

Olympic dressage rider brings world-class show to Caledon



Written By JAKE COURTEPATTE

For those in the know in the equestrian dressage scene, the name Charlotte Dujardin is a household one.

The three-time Olympic gold medal winner, and Commander of the Order of the British Empire recipient, brought her knowledge of the highly-skilled form of riding to the Caledon Equestrian Park last weekend for a two-day master class, featuring loads of Canadian talent.

"We are so fortunate to be able to host someone that certainly needs no introduction to the dressage community to spend the weekend with us," said Craig Collins, managing partner of Equestrian Management Group Inc., who hosted the event. "We are committed to hosting top-notch dressage competitions and bringing in world-class instructors and clinicians for more events like this one, but we couldn't do it without the support of our sponsors, riders, owners, and of course all the spectators, so thank you to all of them."

Though Dujardin may enjoy almost a sense of royalty among the British equestrian community and the worldwide equestrian community as a whole, her Masterclass show focused on involving riders from the area to give the lavish event a local taste. A packed house on Saturday, Oct 20 was privy to the riding styles of Leah Wilkins, a rider from Mulmur, Ont., who operates a training business near Shelburne. Also riding Saturday was the Collingwood-based Justin Ridgewell, who showcased his horse Jolene's proper canter while Dujardin played Master of Ceremonies for the crowd.

"It looks very easy with a good rider," said Dujardin to the crowd of over 700 spectators around the ring at both tables and bleachers. "It should look like the rider does not have to do much to make it happen."

Sunday's instructions began with Alexandra Reid, an Erin, Ont. native now living and riding in the United States, while Stouffville's Jaimey Irwin and Hillsburgh's Tom Dvorak also featured in the centre ring.

Holding all three world records in the sport of dressage, Dujardin was paired up with her prized gelding Velegro for her first Olympic gold medal performance, taking home both the individual and team dressage top trophy along with Great Britain in the London 2012 Games.

She followed up with a repeat gold performance in the individual category in Rio 2016, adding a silver medal with Team Great Britain.

Her sights are now set on a third-straight gold medal at the 2020 Games in Tokyo.

"What makes a winner a winner?" Dujardin asked the audience on Saturday. "It's the person that can really take the most risks without making mistakes. We can all do a set, but it's being able to take the risk and learn from those mistakes. The more you practice, the less you'll make them."

"When you start taking the risks, mistakes happen. You've got to keep going until you find that way to get through the mistake." The 33-year old Dujardin said she "really enjoyed" working with the talented riders featured over the weekend.