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For More Information:
Contact Press Officer John Strassburger
707-217-5072/phoenixfarm@hughes.net

Nunnink Corners The Galway Downs International Three-Day Event

Temecula, Calif., Nov. 1, 2009 -- Kristi Nunnink and Corner Street ended the CCI2* at the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event the same way they started it--in first place.

With her three closest competitors less than 2 points behind her as show jumping, the event's final phase, got underway, it looked as if Nunnink and the 10-year-old gelding would have to be absolutely perfect. But third-placed Tamra Smith dislodged two rails on Bubbles At Brickly before second-placed David Koss lowered three rails with Look Sweet. Those miscues gave Nunnink, of Auburn, Calif., all the room she needed.

Corner Street was en route to a faultless round until Nunnink said she caused him to barely tick the final two fences and drop the rails to the ground. "I

just got a little too excited because it was going so well!" said Nunnink, 48. "Even though they'd taken the pressure off, I still really wanted to jump around clean, so I'm a bit disappointed."

Smith, of Hemet, Calif., ended up in second place with Bubbles At Bricky, and Leigh Mesher, of Redmond, Wash., moved up to third place on Mar de Amor after recording a faultless round.

Victory at Galway Downs climaxed a successful fall season for Nunnink. Two weeks ago she finished a strong 10th on her mare R-Star at the Fair Hill CCI3* in Maryland. Next March she'll be aiming both R-Star and Corner Street for the CIC3* at the Galway Downs International Horse Trials before heading east for the Rolex Kentucky CCI4* with R-Star and another CCI3* with Corner Street.

"I think it's so important for us as West Coast competitors to prepare for those big events in the East as much as we can out here on the West Coast, because organizers like Robert Kellerhouse have committed a huge fortune and so much time to make these events for us," said Nunnink.

Smith, 34, has similar plans for Bubbles At Bricky, a 13-year-old gelding. Smith has only been riding him since May, but they've won three events at intermediate and advanced since then. Galway Downs was Bubbles At Bricky's first CCI2*.

"I think we're developing a good partnership, although we're still trying to figure each other out," said Smith.

"I always like Ian Stark's cross-country course, even though you're not quite sure how some of the questions are going to work out when you walk it. But they always do," said Smith.

Mesher agreed, saying that Mar de Amor "was phenomenal on cross-country." The pair added no penalties to their dressage score of 57.2, which propelled them from the 11th place they earned in dressage.

"When I walked the show jumping course, I was pretty nervous because there were quite a few vertical fences, and I don't usually ride them as well as I ride the oxers. But it all worked out," said Mesher, 29.

Smith's successful weekend included more than second place in the CCI2*. Earlier in the day a faultless show jumping round on Clark Kent moved the pair up from fourth to the top spot in the short-format CCI1*. They finished just ahead of Karen O'Neal, from Rivers, Ore., on True Avenue.

Clark Kent, a 9-year-old Thoroughbred gelding, competed as a show hunter before Smith found him--and changed his name. "He jumps so big and so light on his feet that we thought of naming him Superman, but I thought that was a bit presumptuous. So we came up with Clark Kent, which suits him perfectly because he's kind of an unassuming, plain bay," said Smith. "I think he has a very bright future."

O'Neal hopes that True Avenue has a bright future too. She bought the 6-year-old, Thoroughbred mare as a 4-year-old because she'd previously competed on another horse by the same stallion, named True Confidence.

Like Smith, O'Neal, 38, will next aim True Avenue for the CCI2* at the 2010 Galway Downs International Three-Day Event. "I really like this event. It's fun, it's challenging, and the weather is so nice for those of us coming from the Northwest," said O'Neal, mother of a 10-year-old daughter who often competes with her mother.

Two teenagers from Washington dominated the classic-format CCI1*. MacKenna Shea, 16, of Tacoma, only added to the substantial lead she grabbed in dressage on Landioso, while Tessa Beckett, 19, of Snohomish, moved up to second place, even though she earned 4 penalties in show jumping today on Sound Prospect.

Shea could afford to lower four rails by the time she started her round, but she said she still felt anxious. "I always put a lot pressure on myself to ride well, so I definitely still felt pressure," said Shea, who performed a faultless round.

Like Landioso, Sound Prospect jumped impressively, just catching a toe on one rail and dislodging it. Beckett bought the Thoroughbred gelding, now 7, as a 2-year-old and has brought him along. "We really bought him just because he was cute, but he's turned out to be a lot more than that," she said.

Beckett attended Fresno State College in California last year, but she's now transferring to the University of Washington after taking a break this semester to compete at Galway Downs. Shea is a junior in high school.

The two girls were part of a team effort from the U.S. Eventing Association's Area VII (Oregon and Washington). The classic-format CCI1* was to have offered a West Coast young riders team championship, but only the Area VII team entered, causing the competition's cancellation. So the Galway Downs organizers gave Shea, Beckett and teammate Brooke Bayley (who finished seventh) a prize of one free entry apiece to a future Galway Downs Event.

The two divisions of the training-level three-day event also ended up just as they started: Fiona Graham, of Portola Valley, Calif., won division A (for riders under 25) on Isengart, and Gina Miles, of Atascadero, Calif., won division B (for riders over 25) on Patronus.

Neither rider added any penalties to the dressage scores they earned on Friday.

Graham, 22, attends Cal Poly--San Louis Obispo University and trains with Miles, a veteran of the 2008 Olympics. Galway Downs was Graham's second training-level three-day event start with Isengart this year. In June, Isengart, a 6-year-old Trakehner gelding, finished seventh at Inavale (Wash.).

"He's the first young horse I've brought along myself, and I want to really make sure he's confident before I move him up to preliminary,"

said Graham. "This course was the right mixture, because it was longer and harder than the regular training level course. It was sort of between training and preliminary, and I think it was the perfect career step for him."

Miles, 35, said she hadn't competed in a classic-format event since 2004 since no events have offered them above the one-star level since 2005. "By riding here in this event, I hope to send the message to other eventers that I think it's a great thing to do, that it's a really important thing to do for young or inexperienced horses and riders," she said.

Miles and Graham each plan to run these two horses in the classic-format CCI1* at the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event in October 2010.

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For more information on the Galway Downs International Three-Day Event, visit www.galwaydowns.com or call 951-303-0405. To learn more about eventing, visit the U.S. Eventing Association's website (www.useventing.com).