



USET Foundation Supports Development of Elite Jumping Athletes

The route to representing the United States in international competition can be a circuitous one, but for jumping athletes that hold that as a goal it doesn't have to be a difficult one. USET Foundation, the philanthropic partner to USEF, helps support the journey from national competition to high performance sport in order to continue our country's competitive equestrian excellence on the greatest international stages.

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 are all programs along the pathway to aim athletes toward Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)-rated competition.

Searching for Talent

With the goal of helping athletes develop and hone



skills needed to become an effective jumping athlete, USEF 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. The historic results of the USEF Talent Search Finals reads like a who's who of past and present stars of jumping, including Andre Dignelli, Brianne Goutal, Richard Spooner, Lauren Hough, Lillie Keenan, Peter Lutz, Meredith Michaels-Berberbaum, McLain Ward,

and many more.

The 2023 winner of the USEF Talent Search Finals – East, Luke Jensen, noted, "To be at the top of the level among your peers and to compete in a high-pressure situation is a great way to prepare yourself for future situations. As you come through as a junior and experience this fall season, it gives you the tools you need to begin dealing with pressure, which is very important because this sport is very mental. To be able to do this and continue to learn to deal with the pressure and the mindset has been super important."

The USEF Junior Jumper

Luke Jensen and Calina M won the 2023 Platinum Performance/USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Final – East held at Hamilton Farm, home of the USET Foundation.

Photo by US Equestrian/Avery Wallace

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 with four levels for athletes in Children's, Pre-Junior, Junior, and Young Rider divisions.

For those who are

successful at NAYC, junior and young rider teams are chosen to represent the United States at the FEI Jumping Nations Cup Youth Final. This year's teams competed in Belgium and brought home the team bronze in the junior division.

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.

USEF has three coaches that provide one-on-one support for athletes in the pathway programs, including 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, and they are aided by Lizzy Chesson, Managing Director of Show Jumping, and Hallye Griffin, Director of FEI/High Performance Sport at USEF. Based on their experiences with the athletes and their in-depth

U.S. Jumping Development Coach Anne Kursinski speaking at a USET Foundation pathway reception at the 2023 NAYC.

Photo by
KTB Creative Group



knowledge of the athletes' trajectories, the three coaches consistently work together to build teams that will successfully represent the U.S. in international competition.

"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."

Developing Onto Teams

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.

A regular stop on the international calendar for developing teams are the Jumping Nations Cup

CSIO3* competitions in Vilamoura, Portugal, and Vejer de la Frontera, Spain.

Riders who have come up through pathway programs were fielded onto teams this year, including Zayna Rizvi, Caitlyn Connors, Hannah Selleck, and Jacob Pope.

Rizvi picked up individual gold medals in the Junior and Young Rider divisions in 2021 and 2022 at the FEI North American Youth Championships, while Jacob Pope was a team gold medalist in 2015 and Caitlyn Connors won team bronze in 2017. Team veteran Hannah Selleck was individual and team gold medalist in 2008, the same year she won the USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals – West. Pope won the East Finals in 2012.

Following a third-place podium finish, Kursinski



Jacob Pope, Zayna Rizvi, Hannah Selleck, Caitlyn Connors, and Chef d'Equipe Anne Kursinski on the podium at the 2023 Nations Cup Vejer de la Frontera CSIO3*.

noted, "They really deserved to be here. People were saying how well they rode and noting the American system and style with loads of great compliments from other athletes around the world over here."

The Pathway Runs Through Wellington

The first jumping pathway program in 2024 will be the USEF Horsemastership Training Series running January 4-7 at Equestrian Village, home of the Adequan® Global Dressage Festival and WEF jumping events, in Wellington, Florida. The 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.

Last year, the USEF Horsemastership Training Series had an enhanced format structure, offering both in-person and online instruction with selected athletes throughout the duration of the year. The in-person series in 2024 features four days of mounted and unmounted educational sessions with top athletes and experts in the equine industry.

As philanthropic partner to



Zone 4 riders Alexa Curry, Taylor Finkle, Laila Murad, and Hailey Guidry won the Children's Team Final at the FEI North American Youth Jumping Championships presented by USHJA.

Photo by US Equestrian/Leslie Potter



The junior team of Tessa Downey, Laurel Walker, Elise Stephens, Stephanie Garrett, Carlee McCutcheon, and Chef d'Equipe Anne Kursinski were honored on the podium at the 2023 FEI Youth Nations Cup Final.

Photo by US Equestrian/Matt Turer



Luke Jensen, Corinne Sweeney, Elisa Broz, Tessa Downey, Trent McGee, and Maya Aryal were part of the group participating in the 2023 USEF Horsemastership Training Series at Wellington International.

Photo by Taylor Pence

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. Visit 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.