

# Weniger Claims Her Birthright With Freestyle Gold At Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships

*Her victory has been 19 years in the making.*

BY EMILY STAKEM

Marlene Whitaker promised Anna Weniger's mother a young rider freestyle for her daughter as a baby shower present, and with that gift Weniger delivered a gold-medal winning test on Don Derrick at the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships. EMILY STAKEM PHOTO



**A**nna Weniger was a long way from even sitting on a horse when family friend and freestyle specialist Marlene Whitaker promised her parents, Dawn and Andrew Weniger, that she'd create a young rider freestyle for their daughter when the time came.

What began as a baby shower gift turned into a gold medal at the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships, held Aug. 1-5 at Old Salem Farm in North Salem, New York.

Anna admitted she never really thought it would happen.

"It was just kind of in the back of my head for many years," said Anna, 19. "I started competing at young riders, and Marlene just shows up and was like, 'Hey, would you like me to make you this freestyle that I said I would make you?' And I was like, 'Well, OK! That sounds awesome!'"

Whitaker didn't stop with just one freestyle. After Anna performed the first one she created, Whitaker decided it wasn't good enough for the budding young rider and created a new track. Anna's current test features music from Jane Austen movie soundtracks, and her win in the USDF North American Young Rider Dressage Freestyle Championship (74.22%) was only the fourth time she'd ridden it. She also collected team bronze with the Region 1 team earlier in the week, behind Team Quebec/Alberta in first and the mixed team from Regions 4 and 7 in silver.

"I've been dreaming of winning a medal at this show for almost 10 years," said Anna. "Winning an individual medal is way more than I ever imagined."

And just as Anna's freestyle was prophesied long before she had the NAYC in her sights, so was the horse she rode. Her parents own Firstview Farm in Apex, North Carolina, and Anna's mother, Dawn, bought Don Derrick, a 14-year-old Dutch Riding Horse (Don Ruto—Gambrina, Libertino I) as a 2-year-old in Belgium when Anna was 7. She had little to go on beyond a kind personality and

three good gaits.

"My mom said to me, 'Maybe if I train him right, he'll be your young riders horse one day,' and here we are," said Anna.

Dawn trained and competed Don Derrick through Grand Prix before handing over the ride to Anna two years ago.

But Anna's familiarity with the gelding gave her a good start in building a quick partnership.

"I did juniors [with Don Derrick] in 2016, and it was a bit of a whirlwind," Anna said. "I had not much clue what I was doing back then; I was sort of just steering. Over the last two years I've really gotten to know

## ADEQUAN FEI NORTH AMERICAN YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS North Salem, N.Y.—Aug. 1-5

### ► YOUNG RIDER INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Gabriel Armando (ARG); H: Lee Tubman (CAN); C: Cesar Torrente (COL); M: Ricky MacMillan (AUS); B: Christof Umbach (LUX)

HORSE/RIDER/NATION/REGION	E	H	C	M	B	TOTAL
1. Don Filippo/Callie Jones/USA/2	70.14	73.97	72.20	71.47	73.23	72.20
2. Delfiano/Beatrice Boucher/CAN/Que./Alta.	68.97	72.50	69.70	72.35	71.61	71.02
3. Perfect Step/Kayla Kadlubek/USA/1	71.32	72.20	70.58	70.00	69.70	70.76
4. Davidoff V.H. Trichelhof/Rakeya Moussa/CAN/Que./Alta.	70.58	70.88	68.52	70.73	71.17	70.38
5. Don Derrick/Anna Weniger/USA/1	68.67	69.85	69.11	71.17	69.11	69.58
6. Baldacci/Camille Carrier Bergeron/CAN/Que./Alta.	69.70	69.70	68.08	70.14	68.67	69.26

Also competed: 7. Lambada/N. Scarpino/USA/3, 69.20; 8. Iggi Pop/B. Kerr/USA/8, 68.41; 9. Twelfth Night/A. Redston/USA/8, 67.20; 10. Hollywood/M. Syribeys/USA/3, 66.82; 11. Behlinger/B. Ebeling/USA/7, 66.47; 12. Three Times/K. Counterman/USA/1, 66.08; 13. Vade Mecum Interagro/A. Tedlund/USA/4, 65.41; 14. Harley L/V. Creech-Terauds/CAN/Ont., 64.76; 15. Idolo Americano HGF/S. Schults/USA/3, 63.44; 16. Nido King/E. Sevriens/USA/3, 63.08; 17. RF Cosima/A. Youngdale/CAN/Ont., 62.41; 18. Ritter Benno/A. MacCoubrey/CAN/Ont., 61.64; 19. Chateau/K. Christensen/USA/2, 61.32; 20. Rosamunde/J. Barrett/CAN/Ont., 60.88; 21. Ringmoylan/E. Szegvari/USA/8, 60.47; 22T. Weltrubin/J. Mackie/USA/2, 59.32; 22T. Westerstorm/J. Upchurch/USA/4, 59.32; 24. Stenkaergards Mr. Swing King/L. Erdogus-Brady/USA/8, 58.97; 25. Leonardo/G. Sacoman/USA/2, 58.41; 26. Quando Boy/A. Perkowski/USA/1, 58.26; FRH Rassolini/C. Simonson/USA/7, E; Apachi/T. Jones/USA/4, W.

### ► YOUNG RIDER FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Irina Maknami (RUS); H: MacMillan; C: Umbach; M: Armando; B: Sandy Hotz (USA)

HORSE/RIDER/NATION/REGION	E	H	C	M	B	TOTAL
1. Don Derrick/Anna Weniger/USA/1	73.75	74.75	73.87	73.37	75.37	74.22
2. Delfiano/Beatrice Boucher/CAN/Que./Alta.	73.50	74.50	74.00	69.87	72.12	72.80
3. Don Filippo/Callie Jones/USA/2	73.75	70.25	74.62	71.62	73.62	72.77
4T. Lambada/Nicole Scarpino/USA/3	72.25	74.25	71.62	70.00	73.75	72.37
4T. Iggi Pop/Bobbie Kerr/USA/8	74.25	72.50	72.25	70.75	71.12	72.37
6. Behlinger/Benjamin Ebeling/USA/7	71.12	70.37	70.37	73.25	69.25	70.87

Also competed: 7T. Davidoff V.H. Trichelhof/R. Moussa/CAN/Que./Alta., 69.60; 7T. Baldacci/C. Bergeron/CAN/Que./Alta., 69.60; 9. Perfect Step/K. Kadlubek/USA/1, 69.35; 10. Three Times/K. Counterman/USA/1, 68.50; 11. Hollywood/M. Syribeys/USA/3, 68.30; 12. RF Cosima/A. Youngdale/CAN/Ont., 66.57; 13. Vade Mecum Interagro/A. Tedlund/USA/4, 66.40; 14. Harley L/V. Creech-Terauds/CAN/Ont., 66.27; 15. Nido King/E. Sevriens/USA/3, 66.25; 16. Rosamunde/J. Barrett/CAN/Ont., 61.15; 17. Chateau/K. Christensen/USA/2, 60.97; 18. Twelfth Night/A. Redston/USA/8, 59.95.

### ► YOUNG RIDER TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Umbach; H: Armando; C: Tubman; M: Torrente; B: MacMillan

1. CAN/Que./Alta (Davidoff V.H. Trichelhof/R. Moussa, Delfiano/B. Boucher, Baldacci/C. Bergeron), 210.14; 2. USA/Region 4, 7 (Westerstorm/J. Upchurch, Vade Mecum Interagro/A. Tedlund, Apachi/T. Jones, FRH Rassolini/C. Simonson), 202.64; 3. USA/Region 1 (Quando Boy/A. Perkowski, Three Times/K. Counterman, Don Derrick/A. Weniger, Perfect Step/K. Kadlubek), 202.08; 4. USA/Region 3 (Hollywood/M. Syribeys, Idolo Americano HGF/S. Schults, Nido King/E. Sevriens, Lambada/N. Scarpino), 199.99; 5. USA/Region 2 (Chateau/K. Christensen, Leonardo/G. Sacoman, Weltrubin/J. Mackie, Don Filippo/C. Jones), 198.58; 6. USA/Region 8 (Stenkaergards Mr. Swing King/L. Erdogus-Brady, Ringmoylan/E. Szegvari, Twelfth Night/A. Redston, Iggi Pop/B. Kerr), 198.44; 7. CAN/Ont. (RF Cosima/A. Youngdale, Rosamunde/J. Barrett, Ritter Benno/A. MacCoubrey, Harley L/V. Creech-Terauds), 197.38.

## ▶ YOUNG ENTRY

him better, and now we're schooling most of the Grand Prix at home."

Anna said she couldn't really imagine a situation where she wasn't the one caring for her horses because she's grown up having them right in her backyard.

"I've lived at this barn since I was 1, and I've always been around horses every single day and known the horses I've ridden really well," said Anna. "I think it's really helpful to know your horse inside and out and to be able to go hang out with them in the field if you want to."

Anna trains with her mother and George Williams. She admits that having a parent as a coach can be difficult at times, but Williams helps balance the relationship.

"Their training styles really complement each other, and for the most part it's really easy to work with both of them," said Anna. "[My mom is] not just my trainer because she's my mom, she's also my trainer because I think she's one of the best trainers I could work with, and I really believe in her philosophy in letting the horses be horses."

### Robertson Surprises Herself

Unlike Anna, Chase Robertson hasn't known her horse forever. In fact, she's only been riding Winsome for a year. She came to NAYC to gain some mileage on her new mount but earned a lot more, winning the USDF North American Junior Dressage Freestyle Championship and bronze in the junior individual championship.

Robertson got her start in the jumpers, but when she outgrew her pony, she wasn't opposed to finding a new discipline. Her trainer at the time found a good-moving warmblood at an auction, and Robertson gave dressage a try. The pair progressed through first level, and that's where experienced dressage horse Winsome came in. The 15-year-old Dutch Warmblood (Obelisk—Jodena, Wolfgang) owned by Teresa Van Lambalgen helped Robertson move up to the juniors in under a year.

But the 16-year-old from Calgary, Alberta, never expected

## ▶ Tidbits

▶ **CALLIE JONES**, 20, may have needed to buy a new bag to get all her swag from the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships home to Henderson, Kentucky. She claimed the USDF Young Rider Dressage Individual Championship and followed that up with a bronze medal for her freestyle ride with Don Philippo. Jones was also the recipient of the Dressage Style Award and the Fiona Baan Memorial Trophy, given to the rider with the highest combined score from team, individual and freestyle rides.

▶ In addition to her team gold with the squad from Quebec/Alberta, **BEATRICE BOUCHER**, 20, earned silver in the USDF Young Rider Dressage Freestyle Championship (72.80%), despite her horse Delfiano spooking in front of the judges at C in the beginning of their test.

She said the spook didn't derail her because she was going to be happy with whatever the outcome would have been. "I said, 'Let's just do our best, and we'll see what happens and be a team.' We were going to do that together," said Boucher.



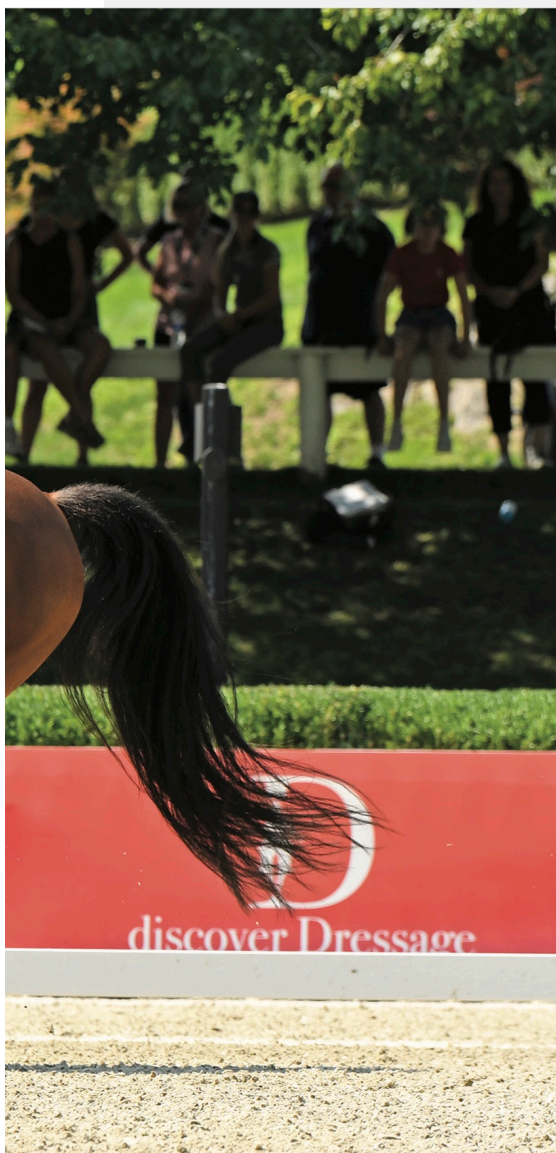
Caroline Garren and Bell Angelo claimed the USDF North American Junior Dressage Individual Championship at the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships. EMILY STAKEM PHOTO

► **BIANCA SCHMIDT** kept it in the family when deciding who would help make her freestyle music. Her sister, Isabella, put together the music from Batman and X-Men movies, as Bianca is a DC Comics fan. Even though she has only been paired with her horse, Lou Heart, since February, the pair earned junior silver with a score of 71.90 percent.

► **CAROLINE GARREN** enjoyed a winning week, starting with a junior team gold medal with the Region 3 team. In her team test she wasn't

thrilled with the geometry of her movements, but with the help of trainer Karen Lipp, she was able to turn things around, and aboard Bell Angelo she moved on to claim the USDF North American Junior Dressage Individual Championship

(70.14%). She then took home a bronze medal for her freestyle ride as well. Before her rides Garren listened to recordings of sports psychologist and hypnotist Laura King, and that helped her feel more prepared going into the ring.



### ADEQUAN FEI NORTH AMERICAN YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIPS North Salem, N.Y.—Aug. 1-5

#### ► JUNIOR INDIVIDUAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Natacha Wadell (BRA); H: Cesar Lopardo Grana (ARG);  
C: Brenda Minor (CAN); M: Irina Maknami (RUS); B: Sandy Hotz (USA)

HORSE/RIDER/NATION/REGION	E	H	C	M	B	TOTAL
1. Bell Angelo/Caroline Garren/USA/3	68.67	70.58	68.38	71.61	71.47	70.14
2. Lou Heart/Bianca Schmidt/USA/4	67.35	69.85	72.20	70.14	70.58	70.02
3. Winsome/Chase Robertson/CAN	71.41	69.20	69.35	70.67	69.50	70.02
4. Tiko/Allison Nemeth/USA/1	66.17	67.50	70.44	69.70	69.11	68.58
5. Fiderprinz/Jori Dupell/USA/6	68.67	66.61	64.55	69.11	67.94	67.38
6. Mariska/Juliette Cain/USA/3	66.91	66.76	67.79	67.94	67.05	67.29

Also competed: 7T. Wellknown/B. Mancusi/CAN/Central, 67.17; 7T. FHF Racharee/R. McCool/USA/2, 67.17; 9. Wrazzmatazz/A. Swackhammer/CAN/Central, 66.82; 10. Qaro GS/J. Buchanan/CAN/Central, 66.05; 11. Ferra/S. Fritz/USA/4, 65.50; 12. Cuby/K. Templeton/USA/7, 65.14; 13. Fascinata/M. Doughty/USA/3, 65.08; 14. Ich Will Spass/M. Long/USA/8; 64.85; 15. Weltwunder/M. Gunyon/CAN/East, 64.79; 16. Raven Black/A. Dawson/USA/2, 64.26; 17. Don Akzentus/M. Matern/USA/4, 64.11; 18. Winniepuuh/A. Boesener/CAN/East, 63.64; 19. Dali De La Ferme Rose/I. Braden/USA/3, 63.58; 19. Aspen/E. Windsor/USA/8; 63.58; 21. World Lady/L. Lemaire/CAN/East, 63.35; 22. Ultima O.A./C. Horrigan/USA/1, 63.29; 23. W Spotlight/S. Chavonelle/USA/8, 63.17; 24. Ladybug/K. Williams-Brown/CAN/Central, 63.00; 25. Ducan/L. Smith/USA/1, 62.94; 26. Adel K/L. Tenney/USA/8, 62.50; 27. Dalanda/G. Bouchard/CAN/East, 62.32; 28. Coogan/M. Hohmann/USA/2, 61.76; 29. Aarakon/E. Martin/USA/9, 60.97.

#### ► JUNIOR FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Grana; H: Minor; C: Maknami; M: Gabriel Armando (ARG); B: Wadell

HORSE/RIDER/NATION/REGION	E	H	C	M	B	TOTAL
1. Winsome/Chase Robertson/CAN	72.62	75.62	75.12	72.00	73.50	73.77
2. Lou Heart/Bianca Schmidt/USA/4	70.02	70.12	73.87	73.12	72.37	71.90
3. Bell Angelo/Caroline Garren/USA/3	71.45	71.00	73.62	71.00	70.37	71.49
4. Tiko/Allison Nemeth/USA/1	68.17	68.75	72.00	71.00	70.37	70.06
5. Weltwunder/Molly Gunyon/CAN/East	67.25	69.37	69.62	67.25	68.50	68.40
6. Fascinata/Melanie Doughty/USA/3	66.97	69.25	70.00	67.37	67.62	68.24

Also competed: 7. Fiderprinz/J. Dupell/USA/6, 68.23; 8. Wrazzmatazz/A. Swackhammer/CAN/Central, 67.94; 9. Qaro GS/J. Buchanan/CAN/Central, 67.51; 10. Ferra/S. Fritz/USA/4, 67.36; 11. Cuby/K. Templeton/USA/7, 67.29; 12. FHF Racharee/R. McCool/USA/2, 66.69; 13. Mariska/J. Cain/USA/3, 66.54; 14. Raven Black/A. Dawson/USA/2, 66.32; 15. Winniepuuh/A. Boesener/CAN/East, 65.65; 16. Wellknown/B. Mancusi/CAN/Central, 65.59; 17. Ich Will Spass/M. Long/USA/8; 64.98; 18. Don Akzentus/M. Matern/USA/4, 64.51.

#### ► JUNIOR TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Judges: E: Minor; H: Maknami; C: Hotz; M: Wadell; B: Grana

1. USA/Region 3 (Dali De La Ferme Rose/I. Braden, Fascinata/M. Doughty, Mariska/J. Cain, Bell Angelo/C. Garren), 202.78; 2. USA/Region 4 (Ferra/S. Fritz, Eclipse BR/K. Tedlund, Don Akzentus/M. Matern, Lou Heart/B. Schmidt), 199.36; 3. CAN/Central (Qaro GS/J. Buchanan, Ladybug/K. Williams-Brown, Wrazzmatazz/A. Swackhammer, Wellknown/B. Mancusi), 199.15; 4. USA/Region 6, 7, 9 (Aarakon/E. Martin, Cuby/K. Templeton, Fiderprinz/J. Dupell), 194.21; 5. USA/Region 1 (Ducan/L. Smith, Ultima O.A./C. Horrigan, Tiko/A. Nemeth), 193.54; 6. CAN/East (World Lady/L. Lemaire, Dalanda/G. Bouchard, Winniepuuh/A. Boesener, Weltwunder/M. Gunyon), 193.07; 7. USA/Region 2 (Coogan/M. Hohmann, Raven Black/A. Dawson, FHF Racharee/R. McCool), 192.93; 8. USA/Region 8 (Ich Will Spass/M. Long, Aspen/E. Windsor, W Spotlight/S. Chavonelle, Adel K/L. Tenney), 192.13.

## ► YOUNG ENTRY

to perform a personal best when it counted the most, scoring 73.77 percent in the freestyle.

"I'm super emotional about it," said Robertson. "I've only done this test a few times, and the music really gets to me. Whenever [Winsome] hears the music, he always steps up too and is like, 'OK, let's do it.'"

Robertson trains with Pia Fortmuller when she's at home in Canada, and she works with Verena Sonstenes-Mahin when she travels to California.

NAYC was the first competition where Robertson has run the test all the way through with some tweaks she'd added.

"I was blown away with how well it went," she said. "We've had some troubles with some of the movements, and for him to step up to the plate and perform the way he did blows my mind. He's my heart horse. I couldn't ask for a better partner or best friend." 🐾



Chase Robertson was shocked to hear she'd won the USDF North American Junior Rider Dressage Freestyle Championship at the Adequan FEI North American Youth Championships, just one year after she started riding Winsome. *MOLLIE BAILEY PHOTO*



Region 3 junior team gold winners (from left) Isabelle Braden, Melanie Doughty, Juliette Cain and Caroline Garren celebrated their win with Chef d'Equipe Elizabeth Molloy. *MOLLIE BAILEY PHOTO*