

Rossow Steps Into The Spotlight At Capital Challenge

A grassroots start, persistence and patience lead to victory in the WCHR Developing Professional Challenge.

By **Laura Lemon** and **Mollie Bailey**

Photos by **Shawn McMillen Photography**

As a teenager, Julia Rose Rossow could arrive at her sanctuary—Rebecca Atwater’s barn in Santa Barbara, California—in a mere four blocks by bike. After school, she’d work at Atwater’s barn and spend every minute of the long summer days at the stable, competing on the local level when she could.

“It provided a place where I could learn, figure out on my own how badly I wanted it,” said Rossow. “A lot of little girls’ dreams are to just like go out and do it all the time. I would have loved to have the big junior career and do all the medals. And it just wasn’t what I was able to do.”

But it was enough to foster a lifelong love of horses.

“It was just having that in your backyard and having that local circuit where you just feel so part of something, part of the community. It was the catalyst,” Rossow said. “So then you’re like, ‘OK, well now I want to do regional.’ And you’re like, ‘Oh now there’s national stuff to chase.’”

Her parents assumed she’d grow out of her horse phase, but as Rossow learned more about the sport, her interest only intensified. “I’m like, ‘Oh wait, there’s more! There’s more,’” she said. “This is how big I want to try and create it to be for myself.”

Rossow longed to turn horses into her vocation, but she needed to gain more of a résumé. So, she competed in the amateurs at regional shows under the tutelage of Leslie Nelson. And to pay for expenses, she nannied.

“You can’t, especially with the horses, you can’t rush things,” Rossow said. “I didn’t show as much as a junior. I certainly got to show as a junior, but I didn’t get to do what I personally felt was enough to justify to myself becoming a professional right out of being a junior. I felt like I just had more to learn and more to experience. And so I knew if I could find a way to afford it and make it work—which Leslie was incredibly hugely instrumental in planning out how we were going to do everything—I knew I could take the time and give myself those amateur years.”

In 2017, Chad Mahaffey offered her a job as assistant trainer at his Calabasas, California, stable. And Rossow’s dreams of competing on the national stage started to take shape, culminating this year when she realized her goal of winning the \$5,000 World Championship Hunter Rider Developing Professional Challenge at Capital Challenge, held in Wilmington, Ohio, Sept. 25-Oct. 4.

This was Rossow’s third go in the developing pro class, and this year she rode Marina Boudreau’s Chantilly, a 12-year-old warmblood mare by Casini I.

Since 2018, Rossow has worked with Chantilly, producing her through the professional divisions while also helping Boudreau realize her goals in the junior hunters.

“We’ve all kind of been able to develop along with each other,” said Rossow. “This year she’s gone up to the 3’6” with her rider and with us in the performance hunters. We kind of broke out into a more national level, so it’s kind of those baby steps up. We’ve been there along the way with each other and with the mare. It’s been really special to be a part of it and see the development of her as a horse and a competitor and all of us who are blessed to ride her.”

While the diminutive Rossow joked that Mahaffey hired her to ride ponies because she never grew out of them, she also expressed her gratitude to him for taking her under his wing and pointing her at bigger shows.

“He’s helped me just move up to that—start to chase the national dreams,” said Rossow, 26. “Starting with this, this has been a goal of mine for a while now. And it was really, really, I mean, it’s still kind of a ‘pinch me’ moment to see it really come to fruition this year.”

“It is a very cool culmination of my experience within the industry so far from like the very grassroots part of it all the way up,” she continued. “I do know that when I was that young, I wanted to do this forever. It was always something I knew I was going to do, whether I knew how I was going to do that or not. I just trusted the process. I knew I was going



Julia Rose Rossow knew she needed to gain experience in order to go professional, and her efforts paid off on the national stage when she claimed the \$5,000 WCHR Developing Professional Challenge aboard Marina Boudreau's Chantilly at Capital Challenge.

to find my way to where I eventually wanted to be if I worked hard enough to do it. It's a passion industry. You have to really love it. You have to love the horses and the early mornings and the late nights and the people. You have to be passionate about it and have a desire to do it every day. And that's how I feel. I wake up longing to ride every morning, so I'm very lucky to get to do what I do."

GETTING IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME AROUND

Heading into the second round of the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge, Courtney Lenkart had an eerie sense of déjà vu. She'd only done the class once before, but that year the course featured an almost identical line to the current edition: an in-and-out to a long bending

line. A swap in the bending line knocked Lenkart out of top contention in her first attempt, but this time she redeemed herself, nailing the challenge to claim the top check aboard Glorieus.

Glorieus joined the South Haven Farms crew in 2018, but back then the Dutch Warmblood (Lucky Boy—Toberlina S, Corland) partnered with Lenkart's husband and business partner Scott Lenkart as a jumper. At Pin Oak Charity (Texas) one year Scott suggested Courtney take over the reins for a big-money hunter derby, as Glorieus wasn't quite ready for the 1.50-meter grand prix class at the same show.

"I was like, 'Sure! Sounds fun!'" recalled Courtney, Bartonville, Texas. "That Wednesday in his first hunter class he scored an 88. Scott was like, 'Uh oh.'"

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864
 HORSES
 COURTNEY LENKART
 PRIMERA HACIENDA, L.P.



Courtney Lenkart scored a big win with jumper-turned-hunter Glorieus in the \$25,000 World Champion Hunter Rider Professional Challenge at Capital Challenge.

So Glorieus converted full time to the other side of the showgrounds with Courtney, focusing on the high performance hunters and the derbies. The 9-year-old gelding won his first USHJA International Hunter Derby—a \$25,000 class—at the Great Lakes Equestrian Festival IV (Michigan) this summer.

“He’s so easy; that was the coolest thing,” said Courtney of the horse owned by La Primera Hacienda LP. “He’s so straightforward, and because my husband rode him for a year he’s really broke. Plus he jumps huge and has a big stride. All you have to do is worry about you. You don’t have to worry about if he’s going to look at this jump, or is this too wide, or is it too tall, or is the environment going to get to him. He does not care at all.”

With the win at Capital Challenge, Courtney can check off one box on her list of major goals. She attributed that win to



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her team, including her husband, ground man Cody Williams, assistant trainer Lizzie Ekong, a great squad of grooms and a barn full of supportive clients.

“My first really big class was [the \$100,000 ASG Software Solutions/USHJA International Derby Finals (Kentucky)] the first year in 2009,” said Courtney. “I remember being there and looking around, and I didn’t have anyone—no team. I remember thinking, ‘It doesn’t matter even if you do win; you have nobody to share it with.’ I remember thinking that I had to figure out a way to change this because it’s not what I want. Now it’s so cool a little over 10 years later, so lucky I have that team. I really appreciate everyone. You can’t do anything without that kind of team.”

A FRESH START

With boxes piled high and two dogs in the back seat, Michael Britt-León and Chess Britt-León knew it was really time to hit the road. They’d done the farewell tour through California between West Hollywood and Palm Springs, but now it was time to make the 2,000-mile trek across the country. For almost half his life, Michael had worked as a professional trainer in the California horse show scene, starting when he was 17 and maturing through years of mistakes and victories. But in 2017 he left it behind and headed for Atlanta with his personal horses and one client horse.

It made sense family-wise to relocate, as the couple’s families resided in the Southeast. But the close quarters of the California horse industry had also taken a toll on Michael, leaving him looking for a change.

“California has a great horse industry. I would say it’s a little bit cutthroat there just because everybody’s so on top of each other, as far as like sharing land and space with your business,” said Michael. “That was very scary to give up your whole business and start at zero. But I did. I brought my horses out here, and I had a big leap of faith, but I knew that I had the support of my husband and my family behind me. And so I did it. I met my very best friend Kelly Sims, who actually owns Private I and about 15 others that I ride. And we started Windsor Stables again: Kelly, myself and my husband Chess.”

Though the decision to leave was hard, Michael, 37, relished the fresh start.

“Starting my business as early as I did—I was very young, and I definitely got a chance to make all the mistakes,” he said. “I had some role models in there that maybe weren’t even the best ones. But I went about doing business in certain ways that didn’t always work out in my best interests, and with that came a lot of negativity and a lot of judgment.”

The move helped him return to the lessons he learned in childhood about horses.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP HUNTER RIDER PROFESSIONAL FINALS Wilmington, Ohio—Oct. 2

Judges: Panel 1: Keri Kampsen, Shane George; Panel 2: Tammy Provost, Mark Jungher; Panel 3: Mike Rosser, Scott Williamson

HORSE/RIDER	ROUND 1			ROUND 2			FINAL
	PANEL 1	PANEL 2	PANEL 3	PANEL 1	PANEL 2	PANEL 3	
1. Private I/Michael Britt-León	92.00	93.00	91.00	95.50	94.00	93.00	186.16
2. Bond/Geoffrey Hesslink	91.00	92.00	92.00	95.00	91.00	97.00	185.99
3. High Society/Evan Coluccio	87.00	91.00	87.00	96.00	95.00	95.00	183.66
4. Handwritten/Greg Crolick	89.00	90.00	89.00	92.00	92.00	92.00	181.33
5. Glorious/Courtney Lenkart	90.00	87.00	85.00	87.00	93.00	94.00	178.66
6. Nolan/Kelley Farmer	84.00	83.00	82.00	83.00	84.00	84.00	166.66



Michael Britt-León was supposed to be at a rehearsal dinner on the night of the \$10,000 WCHR Professional Finals, but a change of plans earned him the victory with Kelly Sims’ Private I at Capital Challenge.

TIDBITS

• **Jordan Allen** made a seamless transition from junior to amateur as she guided catch-ride **Coltrane** to the top of the North American Adult Amateur Equitation Championships with the help of her barn family at Ken and Emily Smith's Ashland Farms

"I feel really lucky to be able to do this, especially in these unprecedented times, with everything going on, we're so lucky to show," said the 19-year-old from West Bloomfield, Michigan. "They're like family to me. I can't even put into words; they're the best people ever. There's Michael Murphy, Daisy Farish—tons of people on the team. I just feel very, very lucky to be part of such a family. We love each other so much. There's no one else I would rather start our days at 4 a.m. and leave at 8 for."

• After years of competing in the NAL Adult Hunter Finals, **Kendall Meijer** finally captured the coveted tricolor aboard **Elliot**, her Selle Français gelding of unrecorded breeding.

"I've done this class the last maybe 10 years, and I was always a bridesmaid. I made the top 12 a few times, but to really get a win on my 7-year-old was really special," said the 28-year-old from Grand Rapids, Michigan. "He's definitely a kick ride. He's very quiet, which always works for me. I like a horse that's quiet and easy going, and he's just those things. We joke in the barn that he's 7 going on 17."

• COVID-19 left plans up in the air for **Ashton Alexander**, but she still hoped to compete in the Ariat National Adult Medal Finals. Since aging out of her junior years, the 23-year-old from Ocala, Florida, has devoted her attention to Auburn University (Alabama), where she helped guide their NCAA Equestrian team to national championship titles. And in the midst of figuring out her next step, she took the top honors in the finals with Brookside Pine Farms' **Travis Scott**.

"This is something we set in June when we were allowed to come back showing. It's very exciting that we were able to accomplish this together," said Alexander. "[After graduating in 2019] I didn't know what I wanted to do yet, so I decided to go back for my master's. It was in adult education with a minor in sports management. Basically, right now I want to get into the sport industry. Things kind of stopped when COVID happened, but that is still my plan right now. Horses are also here for me, so I've been going day-by-day at this moment."

• From eventing in Kenya to galloping steeplechase horses in Maryland, **Ellen Halle** has experienced more facets of horses than most people. But one thing she didn't expect to experience was winning the NAL Adult Jumper Finals.

"If you'd asked me in February if I was going to be showing at all this year, let alone showing in NAL Finals, I would have said that you were crazy," said Halle.

COVID-19 opened up riding opportunities for Halle, who is currently getting her MBA and her master's in public administration, as her trainer Troy Hendricks offered her **Iggy Pop** to lease (and buy—which she did in August) after her project ex-hurdler horse turned up lame. A spur of the moment entry to Capital Challenge brought her the blue ribbon on the 12-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding (Ironman—Ms. Media).

"Having the opportunity to jump off was a total win in my book, and then the win was just the cherry on top," said Halle. "I feel really lucky to be able to spend time outside with the horses and get to build a relationship with 'Iggy,' because that never would have happened if this year had gone as it was supposed to go."

NORTH AMERICAN ADULT EQUITATION CHAMPIONSHIPS Wilmington, Ohio—Sept. 25

RIDER	HOMETOWN
1. Jordan Allen	West Bloomfield, Mich.
2. Ashton Alexander	Ocala, Fla.
3. Grady Lyman	San Diego, Calif.
4. Grace McReynolds	Colorado Springs, Colo.
5. Grace Pearson	Seattle, Wash.
6. Helen Voss	Versailles, Ky.
7. Anna Koenig	Hollywood, Fla.
8. Payton McClintock	Columbus, Ohio
9. Shannon Davidson	Argyle, Texas
10. Kiera Philipot	Manchester, Mich.

>20 riders competed.

ARIAT NATIONAL ADULT MEDAL FINALS Wilmington, Ohio—Oct. 2

RIDER	HOMETOWN
1. Ashton Alexander	Ocala, Fla.
2. Grace Pearson	Seattle, Wash.
3. Hannah Eddlemon	Beavercreek, Ohio
4. Annalise Reed	Grosse Pointe, Mich.
5. Carly Hoft	Raleigh, N.C.
6. Shannon Davidson	Argyle, Texas
7. Casey Zuraitis	Sutton, Mass.
8. Grace McReynolds	Colorado Springs, Colo.
9. Evelyn Smith	Morristown, N.J.
10. Mary Canfield	Chicago, Ill.

>31 riders competed.

“They’re so healing to our lives and our souls, and we have [to make sure] that they’re taken care of on their side,” he said. “When I was in Los Angeles, I was losing a little bit of that just because there was so much to do. When I gave up what I had in California to come here, it allowed me to reconnect with my animals.”

And one of those animals came in the form of Private I, a horse he spotted in a Gulfport, Mississippi, schooling ring with Jason Berry. Smitten with “Elliot’s” jumping style, Michael knew Sims needed the Oldenburg gelding (Corrado—Verdi).

“There are very few horses that have the talent he has in the show ring and have the brain that he has,” said Michael. “He’s so special to me, not only because he walks in the ring and tries to win for me every time, but I love teaching. I love teaching Kelly, and to watch a horse know the change in rider and watch what he does for her is very special.”



Helen Voss returned to the saddle after several years away, and she lost no time in taking the WCHR Adult Amateur Challenge aboard Cantina at Capital Challenge.



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HORSE SHOWS

Michael picked Elliot to ride in the \$10,000 WCHR Professional Finals at Capital Challenge. The class normally calls for four riders to swap horses, but with COVID-19 still a threat, it made changing tack and gear more complicated. Instead, the riders showed over a classic course and a handy course, and they could choose a different horse for each round. Initially, Michael wasn't even going to be in Ohio on Friday night, as Sims' son was getting married that weekend. But Sims talked Michael into missing the rehearsal dinner, and he made the extra day count when he took the top spot in the WCHR Pro Finals ahead of Geoffrey Hesslink.

"When I talked to Kelly about it, she said, 'Don't be ridiculous. You have to stay; this is a huge deal.' She was very supportive of that," said Michael. "And I'm so glad I did because this is just absolutely huge. You go through a rollercoaster in this business and through life, and it's like all the pieces just kind of went together. And I felt like somebody was saying, 'You're doing good. Keep going. You've got this.' I think all that emotion together and then hearing the screams from the stands, it felt incredible because just to know you have that support out there was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun. It was definitely a career highlight that I will never, ever forget." 🐾



In her first Capital Challenge out of the juniors, Madeline Schaefer swept the amateur-owner hunters, taking the top spot in the WCHR Amateur-Owner Challenge on Sutton Place (pictured) and the WCHR 3'3" Amateur-Owner Challenge aboard Checkmate.

CAPITAL CHALLENGE

Wilmington, Ohio—Sept. 25–Oct. 4

3'6" GREEN HUNTER CH: Guggenheim, The Lignelli Family.

RES: Trademark, Take 3 LLC.

3'9" GREEN HUNTER CH: Philadelphia Story, Balmoral.

RES: Private I, Kelly Sims.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HUNTER CH SEC. A: Monday Balous, Redfield Farm.

RES: In The Know, Madeline Schaefer.

GREEN CONFORMATION HUNTER CH: Miller's Cove, Balmoral.

RES: In Writing, Sterling Malnik.

HIGH PERFORMANCE HUNTER SEC. B CH: Category, Camille Leblond.

RES: High Society, The Lignelli Family.

3'6" PERFORMANCE HUNTER SEC. A CH: Captivate, Maher Family LLC.

RES: Screenshot, Esperanza Imports LLC.

3'3" GREEN HUNTER CH: Unprecedented, Shadowfax Equestrian LLC.

RES: Captain America, Lori Mathews.

3' GREEN HUNTER, 6 & UNDER CH: Caso 2, Elizabeth Simpson.

RES: Side Hustle, La Primera Hacienda LP.

3' GREEN HUNTER, 7 & OVER CH: Jordan, Gentry Beresford.

RES: Cornucopia, Isabella David.

3'-3'3" GREEN HUNTER MARES CH: Ever So Often, Ava Peck.

RES: Heavely, Laurie Jueneman.

GREEN HUNTER COLT /GELDING CH: Cascatero, Redfield Farm.

RES: Rarity, David Glefke & Kelley Farmer.

PERFORMANCE HUNTER SEC. A CH: Luminosity, Sabrina Hellman.

RES: True Story, Vantage Point Equine Corp.

ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 18-35 CH: Rocketman, Sorensen Stables.

RES: Luscious, Roberts Stables LLC

ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 36-50 CH: Levianto, Barbara Brungess.

RES: About Last Night, Nicole Jeffries.

ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER, 51 & OVER CH: Simply Cool, Julia Barnes.

RES: Hollywood Park, Lynn Walsh.

AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 18-35 CH: Sutton Place, Madeline Schaefer.

RES: Breaux, Kaitlin Porath.

AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 36 & OVER CH: Charming, Dorli Burke.

RES: Killian, Doreen Toben.

3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 18-35 CH: Checkmate, Samantha Schaefer.

RES: Coretto, Devney Darge.

3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER, 36 & OVER CH: Idolize, Jaime Auletto.

RES: High Tide, Indian Rock Farms LLC.

ADULT EQUITATION, SEC. A CH: Grace Pearson.

RES: Grady Lyman

ADULT EQUITATION, SEC. B CH: Jordan Allen.

RES: Helen Voss.

LEADING HUNTER RIDER: Evan Coluccio.

LEADING HUNTER TRAINER: Stacey Weiss.

GRAND GREEN HUNTER CH: Philadelphia Story, Balmoral.

GRAND HUNTER CH: Philadelphia Story, Balmoral.

GRAND CONFORMATION HUNTER CH: Category, Camille Leblond.

GRAND 3' & 3'3" GREEN HUNTER CH: Ever So Often, Ava Peck.

GRAND ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER CH: Levianto, Barbara Brungess.

BEST ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER RIDER: Barbara Brungess.

GRAND AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER CH: Sutton Place, Madeline Schaefer.

BEST AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER RIDER: Madeline Schaefer.

GRAND 3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER CH: Checkmate, Samantha Schaefer.

BEST 3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER RIDER: Madeline

Schaefer.

BEST MEDIUM AMATEUR JUMPER RIDER: Lily Walton.

BEST LOW AMATEUR JUMPER RIDER: Leslie Schillat.

EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, PROFESSIONAL HUNTER: Captivate, Maher Family LLC.

EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER: Charming, Dorli Burke.

EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, 3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER HUNTER: High Tide, Indian Rock Farms LLC.

EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, ADULT AMATEUR HUNTER: Rocketman, Sorensen Stables.

EMO TRIP OF THE SHOW, 3'-3'3" GREEN HUNTER: Captain

America, Lori Mathews.

DERBYDOWN TRIP OF THE SHOW: Captivate, Maher Family LLC.

WCHR PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE CH: Glorious, La Primera Hacienda LP.

RES: In The Know, Madeline Schaefer.

WCHR AMATEUR-OWNER CHALLENGE CH: Sutton Place, Madeline Schaefer.

RES: Breaux, Kaitlin Porath.

WCHR ADULT AMATEUR CHALLENGE CH: Cantina, Helen Voss.

RES: Luscious Roberts Stables LLC.

WCHR 3'3" AMATEUR-OWNER CHALLENGE CH: Checkmate, Samantha Schaefer.

RES: Caruso, Grace McReynolds.

WCHR DEVELOPING PRO CHALLENGE CH: Chantilly, Mailibu Valley Farms Inc.

RES: Small Occasion, Shadowfax Equestrian LLC

NAL ADULT HUNTER CH: Elliot, Copper Fox LLC.

RES: Mojito, Kelly Bauernschmidt.

NAL ADULT AMATEUR JUMPER CH: Iggy Pop, Ellen Hale.

RES: Falco Van De Noordhoek, Pinecone Farm LLC.