

by Amelia Enzminger

Keep Calm & Canter On

The in's and out's of NAYC through the lens of a junior competitor.

For junior and young riders across the continent, qualifying for the North American Youth Championships is among one of the greatest accomplishments in our careers thus far. Riders battling for a spot on the Zone 10 team know all too well the excitement of traveling from show to show, gathering as many points as possible in the Junior and Young Rider Selection Trials. Showing throughout the California coast all for the chance to fly our horses across the country to compete for a spot on the podium.

At the beginning of the year, my initial chances of making it through the trials unscathed looked bleak and the possibility of being put on a team even bleaker. Tackling massive oxers, tricky bending lines, and spooky water jumps was a lot to handle for a rider who had just recently started showing at a 1.40M on a relatively new horse. The first trial came as a bit of a wake up call, showing me that I would have to work hard and really push myself to improve if I were to have a shot of making it to NAYC. By the end of the last trial, my horse and I had earned a spot as the alternate for Zone 10 ...whoopie!

Be it as an individual rider or a team member, I was ecstatic to fly out to New York and compete against some of the best junior riders in the world, but what would it be like once I got there? This question struck me frequently the closer we got to the show, especially after I received a call telling me that I would be the fourth team member after all. Though fun and fantastic, the answer to what it's like to compete at NAYC proved to be anything but simple.

Supporting Each Other

Between uncertain weather conditions and a multitude of young riders navigating their first FEI experience, we learned how important it would be to support each other through the changing tides of international competition. Pulling into Old Salem Farm, I was so excited to compete alongside the people who had been by my side throughout all of the trials back home. Before we even started showing, our Zone 10 officials warned us that something will always go haywire when competing at a competition like this. A comment we promptly

shrugged off until our team of four became a team of three... meaning no dropped score.

With all the events that went on during the week, each of us felt more eager than ever to finally get in the ring on Thursday for the individual finals. As I watched the first few rounds, I noticed how the pressure of it all served as a major obstacle to some riders while pushing others to perform in ways beyond what they thought possible. Nerves and pressure had always come to me as a challenge at times like this when I knew my performance would count towards something greater. In terms of staying calm in the face of pressure, "fake it til' you make it" became my ultimate mantra at the start of the week. However, the more I focused on appearing calm and collected, the more I was able to center myself and focus on the fun, not the stress of showing at this level. I felt more confident and prepared than ever stepping into the ring, remembering that this kind of adrenaline and excitement is what made me fall in love with show jumping all those years ago.

As upcoming riders, we take our careers so seriously that we often forget to sit back, enjoy the ride, and take in how lucky we are to spend

every day doing what we love aboard nature's most beautiful animals. Being at NAYC allowed me and dozens of others to catch a glimpse of international competition beyond our junior years. At competitions like NAYC, standings and plans change like the ocean tides and a major part of being successful in this environment is learning to persevere despite the definite setbacks that will appear every time you arrive at a new show.

"Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn," my trainer used to tell me whenever things got rough in the ring or even off of the horse, instilling in me this ability to move on and learn from the times where we could've done something better. Though the podium was just beyond reach this time around, I was proud to finish in the top 15 at my first FEI competition and even more proud to call Zone 10's supportive crew my own. With all of the energy, excitement, adrenaline, stress, and joy, I can't wait to do this for the rest of my life.

Author Amelia Enzminger trains with Katherine Gintzon & Greg Hedrick of Myrtle Hill Farms in La Canada/Flintridge.



The Zone 10 NAYC team. (just missing Sahana Ganesan)

Upper: Will Maclean, Clea Caddell, Amelie Bittar, Amelia Enzminger, Emma Reichow, Cate Tomlinson, Ty Simpson

Lower: Parker Cliff, Alessandra Volpi, and Natalie Dean