



IN STRIDE

The Official Magazine of the United States Hunt Jumper Association

How to Develop Mental Resiliency

*Kate Conover
and Small
Friendship*

**CONOVER
CLAIMS
WCHR
PRO FINALS**

**MIKE ROSSER PROMOTES
SPORTSMANSHIP**



**BLOWING ROCK
CELEBRATES
100**

Kate Conover Rolls Over the Competition in the WCHR Professional Finals

She makes her Pro Finals debut a winning one with a decisive victory.

Story and photos by
Tricia Booker



Kate Conover chose Small Friendship for the Playoff Round, where they scored 95, 90 and 94 for the victory. Conover went on to win the Final Four to secure the WCHR Pro Finals title.

ily, and I couldn't be more ecstatic that it actually happened."

What "actually happened" is that Conover rode to the top in the \$25,000 WCHR Professional Finals, sponsored by the Rein Family, one of the featured classes at the Capital Challenge Horse show, September 28-October 8 in Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

Her victory was met with unprecedented support from those who know

her and the many fans she's developed throughout her impressive riding career. Dozens dressed in "Team Kate" T-shirts filled the stands in the Prince George's Equestrian Center to cheer her on enthusiastically and join her for the awards photos (see p. 38).

"[I'm] proud of my friend Kate Conover. A great rider, a respected horsewoman, a champion, legend and superb friend. I'm lucky to dance with

you. Congrats on slaying the WCHR Pro Finals," wrote defending champion Nick Haness after he placed fifth in the class.

"I go through phases where I show a lot, but this year's been a little different," said Conover, who decided that riding in the Professional Finals was her primary mission for 2023.

Conover, of Ocala, Florida, was one of six top professional Hunter riders who qualified for the Finals and began in the



Kate Conover focused on showing in 2023, which resulted in her first WCHR Professional Finals appearance and the victory.



Ingenium Farm's Totoka Fuji received the Best Horse Award in the WCHR Pro Finals after earning the highest cumulative score with the four riders.

opening Playoff Round on Friday evening. She joined Shelley Campf, Nick Haness, Geoffrey Hesslink, Brady Mitchell and Leslie Steele, who each qualified based on their WCHR national standings.

Aboard horses of their choosing, all six jumped a Handy Round designed by Ken Krome and Meghan Rawlins. From there, the field was narrowed to the top four for the Final Four, where the riders returned with a clean slate and rotated

rides aboard for unfamiliar horses, generously donated by their owners.

For the Playoff Round, Conover chose Small Friendship, owned by R&R Sport Horses LLC. They posted an average score of 93 from the three judging panels—Chris Wynne and Virginia Edwards, Brian Lenehan and Scott Fitton, and Mark Jungheer and Eric Dirks. She and the 11-year-old Holsteiner gelding nailed the course, which included mul-



As icing on their winning week, Rindy Dominguez and Frosted captured the WCHR Adult Challenge.



DJ Johnson, owner/operator of Johnson Horse Transportation, Inc., received the David Peterson Perpetual Trophy from Louise Serio, left, and Whitney Allen for his dedication and commitment to the care and well-being of horses.



Caroline Ingalls piloted Concerto to the top in the WCHR 3'6" Amateur-Owner Challenge.



Vivian Yowan received the Derbydown Trophy for her score of 92 aboard Knowingly.

title option jumps, a walk-through chute and a long gallop to the final oxer.

"The horse I brought in the first round is one that I show in the 3'6" Greens, and I thought that I should go with one that I really know in that class because [on] that track you had to be handy," said Conover of the 11-year-old Holsteiner (Cassini I—Ungewitter). "I made the right decision going with him, and he rose to the occasion. From there it was pretty amazing, the whole experience."

Geoffrey Hesslink (Spoken), Brady Mitchell (Holden Out) and Shelley

Campf (Understudy) placed second, third and fourth, respectively, in the Playoff to make the cut for the final four. The two Californians in the class had some bad luck, with Hanes, of Temecula, placing fifth aboard Queen Celeste, and Leslie Steele, of Calabasas, taking sixth riding No Reservations.

On a Mission

Conover started the Final Four riding Totoka Fuji, a 9-year-old Belgian Sport Horse gelding owned by Ingenium Farm. Her 88 aboard the striking pinto led the field by 2 points. She only lengthened

that lead on her second mount, Actionable, a 7-year-old Oldenburg gelding owned by LG Sportshores LLC. They earned the high score of the competition with a 92, which increased her lead to 8 points.

It was obvious that Conover had a talent for quickly connecting with new horses and bringing out their best.

"When I was a kid, and my whole life, I never really had the same horse or pony all the time, so it's a lot of experience of just trying to make a relationship very fast," she said. "You don't ride every horse the same. Riding a lot of different horses



John French won his third WCHR Professional Challenge with the remarkable Babylon, bringing his career total to six.

my whole life really set me up well for this class here today."

For the third round, she piloted Life-style, a 7-year-old KWPN gelding owned by Topline Imports LLC. Although her lead diminished to 5.34 points, she didn't let that worry her. Aboard her final ride, A Little Less Conversation, a 7-year-old Oldenburg gelding owned by Emily Wolkind, she sealed her victory with a score of 86.33.

For her win, Conover received the All The Way Perpetual Trophy, donated by Elizabeth Busch Burke and Lisa Burke Horkan.

Mitchell, of Wellington, Florida, riding in his first Pro Finals, placed second. After a rough start in the first round with a spooky horse and a refusal, he received a re-ride and made the most of it. He kept the momentum going, his best score of 91.66 coming aboard Totoka Fuji, a horse Mitchell had been looking forward to riding.

"From the first second this morning [when we saw the horses school], I have to say, I wanted to make the second round so I could ride the paint horse," he said. "I knew I was going to like the way that horse felt. I'm really glad that I



Martha Ingram was all smiles after earning the WCHR 3'3" Amateur-Owner Challenge title with Private Practice.



Halle Robinson topped a tough field in the WCHR Developing Professional Challenge with great jumping by Leisure.

had a chance to ride all of the horses, but he gave this wonderful feeling and that ended up being my best round."

Totoka Fuji's consistently impressive performances in the Final Four earned him the Far West Farms Perpetual Trophy, donated by the Karazissis Family, as the horse with the highest cumulative point total in the four rounds of the Final Four.

Campf, of Portland, Oregon, also made her Pro Finals debut and finished wearing the yellow sash for third. Campf, who attended the inaugural Capital Challenge in 1994, has for 15 years

2023 WCHR National Champions

- Professional Nick Haness**
Professional Owner
 John and Stephanie Ingram LLC
- Developing Professional**
 Falie Robinson
- Developing Professional Owner**
 Stable Assets
- Amateur-Owner 3'6"**
 Caroline Ingalls
- Amateur-Owner 3'3"**
 Stephanie Bulger
- Adult Amateur** Rindy Dominguez
- Junior 3'6"** Ariana Marnell
- Junior 3'3"** Katherine Simonds
- Children's** Madison Wu
- Pony** Emi Richard



Harley Holt celebrated his WCHR Children's Challenge victory aboard Con Figaro with Capital Challenge Sponsorship Manager Jennifer Glass.

WCHR Trophies

- In Disguise Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by Ellen and Jim Toon
- Derbydown Trophy**
 Donated by Louise Serio
- Urala Perpetual Trophy** Donated by Kimberly and Terry Maloomian
- Rox Dene Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by Elaine and Chanda Boylen
- Jeffrey Katz Trophy** Donated by Lisa Cudahy
- Alabama Clay Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by The Weisman Family
- Small Town Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by Iwasaki & Reilly
- Charles Johnson Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated in memory of Charles Johnson
- Winter's Run Sportsmanship Award**
 Donated by Patricia Bosley
- Daniel P. Lenehan Perpetual Trophy**
 Presented by the WCHR Committee
- David Peterson Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by Kavar Kerr & Jim Anderson
- Old Spring House Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by the Old Spring House Corporation
- Stewart Warner Perpetual Trophy**
 Donated by Don Stewart and Louise Serio

claimed either the championship or reserve in the WCHR Northwest Region standings.

"When I come here [to the Capital Challenge], I'm always very focused on delivering for my customers in their classes," she said. "I got invited into this class. I haven't been showing much this summer because I ripped my abductor muscle in my thigh, so it was kind of exciting. I didn't know how it was going to go. It was really fun to be riding with these riders, and we were all really helping each other. I thought it was a fun environment."

Hesslink, of Wellington, Florida, placed second in the Playoff Round but had an unfortunate start to the Final Four. A refusal from his first

mount resulted in a re-ride, but after a rail down on the same horse in the re-ride, Hesslink elected to retire from that round.

"It wasn't my night tonight, and that's OK," said Hesslink. "I did get an honor to be in this class, and I think Kate is one of the most beautiful and most amazing riders, so I could not be happier for her."

Words From the WCHR Challenge Winners

\$25,000 WCHR Professional Challenge:
John French and Babylon, owned by Marnell Sport Horses

"It's still special, and he's such a special challenge," said French of his sixth victory in the Professional Challenge and his third

aboard Babylon, an 8-year-old Oldenburg (Crumbie—Die Cera). "When you bring them up from the very beginning, it means a lot because, I don't know—we just have a special relationship.

"Most people show their horses all week, and I just brought him here last night. I save him for the special classes. I wanted him to be out at the farm and turned out because he's doing the Juniors here, too. He amazed me three years ago when he was a First-Year horse and only 6 years old, and was grand champion and won this class. Then last year, he won this class and was champion in the Juniors, and then he won this again.

"He just likes this show so much. He's the kind of horse I like [to ride] in the morning. We go on a lot of trails, you know, and if I'm having a bad day or whatever, we have a lot of conversations. He's just a very special horse."

\$10,000 WCHR Developing Professional Challenge: Halie Robinson and Leisure, owned by Stable Assets

"She was so amazing, because it's a big atmosphere for a younger horse, and I didn't really know what to expect," said Robinson of the 8-year-old Hanoverian (Comte—Quanta Costa). "She's never put a foot wrong with us, and she's always amazing. But tonight, I just wanted to give her whatever she needed, and she was a professional out there and really didn't need too much help.

"I just tried to give her the best ride I could so that she could have a special night. I love being at Capital Challenge; it's my favorite horse show of the year. I'm so happy to be here with her. It's a class that I've done a couple of times, and I've gotten closer and closer [to winning], but it was finally tonight, so I was really happy. It's also so great to win on a horse that we've gotten to know over the last couple months and so rewarding to have her really shine at the end."

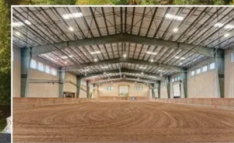
\$5,000 WCHR Amateur-Owner 3'6" Challenge: Caroline Ingalls and her own Concerto

"This horse—he's one in a million," said Ingalls of the 12-year-old Westphalian (Cathanos—Chevelle La Ferme).

"He's one of those horses that you don't really come across very often. It's just so special. I've had him seven years, and we got him when he was almost 5. He was originally supposed to be an Equitation horse for me. And when we were training him, we wanted to get him more ring time, so we put him in the Hunters. And he did

really well. So, we're like, 'Oh, well, maybe this is his calling.'

"And, so, we kept him in the Hunters, and he's completely blown us away. He was grand champion at Devon this year, he retired a trophy at the National Horse show last year, and we were grand champions at Harrisburg [the Pennsylvania National]



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\$25,000 USHJA WCHR Professional Finals Results

Rider	Playoff	Final 1	Final 2	Final 3	Final 4	Final Total
1. KATE CONOVER	93	88	92	89	86.33	355.33
2. BRADY MITCHELL	86.66	86	86	91.66	89.33	352.99
3. SHELLEY CAMPF	86.66	83.33	85.83	88.66	83.33	341.15
4. GEOFFREY HESSLINK	88.33	0	84.33	83.66	91.33	259.32
5. NICK HANESS	71.66					
6. LESLIE STEELE	66.33					



Ariana Marnell and Babylon celebrated their victory in the WCHR 3'6" Junior Challenge and WCHR Junior National Championship.



Katherine Simonds was pleased with Crowd Pleaser, who carried her to the WCHR 3'3" Junior Challenge Championship.

last year. He's just racking up the big indoor championships and making all my dreams come true as a rider. I'm so thankful and can't thank my team enough."

\$2,500 WCHR Amateur-Owner 3'3" Challenge: Martha Ingram and Private Practice, owned by John and Stephanie Ingram LLC

"I trust him, and he's such a winner," said Ingram of the 13-year-old Holsteiner (by Lordanos). "And, you know, I had a really great week with him over the past few days, and so my goal in this class was really just to make sure I had fun and riding the way that I know how.

"We've had him for a while now. But just over the past couple of months I've really understood his ride, because it's really like riding a Formula One racecar, where you know you can go from gear zero to gear 20 so quickly. He's really responsive, which is part of what makes him really special. It was a really fun course today, and I thought he jumped his heart out."

\$2,500 WCHR Adult Amateur Challenge: Rindy Dominguez and her own Frosted

"He's just been amazing, and this has been

such a great year with him," said Dominguez of the 9-year-old Holsteiner (Connor—Zucht-buch). "He was a jumper in the Ukraine, and we imported him last October, but he had to stay in quarantine for a month because he's a stallion.

"I started showing him this winter in the Adults, and this was my first year doing this class. It's been a lot of fun, and I really enjoyed the process of bringing the horse along and being able to put it all together. This was our goal; we're not doing any other finals, so this was an excellent way to finish the year."

\$5,000 WCHR Junior 3'6" Challenge: Ariana Marnell and Babylon, owned by Marnell Sport Horses

"I'm speechless. I don't even know how to describe this week," said Marnell. "Both horses [Babylon and Ocean Road] were just amazing. Amazing. I'm so lucky to have horses like these and a team like this. I definitely felt some pressure, especially after he had won the Challenge with John. We were a close second in this class last year, so I wanted to win this year more so for him than me.

"He deserves to win every class he goes in, and he does unless I make a mistake. He's just a real winner. So, I think that winning the last class at Capital Challenge, and maybe my last class here with him, was really special."

\$2,500 WCHR Junior 3'3" Challenge: Katherine Simonds and Crowd Pleaser, owned by West Coast Equine Partners LLC

"This year there was definitely pressure," said Simonds, who defended her challenge victory, this time aboard the Selle Francais Crowd Pleaser (Quidam De Revel—Kamtchatka). "I wanted to come back and just have another amazing year. We call Crowd Pleaser 'Taxi' in the barn. He really showed up to win, and I was really happy.

He's a little bit slow to start, but once you get him off your leg, he really gets going. He's a real competitor and is so game. He knows exactly what you want and is a great partner. This weekend has been amazing. It really takes a village, and I couldn't have done it without everyone's support. This has been a beautiful Junior career."

\$1,500 WCHR Children's Challenge and WCHR Children's Challenge: Harley Hott and his own Con Figaro



Emi Richard, the WCHR Pony Challenge winner aboard Prestige, and Vivian Golden, riding Brixton, rejoiced after receiving the WCHR Pony National championship and reserve championship, respectively.

“Since I started doing the Children’s Hunters, this has been a goal,” said Hott, who was competing at his first Capital Challenge with the 11-year-old Oldenburg (Cabardino N—Lhayla). “I always wanted to actually go to a big horse show like this and do something good.

“I tried to ride the course as best I could. I had lots of people telling me what to do, and it’s sometimes hard to keep it all in my brain, but I tried my hardest for this class. Everything went well besides one little rough moment, but I got an 85 and I was really happy.”

**\$2,500 WCHR Pony Challenge:
Emi Richard and Prestige, owned by Swede Ventures LLC**

“He’s amazing. Riding him is so much fun,” said Richard of the 12-year-old Belgian Riding Pony (Ive Van De Delthoeve—Bichette Du Moulin De Pierres). “My friend [Sophie Stenbeck] asked me to ride him a couple of months ago, so I’m just helping them out. I think he likes my soft riding, and we clicked.

“I’ve done this class before, and I think I was seventh one year. I haven’t done very well. But having this pony made all the difference, and I’ve definitely gotten a lot better

as a rider since then. It all came together, and it’s so fun.”

WCHR Awards and Trophy Winners

In Disguise Perpetual Trophy presented to the trainer of the WCHR Amateur-Owner 3’6” National Champion—Hap Hansen

Professional American Style of Riding Award—Jacob Pope

Developing Professional American Style of Riding Award—Hunter Kay

Derbydown Trophy—Vivian Yowan and Knowingly, owned by Partridge Hill Equestrian LLC, with a score of 92

Urlala Perpetual Trophy—Frosted and Rindy Dominguez

Rox Dene Perpetual Trophy—Pavlova, ridden by Nick Haness and Kate Conover, and owned by John and Stephanie Ingram LLC

Jeffrey Katz Trophy—McQueen, ridden by Nick Haness and owned by Walkenbach Equestrian LLC

Alabama Clay Conformation Hunter Perpetual Trophy—California Love, ridden by Scott Stewart and owned by Rivers Edge

Small Town Perpetual Trophy—Babylon, ridden by Ariana Marnell and owned by Marnell Sport Horses

Charles Johnson Perpetual Trophy, presented to the high-point rider from the Midwest Region—Christopher Payne
Winter’s Run Sportsmanship Award—Mary Gatti

Daniel P. Lenehan Perpetual Trophy, presented by the WCHR Committee to a person who exemplifies dedication and lifetime commitment to judging show Hunters—Bill Ellis

David Peterson Perpetual Trophy, presented by the WCHR Committee to a person who exemplifies dedication and commitment to the care and well-being of horses—DJ Johnson

**Old Springhouse Perpetual Trophy/
WCHR Lifetime Achievement Award**—Hap Hansen

USHJA/WCHR Course Designer Perpetual Trophy—Meghan Rawlins

Stewart Warner Perpetual Trophy, presented to the Pony, Junior and Children’s riders who, in the opinion of the judging panel, exhibit the best Hunter style and show potential as Hunter-style riders:

Junior 3’3”/3’6”—Christopher Dominguez
Children’s—Wyatt Rofey
Pony—Colin Shippman