

BELGIUM TAKES THE FURUSIYYA 2015
TITLE IN GRIPPING FINALE

MEET THE CHAMPIONS

By Louise Parkes

THE BELGIUM TEAM CLINCHED THE FURUSIYYA FEI NATIONS CUP™
JUMPING 2015 TITLE IN THE FINEST OF STYLE WITH A FANTASTIC
PERFORMANCE IN THE FINAL ROUND AT REAL CLUB DE POLO IN
BARCELONA (ESP).

© Dirk Caremans



Rolf-Göran Bengtsson (SWE)

They threw down the gauntlet when topping Thursday's opener in which they pinned Germany and Sweden into joint-second place. But it was the British who emerged to fill runner-up spot this evening, pinning the rampant Dutch back to third when the clock decided the final placings. USA, Ireland and Germany were next in line, also separated only by time when they also finished on an equal scoreline, while Sweden lined up seventh ahead of Switzerland in eighth.

The city of Barcelona certainly welcomed the world with open arms once again before tonight's competition began FEI President Ingmar de Vos, made a special presentation to Mr. Carles Villarubi Vice-President of FC Barcelona who provided access to the world-famous Camp Nou stadium for a special photo-shoot ahead of the Final.

Tonight's competition more than lived up to expectations, with fortunes fluctuating wildly and the result once again decided by the very last rider into the arena. The crowd was spell-bound with spectacular jumping from many of the world's greatest athletes and horses, but the Belgians were the shiniest stars of all, with Judy-Ann Melchior and Gregory Wathelet producing two of just six clear rounds on the night to clinch it.

ALWAYS LOOKED COMPETITIVE

The winners always looked competitive when Olivier Philippaerts' opening four-fault effort with H&M Armstrong van de Kapel was followed by a fabulous clear from Melchior and As Cold as Ice Z. There's nothing extravagant about the 13-year-old mare's jumping style, but she is honest as the day is long and always gives her rider everything she's got. Melchior's emotion when the pair crossed the line said it all.

The course proved quite a conundrum for many of the others however; Course Designer Santiago Varela has been making sure that this trophy wouldn't be easily won. The Dutch were well-fancied to add a second Furusiyya title to the world and European gold medals they've scooped up over the last 12 months, but it wasn't to be. Their super-star combination of Jeroen Dubbeldam and SFN Zenith led the way with a 12-fault result, hitting the second element of



Opartny Ales (CZE)

© Dirk Caremans



Marlon Modolo Zanotelli (BRA)

© Dirk Caremans

the triple combination at fence seven and the following vertical before losing rhythm when the horse broke into a trot in front of the first part of the double, three fences from home, which added another four to their tally.

REINED IT BACK

By the time Gerco Schroder reined it back with a clear when last in for the Dutch side however it had come down to a game of cat-and-mouse between the Germans and Belgians, each with the possibility of finishing on a four-fault final result.

Germany's Christian Ahlmann, one of the four riders in contention for a cut of the €200,000 bonus on offer to riders jumping clear on Thursday and again today, saw that slip from his grasp when clipping the first of the vertical of planks at fence 11, but the crowd was mesmerised by the performance of his team-mate Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum whose fabulous grey gelding, Fibonacci, soared around the course, clearing the fences with such drama and grace that the spectators burst into rapturous applause before the pair had even crossed the finish line to post their clear round.

Daniel Deusser's double error with Cornet D'Amour, at the water and the first element of the double, could still be discounted if German anchor, Ludger Beerbaum, could leave all the poles in place with Chiara. But the first part of the troublesome double at the end of the track, and the penultimate oxer, both fell, so as Wathelet entered the ring victory, or defeat, was in his hands.

Just as he did on Thursday however, he kept a cool head and steered the ten-year-old stallion, Conrad de Hus, home safely to cement his side's four-fault result. He had a big smile on his face as he raised his arm in a victory salute, because he hadn't only clinched the 2015 Furusiyya title, but he had also earned that bonus all for himself.

ROCKETED ONTO THE PODIUM

Meanwhile the British were rocketed onto the podium when Joe Clee produced one of his extraordinarily solid last-to-go rides with his great stallion Utamaro D'Ecaussines. Ben Maher (Diva

II) Jessica Mendoza (Spirit T) had kicked off with just four faults a piece, but Laura Renwick, substituting for Michael Whitaker, had a much less comfortable time, her nine-year-old gelding picking up 16 faults in a round that included a very definite refusal to go down to the four-metre-wide open water at their first attempt. This fence played a major role, with plenty of horses making a splash there. Clee's clear however negated that little hiatus and left the British on eight faults along with the Dutch, but in runner-up spot because their combined times left them almost three seconds faster.

The other eye-catchers of the night were America's Beezie Madden and Cortes C and Ireland's Cian O'Connor and Good Luck who both drew gasps from the crowd as their horses put on jumping exhibitions.

But it was the Belgians who would be enjoying the biggest celebration. They topped the Europe Division one League of the Furusiyya series this summer but, as Chef d'Equipe Dirk Demeersman said tonight, they had "one bad week" at the FEI European Championships in Aachen (GER) last month and failed to qualify for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The taking of the 2015 Furusiyya trophy however has reminded the world that this country is truly a force to be reckoned with.

HOW TOP SPORT SHOULD BE

The winning team manager congratulated his riders, the course designer and the FEI who found this formula - "how top sport should be!" he said. "It is good for the welfare of the horses, only two rounds each on different days, and it makes for a great competition" he insisted. Jos Lansink, whose eight faults with For Cento was the discard today, said "the course builder should get a good big bonus - I've competed at a lot of events this year but there has never been sport like this - it was just fantastic!"

Judy-Ann Melchior's big hug for her mare as they left the arena today will be one of the iconic memories of this week's Final. Talking tonight



Beezie Madden (USA)



Joe Clee (GBR)

about the delight she felt at having made such a massive contribution to her country's victory, the rider whose father, Leon Melchior, is master of the legendary Zangersheide Stud in Lanaken, Belgium, said, "you have to go back 13 years to where it all began with her because she was born at our place. We've known each other for a very long time and she makes my life very easy, even in a difficult sport like this. She has a heart of gold, she gives me everything - she never makes it difficult, she always tries to help, she's just wonderful!" she said.

Wathelet admitted that "Tonight, I was under the biggest pressure of my life! But I had a good feeling because everyone was trying so hard and Judy-Ann had done a great round. My horse did well again, he's had a great season and this is a great end to it; he will have a month off now at least," he said.

AS GOOD AS IT GETS

FEI Jumping Director John Roche, described this week's competition as "about as good as it gets! This was team jumping at its very best, in front of a full house and at a fantastic venue. I want to thank the Polo Club and the city of Barcelona for hosting another great Final and my thanks also to Furusiyya for their foresight and support. We are always grateful to our partners, Longines, and I'm happy to say we will be back here in Barcelona next year for another great Final!"

The week of exceptional sport owed a great deal to course designer, Santiago Varela, however and Irishman Cian O'Connor was quick to point that out. "When I walked the course this evening I said you'd need to be an Honours Maths student to work it out! But it was one of the best courses I've ever jumped - Santiago is a genius!" he said.

For further information on the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup™ Jumping Final 2015 at Real Club de Polo in Barcelona (ESP) from 24 to 27 September, visit www.csiobarcelona.com or contact Press Officer Isabel Suter, isuter@rcpolo.com, +34 760 258 222.

FINAL RESULT:

1. Belgium 4 faults: H&M Armstrong van de Kakpel (Olivier Philippaerts) 4, As Cold as Ice Z (Judy-Ann Melchior) 0, For Cento (Jos Lansink) 8, Conrad de Hus (Gregory Wathelet) 0.

2. Great Britain 8 faults in 223.14 seconds: Diva II (Ben Maher) 4, Spirit T (Jessica Mendoza) 4, Bintang II (Laura Renwick) 16, Utamaro D'Ecaussines (Joe Clee) 0.

3. Netherlands 8 faults in 226.80 seconds: SFN Zenith NOP (Jeroen Dubbeldam) 12, VDL Groep Verdi Tn NOP (Maikel van der Vleuten) 4, VDL Ziocco Blue NOP (Jur Vrieling) 4, Glock's Cognac Champblanc (Gerco Schroder) 0.

4. USA 12 faults in 219.61 seconds: Nouvelle (Laura Kraut) 8, Cylana (Reed Kessler) 8, Ohlala (Lauren Hough) 4, Cortes C (Beezie Madden) 0.

5. Ireland 12 faults in 221.64 seconds: All Star (Denis Lynch) 8, MHS Going Global (Greg Broderick) 4, Molly Malone V (Bertram Allen) 8, Good Luck (Cian O'Connor) 0.

6. Germany 12 faults in 223.36 seconds: Taloubet Z (Christian Ahlmann) 4, Fibonacci 17 (Meredith Michaels-Berbaum) 0, Cornet D'Amour (Daniel Deusser) 8, Chiara (Ludger Beerbaum) 8.

7. Sweden 16 faults: H&M Tornesch (Malin Baryard-Johnsson) 8, Tinkabell (Angelie von Essen) 8, Unita Ask (Rolf-Goran Bengtsson) 4, Cantinero (Henrik von Eckermann) 4.

8. Switzerland 20 faults: Quorida de Treho (Romain Duguet) 8, Clooney (Martin Fuchs) 4, Bonne Chance CW (Janika Sprunger) 12, Castlefield Eclipse (Paul Estermann) 8.

FULL RESULTS AT LONGINES TIMING AND RESULTS

FACTS AND FIGURES:

A total of eight nations competed in the second and final round of the Furusiyya FEI Nations Cup™ Jumping Final 2015 at Real Club de Polo



Team Belgium



Team Ireland



Team Great Britain



Team Germany



Team Netherlands



Team Sweden



Team USA



Team Switzerland

in Barcelona (ESP) tonight.

All teams started on a zero score, and Team Belgium won the competition outright.

Total prize money for tonight's final competition was €1.5 million with €500,000 going to the winners, €300,000 to the runners-up from Great Britain, €200,000 going to The Netherlands in third place and prize money all the way down to eighth place.

4 riders - Jeroen Dubbeldam (NED), Christian Ahlmann (GER), Rolf-Goran Bengtsson (SWE) and Gregory Wathelet (BEL) were in line for a share of the €200,000 on offer to any rider who could jump clear in the first round on Thursday and again tonight.

Wathelet (Conrad de Hus) was the only one of the four to jump clear again tonight so he bagged the entire bonus.

QUOTES:

Course designer Santiago Varela: "Tonight's course was difficult and technical. I left the riders with many options and after the water jump they had a lot of choices right up until the very end. They had to ride really well to make a clear round but we came up with a very nice result and you can't ask for more than that!"

Belgian Chef d'Equipe Dirk Demeersman: "the horse jumped really good and the riders weren't so bad - there was such an atmosphere here tonight. My riders rode very precisely and they did a great job - I'm really happy with them."

Belgian team member Olivier Philippaerts: "Judy-Ann and Gregory did two beautiful rounds. We had the right team to bring to Barcelona!"

Belgian team member Jos Lansink: "I had a young horse here doing his first Nations Cup - I'm very happy to be a member of this team."

This article was first published on FEI.org