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Bennett-Awad Races To Top Of Galway Downs International Horse Trials

Temecula, Calif., March 30, 2013 – Hawley Bennett-Awad is no stranger to victory at Galway Downs, and this spring she and Linda Paine's superstar mare Gin 'N Juice have gone perfectly, winning their first two outings of the year. They made it three-for-three by flying to victory (50.1 penalties) in the CIC3* at the Galway Downs International Horse Trials.

Tivoli and James Alliston (55.3) moved in to second behind Bennett-Awad when overnight leader Kristi Nunnink and R-Star added 8.8 time penalties to fall to third (56.1). Alliston also finished fourth on Jumbo's Jake (56.2).

"This spring has been unbelievable with her," said a beaming Bennett-Awad, who rides for her native Canada but lives in Temecula. "She was a machine – foot-perfect everywhere." Bennett-Awad added only .8 time penalties to grab the top prizes.

Gin 'N Juice's speed propelled her to victory, because the optimum time of 6:51 proved to be tough to achieve – only Tivoli and Jumbo's Jake finished faster than the optimum time.

"They must have wheeled the course really tight," said Bennett-Awad of the time penalties. "[At the CCI3* last fall] I could have been 20 seconds fast, and today I was really riding. I don't think I could have gone any faster. But [course designer Ian Stark] wanted it to affect the placings, for sure."

Bennett-Awad and the feisty bay mare known as "Ginny" competed for Canada in the 2012 London Olympics, but they fell early on course. Instead of letting that misfortune become a roadblock, Bennett-Awad has used it as inspiration.

"This spring I feel like everything is really clicking. Whatever happened in London isn't really affecting either one of us. She's just

on top of her game. I've never had her jump this good before," she said.

"Last year was a bit of a downer," she continued. "And I want to prove that my horses and I are really there."

But there was one black cloud over Bennett-Awad's day, as she took a tumble from her second horse, Five O'Clock Somewhere. He was in position to move ahead of Ginny, until they fell at fence 13C, the Majik Equipe Moat.

"That's the sport of eventing," she said with a sigh. "One minute I'm winning the three-star, and the next minute I'm snorkeling in the moat."

"I was trying to be really competitive, and he was jumping super. I'm not really sure what happened, and nobody else has an answer either. I was glad I had an air vest on – it acted as a flotation device. I was soaked," she added.

Great Britain's James Alliston has earned his share of top ribbons at Galway Downs, and he garnered several more this weekend. In addition to placing second and fourth in the CIC3*, he's also standing second and fourth in the advanced horse trials division with Mojo and Parker. The advanced division show jumps on Sunday.

"I was really happy with both of them," said Alliston of his three-star mounts. "Tivoli gave me a great ride. I wanted to go pretty quick with him, and Jake felt confident and jumped well. Tivoli takes a hold, but that's the way he goes. He's pretty easy cross-country, apart from being strong. Jake really did feel awesome – as good as ever."

Alliston added, "They are very different horses. Jake is probably more tiring to ride. With Tivoli you can just drop your hands and let him gallop between the fences. But with Jake if you want to make time, his comfortable galloping speed is not quite there. You have to press him a little bit. But I enjoy him very much."

While the placings in the CIC2* shuffled around a bit, James Atkinson and Gustav jumped double-clean to hold on to the lead they'd maintained ever since dressage (46,8), topping Barbara Crabo and Over Easy (53.0). Atkinson also moved in to third on with a second double-clear round aboard Annie Oakley III (53.4). Emilee

Libby and Nonsensical, who finished sixth, were the only other pair to complete the course without time faults.

“Both horses were really, really good today. They’ve both been really good all year, but you never know,” he said. “Annie has been really strong, and I thought she would do well today. Gustav is not the fastest across country, and time was definitely a factor today. I had to really stay on the minute markers to get it done with him. But he’s so educated now that I didn’t have to waste any time setting him up for the jumps. He likes to be quite lofty in the air, and he’s certainly not the fastest, so I have to save seconds wherever I can.”

While this weekend’s performances indicate his horses are ready for more, Atkinson is circumspect about their future. “Winning here would certainly suggest that they’re ready to move on from here,” he said. “But Gustav may not be an upper-level CCI horse. Much over eight minutes is really a stretch for him. So the CCI3* is not in his future. Annie, though, is being so strong this year, and I’d like to take her back up to advanced. She’s so fun to ride across the country.”

Atkinson, a Canadian who lives in Ramona, Calif., is an accomplished course designer, and he was especially impressed with Stark’s course. “You walk the course and you catch your breath a couple of times, but the horses seem to understand the questions he puts in front of them,” he said. “He really makes you get aggressive and make it happen. Ian’s a horseman, and he really understands horses. It’s nice to ride a course by a real horseman like that.”

The CIC* division also featured a wire-to-wire winner in Julie Flettner and Ping Pong, who had a flowing double-clear cross-country round to keep their spot on top (46.0). They were chased all weekend by Maya Black and Doesn’t Play Fair (49.3), but their perfect round today wasn’t enough to catch Flettner. Erin Kellerhouse and Roxabelle moved up to third with a double-clear round (53.2).

The Galway Downs event will continue on Sunday, with the more than 300 horses in the five national divisions competing on either the show jumping or cross-country courses. And teenage musical sensation Jillian Calkins will climax the weekend’s musical performances on Sunday afternoon, following the conclusion of show

jumping. The kids will also enjoy an Easter Egg Hunt at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The CIC3* division of the Galway Downs International Horse Trials is one of 15 member events of the Adequan/USEA Gold Cup/PRO Tour Series for 2013. Riders in each of these events aim for top prize money and prizes while seeking to qualify for the series final at the American Eventing Championships, where the purse is \$40,000.

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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).