



THE USEF JUMPING PATHWAY

Supported by the USET Foundation
Develops Top Talent

Adapted from US Equestrian press releases

For U.S. athletes with aspirations to compete at the high-performance level, there is a long journey from competing at the national level to representing the U.S. at international championships. The US Equestrian (USEF) development pathways for each Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) discipline, supported by the USET Foundation, help bring promising athletes along each step of the way, ensuring the best opportunities for success. What's more, these pathway programs are key to building a robust pool of talent and therefore our country's

competitive equestrian excellence on the greatest international stages now and in the future.

In jumping, programs like the Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals, the USEF Junior Jumper National Championships (Prix des States), FEI North American Youth Championships (NAYC), and the USEF Horsemastership Training Series prepare junior athletes for the higher levels, many of whom will compete at the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF).

With the goal of helping athletes develop and hone skills needed to become an effective jumper athlete, Talent Search Finals is a jumper-style equitation competition composed of four phases: flatwork, gymnastics, jumping over a grand prix-style course that includes a water jump, and a ride-off where the top four competitors ride each of the other three top horses. USEF Junior Jumper National Championships (Prix des States) features both the Prix des States team competition, with teams fielded by zones, as well as an individual competition at the national level. NAYC provides competitors with a first step into international team experience and championship atmosphere and the annual USEF Horsemastership Training Series helps identify upcoming riders as potential future U.S. jumping team athletes while also providing them with an all-encompassing educational experience to promote their development.

There are three coaches that provide hands-on support for athletes participating in pathway programs: U.S. Jumping Youth Chef d'Equipe DiAnn Langer, U.S. Jumping Development Coach Anne Kursinski, and U.S. Jumping Chef d'Equipe and Technical Advisor Robert Ridland. Based on their experiences with the athletes and their in-depth knowledge of the athletes' trajectories, the three coaches consistently work together to build teams that will successfully represent the U.S. in international competition.

This year, Langer and Ridland were onsite at the Talent Search Finals - West competition and discussed the purpose of the event as well as the caliber of the competitors and their potential.

"What makes Talent Search so special is that it's not just another equitation class," said Ridland. "It's a jumper class where the riders are judged. The time allowed and the open water, those are real issues when you get to the next level. I think we're in good stead with our future, and this was really exciting to watch."



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"I'm always excited to see the top four and what they can accomplish," added Langer. "I think all of our riders [in this competition] are riders to keep an eye on for the future."

While it's not required that aspiring U.S. team riders participate in programs such as Talent Search, NAYC, and the Horsemastership Series, the programs do provide helpful steppingstones for athletes with their eyes on the greatest stages, particularly because U.S. athletes have less exposure to international competitions.

"We have great depth," Kursinski said of the up-and-coming jumping talent in the U.S., "but we don't have [easy access to] international experience like

the Europeans [do]. For us, getting riders to qualify [for NAYC] and getting that team experience under their belts is so important."

Athletes' progression onto the international stage is also part of the pathway. Athletes are selected to represent the U.S. to gain experience at the CSIO3* levels before moving up to the CSIO5* level. Simply getting overseas to compete against European teams is a crucial component of developing competitive team athletes.

The Team Experience

In November, the 2022 CSIO3* team led by Kursinski had an important outing in Europe competing at the FEI Jumping Nations Cup Vilamoura CSIO3* in Vilamoura, Portugal, ultimately capturing second place.

The team comprised of Kelly Arani and Impossible Dream, Cathleen Driscoll and Arome, Mimi Gochman and Celina BH, and Mavis Spencer and Carissimo 25, edged out 13 other teams to finish second behind the gold-medal team from France. Most of the athletes had competed as part of a team at the North American Youth Championships (NAYC) earlier in their careers, but this event offered them their second experience on a senior FEI Nations Cup team. These athletes had competed at the CSIO3* in Vejer de la Frontera, Spain, in October.

"They all put in great rounds," said Kursinski. "I think they've come a long way since Vejer [de la Frontera] getting that first one under their belts. They were all first-time three-star Nations Cup team members [at Vejer], so I think everybody was more relaxed and confident [at Vilamoura]. It was extremely competitive because there were 14 teams that got to compete, and you needed to fight to come back for the second round, so it was very tough competition."

Kursinski says that all of the team members have impressive results nationally at the grand prix level, and some have had team experience as young riders, but team outings like Vilamoura are a step up.

"There's just no substitute for this kind of experience," Kursinski explained. "When you're a team member, it's got a totally different feeling. If you're going first you've got to show the way [and] at the end you have that pressure of, 'Can you bring home another clear round?' You can only get that kind of team experience in the show ring."

"For athletes who want to get on a Wellington team or one of Robert Ridland's five-star teams, you've got

to get your feet wet in these three-star Nations Cups" Kursinski continued. "The European experience is different. The warmup is different. Getting to the ring and starting is different. There are all these little things, and you can watch all the videos, but you have to come here and really experience it. So, if you want to get on the bigger teams, if you have those goals, these are really important for your experience."

The first jumping pathway program in 2023 will be the USEF Horsemastership Training Series running January 5-8 at Equestrian Village, home of the Adequan® Global Dressage Festival and WEF jumping events, in Wellington, Florida.

As philanthropic partner to USEF, the United States Equestrian Team (USET) Foundation helps provide the necessary development, training, and competition resources for our country's developing and elite athletes. Please visit [USET.org](https://uset.org) to learn about the ways you can support riders progressing along the high-performance pathway and to ensure our U.S. teams' prominence at the most impressive events in the world. W

