

# NCEL Promotes Good Horsemanship And Sportsmanship

*Team Competitions For Junior Riders Have Produced Some Star Alumni*

**By Michelle Benczkowski and Judi Novak**

Since its inception in 1979 the National Capital Equitation League (NCEL) and its affiliates, the National Capital Short Stirrup Equitation League (NCSSEL), and Junior Equitation League (JEL), have been teaching young men and women the values of good horsemanship and good sportsmanship.

With the rise of intense competition at the national level in IEA (Interscholastic Equestrian Association), and Intercollegiate teams in IHSA and NCAA, NCEL and its affiliates provide a less expensive place for riders to hone the skills necessary to later be competitive on the national stage in a safer, more user-friendly atmosphere.

Unlike the national leagues, in the NCEL there is a two-minute warm up and coaching period before each flat class. If a horse seems unsafe or unsuitable, the coaches can agree to switch horses or give the rider a different mount. In jumping classes, the riders are allowed two practice jumps and discussion time with their coach. Many top local riders compete in both NCEL and IEA to get more valuable practice.

NCEL Alumnus and 5\* event rider Savannah "Woodge" Fulton of Full Moon Farm Equestrian, competed in Europe as the recipient of a \$45,000 USEA

grant as one of the top up and coming young riders in the US. In 2018, she was the top finishing young rider at the Land Rover Kentucky Three Day Event. She has also earned titles at Kentucky

for "Best Turned Out" and "Best Conditioned Horse" aided by her groom, sister, former NCEL Open Reserve Champion and Advanced level event rider, Grace Fulton, who earned the "Best Groom" award at our nation's biggest international event.

When asked what was the most valuable experience that prepared her to work in the barn of one of our nation's top event riders, Woodge replied without hesitation, "Riding in the NCEL leagues growing up made me comfortable and confident enough to get on strange horses and in a very short time analyze what I needed to do to give them the best ride possible. Most of the people



**Coach Judi Novak leads Olivia Hall into the arena for a practice round during the NCEL Finale Meet.**

I met when I first started working for Buck Davidson had only ridden their own horses and were uncomfortable and unprepared to ride whatever came their way."

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Five-time IHSA (Intercollegiate Horse Show Association) and six-time ANRC (American National Riding Commission) National Champion Cody Wooten credits his collegiate and his professional success to his time in NCEL. "NCEL really helped shape the rider I am today. The league was a fun and inviting way to introduce the concept of "catch" riding. In many ways NCEL was, in combination with solid instruction in basic horsemanship, more helpful than anything else in building solid basics and confidence in the



**Tatiana Bachara from Oak Crest Farm focuses on keeping her eyes up and her heels down during an NCEL flat class.**

show ring because it allows you to practice on a wide variety of horses in various show situations."

An NCEL team is comprised of six to nine riders. NCEL riders may be 18 years old and younger as of 10/1 of that competition season. They compete in three classes at the coach's discretion, which may be flat and or jump classes.

In addition, two riders from each team at each meet compete in a Finale class in which they show at all three gaits. They then ride at the walk and trot without stirrups, jump two jumps chosen by the judge and answer a horsemanship question.

An NCSSEL team is comprised of six to nine riders. NCSSEL is our intermediate league, designed to introduce the skills necessary to compete in NCEL; riders may not have competed at jump heights higher than two foot six inches in recognized shows. They compete in three classes at their coach's discretion. The coaches may choose between Walk-Trot, Walk-Trot-Canter, and two jumping classes at 18 inches.

A JEL team is comprised of five to ten riders. JEL riders may be between 3 and 18 years of age and may compete in divisions ranging from lead line through an 18", 6 fence course level. JEL is an introductory league providing an opportunity for beginner riders to be a viable part of a team, establish horsemanship skills and a solid foundation in hunt seat equitation.



**The Full Moon Farm NCEL team plans strategies and makes final adjustments to their show attire and hair before going into the ring at a Red Gate Meet.**

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