

# How Capital Challenge Taught Karli Postel Schroeder to THRIVE UNDER PRESSURE

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION in 1993, the Capital Challenge Horse Show has held prestigious year-end finals, allowing the best hunter, jumper, and equitation riders to shine. In 2008, Capital Challenge began emphasizing the up-and-coming professionals in the hunter industry by offering the World Championship Hunter Rider Developing Pro Challenge. Since then, 13 riders have earned the title and gone on to successful professional careers. This year's event will be no different, as the Capital Challenge Horse Show returns to Prince George's Equestrian Center from October 1-10, in Upper Marlboro, MD.

Capital Challenge annually invites the top developing professionals for the \$5,000 WCHR Developing Pro Challenge, presented by The John R. Ingram Fund, which will be held this year on October 6. The class offers professionals the chance to compete on a level playing field and showcase their potential as top hunter rider superstars. For many of the past WCHR Developing Pro Challenge winners, like Karli Postel Schroeder, the class has served as a valuable springboard for their professional careers.



After winning the 2018 WCHR West Coast Hunter Spectacular, Schroeder and Banksy topped the field of 34 in the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge at Capital Challenge

## SPOTLIGHT

In 2018, Schroeder, of Westlake Village, CA, won the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge out of 34 entries aboard Banksy, a 2010 German Sport Horse gelding owned by Grace Russo. It was Schroeder's second time competing in the class and at Capital Challenge, and taking the win was a goal two years in the making.

Schroeder, born and raised in California, learned the riding ropes at her family's Foxfield Riding School in Westlake Village. Though she did not compete on the "A" circuit growing up, she rode for the equestrian team at Goucher College in Towson, MD, then spent time training with professionals in Malibu before taking a job with Archie Cox of Brookway Stables in California. It was Archie who helped her set her sights on the WCHR Developing Professional program and the class at Capital Challenge.

"As I started to learn more about the AA circuit, Archie gave me the opportunity to show top-quality horses," says Schroeder, now 30. "I was leading the country in points, and I came to Capital Challenge in 2017 for the first time ever to compete in the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge. I was extremely nervous because it was a big stage and there was a national title at stake." Her nerves ended up leading to a mistake at fence two that resulted in a refusal, costing her the class and the overall national title as WCHR Developing Professional of the Year.

"I was really disappointed, but I think it was actually a blessing in disguise," Schroeder says about her performance during her first time at Capital Challenge. "I learned how to handle high-pressure situations and it made me hungrier for a win."

With her sights set on qualifying and earning her spot in 2018, Schroeder was able to pack her show schedule with high-pressure environments, including the WCHR West Coast Hunter Spectacular, which she won, as well as the USHJA Green Hunter Incentive Championships. Both events taught



After a disappointing finish in 2017, Schroeder returned to Capital Challenge hungry to win the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge

her how to handle the nerves that come along with a major hunter stage.

Returning to Capital Challenge in 2018, Schroeder had the ride on Banksy, a horse she showed with John French. "Banksy was a horse that won the Spectacular and competed in the Green Incentive with me, so I felt comfortable despite the pressure," she says of the gelding. "He performed incredibly; he jumped two beautiful rounds, winning the class and helping me win the national title. The WCHR Developing Pro program really kickstarted my career and led to a level of confidence I'd never had before."

Schroeder went on to earn reserve champion honors in the High Performance Hunters at the Washington International Horse Show behind Scott Stewart, which was a result beyond her wildest dreams. Twelve months later, she returned to Capital Challenge, an established professional, and won the Professional World Champion Hunter Under Saddle Class aboard Favorite, owned by Teton Farms. Schroeder

credits her success to the time she spent qualifying for and winning the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge at Capital Challenge.

Since then, Schroeder's career has shifted gears, as she and her husband, Simon Schroeder, have started a business in Moorpark, CA, focusing on sales and training clients in the hunter, jumper, and equitation rings. Although her business is operating at a smaller scale than what she knew at Brookway Stables, she credits Cox for her training philosophy and purpose.

While her husband is a top-level show jumper, Schroeder primarily enjoys the hunters because of the intricacy and skill required to make the horses stand out. "I think I have a true appreciation for the hunters because I was given the opportunity to do it at the top level of the sport," she says. "Sitting on talented hunters makes you realize it is equally as hard as the jumper ring. It's an entirely different skill set; it teaches you finesse, determination, and consistency. Now



that I'm on the ground teaching, I know that consistency is really hard for people. I find it fun to give my clients the tools to produce consistent rounds."

Capital Challenge will always be a favorite show on the calendar for Schroeder. On the west coast, few events replicate the special feeling you get when you're in the Show Place Arena competing under the lights. "I'm a goal-oriented person, and you can set your sights on Capital Challenge at the beginning of the year and there's something special about being able to get there and accomplish it," Schroeder says. "I would say it is 100 percent worth the trip, even from as far away as California."

While the trip is every bit worth her time and effort, she will be sitting it out in 2021 because she and her husband are expecting their first child in October. "Though I'm sad to be missing it this year, I'm definitely going to be cheering everyone on from afar and watching the live stream," adds Schroeder. "It's an amazing event, and you really feel

important when you're showing at Prince George's Equestrian Center."

For those taking on the 2021 WCHR Developing Pro Challenge, Schroeder's advice is to avoid catch riding or riding an unfamiliar horse. "If you have the opportunity to show a horse you are comfortable on, that helps tremendously," she adds. "Often developing professionals end up catch riding or riding something already at the show out of convenience, and I do think having a partner you feel confident with is crucial."

The future is bright for Schroeder and her growing family. Her primary goal is to get back in the saddle after her baby is born and to adapt to life as a mother. Longer-term, she aspires to develop a horse to compete at USHJA International Hunter Derby Championships one day. Schroeder sees herself coming back to Capital Challenge for years to come and being a top competitor, as well as helping her students rise to the caliber of shows like Capital Challenge and beyond. *by*

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—KARLI POSTEL SCHROEDER

LEFT: Banksy, a German Sport Horse gelding owned by Grace Russo, was only eight years old when the pair took the win

## WINNERS OF THE WCHR DEVELOPING PRO CHALLENGE

The Bittersweet Perpetual Trophy donated by Rachel B. Kennedy

- 2008: Megan Edrick, Lyle
- 2009: Katherine Newman, Day Dream
- 2010: Molly Sewell, Maddox
- 2011: Tara Metzner, Rumba
- 2012: Melissa Feller, Serafino
- 2013: Greg Crollick, Grey Street
- 2014: Brian Feigus, Quinn
- 2015: Alexis Taylor Silvernale, Citation
- 2016: Amber Henter, Si Bene
- 2017: Dominique Damico, Rockette
- 2018: Karli Postel, Banksy
- 2019: Sara Taylor, Noah
- 2020: Julia Rose Rossow, Chantilly