

## Akin, Early Win Dressage Seat Medals

**T**hirty-five riders qualified for the 2008 U.S. Equestrian Federation Dressage Seat Medal Finals (presented by *Dressage Today*) at Lamplight Equestrian Center in Wayne, Illinois. Riders in two age divisions—14 to 18 and 13 and under—came from across the nation to compete. Many rode borrowed horses, which allowed them to compete without incurring the cost of hauling their horses hundreds of miles. Parents, trainers and fellow competitors watched as riders walked, trotted and cantered in each direction, then rode individual patterns for the judges.

Jessica McTaggart



**From left: 13-and-under winners Stephanie Early (gold), Alexandra Schenck (silver) and Danielle Dever (bronze); Colleen Akin, 14-to-18 gold medal winner**

**Colleen Akin**, 17, of Warwick, New York, took home the gold medal in the 14-to-18 division with a score of 76.667 on *Volontaire*, owned by **Mark Miller** of Arabian Nights Dinner Attraction in Orlando, Florida.

**Erin Mullen**, 17, of Louisburg, North Carolina, received the silver medal with a score of 76.500 on her horse, *Zhivago*. Mullen found the competition intense. "Everyone looked amazing, so I couldn't help but compare myself to each one of them," she said. "I just had to remind myself that I qualified the same way they did."

**Stephanie Early**, 13, of Salinas, California, won the 13-and-under division with a score of 80.333 percent. She rode *GP Sarasanna* owned by **Ginna Frantz**. Early

notes that she learned the value of good equitation and was reminded of why she chose dressage as her passion. "I found dressage to be the most challenging. Because I know how to get a horse working over his back, I feel that I could do almost any equestrian discipline." Then she smiled and added, "maybe."

**Alexandra Schenck**, 13, of Coco Beach, Florida, picked up the silver medal with 76.333 percent. She rode *Luna*, who is owned by **Julie Madriguera**. All the riders worked hard for their success, but the Schencks also had to battle Mother Nature. "Thanks to Tropical Storm Fay, we had to evacuate all of the horses," said Alexandra's mother, **Barbara Schenck**. "We were home in time for one practice session in the dressage ring, but we were literally still surrounded by dead fish the day before we left for Chicago."

The purpose of the Dressage Seat Medal program is to promote and reward excellence in equitation, including correct seat position and use of the aids. Riders qualified for the finals last year by competing in Dressage Medal semi-final classes held at the 2007 U.S. Dressage Federation Regional Championships. The top two competitors in each age division were eligible for the finals. Find out more at [usef.org](http://usef.org).—*Jessica McTaggart*

## Balkenhol Leaves American Coach's Position

In a mutually agreed upon decision, the U.S. Equestrian Federation (USEF) High Performance Dressage Committee announced that, after eight years as *chef d'équipe*, National Dressage Coach and Technical Advisor to the committee, **Klaus Balkenhol's** contract will not be renewed.

Balkenhol guided the U.S. dressage team to gold medals

at the 2003 and 2007 Pan American Games, a team silver at the 2002 World Equestrian Games and team bronze medals at the 2004 Olympic Games and 2006 World Equestrian Games. The Dressage Committee will have further discussions with Balkenhol about his future role with USEF. The appointment of a new coach is currently under discussion.