MTSU Equestrian Team Takes Aim at Nationals in Pennsylvania

First-year coach Ariel Herrin likes her Middle Tennessee State University equestrian team’s chances in the four-day Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association National Championships that started Thursday (May 3) at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The IHSA nationals is the culmination of the season for nine MTSU riders. It marks the first time in five years the Blue Raider riders qualified as a team in the Western (horsemanship and reining) category, allowing riders of all levels and abilities — from beginner with no show experience to ones having success at a high level — to compete as a team.

MTSU took four individuals and six Western team riders to the nationals, which includes more than 400 teams and nearly 9,000 competitors. To advance, MTSU had to place in the top three in the regional.

Individual riders include seniors Kelsey Sloan (Cacchione Cup class) of Olive Branch, Mississippi; Julia Rhyne (novice fences) of Brentwood, Tennessee; and Steven Todd (individual novice horsemanship) of Meridian, Mississippi. Alumna Emily Kopko (Class of 2014) of College Grove, Tennessee, competes in Alumni Horsemanship Reining.

The United States Equestrian Federation/Cacchione Cup is awarded to the national individual Hunter Seat high point rider. It is named for Bob Cacchione, who helped found the organization and competition as an 18-year-old Fairleigh Dickinson University sophomore.

Todd is joined by Mary Catherine Wade of Germantown, Tennessee; Jenna Seal of Meridian, Mississippi; Patricia Wingate of Woodbury, Tennessee; Lucas Brock of Franklin, Tennessee; and Sarah Kozuszek of Scheller, Illinois, in the Western team event.

“They are prepared and mentally focused,” Herrin said of her riders. “I’m excited to see how this week turns out.”

Herrin, who replaced longtime coach Anne Brzezicki, calls the nationals “a really big deal to make it. Everyone on the team who qualified did it in style. We’re looking very strong.”

In the Western team category, Herrin considers the University of Nebraska, Oregon State and perennial power University of Findlay from Ohio as favorites. St. Andrews University in North Carolina won the title in 2017 and returns to try to repeat.

MTSU took five of its horses to the competition. All riders draw for the horse they will compete in at the event.

“We may draw our own horse or draw a horse from a college in New York we’ve never heard of,” Herrin said. “That’s the fun but challenging part of being here.”

MTSU riders fare well in national stock horse show

In April, Blue Raider riders fared extremely well against NCAA Division I and II schools across the country at the three-day North American Stock Horse Association Show in Sweetwater, Texas.

Riding a horse named Boots, MTSU rider Lucas Brock of Franklin, Tenn., earned a number of honors at the North American Stock Horse Association Show in Sweetwater, Texas, in April. He competes with the MTSU Western team May 3-6 at the IHSA National Championships in Harrisburg, Pa. (Submitted photo by Jenna Gaynor)
Award winners included:

- **Lucas Brock** — placed first in pleasure and reserve in reining; he took Reserve Champion overall in limited non-pro cow horse and trail, and finished fourth overall in collegiate trail.
- **Jenna Seal** — placed second in pleasure and first in reining; named grand champion in green horse trail and fifth overall in cow horse class.
- **Jennifer Dowd** of Shelbyville, Tennessee — placed sixth in pleasure and reining; maintained top-five placings in green horse trail and cow horse.
- **Caroline Blackstone** of Douglasville, Georgia — took fourth place in novice pleasure and sixth in novice reining; seventh overall in novice cow horse.
- **Mary Catherine Wade** — tied for fifth place in novice pleasure and third in reining; sixth-place overall in novice cow horse and trail.
- **Patricia Wingate** — tied for fifth place in novice pleasure; clinched title for collegiate novice champion in trail and eighth-place overall in novice cow horse.
- **Andrea Rego** — in coach division, took reserve champion overall in open trail.
- **Jessica Starling** of Knoxville, Tennessee — 12th-place overall in collegiate limited non-pro trail.
- **Lindsay Kate Gilleland** of Powder Springs, Georgia — placed second overall in youth cow horse.

MTSU was the American Stock Horse Association Division II champion in 2016.

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