



## Bulldogs Bare Their Teeth At The Varsity Equestrian National Championships

*University of Georgia wins the overall title, hunter seat phase and individual fences.*

Anne Lang

TWO HOURS BEFORE their overall win at the Varsity Equestrian National Championships became official, riders from the University of Georgia had done the math and knew they had a lock on first place.

The team's English and Western athletes excitedly gathered in their barn aisle at the show complex in Waco, Texas, to practice a newly penned cheer: "We wear red, we wear black, we won two, back-to-back!"

The words referred to UGA's decisive overall championship repeat. Last year they won the overall title, but the hunter seat title escaped them, so the "Dawgs" returned to Waco more determined than ever.

Their resolve paid off: Not only did the Georgia riders go home with the national all around and hunter seat trophies (UGA's Western team finished fourth), but they

**"We wear red, we wear black, we won two, back-to-back!"**

—UGA cheer

also won champion and reserve champion (Haylie Jayne and Kelley Cowperthwait, respectively) in the individual hunter seat fences phase at the eighth annual VENC, April 16-18.

"It's absolutely thrilling to be in the spot where we've got two national championships—three, counting Haylie's," said UGA Equestrian Head Coach Meghan Boenig. "The consistency of our over fences team has been outstanding. They have a die-hard attitude and never give up under pressure. And our freshmen have it all figured out now. I think that bodes really well for the future."

### ► Teammates Face Off

In winning the individual fences section, Jayne lived up to her No. 1 seed position going in. Her teammate, Cowperthwait, pulled off more of an upset for the reserve champion finish, having entered as the No. 7 seed out of eight individual fences competitors.

Jayne, a junior from Elgin, Ill., whose major is classical culture, said that riding head-to-head against a teammate for the championship "took the pressure off completely. Kelley and I talked about it beforehand—we didn't care which one of us won. We decided we were both just going to go for it. We wanted to really hand-gallop, make some really tidy turns, and show off. We had nothing to lose—the winner would be Georgia, either way."

Indeed, their smart and snappy



The University of Georgia team brought their bulldog mascots to celebrate their second consecutive Varsity Equestrian National Championships overall title. Attending were (from left) assistant coach Logan Fiorentino, Michelle Blair, Daisy Whelan, Kacy Jenkins, Katie Brown, Emma Lipman, Amelia Rogers, Kelley Cowperthwait, Amanda Hanafi, Michelle Morris, Katie Hagerty, Haylie Jayne, head coach Meghan Boenig, and Marion Maybank of the U.S. Equestrian Federation.



**NCAA VARSITY EQUESTRIAN  
NATIONAL HUNT SEAT  
CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Waco, Texas—Apr. 16-18

**TEAM**

1. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
(Michelle Morris, Katie Hagerty, Haylie Jayne, Emma Lipman, Kelley Cowperthwait & Kacy Jenkins)
2. AUBURN UNIVERSITY  
(Ali Loprete, Jenny Reinhart, Maggie McAlary, Rebecca Rifkin, Chelsea Anbeuser, Jessica Brasswell, Anna Schierholz, Grace Socha & Dottie Grubb)
3. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
(Victoria Middleton, Alex Haskell, Carly Babcock, Megan Massaro, Sarah Stephens, Eleanor Kunsman, Courtney Reese, Nicole Bourgeois & Rachel Koggan)

Also competed: 4. Baylor University (M. Beaudoin, S. White, M. Smitson, C. Wilson, H. Healy, L. Goldman, K. Ferguson, K. Vicary & N. Brown); 5. Oklahoma State University (S. Summers, A. Blais, C. Collingsworth, S. Collingsworth, J. Osterstock, J. White, T. Nolte, E. Prutow); 6. Texas A&M University (C. Matz, T. Zealy, B. Dodson, C. Heine, M. Webb, L. Smith, K. Waldal, B. Coleman & E. Ivy).

Competed in Round 2: Kansas State University (P. Kovari, L. Yates, W. Snyder, K. Mellon, D. Sommer, J. Rawles & K. Marvin); Fresno State University (C. Marshall, K. Bullock, K.H. Budnik, K. Steinbach, L. Wells, J. Jory, K. Nennecker & C. Kissell). Competed in Round 1: University of Tennessee-Martin (C. Cramer, H. Mason, K. Abell, M. Thompson, B. Kasprack & M. Brown); Delaware State University (K. Brown, C. Foltz, A. Butler, E.F. Tuttle, K. Blair & K. Kambach); Southern Methodist University (M. Vandyke, K. Collins, A. Vinings, C. Wenholz, E. Gardener, E. Buie & K. Wilson); Texas Christian University (J. Hagen, J. Skobel, M. Trimino, T. Munore, V. Lee, L. Quiroz, C. Von Uhlit & T. Frederick).



The University of Georgia's Haylie Jayne showed off in her final round and ended with the Varsity Equestrian National Championship individual hunter seat over fences title.

performances over the challenging finals course didn't disappoint the capacity-level crowd.

**"Kelley and I talked about it beforehand—we didn't care which one of us won."**

—Haylie Jayne

Jayne, who also is UGA's hunter seat team captain, said she felt the most difficult elements of the final round were "all of the tight rollbacks. Everything came up really fast. From jump 1 to 2, you had no choice but to do a really tight inside turn. On a horse you don't know, that was really hard. I rode the horse first, and he had been standing for a while, so in the schooling ring, he wasn't staying on either one of his leads. But luckily, when we went into the ring, his adrenaline kicked in and he stayed on them."

By Jayne's own admission, not every ride leading up to her triumphant fences finale had gone smoothly. In the semi-finals of the individual flat phase, she briefly went off-pattern, resulting in no score. "Once I realized I didn't know where I was going, it was the worst feeling in the world," Jayne said. "I just completely blanked. I did another maneuver and didn't know where to



Kelley Cowperthwait claimed the reserve individual hunter seat championship and helped the University of Georgia team pick up the overall championship at the Varsity Equestrian National Championships.



## YOUNG ENTRY

go next, so I made a circle, which eliminated me."

But the noble-minded team player, who grew up riding with her father, Alex Jayne, and showing on the A circuit, put it all in perspective. "I'm so glad that if it had to happen, that it happened in the individual phase and not the team phase," Jayne said.

"It definitely woke me up for my team ride, and it all worked out. Everyone was really supportive. I took myself away for a little while before my next flat ride, just to get mentally back on track. I was still pretty nervous for the next flat pattern, worried that I'd forget it again, but luckily I didn't."

Boenig was impressed by Jayne's resiliency. "It takes a pretty special person to stop, regroup and come back like Haylie did for her team rides and her individual rides," said the coach. "The mental game is something that Haylie's definitely mastered. She's been so consistent over fences; it's been extraordinary to watch her. The same is true of Kelley. Both of them had such huge tests on Friday, having to go against high scores and maintain them when it was a real nail-biter in the semi-finals [against Auburn]."

"But in today's finals, I think it was just fun for them," Boenig added. "And that fun paid off with beautiful scores and beautiful rides. I'm so proud and pleased with these two individuals."

Cowperthwait, a senior psychology major from Southampton, N.J., credited the entire team for her individual success. "I think that just during this year we've really come together as a group," she said. "Not only were we ready for this in terms of practice and preparation, but we were also all mentally ready to ride here, too. We badly wanted this championship, so we stepped it up when we got here, and we all went in and rode our best."

### ► Spreading The Glory

The flat portions of the hunter seat competition provided some elements of drama and suspense. A violent electrical storm struck Friday morning, midway through the three-day VENC. Flooding of the covered (but not enclosed) flat-class arena ensued, forcing a transfer of the flat events to the indoor jumping arena and adding

Ally Blais of Oklahoma State University triumphed in the hunter seat on the flat individual championship at the Varsity Equestrian National Championships.

many hours to an already marathon-like day.

The suspenseful element occurred during Saturday's flat-phase finals when head-to-head competitors—Ally Blais of Oklahoma State University and Victoria Middleton of the University of South Carolina—ended up with identical scores from the two hunter seat judges, Scott Alder and Randy Mullins.

Under VENC rules, such a tie is usually broken by using only the senior judge's score, but in this rare case, the numbers from both Alder and Mullins were absolutely identical. The result: a ride-off.

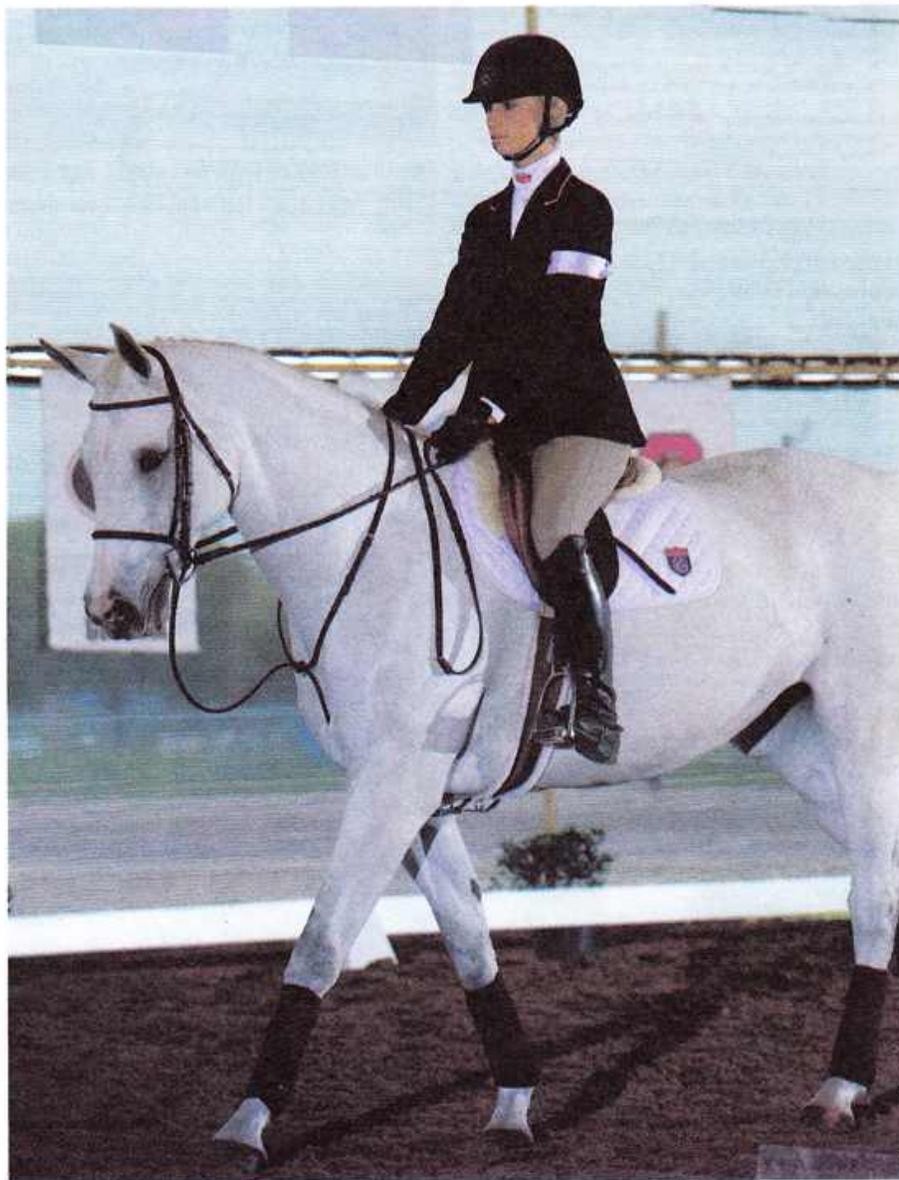
Fortunately, Blais and Middleton did not have to memorize yet another flat pattern; they simply repeated the original finals test, on a new horse. Both of their rides were smooth and accurate, but Blais

would emerge as the winner, topping Middleton 143 to 134.

**"Probably the hardest part of the final test was just remembering it."**

—Ally Blais

A junior from Boynton Beach, Fla., where she trained during high school with Alan Korotkin, Blais said there wasn't any particular maneuver in the last test that rattled her; rather, it was the brain drain from the week's cumulative competitions that nearly did her in. "Probably the hardest part of the final test was just remembering it because it was the fourth one!" Blais said. "Also, the haunches-in and shoulders-in were a little difficult for most of these horses, I think."



(WillieCame/Photos.com/Photo)



Blais described both of the finals horses she rode as "great, although they were very different. One was definitely more of an equitation horse; the other one was more like a hunter. The mare was a little more sensitive; you couldn't really get in her face, and I had to be careful not to make her angry with my spur. The gelding was more tolerant. I was able to get him into my hand and use my leg a lot.

"This whole week has just been a blast," said Blais, an apparel merchandising major who has lined up a summer internship with Nordstrom. "Hanging out with the team and riding a bunch of different horses has really been a great experience."

OSU hunter seat coach Suzanne Flaig was so happy with her student's win that she nearly knocked Blais over with her exuberant hug. "Ally just has wonderful finesse with a variety of horses and wonderful timing," Flaig said. "It's very challenging for a rider to be able to switch back and forth between two very different horses in the span of 10 minutes, as she did today. She has a way of making horses feel comfortable. They know they're in good hands with her, and they wait for her to tell them what to do.

"Ally has all the technical skills, too," Flaig continued. "She always knows where the horse is underneath her, and she has beautiful classic lines. Also, she has a wonderful outlook on competing. It's a challenge simply to stay focused here, and not to get overwhelmed. It takes tremendous stamina to stay at your top level for three very long days, for numerous competitions on numerous different horses. But Ally did all that and still kept a smile on her face the whole time."

## ▶ An "A" For Effort

Another rider who maintained a positive attitude throughout the competition was Auburn University's Maggie McAlary of Amherst, N.H. The judges rewarded McAlary's cheerfulness (as well as her skillful riding aboard a number of challenging mounts) with the hunter seat MVP award, sponsored by the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association.

"She didn't always get the best draws," said judge Alder of McAlary (who rides under the direction of AU assistant coach Lindsay Neubarth), "but Maggie's a beautiful rider and did a great job with the horses that she drew. She kept a great attitude and didn't let the frustration get to her. She handled everything with a lot of composure and very professionally."

As a freshman, this was McAlary's inaugural VENC. "It's a lot different than I expected," McAlary said of the format. "I'm so much more into it than I thought I would be. It's so much more intense than regular horse shows. You build up all year for this, and it feels like indoors or equitation finals. The nerves are exactly like they are if you're at [the Pessoa/USEF Medal Finals]. This week, I always felt like I was doing something really important, being part of a team and doing it all together. Win or lose, we always have a good time. Even if you don't do well yourself, you have your teammates to root for."

**"It's so much more intense than regular horse shows."**

—Maggie McAlary

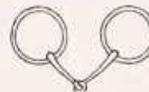
Mullins, in his first year of judging the VENC, praised the overall caliber of riding that he witnessed at the event. "This is a very good kind of competition, because it's very fair—it's not 'what your father can buy you;' it's your riding ability that counts."

Alder pointed out the benefits of a varsity experience for riders seeking post-collegiate careers in the sport-horse industry. "It gives them a great opportunity to ride different horses and to do something a little different like dressage tests, which most [hunter/jumper] riders aren't used to," Alder said. "That type of work is very important to the training of young horses. And the kids do a great job riding these tests on horses they're not familiar with." ◀



Maggie McAlary of Auburn University earned the hunter seat MVP award at the Varsity Equestrian National Championships.

## TIDBITS



- The No. 2 seeded University of Georgia had not won a VENC hunter seat championship since 2004, though they were the hunter seat champions in 2002 and 2003. They also won the overall championship in 2003, '04 and '08.
- The VENC format calls for 12 qualifying teams 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 varsity colleges are selected by an outside committee to ride in the latter two sections, with eight athletes chosen for each.
- Reserve champion in the overall hunter seat (determined by combined scores in fences and flat) was top-seed and defending champion Auburn University, one of UGA's rivals in the NCAA Southeastern Conference. The VENC reserve national champion (overall) was Texas A&M University, which also won the overall Western title.