

Amy Millar wins two events at Caledon Premier

There's no denying that last week was a good one for Amy Millar.

The 2016 Olympian from Perth got things started last Thursday by winning the \$35,000 FEI Open Welcome, presented by RAM Equestrian. Then she repeated the winning performance Saturday in the \$50,000 CSI2* Grand Prix, at the Caledon Premier II at Caledon Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

She did it on Heros, her mount in last year's Olympic Games in Rio.

Saturday's event saw Millar up against 20 other competitors. The course, designed by Marina Azevedo of Brazil, yielded eight clear rounds, setting the stage for an exciting jump-off.

The first four riders to return for the jump-off all incurred faults, leaving the door wide open for the final four. Shannon Clifford of Paris, Texas, was the first to post a clear round, guiding her 12-year-old selle francais gelding Riesling de Milvrault home in a time of 43.01 seconds. Palgrave area resident Erynn Ballard was next into the ring and moved into the lead with a clear round in 40.66 seconds riding Thalys Z, a nine-year-old Zangersheide mare owned by The Thalys Group. Her time at the top was short-lived, however, as Rachel Cornacchia of Foothills, Alberta, and Valkyrie de Talma, an eight-year-old selle francais mare owned by Eventyre Farms Ltd., were faster still, clocking in at 39.08 seconds.

As the final challenger, Millar knew what she had to do, and rode a tight course with time-saving turns that saw her stop the clock at 38.05 for the win.

‘It was lovely that I drew last, and then got to go last in the jump-off because I knew how fast I had to go,’ she said. ‘On Thursday, there were 12 in the jump-off and there were a lot of double clears, going faster and faster, so I went all out. Today, going last, I knew I had an inch here and there. It's a nice feeling to know exactly what you have to do, and my horse jumped so well.’

At this time last year, Millar was in Rio de Janeiro, making her Olympic Games debut as a member of Canada's fourth-placed team. Fast forward one year, and Millar and her Olympic mount Heros found themselves standing in the winner's circle twice in one week.

‘Heros is on form, and I am so happy,’ said Millar of the 10-year-old Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by AMMO Investments.

‘Last year was such an amazing experience; the horse kept giving me more and giving me more right up until the Spruce Meadows ‘Masters’ in September. Then he was a little hit or miss, so it's been a process. This year had not been nearly as exciting until this week. He's right back on form and hasn't touched a rail all week.

‘He's so talented, and when he's game and with me like he is right now, he's unbeatable,’ continued Millar. ‘I have to say thank you to my owners and the people who support me, especially the Matthews, Overlund, and Millar families for standing behind me.

Without a fabulous horse to do these things with, I wouldn't be where I am today.’

Last Thursday's event saw half the field make it to the jump-off, and the course in the second round proved to be a lot more exacting, especially along the first portion. The first four competitors picked up faults before Millar's brother Jonathon was able to ride clear on Daveau, turning in a time of 42.77. He didn't have the lead very long, as his wife Kelly completed the course in 42.34. on Cacharel. Other fast times were entered, and Millar and Heros were the second last combination to go, completing the course in 38.65.

Ballard and Thalys Z were the last to go out and they came within half a second of Millar's time, but they weren't able to beat it and they had to settle for second.

‘The first round was friendly today,’ Millar commented after the award ceremony Thursday, observing the jump-off was more of a challenge. But she also knew her mount was up to it.

‘He's a good boy,’ she said.

Kathryn Dafoe of Nobleton competed both days on Eos van de Donkhoeve, turning in two clear rounds. She, alas, took a little too long to do it and picked up one time fault each day, keeping her out of the jump-off.

Another important member of the Millar Brooke Farm team was also a winner over the weekend. Danny Ingratta, who has worked for the Millar family for seven years, was selected as the recipient of the McKee-Pownall FEI Groom Appreciation Award.

‘I know everyone probably thinks their staff is the hardest-working, but I think Danny works harder than anybody at the horse show,’ said Millar, who was accompanied to the Rio Olympics by Ingratta. ‘There are four Millars now between Ian, Jonathon, Kelly and myself, and he supervises all of our grand prix horses. He is a very important member of our team, and it's great to see his efforts recognized.’

While nothing can beat the experience of competing at the Olympic Games, the Caledon Equestrian Park is special in its own right, having hosted the equestrian events for the 2015 Pan American Games where Canada won the team gold medal.

‘It's always fantastic coming to the Caledon Equestrian Park,’ said Millar, 40, who is a regular competitor in Caledon. ‘The footing,

the FEI stabling, the course designing; the whole set-up is wonderful for our horses. If it rains, we can ride indoors, and there's lots of space to train your horses properly.?

The Caledon Equestrian Park will host its fourth and final FEI-sanctioned competition of the 2017 season, the ever-popular CSI2* Canadian Show Jumping Tournament, from Sept. 20 to 24.



Palgrave area resident Erynn Ballard was less than half a second off the pace last Thursday, and had to settle for second place, riding Thalys Z.



Olympian Amy Millar of Perth guided Heros through two clear rounds last Thursday to take the \$35,000 FEI?Open Welcome, presented by RAM Equestrian.



Nobleton's Kathryn Dafoe put in a fine effort in last Thursday's event, riding Eos van de Donkhoeve, clearing all the jumps on the course. But she took a little too long to do it, and ended up with a time fault, keeping her out of the jump-off.