



Mackenzie Wray and Jewel LVP jumped double-clear to place fourth in her first CSI2* Grand Prix at the Longines Masters of New York.

YOUNG GUNS! PROFILING MACKENZIE WRAY

Taking a Step Back to Leap Forward. By Molly Sorge

Mackenzie Wray is heading into her summer season with a big goal and a boost of confidence. The 20-year-old from Loretto, ON, jumped in her first Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) sanctioned competition at the Longines Masters of New York (LMNY) held from April 25 to 28 in Uniondale, NY. In her CSI2* debut, she turned in two double-clear performances riding Jewel LVP to place fourth in both the 1.45m Lami-Cell Under 25 class and the CSI2* Equo App Grand Prix.

"It was an amazing show for me," said Wray. "It was the first time I'd ever jogged FEI with Jewel or done the U25 with her. It all kind of came together there, and it gave me a lot of confidence for the summer."

Wray carried that confidence into the first FEI event on the Canadian summer calendar, the CSI2* Caledon National show jumping tournament in Caledon, ON, where she and Jewel LVP jumped two clear rounds and placed seventh in the \$72,000 CSI2* Grand Prix, presented by Case IH, on Saturday, May 18.

Wray plans to continue to build on her success at the Upperville Colt & Horse Show in Virginia in June and then during the Spruce Meadows summer tournaments in Calgary, AB. She hopes to be selected to represent Canada at the Adequan®/FEI North American Youth Championships (NAYC) at Old Salem Farm in New York in August, which would mark her NAYC debut.

For Wray's trainer, Canadian Equestrian Team veteran Erynn Ballard, the LMNY show was a real turning point for the young rider.

"A show like the New York Masters changes somebody," said Ballard. "I do see a difference in her coming home from there. I think it's a cool show that gives you a taste of Europe that we don't see here in North America often. If you've never seen anything like that before, and you've never shown at anything like that before, it's a big deal.

"To have a show like she did, to jump clear rounds in the two big classes, it makes you feel like a better rider," continued Ballard. "You are a better rider for doing it. Even if she'd had one down in those classes, she would have been a better rider for the experience. It just happened that she went clean in both, so the experience was 10 times greater."

Making Smart Choices

Ballard sees Wray's success this spring as a direct by-product of some lessons learned during the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, FL. Wray has enjoyed many accolades in her riding career, including winning the Jump Canada Medal Final in 2016 and the Running Fox CET Medal Final in 2017, under Ballard's tutelage. She bought Jewel LVP in Europe in the summer of 2018 through Stal Hendrix with NAYC as a specific goal with the mare.

The pair earned a second-place finish in the 1.40m division at Toronto's Royal Horse Show in November. By December, Wray and the 10-year-old Belgian Warmblood mare (Berlin x Contender) had jumped their first 1.50m grand prix together in the \$25,000 ProElite Grand Prix at ESP Holiday II in Wellington, FL.

"She spent December with me and rode every day, and they finished in one of the \$50,000 pre-circuit grand prix classes," Ballard said. "It was quite big, and she didn't have a clear round, but they were solid. At that stage of riding, you're not expected to go clear in your first big grand prix. It would be great if you could, but it's a fact of life that it's not going to happen. I told her, 'You know you can jump that big and your horse can jump that big. Now we need to fine-tune your riding so you can jump that big clear.'"

During the WEF season, Wray was also juggling riding with her first semester at Humber College in Toronto, flying back and forth to show. Ballard advised her to spend some time in smaller classes, in the medium amateur-owner division, to hone her skills.

"The high amateur-owner classic at WEF is a two-star grand prix in the rest of the world," Ballard said. "Not only was it a fairly new partnership, but she was flying back and forth, so it was a correct step."

"I had to work in Florida with getting to know Jewel and being able to jump clear," Wray said. "I think after doing the equitation for so long, I struggled a little bit with riding the jumpers, because it is different. During Florida, I had to learn how to ride more jumper style than equitation. I had to remember that I didn't need to think about looking good, just about going clear. The pressure of the jump-off is different, and I had to learn that, too."

By the end of her time at WEF, Wray and Jewel moved up to the high amateur-owner division and finished the 12-week circuit with a fourth-placed finish in the \$15,000 High Amateur-Owner Jumper Classic. Then in April, she turned in those pivotal clear rounds at LMNY and went on to a double-clear performance in her first FEI grand prix at the CSI2* Caledon National.

"I think her winter taught her everything she needed to be where she is today," Ballard said.

Small Mare, Big Jump

One of the other essential elements to Wray's success is Jewel, a little mare who has captured both Ballard and Wray's hearts.

"Jewel is not big at all; she's not much taller than a pony!" Wray said. "We love that about her. It's like she has springs; I'm not sure how such a little horse can jump so big!

"She's not really hot," Wray continued. "She carries herself perfectly; she's a very nice horse to ride. She's very brave. The first few days at a show she can be a bit crazy, but she's very serious when she shows. She knows what her job is."

Jewel competed up to the 1.40m level in Europe before Wray's family bought her in the summer of 2018. Jewel's size was one of the reasons Ballard thought they'd be a good match, since Wray is of smaller stature.

"Mackenzie's first horse, that started as an equitation horse and finished as a junior jumper, had a very long front end from wither to poll, so it was a lot of stride management and holding him together," Ballard said. "When she moved to the next horse, size was something I wanted to take into consideration. Some little horses come with short strides or less scope, but Jewel is the exception to every rule. She's like Hickstead; she can jump any class you want to in the world."

Wray lives just five minutes from Ballard's base at Looking Back Farm in Tottenham, ON, so she spends every moment she can at the barn with Jewel, trail riding and taking the mare out to graze. Her fascination with horses is a mystery to her parents, brother, and sister, since the family had no connection to horses, but they've embraced her passion and supported her.

"My family isn't into animals at all," Wray said. "It's weird that I love horses so much, but I always have. I was adopted from China, and ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to be around horses and have riding lessons. I begged my mom to take riding lessons, and she didn't let me until I was eight."



Double-clear rounds riding Jewel LVP in the CSI2* division at the Longines Masters of New York boosted Mackenzie Wray's confidence for the summer season.

Wray started lessons and showing with Gord Munro at Foxbury Farm before moving to ride with Ballard in 2013.

"I've done hunters and equitation and jumpers with her," said Wray of working with Ballard. "She's taught me everything; I would not be the rider I am today without her. When I have a bit of a learning curve, she helps explain things and is patient."

Throughout her high school years, Wray not only attended school online, but also played ice hockey competitively along with her riding. However, after starting her degree in international business at Humber College, Wray is focusing on riding and has hung up her skates.

Now that Wray is stepping up to the grand prix classes, Ballard is pushing her to develop in other ways, too. In one class at the CSI2* Caledon National, there were few entries and Ballard had three to ride.

"We walked the course, and I said, 'Alright, today, you're warming yourself up,' and she prepared herself perfectly and was ready to go in," said Ballard. "It's cool seeing her take the next step. Her parents have raised a very independent, kind person. They did a great job."



Mackenzie Wray (left) and her good friend Dannie Murphy (right) both train with Erynn Ballard.

NAYC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST DUE BY JUNE 10

Athletes interested in being selected for the 2019 North American Youth Championships are reminded that Declarations of Interest are due by Monday, June 10.

In order to submit a Declaration of Interest, athletes must create/update an online profile through EC's Major Games and Championships Portal at <https://licence.equestrian.ca/gamesdb/login.aspx>.

For the second year in a row, the North American Youth Championships, open to riders aged 12 to 21, will be hosted by Old Salem Farm in North Salem, NY. The dates for this year's competition are July 31 to August 4, 2019. Age requirements for the three divisions offered are as follows:

Young Rider: Ages 16-21 (born on or between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 2003).

Junior: Ages 14-18 (born on or between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2005).

Children: Ages 12-14 (born on or between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2007).

Sanctioned by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), the NAYC are designed to mirror the competition format used at the Olympic and Pan American Games with the objective of introducing and preparing competitors for international competitions as well as giving athletes the opportunity and experience to compete as team members.

For complete North American Youth Championships criteria, [click here](#).



Canada's gold medal winning team in the Children's division at the 2018 North American Youth Championships.