



IN STRIDE

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Assisting the Stressed Horse



WCHR WINNING WAYS

EMO JUMPING SEAT
MEDAL VICTORS

John French and Babylon



JOHN FRENCH

FINDS HIS FIFTH WCHR PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE VICTORY

He never dreamed his 6-year-old would rise to the top of this competitive class.

Story and photos by
Tricia Booker

When John French arrived at the Capital Challenge Horse Show, he was cautiously optimistic. He knew he had a special horse in Babylon, but the youngster was unproven in an atmosphere such as the Show Place Arena in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, competing under the lights at night.

But the chestnut Oldenburg didn't put a foot wrong throughout the October 1-10 show, carrying French to victory in the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge and helping him win the WCHR Professional National Championship. On the way, Babylon also earned the Grand Hunter, the Grand Green Hunter and the 3'6" Green Hunter championships.

"He just got better and better throughout the year," said French. "He became more confident. For him to come here at 6 years old and show against those horses and win tonight is pretty special. I never dreamed that he would win this—I just thought this would be a good class to go in for experience and see how he did, and he ended up winning the whole thing."

After earning three scores of 95 from the judges in the first round, Babylon returned on top and kept that position with scores of 89.5, 89 and 89.5 from the judging panel of Rob Bielefeld, Steve Wall, Richard Slocum, Linda Andrisani, Chris Wynne and Brian Lenehan.



French, of Wellington, Florida, was thrilled with Marnell Sport Horses LLC's Babylon (Crumbie—Die Cera), a horse he's brought along since the inception of his business partnership with Olympian Kent Farrington two years ago.

"Having started him from the beginning makes it more special," added French. "He was jumping teeny little jumps, and he was a little bit careful and suspicious, but I think we both have confidence in each other now. He's the sweetest horse in the world. Anybody he sees he just wants them to pet him and rub his neck. I don't think I've ever seen him put his ears back. He likes it, and he's one of those special ones that wants to please you. He's a real trier."

French earned his fifth victory in the



John French rode Marnell Sport Horses LLC's Babylon to myriad championships and the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge at the Capital Challenge.

class, sponsored by the Gochman Family, with Scott Stewart taking second aboard Gochman Sport Horses LLC's Catch Me and Victoria Colvin in third aboard JT Farm's Gabriel.

French, who grew up in neighboring Columbia, Maryland, always seems to peak for the Capital Challenge, and he was the Leading Hunter Rider yet again.

"I grew up here, and I get to see my family and friends. That makes it special, too," he said of the Capital Challenge. "Oliver [Kennedy], who runs the show—we grew up together at the same barn, so it's special coming here. I think this is the best show there is for the Hunters with all the special classes and awards they give that showcase the owners, the horses, the riders. Sometimes

the owners and riders don't get all the recognition. It's nice coming here where you get a lot of recognition for all the hard work that we've done."

SHOPPING PAYS OFF

Heather Williams had one thing on her to-do list on the morning of the \$5,000 WCHR Developing Pro Challenge, sponsored by the Ingram Family, that other riders need not have worried about: She had to purchase a shadbelly.

"The nice people at Quail Hollow Tack were able to get me this great shadbelly," she said, modeling the stylish riding coat. "The last time I wore a shadbelly was in Lake Placid in 2010 when I did a National Hunter Derby on one of Mahala Rummell's horses,

Fortune Hunter, and I was lucky enough to win that class, too! I don't bust the shadbelly out often, but when I do it usually pulls through for me."

Indeed it did. Williams, 33, of Eatontown, New Jersey, guided Lillian Soroken's Di-Caprio 3 to the victory.

Williams, who works for Stacia Madden at Beacon Hill in Colts Neck, New Jersey, described herself as a behind-the-scenes professional who most often prepares horses for clients. Having the opportunity to show in the rated Hunters was a bonus, and she made the most of it, despite the friendly teasing she endured for her outdated show clothes.

"I was hopeful that I was going to qualify [for this class], but not arriving pre-qualified like so many of the riders, I wasn't really sure

how it was going to pan out,” said Williams. “And, as I told you, you can tell how much I like to spend money on a hunt coat—I was going to wait to see if I needed it. I didn’t want to get too big for my breeches and buy the hunt coat too early!”

When Catherine Cowie went shopping the morning of the \$2,500 WCHR Amateur-Owner 3’3” Challenge, sponsored by Milestone LLC and Havens Schatt, she picked the right place.

Didi Mackenzie, of Quail Hollow Tack, had just sold the shadbelly to the WCHR Developing Pro Challenge winner, Williams, the previous day. “I told her, ‘This is a lucky shadbelly!’” said Mackenzie with a laugh. And it was.

Cowie rode Traveller to victory in the class with scores of 88, 84.50 and 86 for an 86.16, and she showed off her new coat in the victory gallop.

“I was happy that we got to do another Classic round,” said Cowie. “I had an unfortunate rail in the class earlier, so we were able to redeem ourselves. It was a nice course and just flowed. This is a nice indoor to ride in—it just feels like you’re cantering around on a cloud. He was just perfect. He just cruised around, and it was like I whispered the course in his ear, and he just went.”



Heather Williams enjoyed a victory gallop in her new shadbelly after winning the WCHR Developing Professional title aboard DiCaprio 3.

Cowie, 29, of New York City, divides her time between the city and Heritage Farm in Katonah, New York. “One of the silver linings of COVID is that I’ve been able to show more often because I work full time. I

worked today in the morning and was able to show in the afternoon. It was a really nice surprise to be able to do it this year,” said Cowie, who works in financial services and was competing at the Capital Challenge for the first time.

“Travis’ is such a special horse,” she said. “It means so much to win this class. I say this to our trainers all of the time: ‘When I stay out of his way, he wins.’ So, it was nice that I was able to stay out of his way and he could win, because I know he likes to win.”

Ellen Toon once again added her name to the roster of winners of the \$5,000 WCHR Amateur-Owner 3’6” Challenge, sponsored by Robinson Ridge, this time aboard Gabriel. Toon scored 86.50, 88 and 88 for an 87.50 total.

After Toon led the victory gallop, she returned center ring to present the In Disguise WCHR Trainer Award to the trainer of the WCHR 3’6” National Amateur-Owner Champion. On hand to receive the award was Nick Haness, who accompanied Tonya Johnston, who was crowned WCHR Amateur-Owner National Champion with her mount, Galactic, by her side.

For Toon, presenting the In Disguise Award is a meaningful part of the Capital



Ellen Toon rode Gabriel to top honors in the WCHR 3’6” Amateur-Owner Challenge.

Challenge, since she guided him to victory in the 3'6" Amateur-Owner Challenge for her first win in the class in 2004. She's now earned the top call three times, with Invinible in 2011, in between In Disguise and Gabriel.

"Several years ago, when we decided that we wanted to donate something in In Disguise's honor, I wanted to come up with something different," said Toon. "I don't always think we thank our trainers appropriately. So, that's why we wanted to give it to the trainer of the national champion.

"For both Jimmy and I, we've been blessed to have a lot of very nice horses," added Ellen of her husband and JT Farm trainer. "Jimmy's amazing at finding nice horses and bringing them along, and he does all of the work, driving the trailer and mucking stalls. Trainers don't often receive the recognition they deserve."

STEPPING UP

Lindsey Tomeu had already enjoyed a memorable Capital Challenge when she saddled up for the WCHR Adult Amateur Challenge, sponsored by Kate Considine and Willow Brook Stables. After earning the Adult Amateur, 18-35, championship with Nightfall the previous day, she galloped

around the Show Place Arena hoping to continue her winning streak.

And she did, earning scores of 90, 90 and 89 aboard Popish Farms LLC's black gelding.

"I've only received one 90 in my life, and it was really special because two years ago I was champion here on another Adult Hunter, Statement. We had to put him down this year, so 'Dallas' is kind of stepping into his shoes," said Tomeu. "So, everything is kind of sentimental. All of my first big Hunter wins were on him, and Dallas has stepped in to take that place. There's been a lot of happy tears this week, so we're all very emotional. I'm glad I was able to pull it all together at this show."

Tomeu, 27, began riding Nightfall in June, and has been working with Sweet Oak Farm throughout the summer to establish their partnership.

"I've been struggling to get to know him—literally up until this horse show," she said. "It's pretty amazing, I don't do the Hunters that often; I'm more of a Jumper rider. All my horses are either old or on lease, so this year I have Hunters. And it's different and it's exciting, and I'm really proud."

Although Tomeu's cheering section was enthusiastic, it didn't quite compare to the roar that Betty Oare received as she fin-



Payton Flanders was thrilled to ride her first horse Conlaro to the win in the WCHR Children's Hunter Challenge.

ished her round on Sidenote. Oare, 53 years Tomeu's senior, earned scores of 89, 87.25 and 86.50 for an 87.58 and second. It was a thrilling moment for Oare, who finished as the WCHR Adult Amateur National Reserve Champion, as well.

JUST A NUMBER

At age 21, Rico Suave has seen and done it all. And, to dispel any rumors that he's past his prime, the adorable Small Pony carried 12-year-old Ava Barnes to victory in this year's WCHR Pony Challenge, sponsored by Shane and Ali Sweetnam/Sweet Oak Farm.

Owned by Ponies & Palms Show Stables LLC, the Welsh gelding and Barnes have won many championships and top placings since she began showing him in 2019. Together, they placed fifth overall in the 2019 USEF Pony Finals and have earned championships from the Winter Equestrian Festival circuit in Florida to Lake Placid in New York.

This was their best finish to date at the Capital Challenge. "I've been riding Rico for two years, but this is the first really big class I've won with him. It feels good," said Barnes, who trains with Dave Belford and Chris Payne at New Hope Farm in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Rico Suave carried Ava Barnes to the top of the card in the WCHR Pony Challenge for their biggest win to date.

Despite being just 12 years old, Payton Flanders already has a huge collection of accolades from the Capital Challenge. And this year she added yet another one to her résumé when she guided Conlaro to victory in the WCHR Children's Hunter Challenge and received the Perpetual Trophy donated by The Applegate Family/Arwen Stables.

"His name is 'Connor,' and we got him in March," said Flanders of her winning mount. "He's my first horse, and he's done the 3'6" Equitation and Jumpers. He's so smooth to ride, and I like him and his personality."

Flanders, of Lothian, Maryland, trains with Rachel Agee of Gladwell Farm in Dunkirk, Maryland, and considers the Capital Challenge her favorite show and one that brings her a lot of luck. In 2018, she was reserve champion in the Children's Hunters, and in 2019 Flanders and her Maranatha Flash won the EMO Trip of the Show in the Pony Hunters with a high score of 94.

For this year's Children's Challenge, Flanders went toward the end of the class. "I was a little nervous going into the ring, but the nerves went away when I walked in," she said. "I felt really happy with my round, and he was so good." After earning the show reserve championship in the Children's Hunter, 14 and Under, section out of 36 competitors earlier in the day, their momentum continued with scores 87 and 85 in the Challenge for the victory. "I'm so happy with him. He's a great horse."

REPEAT WINS

When the results were announced in the Junior Hunters at this year's Capital Challenge, those listening might have thought the announcer was holding down the repeat button. Augusta Iwasaki won just about every award for which she was eligible, including the WCHR 3'6" Junior Challenge, the WCHR National Junior Championship and the 3'6" Grand Junior Hunter Championship, with Commentary. Her other titles included the Small Junior Hunter, 16-17, championship aboard Commentary and the Large Junior Hunter, 16-17, reserve championship with Cabrio.

In fact, as she walked up the ramp after the final class, the ribbons, trophies and flowers just about covered her small frame completely. Iwasaki's final victory gallop came

A 'LUCKY' SEVENTH FOR STEWART

Scott Stewart entered the \$10,000 WCHR Pro Finals, sponsored by the Rein Family, as the winningest rider in the event's history, and he extended that streak with his seventh victory in his 21 starts.

But it wasn't a walk in the park. John French held the lead when Stewart entered the ring as the last rider.

The class was his to win or lose, depending on his catch ride aboard Nabisco. Prior to the fourth round, Stewart had taken the time to walk to the ring and watch the horse go around with Jimmy Torano.

"Actually, it made me a little nervous because the instructions of the way to ride him were the opposite of the way I ride, and I didn't know how to do it. I just really listened to them about how to ride him, and it worked," said Stewart with a smile. "You had to give him a little room at the jump and not completely let go of his mouth, which most of the time I'm trying to let go, so it was a different feel for me. I was afraid he was going to be a bit tired, but he actually jumped really well for me."

Indeed he did. Not only did Elise Iafate's Nabisco carry Stewart to the title, but he also received the Far West Farms Perpetual Trophy for the highest average score during the "Final Four" rounds.

In this year's format, the riders earned their qualifying score in the WCHR Professional Challenge on Wednesday, and then the top six in the WCHR Professional National standings chose a horse to compete in the WCHR Pro Finals Playoff Round. Their two-round scores then decided the top four riders who went on to catch-ride unfamiliar horses in the Final Four for the title.

For his Playoff round, Stewart chose Gochman Sport Horses LLC's Catch Me. They posted scores of 91, 95 and 88 to clinch a spot in the final four, where the riders began on a clean slate.

"I thought it was a good format. I really liked the class the other day carrying over to this round," said Stewart. "The Handy was interesting and different to do. I thought it was pretty exciting, and I liked the format."

Course designer Joseph Carnicom offered a course with many options on direction and approach. He also included a bounce, a "walk-through" and a three-fence circle of which riders could choose any two fences any direction.

French placed second after choosing Marnell Sport Horses LLC's Ocean Road for the Playoffs and posted excellent scores aboard his four catch rides. Torono, in his class debut, was third riding Isalou Inc.'s Laskano in the Playoffs, and Tori Colvin was fourth after riding Libbie Gordon's Montauk in the Playoff round.

Torano enjoyed the format. "It was fun. It was a good class and a nice little crowd. All four of us are used to riding different horses," he said. "I want to thank all of the owners and trainers of all these horses that were donated. I thought we had a good group of horses."

In addition to Iafate's Nabisco, the donated horses included 7 Dog Farm LLC's Diablue 7, Sarah Entzian's Spectacular and Brannon Loomis Mooney's Q King Of Hearts Z.

When asked what it means to win this class yet again, Stewart joked, "It means I'm really old!" On a more serious note, he added, "It also means I'm really lucky and fortunate to be doing this at this level and competing against these great riders and having nice horses to show, so I'm very grateful for that."



Scott Stewart and Catch Me



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In their Capital Challenge debut, Lauren Little and Belgravia were best in the WCHR 3'3" Junior Challenge.

aboard Cabrio, owned by Bikoff Equestrian LLC and trained by Kenneth Berkley, in the WCHR 3'6" Junior Challenge. "I started riding him this week, and he's so fun to ride. I thought we got along really well, and I had so much fun," she said. "I thought we were on the same page yesterday, and he felt like the right choice for the WCHR class."

Iwasaki, 17, of Calabasas, California, won the WCHR National Junior Championship and the There'll Be Times Perpetual Trophy, donated by Elizabeth Busch Burke and Lysa Burke Horkan, for the third time (her previous wins were in 2017 and 2020). "I think this is so special. My parents are both Hunter trainers, and I've been doing this since I was a little kid, so getting to come here and do this every year is so special," she said. "I usually bring my own horses here, so it was really great to get to ride other horses and see how that went. I think the WCHR program is special and something that you work toward all year," she added.

"It's really such an honor to win," said Lauren Little, who came off a tricolor sweep

in her section to win the 3'3" Junior Challenge riding Belgravia. "I didn't expect it. I was very emotional. It's so cool to be here and have this kind of success with a horse you love so much."

Little was partnered with Belgravia in January of 2020 but due to COVID didn't have many opportunities to show. "I only went to six horse shows last year, which isn't a lot," she said. But that lack of experience together didn't prevent them from collecting the Challenge win as well as the reserve in the 3'3" Junior, 15-17, section. In addition to her success with Belgravia, she stepped into center ring with Surf's Up for the championship ribbon in the 3'3" Junior Hunter, 15-17, section.

Little currently trains with Meredith Herman at Burgundy Farm in Sonoma, California and also works with Geoffrey Hesslink and Brendan Williams. "The competition has been amazing, and I've made a lot of new friends," said Little, who made her Capital Challenge debut this year. "Everyone at the back gate is super nice to you and accommodating. It's a great show." 