OMAHA EQUESTRIAN FOUNDATION

Media Contact: Jennifer Wood | Jump Media | jwood@jumpmediallc.com







Henrik von Eckermann and King Edward Are Crowned Victorious in the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final Omaha 2023

On the final day of competition for the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup[™] Final Omaha 2023, on Saturday, April 8, it was world number one Henrik von Eckermann of Sweden who reigned supreme with King Edward.

After Round 1 on Wednesday and Round 2 on Thursday, the top 30 combinations advanced to Saturday's deciding competition, with only 10 penalty points separating the leading 11 athletes. The final test featured two rounds over unique courses of a Table A format. After the first phase, the top 20 riders advanced to contest the second track, and with faults being cumulative, each fallen rail was significant.



Henrik von Eckermann and King Edward claimed top honors in the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final Omaha 2023. Photo by Alison Hartwell Photography

"It's not easy to test these guys, and I try to be as good as them," stated the mastermind behind the week's courses, FEI Level 4 Course Designer Bernardo Costa Cabral (POR). "It's hard to create variation in rhythm, but it's one of the tools that creates problems to the rider, but not to the horse. I'm going to say something very clichéd but it's true; not one person can produce these kinds of jumps and tracks - it takes a whole team, and I have a great team behind me. Even if I trip up, they never let me fall down, and I am very happy with the result."

In the first phase, the athletes were once again challenged to adjust stride length from bold gallops to collected steps ahead of delicate obstacles. An imposing triple bar at fence nine on a short four strides to a tall skinny vertical proved to be a tough test for many, as did the subsequent oxer-vertical-vertical triple combination toward the end of the course. Denis Lynch (IRL), Martin Fuchs (SUI), and Harrie Smolders (NED) managed to produce a clear first effort, putting pressure on the rest of the field. With rails coming from each of the top six combinations, the standings were shaken up once more.



Harrie Smolders, Henrik von Eckermann, and Hunter Holloway in their awards presentation with Ingmar de Vos, President of the FEI, Lisa Roskens, Omaha Equestrian Foundation Board Chair, and Yanick Rossier, Longines Vice President of Marketing. Photo by Alison Hartwell Photography

"When I came out today, [King Edward] felt better than all the other days – he was fresh, and he was really jumping good," shared von Eckermann of the 13-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding (Edward 28 x Feo). "I jumped very little in the warm-up because he felt amazing. In the first-round tonight, I came in probably a little bit too far off the oxer [in the triple combination], protecting him a little too much from the front bar. I got a far jump in and then he had so much power, so it was difficult to get him back before the B vertical, and he had that one down. I should have gotten a little bit closer to the oxer, and with that rail, I was thinking maybe the chance of winning was gone. Then, with how the class kept on going, the chance to win kept on being there."

Starting the second phase, less than two rails separated the top six competitors, and as was evident in each previous course, it was still anyone's game. With the trophy in sight, riders were even more determined.



Harrie Smolders and Monaco N.O.P. jumped to second place in the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final Omaha 2023. Photo by <u>Alison Hartwell Photography</u>

Sitting in 17th place, France's Kevin Staut was the first to go fault-free, landing from the final vertical to loud cheers from the Omaha crowd. Then, Denis Lynch (IRL) put the exclamation point on his night with another clear aboard Brooklyn Heights. Andreas Schou (DEN) with Darc de Lux and Yuri Mansur (BRA) with Vitiki followed suit, giving huge praise for their horses as they exited the arena. Next to go, hometown hero Hunter Holloway had to deliver a score of zero with Pepita Con Spita to keep their hunt for the podium alive.

"I knew I really had to fight for that clear second round tonight, every bit of it," she said of her ride with the 12-year-old Westphalian mare (DSP Con Spirit x Come On) owned by Hays Investment Corp. "That's what I tried to do the whole way around – fight for that clear round, every second of it, every inch."



Hunter Holloway piloted Pepita Con Spita to third place in the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final Omaha 2023. Photo by Alison Hartwell Photography

Two rounds later, it was Harrie Smolders (NED) and Monaco N.O.P. who stepped into the spotlight. They ticked the back rail of fence nine, the orange Visit Omaha oxer, for four faults, but their nine-point total put them into the lead.

"Monaco is a truly amazing horse," expressed Smolders of the 14-year-old Holsteiner gelding (Cassini II x Contender) he owns with Evergate Stables that he's been partnered with for seven years. "If you see his statistics, the consistency from him is amazing in the last few years. It feels like he's still getting better and improving even at this age. I think today he probably jumped the best ever. To move up from seventh to second is a great day for me."



FULL RESULTS



Germany Sweeps All Three Divisions of Burlington Capital FEI Vaulting World Cup[™] Final

Germany swept the board in all three divisions at the captivating Burlington Capital FEI Vaulting World Cup[™] Final at the CHI Health Center in Omaha, Nebraska. The Germans came into the second and final Freestyle round in pole position in all categories, and all three of their routines came up golden.

The day's top freestyle score came courtesy of world number four ranked Jannik Heiland, who used his position as last to go — earned by his win in the Technical Test — to full advantage. The 30-year-old was awarded 9.203 and 9.347 from the two technical judges, giving him an overall final score of 8.551, as the Technical and Freestyle routine scores are averaged to determine the final placings. Heiland finished second and third in previous Vaulting FEI World Cup[™] Finals, but this year finally took the ultimate prize, claiming the Individual Male champion's sash.



Jannik Heiland and San Classico S Photo by <u>Alison Hartwell Photography</u>

It was another performance facilitated by Sonja Meyer and San Classico S, a 16-year-old Oldenburg gelding by Sancisco, that scooped the Individual Female top honors. Kathrin Meyer was lunged by her mother to a Freestyle score of 8.556, bringing her final score to 8.428, ensuring her FEI Vaulting World Cup[™] Final debut was a winning one.

"It's always a bit hard to tell after the winter training how the others will be. Of course I hoped I would win this, but you never know. We have a great female vaulter field, so I was hoping to show what I'm able to do and that worked pretty well. It was the first time for us three at such a great competition, and I'm really happy we did such a good job."



Kathrin Meyer and San Classico S Photo by Alison Hartwell Photography

The Pas de Deux contest once again provided top-drawer sport, with all four combinations scoring over eight for their beautiful, artistic routines in the second round.

Congia and Van Gerven, who won FEI World Championship gold in 2022 and third at last year's FEI Vaulting World Cup™ Final, had one glitch in their daring performance. But the 28year-old Van Gerven hopped right back onto Max, a horse they borrowed last minute, and they completed their Black Magic-themed routine with aplomb.



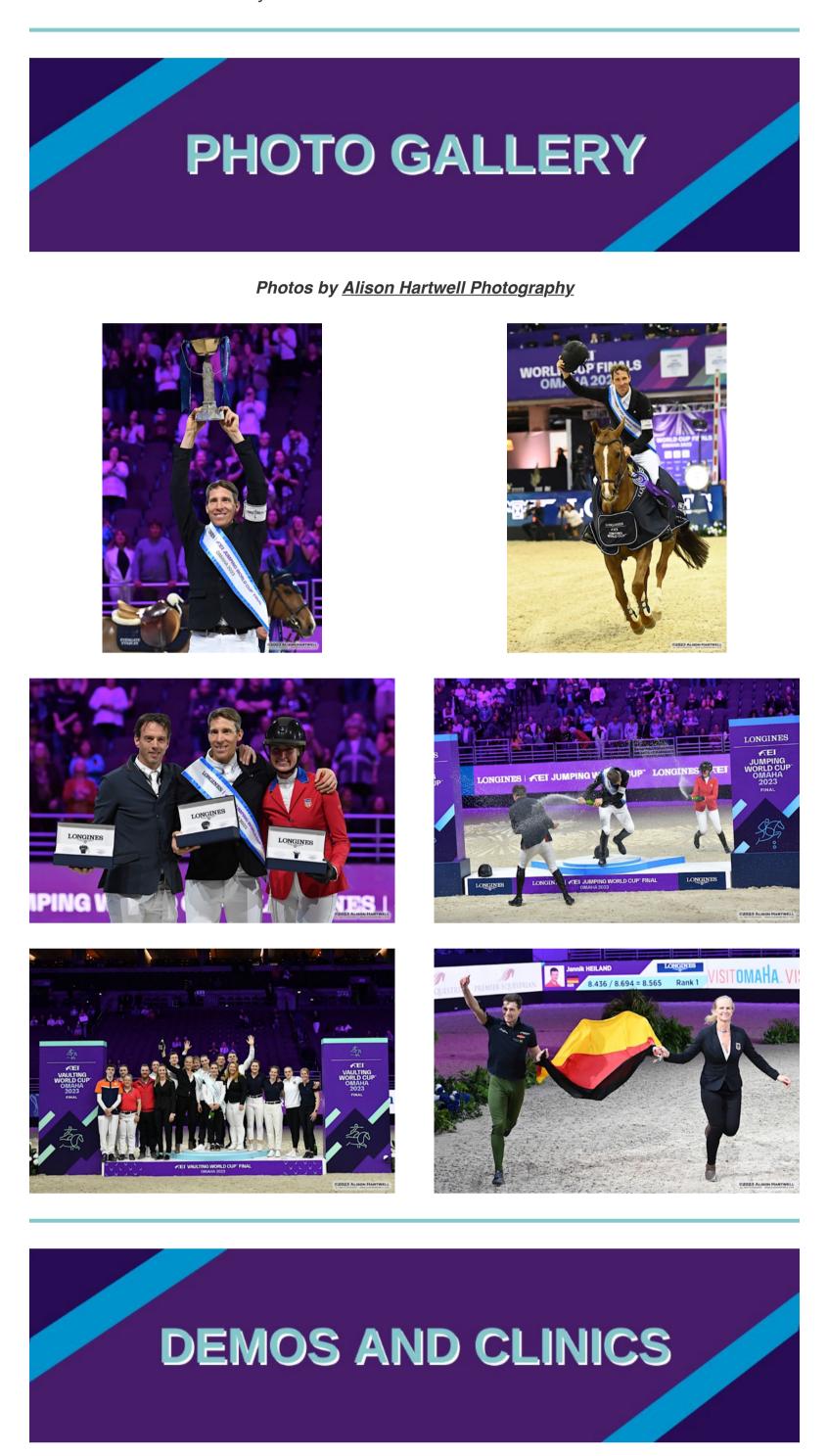
Chiara Congia and Justin Van Gerven performing on Max. Photo by Alison Hartwell Photography

The audience gasped as Congia and Van Gerven performed their signature move: she balanced, unsupported at full stretch, on his shoulders, with only her stomach touching him.

"It feel like I am flying," beamed Congia, whose pas de deux demonstrated breathtaking balance and height, particularly impressive as the horse the pair had brought with them went lame on the morning of the Technical test. "We did a lot of work, we trained the whole last season, and I'm really happy that this time we could win - even if it was bit different from what we planned."



Text by Amanda Picciotto Feitosa and Alice Collins



Photos by Tom Jodis Photography



About the Omaha Equestrian Foundation

The Omaha Equestrian Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that strives to bring equestrian sport into the mainstream by changing the way it is presented and to develop Omaha into a hub of the sport horse industry, attracting and developing championship competitions as both educational and economic development opportunities for the community.



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