



SAM WALKER JUNIOR EQUESTRIAN OF THE YEAR – THE GILLIAN WILSON TROPHY



Photo Credit: Sarah Latterner

Sam Walker, 18, of Nobleton, ON, epitomizes the spirit of the Equestrian Canada (EC) Junior Equestrian of the Year award, which recognizes a junior athlete who has excelled in equestrian competition in the current award year while demonstrating exceptional talent, horsemanship and dedication to equestrian sport and the vision and mission of EC. The prestigious award honours Gillian Wilson, who served as technical director of the Canadian Equestrian Federation for more than 15 years.

After completing another landmark season in 2019, EC is proud to give a second consecutive Junior Equestrian of the Year title to Sam, who became the first-ever recipient in the history of the EC National Awards to receive both the Equestrian of the Year and Junior Equestrian of the Year awards in 2018.

Right from the get-go, Sam came out swinging in 2019, being named the anchor rider for Team Canada in the \$10,000 CSIO-Y Nations Cup at the Palm Beach Masters in January. Riding MarBill Hill Farm's Coralissa, Sam put a clear round on the scoresheet and helped the team earn fourth place against stiff competition, despite having no opportunity for a drop score as a three-member team.



Sam and Coralissa went on to even greater success that summer at the FEI North American Youth Championships (NAYC) in North Salem, NY. While the duo helped Canada clinch the bronze medal in the Junior division in 2018, this time they moved up to the Young Rider division and had their sights set on gold. It was mission accomplished after Sam and Coralissa accumulated just a single time fault over three rounds of competition to put the Canadian Young Rider Team at the top of the podium. A few days later, Sam returned to the podium to celebrate individual silver.

While Sam was categorized a junior competitor in 2019, that didn't stop him from making his mark at the senior level, too. After making his FEI grand prix debut in 2017, Sam has worked hard to finesse his skills and gain experience and consistency at the top levels of show jumping. In 2019, he entered a total of 54 FEI grand prix classes, winning an impressive seven. This included back-to-back wins in the \$10,000 Open Welcome and \$25,000 Grand Prix at Caledon Equestrian Park's Summer Festival, as well as a return to the Caledon winner's circle for the \$25,000 Grand Prix during the Autumn Classic.

However, Sam's greatest grand prix success came at another Ontario venue, Angelstone, where he nabbed the Kubota Triple Crown Championship for consistent high placings across a series of three competitions. His biggest win in the series came aboard his trusted partner Coralissa in the \$72,000 Groupby Grand Prix during The International CSI 2* in late August.

Sam's success continued into the fall season. Having gained a reputation as an equitation phenom in 2018, Sam continued to prove that he is a threat in any ring, anywhere in the world, after becoming the first Canadian to win the Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) Equitation Final. He earned the WIHS Equitation Classic Trophy by showing his versatility and consistency over three challenging phases: hunter, jumper and final work-off. He adds the trophy to an impressive collection of big eq wins. Sam was just the fourth Canadian in history to win the prestigious ASPCA Maclay National Championship in 2018, then claimed the CET Medal Final that same week.

Sam returned back across the border just a few days after WIHS to cap off the season at the Royal Horse Show in Toronto, ON, where he reached yet another milestone in his young career – making his debut in the \$125,000 Henry Equestrian Canadian Show Jumping Championships. Acting as the national grand prix finals, the Championships are by invitation only and see the top 25 athletes from across the country go head-to-head over two days of competition.

Once again, Sam called on Coralissa for this pivotal experience, and despite being the youngest rider in the field, had clears in two of three rounds and finished third overall, just behind Canadian Olympians, Beth Underhill and Amy Millar. His impressive finish in the



Championships earned his berth forward to the coveted international division, where he successfully competed throughout the week against some of the world's best athletes. His best finish came in the \$50,000 Canadian Open, where he placed sixth against a stacked field that included Olympic Champions Eric Lamaze and Bezie Madden.

Equally respected outside of the saddle, Sam is described by coach, Missy Clark, as “always willing to help”, and is known for hands-on horse care, assisting fellow students and displaying an exemplary dedication to horsemanship. EC congratulates Sam on his continued success as an athlete and a commendable role model, and is delighted to add another accolade to his ever-growing collection.