

UNH Equestrian Team Heads to Nationals April 25

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DURHAM, N.H. - The University of New Hampshire men's hockey team may have suffered a heartbreaking defeat at the NCAA finals in Buffalo last week, but for another UNH sports team, hope for a national title is still alive.

For the first time ever, UNH's Intercollegiate Dressage Team has qualified for the national championships. Students Amanda McNeil, Karey Manner, Sarah Costa and Abby White, and coach Sarah Hamilton will travel to Virginia Intermont College in Bristol, Va., to compete for the Intercollegiate Dressage Association (IDA) title April 25 and 26.

Dressage is often described as "ballet on horseback" and at its highest levels produces the spectacular performances of the white Lipizzaner stallions of Vienna's famed Spanish Riding School. At all levels, dressage is a demonstration of grace, beauty and agility that is produced by the seamless communication and harmony between horse and rider.

"Achieving such harmony is a lengthy process requiring athleticism, sensitivity and dedication on the part of the rider and the horse," says Hamilton.

In intercollegiate competition, there is an added challenge as riders draw at random and the host school provides an unfamiliar horse. The rider then has 10 minutes to warm up and "figure out" the horse before entering the ring.

Four riders, each of a different level, compete for each school. UNH competes in the Northeast region of the IDA, which is the largest and most competitive in the country.

UNH finished third in the Northeast as a team in the year-end standings. The team had its best year, including wins at Dartmouth University and Mount Holyoke, qualifying as the only state university for the national championship.

Additionally, UNH students turned out strong individual performances, which earned three spots in the individual national competitions. White was regional champion at the introductory level; McNeil was regional reserve champion at first level; and Manner placed third in the Northeast at the upper training level. While in Virginia, the three will also contend for national championships in their respective divisions.

Amanda McNeil's hometown is Milford, Mass.; Karey Manner's hometown is Swiftwater, Penn.; Sarah Costa's hometown is Boxford, Mass.; and Abby White's hometown is Wallingford, Vt.

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