

SPORTS • CLASSIFIED

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Frankie Chesler is a Rising Star

Florida-born rider has bright future in Canada

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

For Frankie Chesler, Canada is the land of opportunity.

A year ago, the Florida-born teen, who holds dual citizenship, decided to pursue her show-jumping ambitions north of the border, even though she had spent most of her life in the U.S.

So, her Canadian father, Alan, and American mother, Sherry, moved to Orangeville and since then, their daughter has been burning a red-hot trail on the Canadian show-jumping circuit.

In November, Frankie, 17, ended the year as champion of the Rising Star jumper series at the Royal Winter Fair, as well as Reserve Champion in the open jumper division, in which she was one of the youngest competitors in the fair's history.

Her other 1997 showing triumphs are too numerous to list, but among the highlights are several grand prix first-place ribbons and individual and team silver medals from the North American Young Rider Championships in Illinois.

"I had hoped I'd do well, but I didn't plan on winning as much as I did," says Chesler.

Although Chesler could ride for either the U.S. or Canada, she says there's a greater need



SAL SACCO FOR THE TORONTO STAR

RIDING HIGH: Frankie Chesler, seen here competing in Collingwood this past summer, hopes to one day ride with Canada's equestrian team.

for riders and less competition for equestrian team spots in this country. Chesler and her parents still spend the winter months in Florida, but for the rest of the year call Ontario home.

Her dad, who shows in the amateur and low divisions, is her main coach, and Canadian equestrian team member Jay Hayes also instructs her during show season.

To her father, there's a simple secret to Frankie's success — she lives, breathes and loves horses. And her top two mounts, Braveheart and Zeth,

get treated like backyard horses.

"First of all, she has fun with her horses," says her dad. "She takes them trail riding, swimming, rides them bareback. She loves it and the horses seem to know it."

The girl also has good hand and eye co-ordination, a keen eye for distance and "anytime she sees a course, she thinks she can do it," according to her dad.

This year, Chesler's biggest victories came on Braveheart, a 14-year-old black American Quarter Horse — a breed more

associated with barrel racing than grand prix jumping.

"He just tries his heart out over everything," says Frankie. "He's got such a motor and he's so careful. He hates kicking a rail. Zeth (a Dutch warmblood) is a little colder, not as careful, but he's still a good horse."

Other mounts in the Chesler string include Donny Brooke, an 18-year-old former World Cup horse, and two new additions, a 7-year-old Holsteiner, Lugano, and 10-year-old Focus, a Dutch Warmblood.

If there was any disappointment for Chesler this year, it was perhaps not being allowed to ride in the Royal Winter Fair's final event, the World Cup qualifier. As open jumper reserve champ, Chesler, then 16, qualified, but according to rules, riders must be 18 to compete.

"It was a little disappointing, but it was still exciting to win the reserve championship," she says.

After competing in the Winter Equestrian Festival in Florida this winter, the Cheslers will return to Ontario, where Frankie will do a couple of early shows in Bolton, before heading to legendary Spruce Meadows in Calgary.

And if the teen has her way, before the season is over, she may be wearing the red jacket of the Canadian Equestrian Team.

"I want to try for the team next year," she says. "I admire all the Canadian riders and I've learned from all of them."