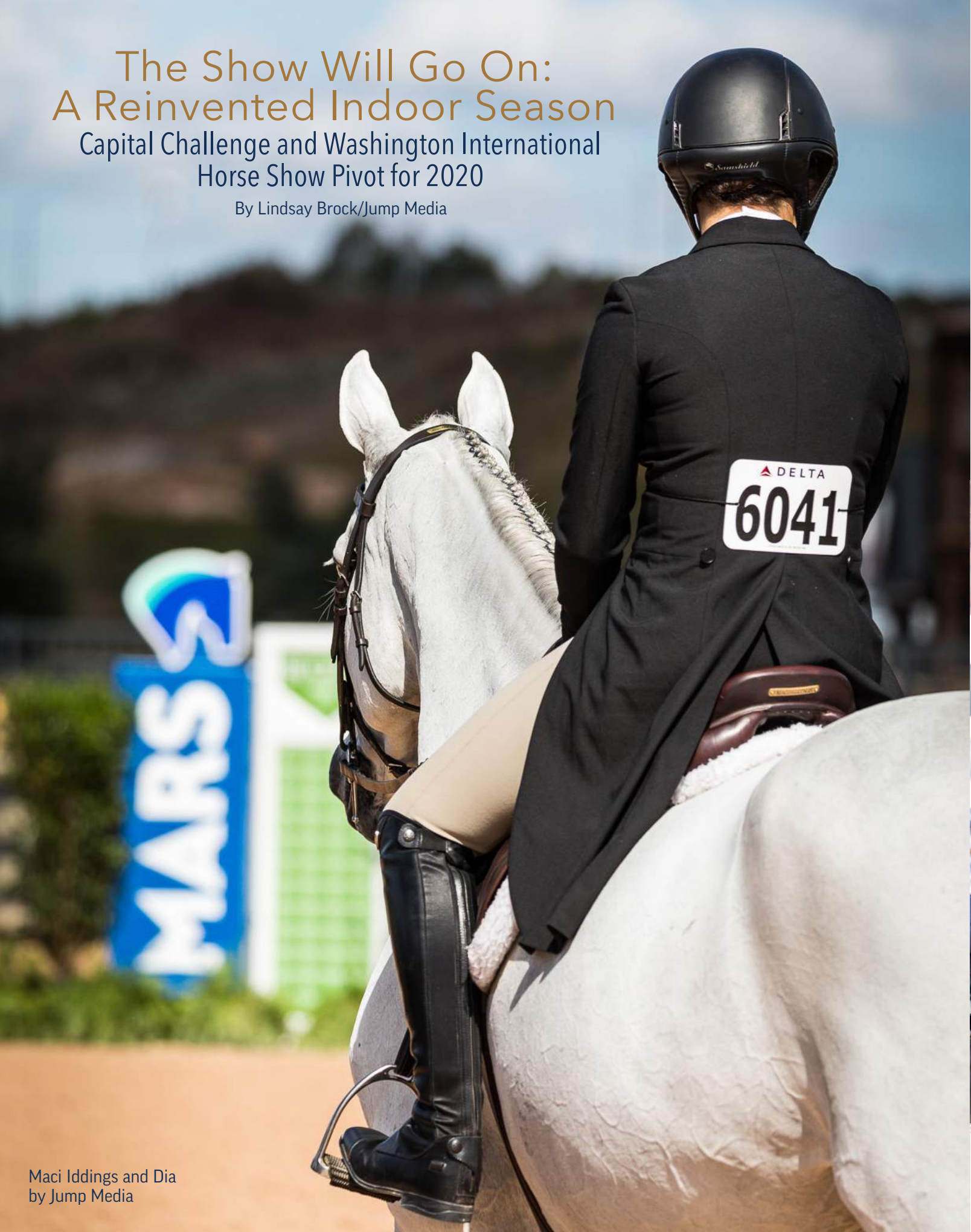


# The Show Will Go On: A Reinvented Indoor Season

Capital Challenge and Washington International  
Horse Show Pivot for 2020

By Lindsay Brock/Jump Media



No one could have predicted the calamity that was 2020. The global pandemic that trickled down into all aspects of everyday life, and the year was unprecedented to say the least. As anyone who has spent even a little time around horses has come to learn, nothing is predictable. The same rule applied to what became of the 2020 show jumping circuit.

As the world began piecing together some sense of normalcy at the end of the summer, the horse show industry peeked out from beneath an unexpected slumber. While the early part of the year brought unavoidable cancellations, the teams involved in managing long-cherished fall indoor events like the Capital Challenge Horse Show and Washington International Horse Show (WIHS), presented by MARS Equestrian™, were determined to see the show go on.

The first priority as management teams began making plans for year-end finals and championships was finding safe and secure open-air venues to host their events. “If at any point we felt that it was going to be unsafe for anyone involved,

we were fully prepared to cancel,” said Capital Challenge show manager Oliver Kennedy. “But, as we worked on a plan in conjunction with the health department, CDC, state organizations, and host locations, we were very confident that we could provide an event that was safe.”

The Capital Challenge Horse Show was ultimately relocated from its longstanding home of 26 years at Prince George’s Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro, MD, to the expansive and state-of-the-art World Equestrian Center (WEC) in Wilmington, OH, owned by The Roberts Family. The Washington International Horse Show also made a move outdoors and took place at Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC) in Mill Spring, NC, after its original location – Capital One Arena in Washington, DC – closed in March as a result of COVID-19, and has yet to reopen.

“Everything changed, and as a result WIHS has had to adapt and rethink tradition,” said WIHS President Vicki Lowell. “WIHS looked very different this year, but it still offered the same level of prestige and achievement as it has throughout its 60-year history.”



WIHS Top 3 Eq Ellie Ferrigno, Tessa Brown, Sophee Steckbeck by Jump Media

While horses didn't make their daily commute to the show ring down F Street in the heart of the nation's capital city, WIHS did crown 2020 champions with the same level of esteem. After adaptations to the schedule reduced the number of horses and people on the grounds, riders still found glory in the coveted WIHS Children's and Adult Hunter and Jumper Championships, WIHS Junior and Pony Equitation Finals, and the 62nd President's Cup Grand Prix presented by MARS Equestrian™. There was even a tiny silver lining that was close to competitors' hearts: several dozen Georgetown Cupcakes made the 500-mile trip to take up their rightful place in the WIHS winner's circle.

The Capital Challenge Horse Show was able to keep their schedule wholly intact thanks to exhaustive planning. The 2020 edition of Capital Challenge featured the World Championship Hunter Rider (WCHR) Finals, the \$25,000 3' and 3'3" Green Hunter North American Championships, as well as the addition of The North American League (NAL) Finals, among all of the regular hunter, jumper, and equitation divisions.

"We took a hard look at the flow of events, reviewed aerial photos of previous shows, and rearranged where we needed to in order to avoid crowds and congestions," said Kennedy. "We were able to accomplish what we set out to do and keep everyone on-site safe and healthy."

## Going Virtual

The management teams of WIHS and the Capital Challenge Horse Show teams pride themselves in delivering to the best of the best in horse sport to all equestrian fans. Whether bringing horses to the streets of D.C., or through live feed production from Capital Challenge, they provide the excitement and thrills of equestrian sport for several weeks each fall. Given spectator limitation protocols from the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF), the events had to reevaluate how they were to showcase sport in 2020. Thanks to support from USEF Network, WEC, TIEC, and unwavering sponsor encouragement, show jumping went virtual.

"So much of our existing spectator base is online, it was not difficult for us to limit access while adding content to what we offer digitally, and we are grateful for the Roberts family's willingness to step up to the plate as host and with live streaming capabilities," said Kennedy of WEC's owners and presenting sponsor of the Capital Challenge Horse Show since 2016. "We were still able to still have the Capital Challenge Horse Show that everyone knows and loves, in a format and venue that provided the best experience possible."



Michael Britt-Leon and Private I by Shawn McMillen Photography



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The Capital Challenge Horse Show and WIHS came alive for all fans despite their inability to attend. Wall-to-wall live streaming was available from WEC and TIEC so that fans could still be a part of both events.

“The horse show world—like the rest of the world—had to adapt, but thanks to efforts by so many individuals, organizations, and governing bodies, we prevailed, and brought the fans of horse sport along with us,” said Lowell.

## Winning Ways

As the Capital Challenge Horse Show and WIHS made the most of a trying year, competition went off in safe and spectacular fashion with winner’s honors being given to both familiar faces and newcomers alike.

The 2020 space on the President’s Cup, which had world ranking points and \$214,000 in prize money on offer – the richest in WIHS history – was filled by Todd Minikus after a storied win with Amex Z, an 11-year-old Zangersheide mare owned by Bit by Bit Group.

“WIHS, and so many horse shows, depend on the support of an immense number of people, especially in a year filled with so much uncertainty,” said Lowell. “After pledging support as the presenting sponsor of WIHS in 2019, MARS Equestrian™ stepped up to renew their support for 2020, and presented the President’s Cup Grand Prix. Such enthusiasm, cooperation, and commitment from MARS Equestrian™, the WIHS Board of Directors, and all of our sponsors is appreciated beyond words. It’s a true testament to what made this year another success.”

Minikus first won the President’s Cup in 1990 aboard Thrilling, a Thoroughbred gelding he owned with Michele M. Masso, and then took the title again in 2009 riding Alaska, owned by Callie Seaman. His third victory put him among a talented few who have their name listed on the prestigious trophy more than twice, including Rodney Jenkins, Bezie Madden, and McLain Ward.

“WIHS has been so important to my career; the first time I won there, it put me on the map,” said Minikus. “This year has been obviously a little bit of a different situation with everything going on in the world as well as show jumping. We were shut down for quite a while and Tryon was one of the first facilities to open up and the team there did a fabulous job of taking on the WIHS President’s Cup. Sometimes you kind of feel like, ‘Here we go, another class,’ but when they mention the President’s Cup – because it has such a history and is such a prestigious event in American show jumping – it is just as meaningful to me as it was 30 years ago.”

Todd Minikus and Amex Z  
by Shawn McMillen Photography

While Minikus found victory at WIHS, a fresh face stole the show in the WCHR Professional Finals at the Capital Challenge Horse Show, which adopted a new format in light of COVID-19 where all riders competed in consecutive first and second rounds on their own horses.

“The change in the WCHR Pro Finals format was done in an effort to reduce the crowding

that we have had in previous years,” said Kennedy. “We minimized exposure between the different riders, who may have switched horses, tack, grooms, and equipment in the past.”

Michael Britt-Leon competed in the WCHR Pro Finals for the first time in 2020 and beat out the likes of Evan Coluccio, Greg Crolick, Kelley Farmer, Courtney Lenkart, and Geoffrey Hesslink for victory. “It is a dream come true to win the WCHR Professional Finals,” Britt-Leon said, who led the WCHR national professional standings coming into the finals. “I have watched this class for a while. Being there in 2020 when it’s been so crazy, just being at a horse show of that caliber, was incredible. It’s been a memorable and wonderful experience, and winning put it over the top.”

This year, virtually every aspect of the world has changed in ways no one could have ever foreseen. The Capital Challenge Horse Show and Washington International Horse Show adapted and rethought tradition to find the safest possible path forward in support of loyal competitors and fans, as well as those who make a living in the sport of show jumping. Thanks to the extraordinary collaboration among many people dedicated to the sport, both events were able to offer safe and prestigious competitions that proved to be bright spots on a 2020 show calendar marked with so much disturbance and change.







# Photo Gallery

Washington International  
Horse Show 2020



Leigh Nanda and El Casper  
by Shawn McMillen Photography





WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW  
1958



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WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW

WASHINGTON INTERNATIONAL HORSE SHOW  
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McKayla Brombach and California Dreamin'  
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# *Photo Gallery*

Capital Challenge 2020





THE CAPITAL CHALLENGE



HORSE SHOW

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