



OLYMPIA INTERNATIONAL HORSESHOW 2018

WILLIAM WHITAKER WOWS THE CROWD WITH EMOTIONAL WIN

BY LOUISE PARKES/FEI

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A BIG WIN IN FRONT OF THE HOME CROWD TO TRIGGER THE EMOTIONS, BUT GREAT BRITAIN'S WILLIAM WHITAKER WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WITH A TEAR IN HIS EYE AFTER HE REIGNED SUPREME IN THE EIGHTH LEG OF THE LONGINES FEI JUMPING WORLD CUP™ 2018/2019 WESTERN EUROPEAN LEAGUE AT OLYMPIA IN LONDON. THE PACKED STADIUM OF SPECTATORS WENT WILD WITH DELIGHT WHEN THEIR OWN MAN SOARED TO VICTORY OVER A WORLD-CLASS FIELD IN AN 18-HORSE JUMP-OFF THAT WAS A NAIL-BITER TO THE FINAL FOOTFALL.



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“It’s surreal! Since I’ve been coming here as a kid this has been a dream, and I can’t believe it actually happened!” Whitaker said after posting the biggest result of his career to date, pinning Belgium’s Karel Cox into runner-up spot while American star, Laura Kraut, lined up in third.

With so many jumping clear over the first track presented by Portuguese course designer **Bernardo Costa Cabral** it was never going to be easy to come out on top, but Whitaker had no doubt about his plan. “The World Cup at Olympia is like a Championship, you get one shot at it every year and it’s all got to come together on the day. And he certainly didn’t when seventh to go with Utamaro d’Ecaussines.

He’s long had a superb relationship with the courageous **14-year-old stallion**, and when the pair set the target at 37.02 seconds with the smoothest of fast rounds in which every fence seemed to come up in exactly the right spot, and every turn was pure perfection, then that really put it up to the rest of them.

However two horses later it seemed Karel Cox and the nine-year-old Evert might just catch them when

galloping down to the last. But the clock showed 37.21 to leave the Belgian contenders trailing by two-tenths of a second. Whitaker could hardly bear the tension.

“It was torture! Especially the last few - every one that goes by you get closer to the win, and it’s not just anyone, it’s the best riders in the world!”, he said.

Third-last to go was the magical German and world no. 4, **Marcus Ehning**, with his Geneva winner Pret a Tout. But when they turned too tight to the penultimate vertical they paid the price with a pole down in the quickest time of 36.03 seconds.

Australia’s Edwina Tops-Alexander and Vinchester, winners of the previous leg at La Coruna in Spain two weeks ago, made a wider turn there to come home clear in 38.17, but Laura Kraut and Zeremonie looked a real threat when last into the ring. The pair who helped clinched team gold for the USA at the FEI World Equestrian Games in September stormed home with a determined run, but their time of 37.70 seconds would only prove good enough for third. It was destined to be William Whitaker’s day, and he

could hardly believe it.

He was of course following in a proud family tradition. His uncles, John and Michael Whitaker, have enjoyed many major successes in the world-famous Grand Hall at Olympia during their spectacular careers. Following in their legendary footsteps means a great deal to their nephew.

“I have memories of watching John and Michael winning the World Cup here - one of the things that got me out of bed in the morning was thinking that someday I could do it too!”, William said this evening. And he was full of praise for Utamaro.

“It helps when you’re on a horse like him, he has such a good brain and mentality. In the collecting ring I was struggling to get him into canter, but he just lights up when he goes in the ring, he grows a foot! I’m delighted for the horse and the owners, Jasmin and Ludwig Criel - he’s had fantastic results over the years but we never won a Grand Prix and I can’t believe it’s this one!” Whitaker said.

He’s got some changes coming up in the new year when he will be relocating to Germany, so he’s not quite clear if he will be in a position to line out in further World Cup qualifiers. “We’ll sit together after Christmas and make a plan”, he said this evening.

FACT BOX

The first International Horse Show took place in the Olympia halls in 1907. Olympia, The London International Horse Show, the event we see today, was started by Raymond Brooks-Ward in 1971. The show took place on 17-23 December 2018 in the Olympia Exhibition Hall, located in West Kensington, London. The show played host to a packed timetable of all things equestrian and welcomed over 90,000 visitors. It is regarded as one of Europe’s oldest and most prestigious equine competitions. The show mixes top class equestrian action, including FEI World Cup™ Jumping, Dressage and Driving with family entertainment, such as the Osborne Refrigerators Shetland Pony Grand National and The Kennel Club Dog Agility.



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