

Spruce Meadows

MASTERS

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Newcomer set to shine

'Barn rat' an equine natural

When you think of Canadian show jumping, names such as Ian Millar and his faithful horse Big Ben, and John Anderson immediately come to mind.

But, Frankie Chesler could soon become a household name in minds of local equestrian fans at this year's Masters at Spruce Meadows.

At 21, she's a newcomer, a multiple Grand Prix winner and the youngest member of Canada's four-member BMO Financial Group Nations' Cup team which also includes Millar, Eric Lamaze and Ansley Vince, the other new gal joining the foursome this week.

"Riding here at Spruce Meadows is always something I've wanted to do and I've ridden on Nations' Cups before, just not in Canada," said the Orangeville, Ont., native — born in Miami — who hopes to help bring Canada its first Nations' Cup title at Spruce Meadows.

"Last time I rode on a Nations' Cup team with Ian in Europe, it was very exciting there and I think riding here will be even more exciting on my home turf."

And she's no stranger to the Masters, having competed here in 2000 — a memorable first effort for the then-19-year-old who ran in two classes that year.

Chesler took part in what was the du Maurier International and just missed cracking the top 12 by a few hundredths of a second — which still ended up being the ride of a lifetime.

"That was, I'd say, the most exciting class in my history of equestrian," enthused Chesler, who will be running in Sunday's \$1 million CN International.

"I was young and when I watched it on TV afterwards, the commentators were saying 'Oh, she'll be happy to get around,' but then I had that round and I think I surprised

myself and everyone else as well."

Considering her main horse, Ravenna Z, loves jumping at Spruce Meadows, Chesler just might be a factor Sunday.

The 13-year-old Hannoverian bay mare has grown with her rider in the sport of show jumping, forging a relationship that is now rock-solid.

"She started the same summer I did, and I think we've just grown a great bond together ... and we've learned a lot," said Chesler, adding Ravenna Z was a brood mare before she began her jumping career.

Chesler is also working on some younger horses, such as Sylvie II, her 12-year-old Holstein, who she hopes will turn out like Ravenna Z — a gamer with lots of spirit.

Perhaps nobody knew Chesler would become an international show jumper.

But when your parents are jumpers, own a barn and live around horses day and night, there's a good chance you might get the jumping bug — and, not surprisingly, Chesler did.

"My parents (Sherry and Alan) used to ride, and my dad still rides and I've lived around horses all my life, so I used to hang around the barn after school — I was always in the barn; they used to call me the 'barn rat,'" said Chesler, who started her Grand Prix career late in 1997 after doing some Young Rides competitions.

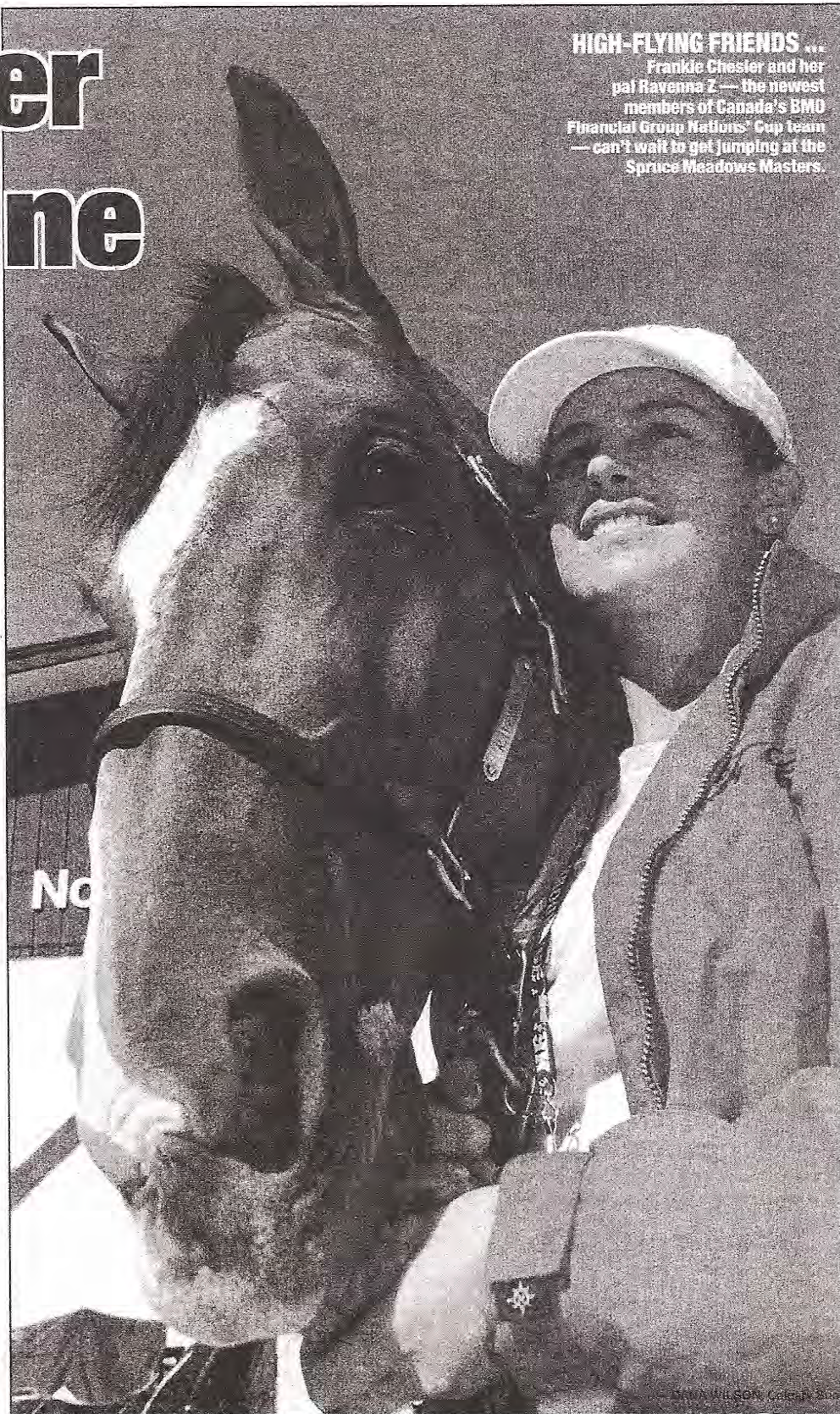
Her career has kept her out of school for lengthy periods, so Chesler had to finish high school via correspondence and is currently doing a management degree online.

The barn rat has gone from hanging around the barns to competing against some of the best show jumpers in the world.

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HIGH-FLYING FRIENDS ...

Frankie Chesler and her pal Ravenna Z — the newest members of Canada's BMO Financial Group Nations' Cup team — can't wait to get jumping at the Spruce Meadows Masters.

PHOTO: WILSON/Calgary Sun