



AVERILL SAUNDERS **JUNIOR EQUESTRIAN OF THE YEAR**



Photo Credit: Kaiser Impressions

Averill Saunders named Junior Equestrian of the Year

Averill Saunders of Sundre, AB, has been named one of two Junior Equestrians of the Year for 2022 – both of whom will receive the Gillian Wilson Trophy. Saunders’ performance at the 2022 ECCO FEI World Championships in Herning, Denmark and her remarkable thirteenth-place world ranking were instrumental in earning her this well-deserved honour. At just 18 years old, Saunders left a lasting impression at the world championships, not only as one of the youngest competitors but also as the highest-placed Canadian woman in equestrian vaulting history.



Founded in 1993, the Junior Equestrian of the Year Award honours Gillian Wilson who served as Technical Director of the Canadian Equestrian Federation for more than 15 years. The award is given to a junior equestrian athlete who has excelled in equestrian competition in the current award year while demonstrating exceptional talent, horsemanship, sportsmanship, and dedication to equestrian sport, as well as the vision and mission of EC.

From a young age, Saunders was not only a rider, but an avid dancer and gymnast as well. It was these skills that laid the foundation for her to begin vaulting. Saunders discovered the sport at a summer camp and immediately fell in love as it combined her favorite interests into one. Vaulting quickly became Saunders' primary focus, and her hard work and dedication has led her to become a rising star in the sport.

At 13 years old, Saunders made history as the first Canadian to perform a backflip dismount. From that point forward, she has continually set numerous firsts for Canadian women in vaulting. Representing the country at four international vaulting championships, Saunders was consistently the highest-placed female Canadian athlete.

Despite the added challenge of multiple horse changes throughout the year, Saunders had an exceptional 2022 season. Her accolades include earning 3rd place at the CVI Canada Cup, 3rd place at the CVI Sweden, and 1st place at the CVI Chilliwack. These performances led to Saunders qualifying for the highly competitive 2022 ECCO FEI World Championships, where she and her partner of only two weeks, the Westfalen gelding Rockemotion (Rockwell 3 x DI Versace), owned by Hans-Peter Krukenberg, Marlies Krukenberg, Kai Vorberg, and Nina Vorberg finished in a solid 11th place.

Saunders embodies exceptional professionalism, horsemanship, and sportsmanship both inside and outside the ring. She serves as both a role model and a voice for younger Canadian athletes in her community. Saunders takes pride in Canada's growing reputation as a renowned talent in the sport. "I have worked incredibly hard to advance Canada and the sport of vaulting in the equestrian community, and I feel I am only getting started. Breaking boundaries and setting an example for youth equestrians in Canada are daily motivators for me." Saunders shared. Looking ahead, Saunders is focused on training for the upcoming championships in Sweden while making time to mentor other Canadian junior vaulting athletes.