

Jumping for The Stars

During the 2023 National Western Stock Show (NWSS) US Equestrian Hunter/Jumper Show, Jeni Lamb Rogers experienced what most people would call a serious setback. But to her, it was just another rung on her ladder toward achieving her goals.

Jeni has been around horses and agriculture her whole life; she spent her early days in the Boulder County 4-H club dabbling in junior leadership experiences and horseback riding, in both the English and western disciplines. By the time she was moving out of the youth programs and into the amateur competitions, she was at the 3' Hunter/Jumper level and working to provide a second career to many off the track, green thoroughbreds.

As Jeni started her collegiate career she knew she wanted to become a Food and Agriculture Lawyer. Her experience as a horse show judge gave her public speaking and argumentation skills. She was recruited by Virginia Tech to compete with their horse judging team and rode on both their western and their hunter/jumper show teams, later to be named the western team captain. She then went into international development work before earning her Master's Degree in Agricultural Economics and was able to travel to many different places, including Kenya and Uganda, to help with building sustainable agriculture development. Jeni achieved her dream of becoming a Food and Agriculture Lawyer before moving back home to Colorado and working for a number of large law firms and went on to develop her own natural product practice. Just within the past few years she was able to start working in-house with one of her clients.



In 2018, Jeni lost of her appendix gelding who she had purchased while in college and who had become significant in her life. She considered not riding anymore after the loss and her trainer, Jill Pelzel, asked her not to give up and come ride with her. After a few years, Jeni was ready to get back in the arena with a horse of her own and in 2020 purchased a new jumping partner, Renaissance Man, aka Manni.

At the 2023 NWSS, Jeni and Manni prepared for their next run with heightened feelings. There was a feeling of a rushed warm-up, trying to find the right placement for Manni to land

when practicing which in turn had him overjumping each jump he approached. As he overjumped an oxer in the show arena going away from the gate, he landed a little too far in front of where Jeni was wanting to be for the following jump lineup. The line for the next jump was an awkward distance and both Jeni and Manni felt the difference. Going into the jump the position they took off from was awkward and Manni touched the top pole which made him panic. The course called for them to go to the right; Manni went to the left. As Jeni went to land on her feet, her foot was caught in the dirt and the impact ended up breaking her tibia, fibula, and her malleolus (the outside bone of the foot). The emergency team was quick to get help to her and give her a ride out of the arena when she was transported to the hospital.

The recovery from this injury was no easy feat. Jeni had an open reduction and internal fixation surgery on her leg which placed plates, pins and a tightrope suture running across her ankle. Post-surgery she developed a rare bone infection which required two additional surgeries to scrape the infection out of her initial injury sight and to remove the hardware they had placed. Jeni also needed a picc line to receive antibiotics three times a day for 6 weeks. During this time her trainer, Jill, and her friends came together to prepare her and her family dinners and her husband was able to drive her out to the barn to see the horses from the car. But it wasn't long until she was back on her feet and back in the barn. Through March and April she rode without stirrups and was sneaky with jumping when she was able. She was required to wear her boot constantly after the hardware was removed as the doctors were fearful of the bones breaking again since they were removed so early in her healing process.



With a little more time, Jeni was able to compete again in July of 2023. At this point there were only four horse shows remaining in Colorado that would help Jeni earn points to qualify for the 2023 Taylor Harris Insurance Services National Horse Show Championships in Louisville, Kentucky. She rode her horse Just for Kick, aka Kick, four weekends back to back in order to earn the points she needed. In the final weekend to reach her goal, she competed at a show in Estes Park then drove to the Colorado Horse Park in Parker the same day to take 2nd

place and earn the final point required. Jeni qualified for the Finals and was ecstatic! She could not wait to compete in October after she had endured such a tragic injury. She had competed at the National Horse Show in 2022 and was hoping to get qualified again in 2023 for another chance at a championship.

Coming back for the National Western Stock Show in 2024, she could feel the nerves. Especially during the first few classes she reminded herself to breathe through the rides and center her mind. She prepared to conquer the show that sidelined her for most of the 2023 show season. She put in her personal best ride with Kick to win the Ariat Medal class. Jeni was the Reserve Champion for the Amateur Owner Hunter division, which is the highest height for amateurs. She was thrilled to get the Stock Show under her belt again and to work through some PTSD from the accident. She left feeling confident and proud of her accomplishments.



Jeni feels as an amateur, "the most important thing is to build relationships with people who believe in your dreams as much as you believe in your dreams and who want to be there with you and want to have fun. It is not easy to ride at the level that we ride at and to maintain the careers that we do. We all take care of each other's horses when one of us has to take a work call at the horse show. Having that community with your horses is about having a relationship with not only your horses but also the people who you set goals with and have fun with. It is a joyful shared experience with friends."

There is no greater feeling than establishing a relationship with your horses and friends, building trust in your partners and being able to jump for a goal within reach. Building confidence takes time and when you surround yourself with a strong community, anything is possible and goals will be met.

Story by NWSS Junior Apprentice Committee Member Rain Wheeler
Photos by Casey McBride Photography & Shawn McMillen

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