youth Nations Cup Final is her best friend, Mackenzie Wray. The two girls have come up the ranks together and both ride with Ballard and her parents at their Looking Back Farm in Tottenham, ON.

“It’s special for them, and it’s kind of the exception to the rule, because they did all the equitation together, then the 1.20m together, and they’ve moved up together. Now they were on a NAYC team together,” said Ballard, who has a storied career at NAYC herself, including claiming the individual gold medal riding Leacock in 1999. “I think it’s neat, because with everything involved in our sport, from jealousy to privilege, it is unusual that two girls who are at the exact same level in everything they do have managed to stay such close friends.”

Dannie has spent plenty of quality time with Wray at Looking Back Farm, since she has spent every summer living at the farm to focus on her riding. Dannie hails from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, which has a more local showing scene.

“She’s lived with me since before she could drive,” said Ballard. “I remember her saying one time, ‘I don’t really like flying, but if I don’t fly, I don’t get to ride.’ She’s been booking her own plane tickets since she was 13 years old. She’s been pretty determined that this is what she wants to do.”

Martie, who has ridden herself, got both Dannie and her older sister, Stevie, interested in horses. The Murphy family has a small farm, and the sisters showed locally on the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick circuits. Dannie met Ballard when she was teaching a clinic in the area and started traveling to Looking Back Farm to ride with her in 2011.

“I can’t say enough about what she’s done for me,” Dannie said of Ballard. “She’s always looking out for me and my horses. She’s taught me so much.”



Dannie Murphy riding Isabeau de Laubry helped the Canadian Young Rider team take gold at the Adequan® FEI North American Youth Championships, presented by Gotham North.

Dannie's sister, Stevie, 23, also continued her junior riding career with Ballard, but now rides with Canadian Olympic team silver medalist Jill Henselwood out of her Oxford Mills, ON, farm and shows at the three-star level.

During her junior years, Dannie excelled in equitation classes saying, "That's my comfort zone, the equitation. If I could do it forever, I would. It's nice because I think it set me up for success in the jumpers."

Ballard has helped Dannie adjust from the precision required in the equitation to the occasionally improvisational nature of the jumper ring.

"She's a perfectionist, which can be a strength and a weakness," Ballard said. "She loves having and following a plan. As she's moved into the bigger jumper classes, that's something she's had to overcome a little bit, because sometimes a six-stride line becomes five strides, or seven strides. But her position is strong and she's got great balance; she's learning as she goes. She's very focused and committed."

"She went from a very difficult horse to a very educated horse, and some of the mistakes she's made have stemmed from riding one that was difficult," Ballard continued. "She's had to learn how to trust Isabeau. She learned a lot at NAYC, especially in the speed phase. When it came to riding for a team, it changed her mentality. She had to learn that if it's not perfect, you find a way to do it anyway. NAYC changed her whole focus, and I think that took her to the next level a bit."

Dannie combines her riding with her studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, NS, where she's entering her third year and working toward a degree in law, justice, and society. She's not ruling out the possibility of attending law school in the future.

"Riding is my main thing in life right now, but I do enjoy school," she said. "I'm not too sure what my end goal is yet, but I'm really enjoying it. I don't know if I'm going to become a professional in the horse industry. I know I'm always going to ride, but I do want to do other things in my life."

Dannie also has a seven-year-old horse she's developing through the levels, Haitie. With Isabeau, Dannie plans on enjoying the ride and is aiming to show the mare in the U25 classes at Toronto's Royal Horse Show in November.

"I just want to take my time getting to know her and keep going with what we're doing now," she said.

CANADIAN TEAM NAMED FOR BMO NATIONS' CUP

The Canadian Team has been named for the \$530,000 BMO Nations' Cup taking place on Saturday, September 7, during the CSIO5* Spruce Meadows 'Masters' tournament in Calgary, AB. Erynn Ballard, Kara Chad, Mario Deslauriers, Eric Lamaze, and Vanessa Mannix have been named with chef d'equipe Mark Laskin making his final selection as to which four riders will represent Canada during the week of competition.

Canada will take on nine other countries in the annual team event which will be broadcast same-day on CBC from 6 to 8 p.m. MT. Canada has only claimed the BMO Nations' Cup on two occasions in the event's long history, in 2006 and 2014. Last year, Canada finished as runner-up to Germany.

Fans will have an opportunity to meet the Canadian team athletes during an autograph signing session, hosted by BMO, at 1 p.m. on Friday, September 6, in Founder's Plaza at Spruce Meadows.



Eric Lamaze and Coco Bongo anchored the Canadian Team to a second-place finish in last year's BMO Nations' Cup.

CET AND JC MEDAL STANDINGS

The most up-to-date point standings for both the JC Medal and CET Medal can be found on the Equestrian Canada website at <https://www.equestrian.ca/sport/jumping/athlete-development>.

The National Finals for both programs will be held at the Royal Horse Show, part of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, running from November 1 to 10 at Exhibition Place, Toronto, ON.