



Brannigan Continues Her Winning Streak In Florida CCI**

It's been a fairytale season for this talented young rider.

Sara Lieser



(Sara Lieser Photo)

Jennie Brannigan won five of her last six intermediate outings with Cooper, so it was no surprise when she came out on top again at the Florida CCI**, but this young rider wasn't taking anything for granted.

"It's kind of surreal," she admitted. "It makes me nervous, because I feel like this is my good one, and every time you go out and have continued success, you're waiting for the downfall to happen."

Even though she's just 20, Brannigan's had a few downfalls already. Last year she was leading the two-star at the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships (Va.), but her horse, Kozmo, lost both front shoes on cross-country and didn't pass the jog before show jumping. Then she won two divisions of the American Eventing Championship (Ill.) but learned that she was overqualified after the event, so her wins went to the next-placed riders.

"You think all of them can be like that, and now I'm realizing that he is very special."

—Jennie Brannigan

But all of that is behind her now as she continues to pile up achievements with Cooper, a 7-year-old, Dutch Warmblood gelding (Corland-Praciana).

Brannigan started the three-day at the Florida Horse Park in Ocala, Fla., April 17-20, in second place behind Amy Tryon and That's Smart. But a run-out on cross-country for Tryon at fence 9B, the second Seminole Corner, allowed Brannigan to take over the lead after she put in a double-clean round.

"I thought the course was appropriate and rode well," said Brannigan. "I rode here last fall, and Cooper was very green at those corners when they were unpainted. A lot of people had trouble there. The line walked in a long three [strides], and my horse is quite careful. He ended up adding in four. He was solid about it. Everything else felt seriously great. He felt really

Jennie Brannigan and Cooper formed an unbeatable team in the Florida CCI**.



Leslie Law and All The Buzz jumped to the top of the 54-horse field at the Florida CCI*.

confident. The time was easy to make. I just let him do his job. He's growing up."

The Seminole Corners, which are located in a small section of trees, always cause trouble, but this year the top rails had been painted yellow to help the horses see the question.

Brannigan headed into show jumping with a 10-point lead over second-placed Karl Slezak and Braveheart. Slezak gave Brannigan even more room when he took down a rail, and Brannigan had a rare rail of her own to finish on top with 47.1 penalties.

"I had a decent lead, and the horse has a good consistent show jumping record, but I was nervous," admitted Brannigan. "I was nervous that I would do something silly like go off course."

Although the rail didn't matter in the final outcome, Brannigan was disappointed. "I came around the turn and sent him into the vertical more than I should have. He was jumping so well otherwise," she said. "I'm so hard on myself. I'll stress about having a rail. I think this was our third rail ever."

Brannigan has produced Cooper herself with the help of grand prix jumper Susie Hutchison and Olympic eventer Mike Winter. Her grandfather bought him for her as a 4-year-old from Kelli Temple.

"Kelli did such a lovely job with him on the flat, and his jumping technique was good, but he was very spooky," recalled Brannigan. "He was quirky to the jumps. Even now I can't walk him by a trash can, because he thinks it's going to eat him."

"So I think the way I produced him was a good thing—I worked for Susie Hutchison, and I got to go to jumper shows and ride in the same ring for three weeks straight," she explained. "I think that was important for him. He's starting to believe in me. I do feel that his quirkiness and spookiness still shows up in his show jumping. You can see him looking. But he's braver on cross-country. It works out perfectly."

Brannigan, San Diego, Calif., has big dreams, and she's hoping her first stop this summer will be another chance at winning gold at the NAJYRC. So she's headed back to California to work with Derek di Grazia.

"I want to be a part of the selection process for NAJYRC and go to the mandatory outings," she said.

If all goes according to plan, she'll



(Sara Lieser Photo)

FLORIDA THREE-DAY EVENT

Ocala, Fla.—Apr. 17-20

CCI **

HORSE/RIDER	DRESSAGE	CROSS-COUNTRY Jump/Time	SHOW JUMPING Jump/Time	TOTAL
1. Cooper/Jennie Brannigan	43.1	0/0	4/0	47.1
2. Braveheart/Karl Slezak	53.4	0/0	4/0	57.4
3. L.A. Albert/Bruce Davidson Jr.	54.7	0/0	4/0	58.7
4. Rock On Rose/James Alliston	55.6	0/0	8/0	63.6
5. Titanium/Bruce Davidson Jr.	54.4	0/5.2	8/0	67.6
6. Ahlerich/Meaghan Marinovich	60.0	0/4.8	4/0	68.8
7. Franklin/Ralph Holstein	57.2	0/0	12/0	69.2
8. Border Lion/Cathy Wieschhoff	65.3	0/1.2	4/0	70.5
9. Tantibes/Beth Murphy-Keane	57.2	0/17.2	0/0	74.4
10. Irish Diamonds/Micheline Jordan	60.9	0/6.4	8/2	77.3

Also competed: 11. Goodbye Cavalier/D. Rath, 80.1; 12. Extravagance/I. Anees, 80.3; 13. Minstral/K. List, 84.0; 14. That's Smart/A. Tryon, 84.0; 15. Kenzo De La Roque/L. Barry, 85.9; 16. Riva Ridge Runs/V. Frey, 87.0; 17. Bounce II/E. Hoverson, 88.1; 18. Sambucca/W. Geven, 92.0; 19. Gold Twist/R. Lee, 96.1; 20. 3 Sweets To The Wind/M. Alexander, 98.7; 21. Erodium/V. Fenwick, 99.8; 22. Magic Drummer/R. Bass, 105.9; 23. Jockaloo/J. Moore, 114.1; 24. Ritchie Rich/R. Bass, 118.0; 25. Bungee/H. Whalen, 135.4; 26. Ghost Of Figgy/A. Mulhern, 144.9; 27. Ashmores Godsend/H. Donahue.

Retired on cross-country: Charley Farley/P. Rowland; Yoshi II/J. Jarnstrom. Withdrawn before cross-country: Woodrow II./H. Hillenbrand.

CCI *

HORSE/RIDER	DRESSAGE	CROSS-COUNTRY Jump/Time	SHOW JUMPING Jump/Time	TOTAL
1. All The Buzz/Leslie Law	45.4	0/0	0/0	45.4
2. Pavarotti/Karl Slezak	45.4	0/0.8	0/0	46.2
3. In The Beat/James Alliston	49.3	0/0	0/0	49.3
4. Roksolana/Momo Laframboise	50.7	0/0	0/0	50.7
5. Irish Odyssey/Callie Judy	47.1	0/0	4/0	51.1
6. James/William Ward	47.1	0/0	4/0	51.1
7. Rockstar/Leslie Law	49.6	0/0	4/0	53.6
8. Land's End/Sarah Murphy	53.6	0/0	0/0	53.6
9. Siletto/Andrew Palmer	46.1	0/0	8/0	54.1
10. Prowler/Susan Beebee	53.2	0/0	4/0	57.2

Also competed: 11. Flamboyant/L. Bammann, 58.0; 12. Manolo Blahnik/S. Dierks, 58.2; 13. Broadway Stroll/L. Welsh, 59.0; 14. Riddle Master/R. Howard, 59.4; 15. Strike Point/S. Beebee, 59.5; 16. Unsteelable/M. Winter, 60.1; 17. Courting Tompkins/M. Murphy, 61.6; 18. Grace/J. Alliston, 61.9; 19. Noble Dunlavin/M. Moore, 63.4; 20. Seajack/L. Ashker, 63.4; 21. Spruce/S. Tuckerman, 63.6; 22. Irish Kate/M. Laframboise, 64.1; 23. Car Tanga/J. Lux, 65.3; 24. Piney North/A. Tracy, 66.2; 25. Montague/S. Murphy, 67.3; 26. Roll-x, J. Alliston, 67.4; 27. Case Closed II/K. Blackmer, 69.1; 28. Without A Trace/K. Hewson, 69.1; 29. Class Charmer/A. Allain, 69.2; 30. Yes My Name Is Bob/A. Glaus, 71.7; 31. Tops/D. Dichtung, 76.2; 32. Tommy Two/R. Harbison, 78.2; 33. Mocha Fusion/C. Davidson, 79.8; 34. Sportsfield Ryan/C. Lendl, 86.3; 35. Judge Not/A. Martin-Dias, 87.7; 36. Plain Jane/J. Brannigan, 88.1; 37. Irish Dreams/F. Bradley, 88.7; 38. Festive Way/R. Hanover, 89.2; 39. Epona Macdara/C. Sacchetti, 104.8; 40. Safdie/R. Harbison, 115.3; 41. After Midnight IV/V. Frey, 118.5; 42. Isidor/K. Kojima/118.7; 43. El Guapo/M. Barnes, 119.1; 44. Chaps/E. Renfroe, 124.9.

Eliminated in show jumping: Bon Chance/M. Brazil. Retired in show jumping: Milestone/V. Thivierge. Withdrawn before show jumping: Oxley's Impulse/C. Lendl; Maguire/O. Kamensky. Eliminated on cross-country: Celeste Foster/A. Ostrov. Retired on cross-country: Bellaney Detiny/S. Kuhn; Leap/A. Posner; Speak Of The Devil/K. Bond; Tequesteris/B. Davidson Jr. Withdrawn before cross-country: Shadowplay/P. MacGregor.



(Sara Lieser Photo)

Karl Slezak captured second place in the Florida CCI* with Pavarotti (pictured) and repeated his accomplishment in the Florida CCI** with Braveheart.

step up from the regular horse trials for him,” he said. “The ground was on the firm side, but I thought the course worked very well. There were quite a few odd 20s, and those turning questions just caught a few out. They were decent questions for my horse for where he’s at. It was a good stepping-stone for him.”

“He’s just got that little bit of a wow factor about him.”

—Leslie Law

Heading into show jumping, there wasn’t a rail to spare in the top six, and Slezak, who was lying third, went clear, so Law knew he needed a clean show jumping round to retain his lead over the 54-horse field. A parade of breeds from the next ring added to the noise and bustle.

“He’s a very good show jumper, but I didn’t know if he’d come out a little bit tired and stiff today,” said Law. “He came out and jumped extremely well. He did take a little spook down to fence 2. From there on out he jumped a great round, so that’s a big education for the horse. It’s good to know that he does jump that well on the last day.”

Law plans to head home to Bluemont, Va., after spending the winter in Ocala, and Buzz has earned a month of turnout.

“He’s definitely on a break now,” said Law. “Then he’ll come back up, but I think he’ll need to stay at prelim this year. He’s a very talented horse, but he’s not high on miles.”

Law bought the 6-year-old Dutch Warmblood (Matterhorn—Oletta K.) a year ago over the phone without ever seeing him.

“I got him off my best friend in England, J.P. Sheffield, this time last year,” said Law. “He phoned me up and said, ‘I think I’ve got a very good horse.’”

“I said, ‘OK, I’ll try and get over in the next few weeks.’ He rang me a few days later and said, ‘Look, this isn’t going to be around in a few more weeks.’”

“So I asked, ‘How good is he?’ and he said, ‘I think he’s very good.’”

It all turned out for the best, and Law has been extremely pleased with Buzz.

“He’s just got that little bit of a wow factor about him,” he said. “He is so good in the dressage and does all three phases well, but there is a little bit of character to

return to the East Coast after the championship and begin working for Phillip Dutton in Pennsylvania.

At times, Brannigan struggles with the pressure of having a horse as talented as Cooper. “He just keeps stepping up to the plate. It’s phenomenal. It kind of messes with your head. You think all of them can be like that, and now I’m realizing that he’s very special,” she said. “He rides like a Ferrari. He’s just 16 hands. People think he’s a big horse, but he’s really not. He just has a lot of presence.”

Brannigan has received large offers for her gelding. “It’s hard for me to not sell him. I could sell him and start my own business right now,” she said. “But at the same time I don’t feel like I’m good enough. I can produce young horses, but I need five more years of experience working under someone. I want to be a part of a program. At Mike’s I have been, and Mike has helped me a ton. It’s been a pleasure working for him.”

Brannigan also said that she couldn’t do what she’s doing without the help of her mother and the Munos family, who own

Plain Jane, a 6-year-old, warmblood mare that Brannigan competed in the one-star.

► He’s Something Special

Leslie Law is another rider who knows he may have to sell his talented young horse, but he’s not ready to do so yet. All The Buzz is only 6, but he’s already proved he has that star quality that Law wants.

“I own him, so if someone came along with the right money, he’d have to be sold, but it would have to be the right money,” said Law. “I think he is a really special horse.”

“Buzz” started the one-star in a tie for second place after dressage but moved up after first-placed Emily Renfroe took a dunk in the water.

“He’s a lovely horse on the flat. He did a very good test, but I don’t think he did his best test,” said Law. “I’ve had better at some of the horse trials. He felt super cross-country.”

Law said he was happy about Buzz’s progress in the year that he’s owned him. “He’s grown up a lot. It was obviously a



him. He's not passed having a little joyful play and buck or a little spin. He's definitely his own person, and that's probably what makes a special horse."

► Second Twice Over

Slezak hoped it might be him taking the blue in the one-star, but he had to settle for second place in the two-star and the one-star instead. Those strong finishes proved to him that a winter's worth of homework was paying off for the 26-year-old.

"I come down here [to Ocala] to work on my own riding," said Slezak. "I have a lot of clients at home. When I come down here I can concentrate on myself. This winter I jumped around from trainer to trainer. I've been taking lessons with David O'Connor with the upper level horses because he's the team coach. I was taking lessons with Darren [Chiacchia] with my young horses, but, unfortunately, Darren got hurt. Just before the one-star I had a couple of lessons with Kyle Carter, whom I've worked with in the past."

Slezak trained with Olympian Gary Rocque from the age of 16 and started his own business two years ago. He trains out of Patricia Fitzgerald's Wolf Run farm in Caledon, Ont.

Slezak knew he could be competitive with his two-star horse, Braveheart, and his one-star horse, Pavarotti.

"Braveheart loved that ride—just gallop and turn into the fence. He was on it yesterday."

—Karl Slezak

He originally hoped to take Braveheart to a three-star this spring, but he didn't get him qualified to run the two-star last fall. He's been working with the 11-year-old Thoroughbred, owned by Fitzgerald, for the past three years.

"Now we've done a two-star, and, hopefully, we'll do advanced," said Slezak. "He went fantastic. I couldn't have asked him to be any better."

Slezak appreciated the flow of Capt. Mark Phillips' cross-country course. "It had a lot of galloping between the fences, but there were lots of 90- or 180-degree turns into combinations. It really set you up on its own. There was no having to pull," he explained. "Braveheart loved that ride—just gallop and turn into the fence. He was on it yesterday. I was ecstatic."

Slezak finished 2 seconds over the time on "Rotti," and a clean show jumping round clinched second place for him in the CCI*.

"The sky is the limit with Rotti," said Slezak. "I want to go all the way, and I want to do well. I might take the summer and get him a little more broke. Prelim was easy for him, and definitely intermediate will be easy for him, but I want to be sure that he's going to be consistently in the top, so I want to make him a little bit more broke. I'd love to do a two-star with him in the fall."

Slezak started riding the 6-year-old Westphalian, owned by Don Good, a year ago. "He's been a superstar. He's an

awesome mover and a great jumper. He just wants to show off. He's got a huge personality and even bigger ego."

Now the young professional hopes to qualify for the Olympics in Hong Kong on another mount owned by Good, Showdown. He rode Showdown in the advanced combined test in Ocala and plans to contest the Jersey Fresh CCI***.

Ocala, FL—APR. 17-20.

JUDGES: Wayne Quarles, Ingrid Macaulay.

▲ Trg. - 1. Isengart, C. Stoop, 31.1; 2. Hampton, E. Nicholson, 38.5; 3. Emilsy Fancy, A. Palmer, 39.7.

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