



Pathway graduate Anna Buffini rode FRH Davinia la Douce in the 2023 FEI Dressage World Cup Final in Omaha, Nebraska. Photo by Jump Media



DANCING DOWN THE PATHWAY

To Ensure International Dressage Success

Perfection is always the dream in dressage, and riders spend a lifetime trying to achieve it. Along the way, those athletes who add the goal of representing the United States dressage team to their list typically participate in US Equestrian (USEF) high performance pathway programs supported in part by the United States Equestrian Team (USET) Foundation.

USEF development pathways for each Olympic Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) discipline help bring promising athletes along through necessary training



The U.S. Dressage team of Sarah Tubman, Codi Harrison, Anna Marek, and Christian Simonson won gold at the 2023 Pan American Games in Santiago, Chile. Photo by Shannon Brinkman.

and competition experiences. The pathway programs are key to building a robust pipeline of talent, which, in turn, enables our country to maintain its competitive equestrian excellence on the greatest international stages now and in the future.

In dressage, programs like the Robert Dover USEF Horsemastership Clinic Week (RDHCW), the North American Youth Championships (NAYC), and the Under 25 (U25) division, prepare junior and up-and-coming riders for the higher levels. The Adequan®

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Global Dressage Festival (AGDF) is host to FEI-level U25 classes every CDI week and hosts the only CDI U25 and CDI O events in North America. Along with developing European tours and additional Nations Cup events, dressage athletes gain the experience needed to excel on senior Nations Cup teams in the future.

NAYC provides juniors and young riders with a unique team experience and atmosphere while the annual RDHCW hosts 20 skilled riders, via invite only, to participate in lectures and lessons from renowned clinicians designed to assist in the development the next generation of U.S. dressage team talent. The U25 division has also become an increasingly important way for athletes between the ages of 16 and 25 (FEI age) to bridge the gap between the Young Rider and Grand Prix levels and provides access to USEF Dressage staff and coaches, including George Williams, the US Equestrian Dressage Youth Coach, as well as the High Performance &



Kat Fuqua, a rising star in both dressage and jumping, and her mother Shereen Fuqua cheered on the U.S. jumping athletes at the 2023 NAYC. Photo by KTB Creative Group.

Pathway Development Advisor and senior team Chef d’Equipe; Laura Roberts, USEF Managing Director of Dressage; and Hallye Griffin, USEF Director of High Performance Sport.

Athletes Excelling on the Pathway

Many of the up-and-coming young dressage athletes today have progressed straight up the pathway, from NAYC to CDI U25 competitions, to Nations Cup teams and international championships.

Anna Buffini started her journey along the high performance pathway in 2014 at NAYC with a team gold medal and won the Grand Prix Freestyle U25 and team silver medal in the CDI U25 at AGDF in 2017 with Sundayboy. With FRH Davinia la Douce, Buffini moved up to riding on Nations Cup teams in 2021. She qualified individually for the FEI Dressage World Cup Final in 2022 and 2023 and rode in the CDI O5* at CHIO Aachen this past July.

“If you want to be a top rider and a top competitor internationally, it is impossible without support. I’m so grateful for the foundations like the USET Foundation that make it possible to do all of this,” said Buffini. “I think it’s incredible that people are able to come together and help fund a team that’s worked so hard to produce an Olympic medal. No matter what you give, no matter what you do, it’s part of a bigger picture. It really can impact and change lives.”

At a similar steep ascent in the sport, Christian Simonson competed in four NAYC events, taking home three medals before his final year in 2021, where he and Zeaball Diawind swept the gold medals in the Young Rider division. He moved up to Small Tour classes in 2022 and was a part of the Nations Cup CDI OY team at Future Champions in Hagen, Germany, and competed at CHIO Aachen in the Young Rider division.

In his breakout year of 2023, Simonson rode Son of a Lady on the silver-medal-winning team at the CDIO3* at AGDF and competed in Hagen again before being named to the U.S. Dressage team for the Pan American Games in Santiago, Chile, where he helped the team win gold.

Joining Simonson on the Young Rider team in Hagen, Germany, was West Coast-based Erin Nichols. Nichols and Handsome Rob AR had similar success at NAYC with team gold in 2021 and team silver and two individual gold medals in 2022. With Elian Royale, her current FEI mount, Nichols is the number eight-ranked U25 rider in the world. The pair participated in the 2023 U.S. Dressage European U25 Tour and placed third in the CDIU25 Grand Prix Freestyle at the CDI Twente in the Netherlands. At CDI Kronenberg, they won every CDIU25 class.

Codi Harrison has the special distinction of having ridden Katholt's Bossco, her gold-medal-winning mount from the 2023 Pan American Games, all the way from the Young Rider division. They picked up team bronze in the 2016 NAYC, were on the team for the silver medal at the 2022 CDIU25 at AGDF, and then moved directly into the Grand Prix.

As part of the 2023 U.S. Dressage European U25 Tour, Ben Ebeling and Status Royal OLD won the CDIU25 Intermediate II test and placed second in the CDIU25 Grand Prix 16-25 test in Belgium. In Crozet, France, the pair swept the CDIU25 classes winning the CDIU25 Intermediate II test, the CDIU25 Grand Prix 16-25 test, and the CDIU25 Grand Prix Freestyle.

Ebeling has a strong pathway journey, having won team gold at the 2017 NAYC, and already has senior team experience, including at the 2023 CDIO4* in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Hosting Pathway Athletes in Wellington

Kicking off pathway programs in 2024 is the Robert Dover USEF Horsemastership Clinic Week running January 3-7 at the Adequan® Global Dressage Festival in Wellington, Florida. The clinic will welcome 20 athletes and hopes to set them up for success in the coming year, as it has for so many in the past.

Two of the riders who participated in the 2023 RDHCW had great success at the 2023 NAYC, including Lexie Kment, who helped Region 6/4 take home the team gold medal in the junior division, and Madison Sumner, who earned silver in the individual and team classes, while also winning gold in the freestyle class in the Junior division.

Kat Fuqua – a dual pathway athlete in jumping and dressage – won three medals at the 2023 NAYC. She received the silver medal in the FEI Freestyle Young Rider class as well as another individual bronze medal, and she helped Region 3 win team gold. She



Madison Sumner and Briar took home three medals at the 2023 NAYC, including gold in the FEI Junior Freestyle Championship. Photo by KTB Creative Group.

went on to compete at the Future Champions in Hagen, Germany, where she rode in the jumping division on Nate Archibald and in the dressage CDI/OY on Dreamgirl.

These are just a few of the young dressage athletes that are currently on the pathway that

speak to the success of the programs and the caliber of talent in the high-performance pipeline.

As philanthropic partner to USEF, the USET Foundation helps provide the necessary development, training, and competition resources for our country's

developing and elite athletes. Visit [USET.org](https://www.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.



Twenty athletes participate in the Robert Dover USEF Horsemastership Clinic Week, held at the AGDF show grounds in Wellington, Florida. Photo by Taylor Pence.