

Junior **RIDER**
FOCUS

Top junior rider, Under 25 Grand Prix competitor, and winner of the inaugural World Equestrian Center – Ocala Premier Cup Equitation Championship during the 2021 Winter Spectacular, Dominic Gibbs, of Colorado Springs, Colorado, has created a name for himself among the top junior competitors of all time.

DOMINIC GIBBS

Dominic won the 2018 Hamel Foundation National Horse Show 3'3" Equitation Championship, the 2020 ASPCA Maclay National Championship, and the 2020 NAL Low Junior Jumper Final. Dominic was the only junior to finish in the top-five in all of the "Big Eq" finals last year, also including the Dover Saddlery/USEF Hunter Seat Medal Final, the Washington International Horse Show Equitation Final and the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals. These performances earned him a spot in the 2021 USEF Horsemastership Training Session as one of the top 12 young riders in the nation. With less than a year left in his junior career, Dominic spoke with WEC about how he got to where he is and what lies ahead as he looks toward his professional career.

AS TOLD TO
TORI BILAS
JUMP MEDIA

Photos by Andrew Ryback Photography



in picnics and driving our four-wheeler manure spreader around. From there, we moved to Colorado Springs where we switched to a boarding barn and I started formal lessons. The rest is history.

WEC Tell us about your early competition days.

DG I started showing out West, mostly at the Colorado Horse Park, which became my second home between 2014 and 2018. I showed in the Pony Hunters throughout Colorado, Arizona and a little bit in California, and of course, Pony Finals. I didn't start competing on the East Coast until I was around 15. My trainer in Colorado introduced me to Katie Prudent and I started doing the 3'6" equitation and Children's Jumpers under her instruction. She admired my passion for the equitation, so she introduced me to Stacia Madden, who I started training with the summer of my 15-year-old year, so I split my time between Beacon Hill Show Stables and Plain Bay Sales. I pretty much left home at that point and started doing a lot of East Coast shows in the equitation and jumpers.

WEC How did you first get into riding?

DG I think I was born with the horse bug, because from the minute I sat on my mom's horse as a baby, I was happiest in the saddle. My mom rode as a child in our home state of Colorado and picked up eventing as an adult, competing through the preliminary level. I was born in Minnesota and we moved when I was about four to a small ranch in Colorado, where I grew up with rescue ponies and horses. When I was little, I just rode around for fun on the property, in parades with my mom and lead-line hunted with the Fort Carson Hounds. My favorite activities were trail rides with my brother that ended

WEC What horses and people have had a significant impact on your riding career?

DG The first really special horse I had was my medium pony, GF Elliot. He is this little ball of spunk and energy, and I was always so joyful around him. He really taught me the



Junior Rider Focus: *Dominic Gibbs*

love of the horse and we had a real connection. He is now busy teaching the ropes to short-stirrup kids. Some other really important horses I've had are my current two, Cent 15, who's carried me to all my proudest equitation wins, and Delia B, my high junior jumper. There was also Douwe, with whom I won the NAL Low Junior Jumper Final. He was named 2020 USEF Low Junior Jumper Horse of the Year. My sister, Jordan, has the reins on a few of my former rides now, so it's fun to see her fly. A few of those rides were green projects for me, so I love seeing how well they've turned out.

I have had so many great coaches I can't count them all. But of course, the Prudents and Stacia Klein Madden were game changers for me. I also couldn't have done any of this without my parents and my first trainers Ann Hanna, Philip Dreissigacker and Karen Catov-Goodell. Julie Winkel, Rita Timpanaro and Nick Karazissis each had a strong influence on my early riding, education and mindset.



WEC | What are your goals for your last year as a junior?

DG | This year, I want to have top finishes in the fall equitation finals. I'm also aiming for a podium finish in the North American Youth Championships and I want to start competing in two-star grand prix. I really want this year to help set up the next steps toward my future as a working professional in the sport.





WEC What are your goals for your riding career?

DG I'm privileged to follow in the footsteps of my coaches; both Katie and Stacia won the Maclay Championship during their junior years, and they both inspired me to pursue a riding career where I represent my sport and my country at the highest levels. I cannot wait to be on a U.S. Team! They also set great examples of what's possible and how to make a difference in the sport. I also want to become a judge and a course designer someday, which I think will help my riding, and someday coaching, too.

WEC What was it like competing at World Equestrian Center – Ocala in the Premier Cup Equitation Championship?

DG To compete at a venue like World Equestrian Center – Ocala in its inaugural season was just magical. I think there was a true sense of awe coming to the venue. Walking down the ramp into the Grand Arena was like descending into a different universe. Luckily, a big ring like that really suits my horse Cent and doesn't overwhelm him. It was really fun to ride in the class with barn friends and now we have this forever-shared experience. The course was a really great test of everything we'd been working on and the jumps were

spectacularly beautiful. It was a forward and technical course, which was a fun test of skill.

WEC How did it feel driving away with a car?

DG Driving away with a car that night was really exciting. It had been threatening to rain all evening and then down poured during the awards ceremony, so I was soaking wet but didn't even notice until I sat in the front seat! I could not believe that I was able to drive the car away that night. My parents helped with insurance arrangements and then my sister and I threw our stuff in the back and left at midnight to drive to Wellington, arriving around 4 a.m. I was still wired with excitement. We had our music going and that new car smell — the whole experience made me feel so proud. It was a huge achievement.

WEC How do you balance school and riding? What are your academic goals?

DG I think the keys to balancing school and riding are to have clear goals and to make sure everyone around you is on board. I enjoy school and learning, but public school my freshman year was tough because they didn't support the absences that happened more frequently as I became more committed to training and competing. I switched to an



online school, beginning sophomore year, which came with its own challenges. Junior year, I switched to my current school, Score Academy, and it really changed my whole academic life. I am graduating with all A's in tough classes and I recently committed to the University of Miami Herbert Business School in their Honors Program. I hope to take a gap year to start in the fall of 2022, and, during that time, focus on my riding and work for someone to start learning the professional side of the business. I think Miami will really give me the opportunity to ride at a high level, travel, work, study and earn a business degree at the same time.

WEC What are your hobbies outside of riding?

DG I am a real nomad now; I'm always on the road, so horses take up the vast majority of my time. I love coming back home to Colorado. Last year, I only spent a few weeks at home, between the National Horse Show and WEF. It's the only time I have a break to do other things I enjoy. I love to ski when I'm home, and, if the weather is warm enough, I live close to a great trail system where I love to go mountain biking.

WEC Who do you admire most in the sport and why?

DG It's so tough to narrow down that list. I really admire my coaches for what they've accomplished in their riding careers and what they're doing now for their students and the sport. I look up to Daniel Deusser and Steve Guerdat for their accomplishments and how they make it look so easy when it is so clearly not easy. I greatly admire McLain Ward, Beezie Madden and Laura Kraut. I also admire Brian Moggre for everything he's accomplished! All of the American riders on the Olympic Short List are truly gifted and I try to learn from each of them. But it's not all about the riders in the sport; I have huge admiration for the grooms, vets, farriers and barn managers who make sure everything runs smoothly behind the scenes and that the horses are happy and healthy. Before I was competing at the higher levels, my family and I did our own work with the horses, so I can see the big picture behind what it takes to win a blue ribbon. I'm hugely grateful now for all the work that makes Beacon Hill Show Stables and Plain Bay Sales such incredible operations.

WEC Tell us a fun fact about you.

DG I speak German, and I ran a half-marathon when I was 12 years old. My favorite snack is spicy Takis. ☺

