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Nunnink Leads With R-Star At Galway Downs International Horse Trials

Temecula, Calif., March 28, 2014 — With the top-scoring dressage test and a four-fault show jumping round, Kristi Nunnink and R-Star have claimed a substantial lead in the CIC3* at the Galway Downs International Horse Trials.

Their score of 51.9 faults gives the pair a 5.1-fault lead over second-place Jolie Wentworth on GoodKnight (57.0) and John Michael Durr on Esprit De La Danse (57.6).

With first place in the CIC3* worth \$2,500, course designer Sarah Dubost set a course with a very tight optimum time. Nunnink was one of only three riders to finish without time faults, while the other 12 finishers recorded between 2 and 13 time faults. No horses finished with both zero jumping and zero time faults.

GoodKnight lowered one rail for 4 faults and added 4 time faults. Esprit De La Danse finished 3 seconds inside the time to avoid time faults but lowered one fence. Gin 'N Juice and Hawley Bennett-Awad, the 2013 CIC3* winners, also finished inside the optimum time but lowered one rail, to climb from 10th to fifth.

"I had no idea that they were going to make the time quite that tight. It was almost impossible to get," said Wentworth.

Nunnink said she suspected the time would be tight because she'd heard other riders talking about making tight turns. But she also had the advantage of being the second-last starter, thus knowing how important time faults had become.

"So I tried to shave time off every turn, and I could do that with her because she jumps anything in front of her," said Nunnink.

With a lead of 5.7 points, Nunnink would have to finish 15 seconds slow on Saturday's cross-country course for Wentworth to overtake her.

But she said that her large lead won't affect how she approaches the course. She's aiming R-Star, a 13-year-old Holsteiner mare, for their fourth start around the Rolex Kentucky CCI4* in a month, and she said that her goal is to finish in the top three places there. So she wants to use Ian Stark's cross-country course as a test, "to see if I can really run and jump well at that speed."

Nunnink added, "Time is always a challenge for me, because I personally would be happy to go out there and jump all those fences nice and slow, like it

was a big hunter course. I like to be pretty and flowy. Plus, she's a very aggressive to the jumps and is a big, strong girl, so I've always spent a lot of time slowing her down."

Wentworth expects the cross-country course to suit her and GoodKnight. "It's a big, bold riding course, and I think courses like that are great. I think the time will be decisive too, just like it was in show jumping," she said.

Although time faults were far less decisive in the CIC2*, the leaders said finishing within the optimum time was a stretch. James Atkinson, of Ramona, Calif., added to the lead he and Man On A Mission II grabbed in dressage, by adding no faults to their score of 47.3. Emily Pestl-Dimmitt, of Renton, Wash., climbed one place by finishing with 1 time fault, for a score of 53.0. Matt Brown and Happenstance are third (59.5).

"You definitely had to land and move to make the time," said Atkinson, who rides for Canada. And he expects to have to do the same on Stark's cross-country course with Man On A Mission II, a 12-year-old, Oldenburg gelding.

"My horse has been running well this year – really fast. So I think he can definitely make the time," said Atkinson. "He can be a bit spooky, so I have to be sure I set the tone early in the course. He'll either jump double-clean, or I'll have trouble somewhere."

Pestl-Dimmitt, 20, plans to gallop too. "I'm going for it," she said. "Our time depends a lot on me – on not being so excited that I got over a fence that I forget to gallop. That's something I'm definitely working on."

Pestl-Dimmitt and Alexandra Ahearn, the leader of the CIC1* on Mai Baum, share a coach: Emily's mother, Michele Pestl. Ahearn tied for first in dressage with Tamra Smith on Sunsprite Syrius, scoring 43.0, but Ahearn took the lead when Smith lowered one fence in show jumping.

"This was my best test I've ever had, and he was great in the show jumping," said Ahearn, of Newcastle, Wash., after topping the 37-horse field. "I felt really good after my test this morning, but I was very shocked when I saw the scores. This is a fabulous surprise to me!"

Ahearn is 18 years old, and Mai Baum is a 7-year-old German Sport Horse.

Saturday's international action starts at 12:25, with the first CIC2* horse on course. The CIC3* will run from 1:50 to 2:40, and the CIC1* will conclude the day's action, from 3:30 to 4:50.

Competitors and fans will enjoy the return of what's become a Galway Downs tradition – food trucks, local wines and micro-brews, and live music in three oasis locations around the cross-country course. This year's food trucks are Super Q (www.superqfoodtruck.com), Two For The Road (www.twofortheroadsd.com) and Sweet Treats (www.sweettreatstruck.com).

Fans at home can watch full cross-country coverage at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsYrniqpBiA&feature=youtu.be>

Competition continues for the national divisions on Sunday, with the preliminary, intermediate and advanced divisions show jumping from 9:00 to 1:40 and the training and novice divisions galloping around the cross-country course from 8:00 to 2:30.

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General admission for the Galway Downs International Horse Trials is only \$10 per day in advance, \$15 at the gate, with children under 12 free when accompanied by a paying adult.

For more information on the Galway Downs International Horse Trials, 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).