



A Look Back:

2014 National Sunshine Series

November 18, 2014

Elli Yeager Wins Onondarka Medal Final



Elli Yeager, 12, and Copperfield 39 jump in the Onondarka Medal Final, a long-running class for young riders. ©ESI Photography

The National Sunshine Series was honored to host this year's Onondarka Medal Final, a prestigious long-running event for young riders, many of whom have grown up to become iconic Grand Prix show jumping stars.

The top prize went to 12-year-old Elli Yeager of Westlake Village, California, who rode in memory of her friend, Shelby Drazan, who was taken at the young age of 17, a fellow
continued on Page 10



Elli Yeager, 12, and her Dutch Warmblood, Copperfield 39, won this year's Onondarka Medal Final. ©ESI Photography

continued from Page 1

prize-winning rider. Elli won the medal final aboard Copperfield 39, a Dutch Warmblood. Elli, who just turned 12 in October, also placed well in numerous other classes, including a win in the Zone 10 Equitation Championships for Riders 11 Years of age and under.

The Onondarka Riding School at nearby Rancho Polo in Thermal sponsors the Onondarka Medal Class and its Final each year for riders 12 years of age and under. Besides the age requirement, competitors must be active members of the Pacific Coast Horse Shows Association and qualify for the Final by winning an Onondarka Medal Class with five or more riders, or accumulating 12 points in qualifying classes since the preceding year's Final.

"These kids riding are the Grand Prix stars of tomorrow," said Don Simington, 81, whose father, Harry Simington, started the riding school in the mid-1940s and established the Onondarka Medal class—the first 3' Equitation Finals for younger riders on the West Coast in the early 1960s.

At that time, the few classes for younger riders were for 17 and under and had 3 foot 6 inch jumps.

"The 9-, 10-, 11- and 12-year-olds were competing against the 17-year-olds. He

felt there should be a medal class designed exclusively for them. It's probably the oldest 3 foot medal class around," said Simington. "It just really would have tickled dad how much the kids look forward to going into it and winning it."

In the Onondarka Medal Final, young exhibitors competed in rounds 1 and 2 for an averaged numerical score. Then, the top 15 riders contend again in round 3, the score from which is added to their total, to produce an overall score.

"I think that as they learn to ride and they start to show a little bit more and then become aware of a medal level class, it gives them something to shoot for, ride to their best, and become great. Something to look forward to," said Simington.

After Round 3, the top eight riders, plus any rider within three percentage points, compete in a work-off, starting in the reverse order of their score. Elli, who was in second place going into the work-off, bested the leading rider, Katie Browne on Candle Light Van De Warande, to the win.

"It was a big day. She was really excited," said Elli's father, Louis Yeager. "I also want to thank Elli's trainers, Karen Healey, Melissa Jones, Tasha Visokay, and their groom, Luis. Elli started riding with Karen a year ago."

MEET THE WINNER: Elli Yeager

HITS: Is this your first year competing in the Onondarka Medal Final?

EY: Well, last year I made it to the second round and then I pulled out because my horse didn't feel right.

HITS: Tell us about the competition.

EY: Saturday morning, going into Round 2, he (Copperfield 39) was a little bit fresh, but then I schooled him for a while which got him quiet. Then, when we did the second round, I got a 90, combined with an 83 for an average of 86.5.

Going into the third round we were in second place which I held with a score of 84, for the work-off.

The work-off gave me the cutting edge to win as I chose a tricky inside turn towards the end of the work-off course. The jumps were all good, as were the turns, so that's how I got her.

HITS: What motivated you throughout the final?

EY: Shelby Drazan, who died in October. She was only 17-years-old and one of my best friends. I was really tight with her and her family. My love for her and her family motivated me through all of these classes—I'm going to do my best for her because that's what she would have wanted me to do.

HITS: Who is your favorite rider?

EY: Beezie Madden...Her style is very good and she rides all of the horses in a consistent form; she rides them all perfectly. It's fun to watch her because she rides so accurately, with style.