

THE CHRONICLE *of the* HORSE

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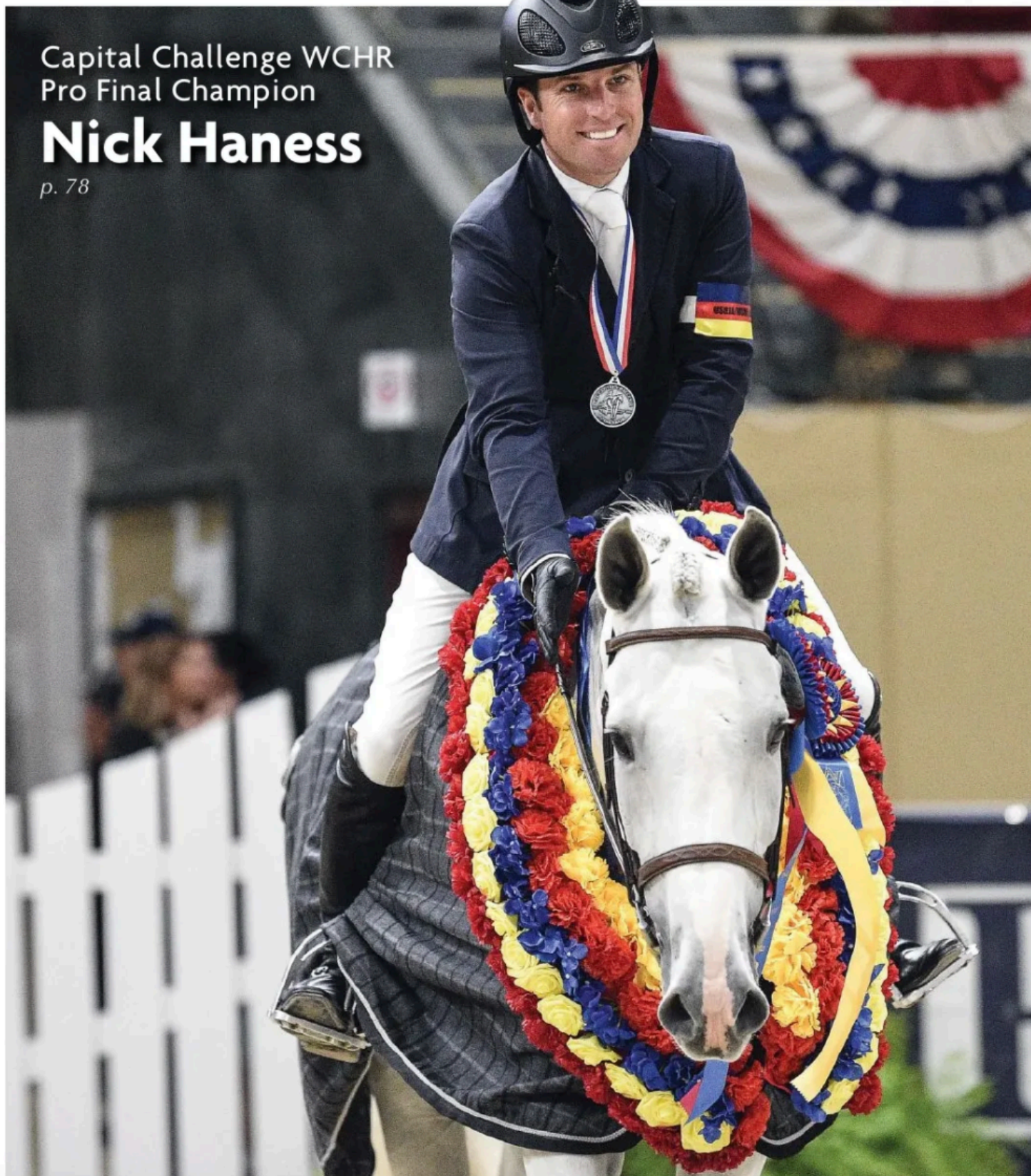
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Pro Final Champion

Nick Hanness

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Capital Challenge Horse Show

SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 9 | UPPER MARLBORO, MARYLAND

Questions With: NICK HANESS

Story And Photo By **Lindsay Berreth**

For years, Nick Haness watched the WCHR Pro Final from the sidelines or on the livestream, hoping to someday compete. This year, he finally got his chance.

He came into the class, held Oct. 7 at the Capital Challenge Horse Show in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, with the armband for the leading WCHR rider.

"I had this armband on all week long, and someone once said to me it's bad luck to wear it all week, and you're going to drop, so I just wanted to maintain that throughout the week," he said. "I was very fortunate to have a great group of horses to show this week, which helped secure my position."

The armband ended up bringing Haness luck, and he came out on top in his class debut.

"This is an absolutely incredible feeling. It's a dream come true," he said. "I feel very honored to be here amongst this group of guys and in this type of a finals. My expectations were low. I really wanted to do the class, and I was excited to make the Top 4 after the stressful handy round and combined with Wednesday night's [WCHR Professional Challenge] performances. I hadn't thought this could be my outcome, but I'm very excited."

Haness, 34, has spent much of the summer showing on the East Coast with a group of clients, flying back and forth to his base in Temecula, California.

"They have been troopers back here with me, and we have been in and out of Airbnbs and hotels and traveling around a lot this summer, and I really appreciate their support," he said. "This has been an extraordinary year for my career."

Why did you decide to show on the East Coast this year?

Being that I'm from California, born and raised, it's very familiar to show on the West Coast, and throughout the years I've always had a challenging time with my schedule with my students and clients in school or committed to staying close, but this year I was in a cool position to be able to travel and make a game plan with my clients and the group of horses we had.

We decided it would be really fun to go back east. It started as one or two shows we were going to do in the summer, and then from there it unfolded, and we decided it was going so well, and we wanted to stay back east and finish the year staying back here.

From June in Kentucky and Split Rock, we went to Tryon [North Carolina]. We went to Traverse City [Michigan]; we went to Derby Finals [Kentucky], Blue Grass Festival [Kentucky] and Capital Challenge.

It was a really amazing summer, incredible memories. I got to step into the FEI ring and do some top-level jumpers, which was really fun and successful. It wasn't really planned to be that way, but I got the opportunity and catch-rode two jumpers and ended up winning a grand prix with each of them. It was one building momentum from the next, and it all wrapped up with a dream week at Capital Challenge.

It's been a bit of a job keeping the farm going in California because I have a lot of [rescue] animals at home as well as keeping the show horses in tip-top condition on the road on the East Coast.



Nick Haness (pictured on Laura Shatzko's Kynaz) made his class debut a winning one at the WCHR Pro Final held during the Capital Challenge Horse Show.

Do you have any tips on catch-riding?

[The WCHR] class [where the top four riders compete on borrowed horses in a final round] is one I've always looked forward to and dreamed of doing. Being that my background is in catch-riding, I always thought it would be so much fun to catch-ride in that spotlight.

I felt pretty confident going into that. Something I always remind myself of, which I think is the most important lesson for myself and others, is that each horse, you have to ride that horse and understand them.

They're all different. There's not one formula for each one. They all have their own ways, tendencies and specialties. I always try to be in tune with what the horse really needs to make them excel and shine and be the best they can be.

I've been very fortunate to be able to develop that skill over the years. I think my record catch-riding per day, I did 82 classes in one day as a young professional. I rode about 30 horses. That was when I was 21. I was much younger and able to do that then. Nowadays I still

World Championship Hunter Rider Professional Final Upper Marlboro, Md.—Oct. 7

Judges: Tom Brennan, David Biesel, Shane George, Bobbi Reber,
Gavin Moylan, Dale Pederson

RIDER	Round 1 Average/Horse	Round 2 Average/Horse	Round 3 Average/Horse	Round 4 Average/Horse	Final Total
1. Nick Haness	90.66/ Etiquette	92.66/ Nabisco	89.00/ Singani	94.33/Kynaz	366.65
2. Scott Stewart	88.33/Kynaz	88.66/ Singani	90.66/ Nabisco	91.33/ Etiquette	358.98
3. John French	89.16/ Nabisco	91.66/ Etiquette	82.33/Kynaz	82.33/ Singani	345.48
4. Michael Britt- Leon	89.00/ Singani	88.00/Kynaz	55.00/ Etiquette	89.00/ Nabisco	321.00

7 riders competed.

typically do around 30-50 rounds a day at a normal horse show, which is still plenty. You're just hopping on a horse, having your lunch in the saddle and keeping riding and riding and going and going, [which] certainly helps me have that tool for a class like the WCHR Finals.

It was also being able to watch other riders and learn what will make each horse go the best, and I think that ultimately helped me win the class. It's something I

love doing, and I love the art of figuring out each horse separately and figuring out what makes them the best they can be.

The first thing I do when I meet a new horse is get on their good side. Get to know them. I give them a pat on the neck; I kiss their nose. I just want the horse to know they're in good hands; they're safe; I'm going to be nice to them. Honestly, building a really quick, good relationship with the horse is the first thing that I usually do.

The next thing is that I spend the first few minutes letting the horse have a long rein and figuring out where their balance naturally is and what they're comfortable with, and then they tell you the rest of that story themselves. I let the horses speak to me at that level.

You've turned your California farm into a sanctuary for rescued animals alongside your show horses. Tell me about that.

I've very fortunate to have the space and ability to have all the animals that I have. I'm one of five boys, and we had a family pet, but I was a true animal lover and always dreamed of having a farm full of animals.



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I like animals a lot, sometimes more than people, and I always dreamed of having an oasis/paradise farm where there's a lot of good vibes and energy, and I think animals bring that vibe and energy and happiness to my life.

When I come home from traveling and horse showing a lot, it's just nice to sit down in the stall with an animal and talk to them and have that bond. Knowing that a lot of the animals we have were rescues is even more special.

We bought some animals, and in a way, it felt like we were still rescuing them and taking them from bad situations. We've bred a few of them. We have quite the menagerie now.

We have two camels, a zebra, about 10 alpacas, 16 miniature horses, emus, parrots, pigs, goats and dogs. It's a handful. We have approximately 75 animals at our farm.

My partner Ryan [May] has started a rescue for birds where he rehomes them.

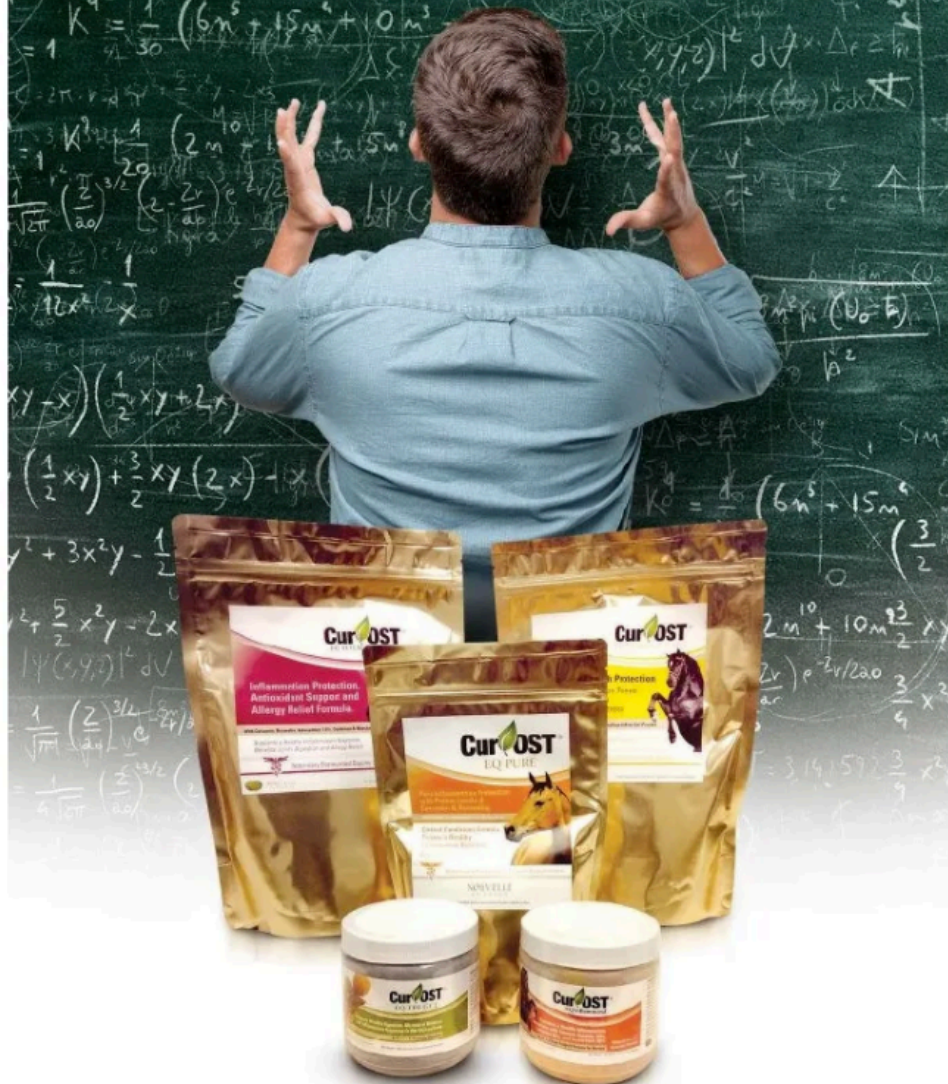
What's the most used app on your phone?

Probably WhatsApp, which is how I look at all the videos of horses in Europe. If it's not WhatsApp, it's Starbucks. I go to Starbucks every day and do a mobile order. I love the passion tea lemonade. I don't even drink coffee. I also go for the egg-white bites.

What do you like to do in your downtime?

My vacation is to be at home on my farm with the animals. I like hiking. Ryan and I also have some electric bikes we like to take out on the hills and go off-roading. 🚲

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