



Bulldogs Rule Once Again At The VENC

The University of Georgia captures the title for the third straight year at the Varsity Equestrian National Championships.

Anne Lang

THERE WERE LOTS of happy tears and exuberant hugs on the University of Georgia barn aisle following the Varsity Equestrian National Championships on April 15-17 in Waco, Texas. UGA defended its overall title (hunter seat and western combined) for the third consecutive year and repeated last year's victory in the overall hunter seat phase. The school also took home individual championships in equitation over fences and equitation on the flat and finished fourth in the overall western team division.

The event marked UGA's fifth overall championship and fifth hunter seat championship in the VENC's nine-year history. Auburn University (Ala.) finished as the hunter seat reserve champion for the second consecutive year.

"The thing that pays off the most is putting in the practice hours," said UGA Head Coach Meghan Boenig. "These riders have done that consistently, and somehow they found a way

to double that commitment in the past several weeks. Our team has had tremendous student leaders who've really put the stamp on what it means to be a Bulldog. This has been an incredible year for team spirit; they've been amazingly united."

"Our team has had tremendous student leaders who've really put the stamp on what it means to be a Bulldog."

—Meghan Boenig

UGA was put to an unprecedented test on the final evening of the VENC, when they were tied with Texas A&M University for the overall championship. VENC officials called for a "sud-



(WillieGomezPhotos)

The University of Georgia's hunt seat team (from left) assistant coach Logan Fiorentino, Katie Brown, Michelle Morris, Katie Hagerty, Kacy Jenkins, Daisy Whelan, Emma Lipman, Carly Anthony, Amanda Hanafi, Grace Rogers, Meghan Adams and head coach Meghan Boenig, celebrated the NCAA Varsity Equestrian title with the U.S. Equestrian Federation's Marion Maybank.



Kacy Jenkins rode in the over fences tiebreaker to give the University of Georgia their third consecutive Varsity Equestrian National Championship.

den death" ride-off: the teams would compete head-to-head in all four disciplines (over fences and on the flat, reining and horsemanship), selecting one athlete for each phase.

The first phase to be contested was equitation on the flat. With a crowd pressing in at the ring's borders, the emotionally charged atmosphere was heightened by occasional thunder rumbling outside the equestrian complex and a pounding rainstorm that threatened to drown out the announcer.

On the flat, UGA's Michelle Morris defeated TAMU's Elizabeth Solch by 30 points as judges R. Scott Evans and Chrystine Tauber issued combined scores of 174 and 144.

UGA then fell to TAMU in western horsemanship, and the suspense mounted. Next, in the over fences phase, Kacy Jenkins of UGA bested TAMU's Lindsay Smith, 152-145. When TAMU responded by winning the western reining phase, the teams found themselves tied yet again. For a final decision, VENC officials went to raw scores—and UGA emerged the winner, with 603.5 over TAMU's 579.0. The University of South Carolina finished third overall.

Jenkins, a junior from Charleston, S.C., and UGA's hunter seat team captain, said she tried to keep a level head.

"I knew that I had to step up for the entire team," said Jenkins, 21. "After being chosen to ride, my first feeling was excitement, knowing this was a new opportunity to try to win another point for my team. [Earlier, Jenkins had scored in team fences against Fresno State (Calif.) and Auburn University.] But my nerves kind of kicked in as I watched Michelle absolutely rock her flat ride. I fell back on what I knew I could do, went in there and did it.

"I knew that I had to step up for the entire team."

—Kacy Jenkins

"I thought last year was intense," Jenkins observed, "because when it came down to the semi-finals, I had to win the point for that round, too. We had tied, and it was up to me for the entire English team to move on. But the tiebreaker this year just blew that experience out of the water!"

The ride-off test (in which Jenkins and Smith competed on the same horse, a requirement in the standard head-to-head varsity equestrian format) called for cantering directly to a single jump, then a right rollback to a single, a left rollback to a single, then a one-stride in-and-out. That was followed by a halt, a turn on the haunches and a hand gallop to a final single.



NCAA VARSITY EQUESTRIAN NATIONAL HUNT SEAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

Waco, Texas—Apr. 15-17

TEAM

1. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
(Grace Rogers, Carly Anthony, Michelle Morris, Emma Lipman, & Kacy Jenkins)
2. AUBURN UNIVERSITY
(Lindsay Potela, Ali Loprete, Katherine Breedlove, Anna Becker, Grace Socha, Anna Schierholz, Maggie McAlary, Chelsea Anheuser & Dottie Grubb)
3. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
(Megan Massaro, Carly Babcock, Colvin Hedgepeth, Alex Haskell, Eleanor Kunsman, Nicole Bourgeois, Kimberly McCormack & Alex Arute)

Also competed: 4. Texas A&M University (B. Dodson, K. Bell, E. Solch, C. Heine, L. Smith, K. Pickett, L. Chaffee & M. Earle); 5. Oklahoma State University (A. Blais, J. White, J. McLaughlin, A. White, E. Sparks & E. Prutow; 6. Texas Christian University (M. Trimino, H. Jacobi, J. Hagen, T. Munroe, V. Lee, T. Frederick, L. Quiroz & C. Selchau).

Competed in Round 2: Kansas State University (S. Patterson, K. Mellon, N. Vincent, L. Laffey, B. Doyle, K. Rheinlander, K. Marvin & K. Yates); Fresno State University (L. Carr, J. Kissell, K. Steinbuch, L. Beach, C. Stone, L. Wells, J. Jory, C. Marshall & H. Elsbernd). Competed in Round 1: New Mexico State University (B. Raab, C. Keyes, M. Bernal, J. Friend & L. Bostwick); Baylor University (M. Appel, H. Healy, M. Smitson, M. Beaudoin, K. Vicary, T. Brown, K. Fergusson & L. Goldman); Southern Methodist University (K. Collins, M. VanDyke, D. Gersh, C. Wenholz, M. Djernes, J. Pettersen & M. Olson); University Of Tennessee-Martin (K. Bergenty, K. Abell, K. Rattner, C. Cramer, B. Kasprack & K. Miranda).



(WillieGomezPhotos.com Photo)

McCormack Named VENC Hunter Seat MVP

Kimberly McCormack, a University of South Carolina freshman from Clermont, N.J., was chosen as hunter seat MVP by judges R. Scott Evans and Chrystine Tauber.

McCormack was 4-0 for the week, winning in fences by 42 points against Auburn; in both fences and flat against TAMU (where USC finished 8-0 and clinched third place overall in hunter seat); and in fences against Oklahoma State.

"Kimberly stood out as an individual who was consistently receiving high scores [ranging from 84-90] on the flat and over fences and on every type of horse she rode," said Tauber. "She epitomized the ideal team player who continued to produce winning performances."

Added Evans: "Every horse Kimberly rode had a relaxed and confident way of going. This speaks volumes when having to get on horses that they don't know, as well as [the horses] being donated and in a college program."

USC Head Coach Boo Major said of McCormack: "I'm especially proud of her for winning this award. Kimberly was solid for us in Waco, and she's really been solid for us all season. Having competed the way she did against the best riders in the country this weekend, I think Kimberly [who trained with Missy Clark prior to college] certainly elevated herself as an elite rider."

Michelle Morris prevailed in a "sudden death" ride-off on the flat, helping to secure the Varsity Equestrian National Championship for the University of Georgia.

"The horse was awesome," Jenkins said, "but very different in the schooling ring than she was in the arena. She was pretty soft during schooling, and she responded to my voice when I said 'whoa.' But when we took the first jump in the arena, I could tell she was ready to go more like a jumper. So when we had to break down to the trot, I had some difficulty."

"There were some things I knew I could have done better," Jenkins acknowledged, "but I also realized that Lindsay might have had the same struggles with that horse as I did. I knew I'd done my best, and that made me happy."

Her school's victories as a team made Jenkins even happier.

"We had great team support," declared Jenkins, whose major is recreation/leisure studies. "We rallied together, and we did what we needed to do. We like to say that we're not just a western team and an English team; we're one team. We all supported each other and knew that we could do it."

► A New Level Of Pressure

Morris recalled the moment when she and her teammates learned that a ride-off would occur.

"We were all freaking out!" exclaimed the sophomore telecommunications/film major from La Cañada, Calif. "Coach [Boenig] told us it was a really hard decision to choose just two riders, and we said we didn't care who they picked; we just wanted to win. When I realized it would be me for the flat, I was honored, but to be honest, I also was so nervous I thought I would get sick."

"Then I walked by myself around the facility for a while," Morris, 20, continued, "thinking: 'What if I screw up?' I mean, it's one thing when you compete as an individual, because you're only letting down yourself. But it's a whole other thing when the entire team championship could depend on your ride. I took some deep breaths, and Meghan sat with me while I learned the new flat test. From that point on, I was focused on my job."

Morris had won the individual flat championship just hours earlier, defeating the defending flat champion (and No. 1 seed) Ally Blais of Oklahoma State University, 179-171.

"I think the hardest part of that individual test was that Ally went in and laid down a beautiful trip," admitted the No. 2 seed Morris, "scoring an 85 and an 86. That definitely put the pressure on me to go in and do my best."

Morris, who had won in fences and on the flat against TAMU and in fences against Fresno State (but lost to teammate Carly Anthony in the quarter finals of the individual fences phase), pointed out that varsity riding can be tough, especially in the VENC pressure cooker.



"What if I screw up? It's a whole other thing when the entire team championship could depend on your ride."

—Michelle Morris

"It's just a challenge in general to get on an unfamiliar horse when you have no idea what it's going to do," said Morris, who trained as a junior with Karen Healey and Melissa Jones. "And in that four-minute warm-up, you have to figure out if it bends one way or drifts another way and how it's going to go when you get into the show arena. Trying to keep your focus during all of that is a challenge, for sure."

Morris partially credited her individual win to "drawing good horses. Also, since this was my second year at Nationals, I felt like I had a better idea of what was expected, and it definitely helped my confidence going in." At the start of the school year, Morris told her coaches that she wanted to make it to the individual finals. "They really helped me by having me ride different horses, and I absolutely wouldn't have won this without them," she said. "I feel so fortunate to be on this team, because not only are they great riders, we work really well together, too."

Boenig described Morris as "an extremely strong and consistent rider. She's a great competitor with a very strong base and a great feel for a horse. All of that made for a very accurate test."

► Teammate Vs. Teammate

Emma Lipman, winner of the national fences championship, added to the swell of Bulldog pride. But the sophomore anthropology major from Bedford, N.Y., modestly downplayed her accomplishment.

"I had a lot on my side," confessed Lipman, who had qualified for the individual fences phase for the first time this year and was seeded fourth. "My first two opponents [in the initial top eight, then in the quarter finals] both went off course. I also had the luck of the draw: I went second every time, which is fabulous, so all of those things helped me out."

Lipman won both her flat and fences rounds against Fresno State and TAMU and her fences round against Auburn.

For the championship round, Lipman found herself squaring off against teammate and No. 2 seed Carly Anthony. "I think the hardest part of the course was all the [five] roll-backs," Lipman said. There also was a one-stride in-and-out, and Anthony had a rail going out on that element. The final score was 145-120.

Lipman and Anthony competed on a horse belonging to Kansas State University. "He was really sweet," said Lipman, 20, who trained with Missy Clark prior to college. "I liked him a lot. It was late, and I could tell he was tired. But he was a good boy. I gave him cookies before and after I rode him."

UGA assistant hunter seat coach Logan Fiorentino said, "Emma is a very strong, solid and technical rider. She has an amazing ability to break down the track of a course. The way she visualizes and plans is incredibly accurate. It's almost like it's math to her. She also has a great ability to feel what's underneath her and to make the right decisions. That's something you just can't teach."

"Both Carly and Emma knew we were still trying for a

team championship, and they each knew the team part came first," she added. "They looked at the individual competition as simply icing on the cake. Carly put in really good effort, and so did Emma. Carly has a no-quit grit, a 'put-me-in-coach' attitude. And she has an ability where if something's not happening that way she'd anticipated, she can make a decision on the fly and make it work."

Fiorentino emphasized that this format is all about thinking on your feet. "It's also about teamwork," she added. "After Carly rode, she went over to Emma and told her about the horse. To see that type of support between your teammates is part of what makes this championship so special. Yes, it was an individual win, but it was an absolute team effort to get them there." 🐾

TIDBITS



- Riders who earned a score of 90 or higher over fences included Maggie McAlary of Auburn, Carly Anthony and Kacy Jenkins of UGA, and Alex Arute and Kimberly McCormack of USC. On the flat, it was McAlary and Ali Loprete of Auburn, and Anthony and Michelle Morris of UGA.

- The hunter seat judges had high praise for VENC riders. "The caliber of riding was very impressive," R. Scott Evans remarked. "It shows that these colleges are taking note of the junior riders coming out of the hunter, jumper and equitation divisions. This is an excellent program with exceptional competition and team spirit."

Said Tauber: "The quality of riding at this year's VENC was the highest I have ever seen, especially since many of the horses originally selected were not available due to a strangles outbreak [at local host-school Baylor University]. The riders had to contend with a greater range of abilities, and they rode each with great skill."

- The VENC format calls for 12 qualifying teams from NCAA division 1 to compete in each discipline, with head-to-head hunter seat rounds in the four-man team equitation over fences, four-man team equitation on the flat, individual fences and individual flat. Riders with outstanding seasonal records from the entire network of 18 colleges are selected by an outside committee to ride in the latter two sections, with eight athletes chosen for each.

- TAMU won the western national championship, with Kansas State University claiming reserve champion honors.