



Ashley Holzer in a League of her Own on Dressage night at The Royal

Holzer claimed the CDI 3 Freestyle to Music by more than six points, while Team USA won the Inaugural \$50,000 Team Challenge handily over Teams International and Canada.*

November 12, 2009

Toronto, Ontario - Canadian Olympians Ashley Holzer and Pop Art once again proved they are in a league of their own when it comes to dressage at The Royal, producing a nearly perfect Freestyle test this evening to win the CDI 3* Presented by Dominion Regalia, with a final score of 75.85, more than six points over their closest rivals.

Holzer's test heavily emphasized "Poppy's" phenomenal piaffe and passage skills, including a piaffe turn on the haunches that took your breath away with its ease and elasticity. Last to go this evening and following Tina Konyot's explosively expressive stallion Calecto V, Holzer's test was the very definition of relaxed and refined, but never stuffy, harmony between horse and rider.

"I had him here last year and he was tense in the indoor arena," explained Holzer following the awards ceremony. "He was so much better this year. I was a little worried today because I thought the crowd would be more electric. It was *very* electric last year. I warmed up quite a bit and the crowd was not so electric, so I said "okay buddy, you really gotta kick now!"

The big news in dressage circles in Canada is the coming on board of new Team Advisor and Coach, guru Robert Dover. Holzer was not the only rider to gush with excitement when discussing the next few months and the plans Dover has for the Canadian contingent.

"I am thrilled about our new coach Robert Dover. He has vision and has made Canadians sit up and realize what great riders, horses, coaches and sponsors we have. We haven't really taken advantage of the great people we have available to us in this country before now. He stood in front of us today and said he is 250% for us and if we need him somewhere, he will go there. And that he expects the same level of commitment and focus from Canada's riders. I think it's about time that we had a coach that pushes us to the next level. We are not trying to be sixth in the world, we want a medal. So let's behave like we are out to get a medal."

Second place went to Tina Konyot of Connecticut with her ultra-expressive Danish Warmblood stallion Calecto V. Third went to Denielle Gallagher-Legriffon who put in a lovely test with her elegant and classically put together Russian-bred stallion Abrikos.

Stephen Clarke, President of the Ground Jury, explained that yesterday in the Grand

Prix, everyone was a little nervous and unsure of the ring and the crowd, while this evening they all came into the ring relaxed and ready to put on a show. Holzer impressed him most though with the harmony and comfortable relationship she has with her long-time partner, Pop Art.

"The partnership they have is the most unique and perhaps perfect," Clarke related. "The harmony mark goes up very, very high. Technically her piaffe scores and marks for transitions are also very high. You don't often see quality like that. Of course there is always room for improvement but the nice thing about Ashley's horse is he does nothing *wrong*. She has really big highlights and these things count for a lot of marks."

Crowd-favourite and long-time competitor at The Royal, Jacqueline Brooks, rode her second horse Balmoral this evening, debuting him among stiff company. The pair finished fourth overall. Clarke expressed the sport needs more riders like Brooks.

"Jacquie is one of the best ambassadors we have for the sport. She knows how to produce a Freestyle and she knows how to ride to music. The audience really appreciates what she does and they love her. That's good for us and good for the sport."

Tonight also debuted the inaugural \$50,000 Royal Team Challenge, pitting top riders from Canada, the United States and "the world" against one another in Teams, with the best six scores from each team counting toward the final result. Team USA came out the victors with a final score of just eight faults, while Team International finished on 18 and Canada brought up the rear with 25.

"We jumped a lot of clean rounds!" Laughed the captain of Team USA, McLain Ward, when asked what set his team apart. "We had a good group of horses and riders tonight, and I think it's great that they are trying to bring back a team competition here. The course was not huge, it was 1.45 metres, but it had some challenging areas and horses had to be paying attention."

This year's Royal Horse Show runs through Sunday afternoon and two of the biggest classes are yet to come. Tomorrow night's \$50,000 Weston Canadian Open and Saturday's \$75,000 Ricoh Big Ben Challenge will afford premium points to those chasing the Leading Rider awards, while Saturday afternoon's Canine-Equine Challenge is one of the family-highlights of the Royal and always proves great fun and entertainment for all ages. By the time the competition ends, nearly \$750,000 will have been awarded in prize money, making The Royal the most prestigious and hotly contested event of the season. For more information, media accreditation, live webcasting, complete schedule, results and to purchase tickets, please visit www.royalfair.org.

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Please advise of web postings.

\$50,000 Royal Team Challenge

Team / Total Score

1. Team USA / 8
2. Team International / 18
3. Team Canada / 25

\$20,000 CDI 3* Freestyle to Music

Rider / Hometown / Horse / Score

1. Ashley Holzer / Bronx, NY / Pop Art / 75.85
2. Tina Konyot / North Stonington, CT / 69.65
3. Denielle Gallagher-Legriffon / Suffern, NY / Abrikos / 69.05
4. Jacqueline Brooks / Mount Albert, ON / Balmoral / 67.95
5. Cheryl Meisner / Halifax, NS / Paganini / 67.95
6. Heather Mason / Lebanon, NJ / Respekt / 63.70

Attached Photo: Ashley Holzer and Pop Art danced their way to victory in the \$20,000 CDI 3* Freestyle presented by Dominion Regalia at The Royal Horse Show.

Captain of Team USA, McLain Ward, guides Phillipa to a clean round in the inaugural \$50,000 Royal Team Challenge in Toronto tonight.

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