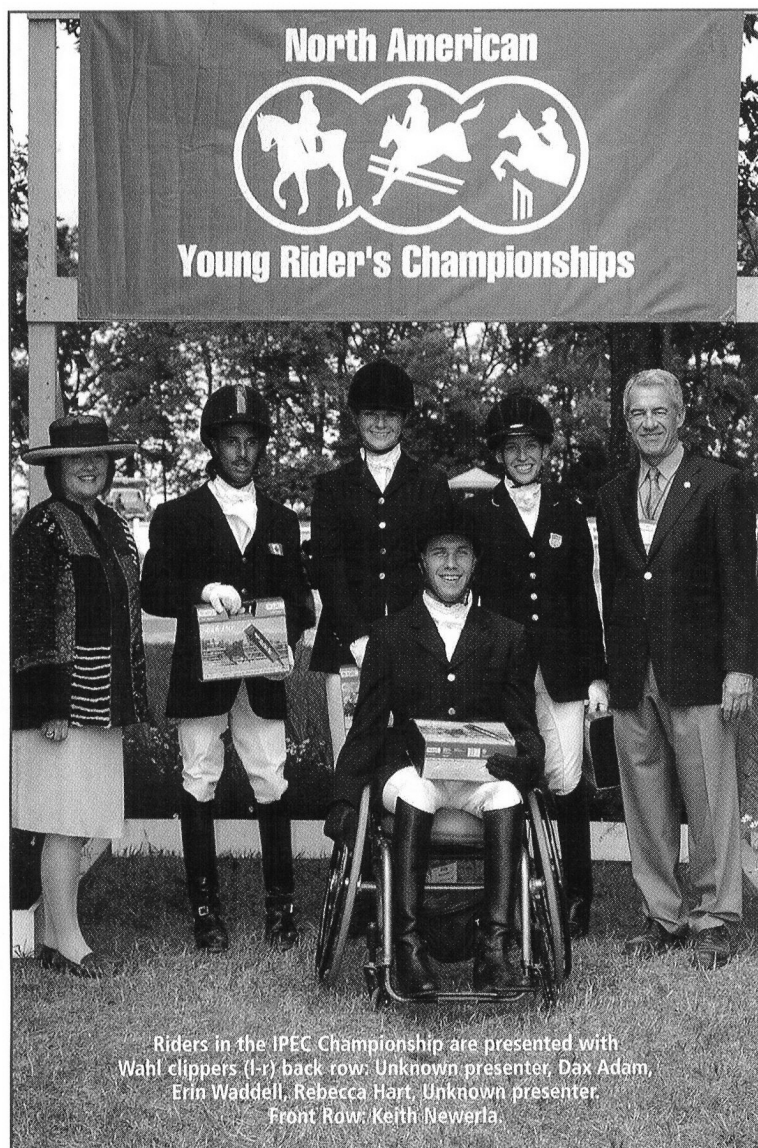




Young Riders with Physical Disabilities Shine



Riders in the IPEC Championship are presented with Wahl clippers (l-r) back row: Unknown presenter, Dax Adam, Erin Waddell, Rebecca Hart, Unknown presenter. Front Row: Keith Newerla

Photo by Catherine Knight

Young riders with physical disabilities demonstrated their remarkable equestrian abilities in the Mills Team Challenge at the 2004 Maui Jim North American Young Riders' Championships (NAYRC) at Tempel Farms in Old Mill Creek, Illinois, August 10-15.

Sponsored by The Mills Corporation, the Mills Team Challenge is run under the auspices of the National Disability Sports Alliance (NDSA), the national coordinating agency for equestrian sports for riders with physical disabilities. These riders, ranging from 16-25 years of age, are teamed with able-bodied young riders who are also competing at the NAYRC.

Each team in the Challenge included riders who competed in the championships' regular competitions in the Olympic disciplines of dressage, eventing, and show jumping teamed with a rider with a disability who competed in dressage. Overall placings in the Mills Team Challenge were based on each team's combined scores after their respective events.

Riders with disabilities at the NAYRC took part in an International Paralympic Equestrian Committee (IPEC) Championship, featuring an IPEC grade class and a musical freestyle. These scores were calculated together with those of their able-bodied teammates to determine the Mills Team Challenge winners.

Keith Newerla of Seaford, New York, rode Pluto IV Sabadilla to a two-round final score of 137.056% to win the IPEC Championship. Following Newerla in second place was Rebecca Hart of Erie, Pennsylvania, riding Lego, with a score of 135.593%. Third place went to Dax Adam of Scarborough, Ontario, who piloted Copper Rose to a total score of 134.411%. In fourth place was Erin Waddell of South Lyon, Michigan, who earned a score of 122.153% aboard Don Giavanni. Newerla, Hart, and Adam all qualified to travel to Athens for the 2004 Paralympic Games.

The Gold Medal in the 2004 Mills Team Challenge was won by the Cobalt Crew, a team featuring Rebecca Hart with Veronique Lavalle (Canada-East, Dressage); Kristine Lyons (Zone 1, Jumping *); Brianne Goutal (Zone 2, Jumping **); John Michael Durr (Area 6, Eventing *); and Athena Arnot-Copenhaver (Area 6, Eventing **).

"It's really great at the NAYRC and we had a lot of fun," said



Steve Jacobsen of The Mills Corporation presents the Jacobsen Perpetual Trophy for the IPEC Championship to Keith Newerla.

Hart, who has previously competed at the NAYRC three times. "The freestyle, for me, was the most unforgettable part of this year's competition because it was my last competition with Lego, my Athens qualifying horse. It was pretty emotional because he's been so wonderful, helping me to become first alternate for the Paralympic team. We won the freestyle, so it was a great final competition with him."

She added, "Alan Renkis and Thermoclad have generously donated Lego to me for competitions for a while now, and even though I'm kind of sad I that won't be riding him anymore, I'm really thankful for the time we've had together."

The Silver Medal went to the Charismatic Centaurs team, featuring Dax Adam with Christina Jahl (Region 8, Dressage); Alexandra Zavayna (Area 2, Eventing *); Cayla Kitayama (Area 6, Eventing **); Katherine Brandes (Zone 10, Jumping *); and Kim Farlinger (Ontario, Jumping **).

"The NAYRC was a great competition!" said Adam, who represented Canada at the Paralympic Games in Athens. "It was fun, a good preparation for the Paralympics. I really enjoyed hanging out with my fellow Canadians, too."

The Bronze Medal was awarded to the Keith's Caravan team, featuring two-time NDSA National Champion Keith Newerla with Christina Beal (Region 7, Dressage); Kathryn Schiess (Area 4, Eventing *); Preston Wofford (Area 3, Eventing **); Jennifer O'Neill (Quebec, Jumping *); and Kelly Soleau (Zone 1, Jumping **).

"It's tough when you don't know what your horse will be like until you get there," said Newerla, who also competed in the Paralympics in September. "There's only so much preparation you can do before you compete, but the NAYRC was good because it's the same quality of competition, so that definitely helped."

Riders with disabilities often ride borrowed horses at events such as the NAYRC. It can be difficult to prepare when they are given only a short time before competition. But they never complain.

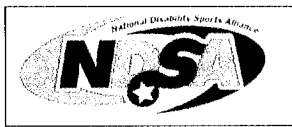
"I have to thank Lauren Sprieser [one of the NAYRC riders] for loaning Don Giovanni to me for the competition," said

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Rebecca Hart and Lego.

Photo by Lisa Patterson



Riders on the Mills Team Challenge Gold Medal team (l-r) Brianne Goutal, Kristine Lyons, Veronique Lavalle, Rebecca Hart, Athena Arnot-Copenhaver, John Michael Durr. Photo by Catherine Knight

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Waddell. "Don got better and better every day. It's hard and frustrating sometimes because you only get those few hours combined over a couple of days, but it's always fun to see how you can do."

The riders always feel special appreciation for all of the help and support they receive before, during, and after competitions—people like Sprieser and Ann Leslie, who have donated their horses for use in NDSA competition; John Stevenson, who served as the Chef d'Equipe for the Mills Team Challenge riders; Carrie and Jerry Schwartz, who work tirelessly to train and assist the riders; NAYRC Director Howard Simpson, who not only hosts the NAYRC, but also puts the athletes first in everything, greeting each one with a high five and a friendly smile; and Steve Jacobsen of The Mills Corporation, who generously sponsors the Mills Team Challenge.

"We can't thank them all enough," said the riders. "Without their help, we wouldn't be able to do what we do. They've joined in our jokes and they've constantly pushed us to get better and better. They're all great!"


Riders with physical disabilities often find themselves unknowingly offering inspiration to others around them, too.

"Someone walked up to me after [a] competition and said that they really admired me for being such a good role model," said Newerla. "She said that others might expect to win because of their horse's ability, or something like that, but we win because we work with what we have and we're dedicated in our training. And all I could think was, 'Wow!'"

Newerla confessed, "I don't really think of myself as a role model, but you have to be an ambassador for your sport, for dressage in general or for riding with disabilities. I just try to do my best."

"We had a man in a wheelchair come up to us and tell us that we had inspired him to start competing too," added Waddell and Hart. "He said he had been doing some therapeutic riding, but now he wanted to compete just like us. We told him, 'Why not? You should because it's really great!'"

The National Disability Sports Alliance provides athletic opportunities for athletes with physical disabilities, just as the Special Olympics movement provides similar opportunities for people with mental retardation. NDSA is responsible for conduct and administration of approved sports in the United States. NDSA formulates the rules, implements policies and procedures, conducts national championships in twelve sports, disseminates safety and sports medicine information, and selects athletes to represent the United States in international competition.

NDSA is the National Coordinating Agency for equestrian competition for riders with disabilities. NDSA works closely with the U.S. Equestrian Federation and other organizations to provide opportunities for riders with disabilities within the "able-bodied" community. NDSA is a CBO (community based organization) member of the United States Olympic Committee. 

For more information on the NDSA and all of its programs, please visit www.ndsaonline.org or www.ndsaequestrian.org.