

## Benjamin And Geisler Star In Kentucky Cup Vaulting

**The World Equestrian Games test event is a success for California vaulters**

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The Mt. Eden Vaulters, of Saratoga, Calif., finished the Kentucky Cup Vaulting on Sunday the way they started it on Thursday-by sweeping the first-placed awards. Megan Benjamin won the women's division of the CVI2\*, Kenny Geisler won the men's division of the CVI2\*, and the Mt. Eden Sun Team won the team division of the CVI2\*.

The Kentucky Cup is the vaulting test event for the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, on Sept. 25-Oct. 10, 2010. The World Championships for vaulting and reining will be held in the brand-new, 5,600-seat indoor arena used this weekend.

Benjamin, 21, of Saratoga, Calif., earned her division's top scores in all but the first of the four phases and climaxed the Kentucky Cup in today's freestyle with the competition's highest score (8.127). Her overall score of 7.974 put her ahead of Mt. Eden teammate Mary McCormick (7.823) and Annalise van Vranken (7.562).

Benjamin won the individual gold medal at the 2006 World Championships, and she thought she'd left vaulting to pursue her studies at Cornell University (N.Y.). "I was kind of vaulting-obsessed earlier in my life, and my goal was to win the gold in 2010. But I did it four years early, and I wasn't sure what to do. So I decided to go on, to go to school and do other things," said Benjamin.

But her Mt. Eden teammates begged her to return, and now, after her victory here, she's looking ahead to the 2010 WEG at the Kentucky Horse Park. "I've made the decision that if I can make the studying and the training work, I'd like to do it. Vaulting really is my sport," she said.

McCormick, 26, of Woodside, Calif., was the only other vaulter to achieve an average score of 8 or more today (8.033). She didn't use the same music that she used on Friday. For the Friday freestyle, she said she used a light and free-flowing instrumental called "Better In Time." She chose a rather different musical genre today.

"I'm originally from Nashville, and my father works in the country music business, so I wanted to go back to my roots and honor the fact that we're in the South and in Kentucky," so she used a country song by Jason Aldean.

And she finished with a perfect back flip dismount, the result, she said, of her experience as a high school cheerleader.

Van Vranken, 27, of Mays Landing, N.J., wished her performance had been mistake-free, but she fell out of one handstand had a couple more slips to score 7.562. "It wasn't quite as clean as I'd hoped, so I was a little upset," said van Vranken, a member of Shooting Star Vaulters.

Geisler, 28, of Sunnyvale, Calif., won all four phases of the men's competition to finish .525 points ahead of second-placed Mikkel Vandrup of Denmark. Geisler's balletic freestyle was nearly flawless as he demonstrated strength and control.

"I had a great performance, and I couldn't have done it without Hudson," said Geisler.

Geisler's regular mount was unable to compete, so he shared Hudson with third-placed Kristian Roberts, 16, of Moss Beach, Calif. Roberts is from the Pacific Coast Vaulters, owners of Hudson.

Vandrup, 23, improved his freestyle score by .347 points to overtake Roberts and finish second. "I was a little bit frustrated with my results on Friday, so I tried to keep it simple and remember to breathe while I was on the horse, because sometimes I forget to do that," he said.

This time Vandrup also stayed on his feet while performing a forward aerial cartwheel over the longe line to land next to the horse's head. On Friday, he fell forward on landing and did a somersault across the ground. "I was happy that I landed the dismount this time," he said.

Geisler also played a key role in the Mt. Eden Sun Team's victory over the Woodside Vaulters, reversing the standing's from Saturday's one-star team competition. In the two-star team division, Mt. Eden scored 6.512 to Woodside's 6.154.

Geisler was the team's alternate and stood on the sidelines as his teammates nipped Woodside on Friday. But during that performance, team member Ali Thrasher suffered a minor injury, so Geisler's teammates spent Saturday fashioning a matching outfit for him. Geisler then played a key role as the base for several of their three-person poses, featuring flier Tasha Thorner.

The Mt. Eden Sun Team also included Geisler's fiancée Kalyn Noan. They're due to be married on Aug. 22.

The other Mt. Eden Sun Team members are: Lizzie Ioannou, Heidi Rothweiler and Makayia Clyne. Jessica Ballenger is the coach, and Jodi Rinhard longed Sampson. They were also the American Vaulting Association 2009 A team national champions.

The Woodside team members are: Patrick Stevens, Katherine Wick, Alyssa Bonora, Yvonne Greenen, Kathryn Jagers, Janie Salsbury and Gabe Aniello. Their coach is Krista Mack, and Erik Martonovich longed Badger.

Cassidy Palmer, 16, of Half Moon Bay, Calif., and Marissa Hamar, 20, of Visalia, Calif., were the winners of the CV12\* pas de deux. Although they live several hours apart, they still put together an enjoyable performance to the Beach Boys' classic song "Surfin' USA."

More than 2,200 people attended the Kentucky Cup Vaulting or watched the online streaming video. More than 300 volunteers helped the staff produce this competition, the second of seven test events planned to prepare for the 2010 World Equestrian Games.

"This facility certainly has a very international feel, and we're looking forward to 2010," said Geisler. "We couldn't ask for more to be fully prepared for next year."