

May 2022

InSpire

Every Woman Has a Story



Amazing Feats

Look for InSpired Senior Living this Month!

AMAZING FEATS

By Dorothy Bliskey

Jaelee Schwartz is not your average 20-year-old. In the world of hunting dog training and competitions, she has accomplished at 20 what countless of highly skilled dog handlers in their 50s and 60s have not been able to achieve. She and her English Cocker Spaniel named Ike won the most prestigious English Cocker dog trial in the nation.

Named the 2021 winner of the U.S. Open Cocker National Championship, Jaelee and Ike traveled to the Flint Hill Preserve in Califon, New Jersey in November to compete against 84 other dogs. Making the win even more unusual is the fact she's a woman. Past winners have been primarily men -- decades older than Jaelee.

"Jaelee is the youngest handler in history to win the U.S. Open Cocker National Championships -- and the only female handler to complete the national championship this year," said her mother, Jena Schwartz, adding that the competitors were from the U.S. and Canada.

Her dog Ike is incredibly intelligent and impeccably trained as a hunting dog, thanks to the training skills of Jaelee -- skills she acquired from observing her dad, Jeff Schwartz, a professional hunting dog trainer who has owned Rock River Kennels near Beaver Dam for more than 30 years.

"My dad taught me how to train dogs to hunt," Jaelee said, noting Ike has a natural talent and a willingness to work. "Ike has a spark to show off, especially at competitions. There is no higher award to be won in English Cocker Field Trials than a National Field Champion."

The award went to the dog that proved -- over multiple days, in many conditions while competing against many other highly skilled dogs -- to be the English Cocker breed's best hunting dog in 2021.

To accomplish the task and win, Ike had to compete against the other 84 dogs in five series, plus a water series over the course of four days. The number of dogs remaining in the competition was whittled down after each series to just 12 in the final series.

"After each round there's an elimination," Jaelee explained. "Only the dogs the judges would like to see again are called back to the next series. During



Jaelee's dog Ike running like a pro.

each series the dog must hunt the field with control and style and flush the birds on their course. The dogs, during the first four series, run simultaneously and must honor each other (they can't steal the other dog's bird). The fifth series is the most intense because it's held in the most difficult cover."

Throughout the 4-day series, Ike continued to be consistent and handled everything with ease.

"As he returned with his third and final bird retrieve, I was immensely relieved and overwhelmed with how incredibly he had performed. After this series, only 12 dogs were called to the final series where they had to complete a water retrieve," Jaelee said.

Consistency and going beyond what was expected are factors that led Ike to become the winner.

"Ike made it look so easy and had beautiful times on all his birds," Jaelee said. "He didn't miss a beat. He didn't make any mistakes. He was an over-achiever. It's what made him stand out from the rest. Ike worked the field with great style and -- most importantly -- he was completely in tune with me, working as a team!"

Ironically, one of the 84 dog handlers competing against Jaelee and Ike was her own father, Jeff Schwartz, with his dog Clay.

"It was very special for my dad and I to be able to run and compete against each other during this national competition," Jaelee said.

Jeff, who had participated in the competition in prior years, did well with his dog Clay in this one, receiving a certificate of merit. But tears came when his daughter Jaelee was announced as the winner. It was an emotional moment for this father-daughter duo.

Looking back, Jeff says he is so happy for Jaelee. "I am impressed with Jaelee's humility even after she won the biggest accomplishment in the English Cocker world," Jeff said. "Many people try their whole life to accomplish a national win and never achieve it. This win offers Jaelee an elite status in the sport that will last her lifetime."

Following the awards, a lavish catered party was held at the elite Flint Hill Preserve where the event was held.

"I was too nervous to eat," Jaelee said, adding that she was letting it all sink in that she'd just won top place. "I always dreamed of winning the national. But I never thought it would happen at 20 years old. I knew Ike was a special dog though."

Jaelee and Ike had developed a strong bond four years ago when he was a young puppy. "I got him at six weeks old. I was always holding him, and he always wanted to be held. We really bonded," Jaelee said.

But Jaelee's earliest memories of dogs reaches back to when she was only 5 or 6 years old.

"As a little girl, I loved playing with my dad's new litters of puppies. I would take them for walks through the fields. I just adored puppies," she smiles.

Jaelee's first experience training a dog occurred when she was 6 years old. It was then she began



Jaelee & her dad at nationals.

training Jimbo, her very first English springer spaniel. "When I was 8, I competed with him in a hunt test," Jaelee said. "My earliest memory is crying at the hunt test when my dog failed! This failure pushed me to train Jimbo in more difficult training scenarios."

Two years later, at age 10, Jaelee placed with Jimbo at an all-age field trial, making her the youngest person in the history of English Springer Spaniels to do so. She was featured on the televised show, *Outdoor Wisconsin*, at that time.

Homeschooling and Business Ventures

Growing up, Jaelee was homeschooled by her mother Jena. So were her three brothers – Jesse, 23 and younger brothers Jedd, 11, and Jagen, 17, who continue to be homeschooled.

"Being home schooled allowed for great flexibility in training my dogs and traveling to competitions," Jaelee said.

For Jaelee, "recess" came in the form of mini-training sessions. "Mom would allow me to take a half-hour break and go out and train my dog, then come back in for school."

Health issues have plagued Jaelee. For years she's dealt with migraine headaches, but feels the right medication has finally helped. Then, at age 19 in November, 2020, she was hit with a severe case of Covid-19. It kept Jaelee from doing her normal training sessions for several months.

"I was pretty sick for almost five months, and it affected my liver," Jaelee said, noting it's now the weakest part of her body. "My joints hurt too."

In spite of it, Jaelee persevered and trained Ike to be at the top of his game for the 2021 national contest. "I really wonder how I could train like I did," she said.

Remarkably, at the age of 18 in 2020, Jaelee started her own business, Green Gable Gun Dogs where she trains clients' dogs to compete professionally. Located on their home property, it is intermingled physically with her dad's Rock River Kennels business and essentially operates the same way. Jaelee has access to the same training fields and ponds that her dad uses to train his clients' dogs, although Jaelee owns most of her own equipment like trailers, place boards and training equipment. Her mother handles the bookwork, takes dogs to the vet, sells puppies, and takes on other tasks related to Jeff's business, but Jaelee handles those tasks for her own business.

"I wanted to have my own identity and my own clients," Jaelee said, noting she trains primarily women and girls and their hunting dogs. Clients have ranged in age from young teens to age 75, and they come from throughout the Midwest.

"I train all flushing dogs for upland and waterfowl hunting," Jaelee explained, although she tends to specialize in English Cocker Spaniels. "I also compete in Spaniel Hunt Tests and Field Trials. I raise a couple of litters of puppies each year and look forward to having them return for training and competitions."

Her mother says Jaelee had a way with animals from a young age. "Most pictures show her holding a puppy or a kitten in her lap," Jena said. "She's always been very mature and has handled herself with such class. She easily relates to many different people and age groups. I admire her tenacity."

Visit www.facebook.com/Green-Gable-Gundogs, www.GreenGableGunDogs.com, or www.RockRiverKennels.net for more information and photos. //



Jaelee & Ike pose for a photo.