Canada misses out in medals for individual show jumping

There were a lot of hopes riding on Canada heading into Saturday's individual show jumping event in the Pan American Games, but disappointment when the event was over.

Yann Candele of Caledon, Eric lamaze of Schomberg and Ian Millar of Perth were among the 35 competitors entering the first of two rounds Saturday, but all three struggled, with only the top 20 being eligible to advance.

The competition was at the OLG Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave, and it saw competitors tackle a new track set by Canadian course designer Michel Vaillancourt, individual silver medalist at the 1976 Montreal Olympics.

Lamaze had the most heartaches. He and his mount Coco Bongo, a 10-year-old bay Rheinlander stallion owned by Artisan Farms LLC were doing very well on the course, until they came to a triple combination near the end. In the end, Lamaze finished with 10 faults, putting him in 22nd place and out of the running.

?He clearly backed away in the air, I don't know if he was looking at something or if he was being extra-careful as the course went on, but he backed away in the air and, at that point, it was over,? said Lamaze of his mount. ?It's disappointing and it's not. I think the mistake came from having a lot of quality. It's not a horse that is scared, just a horse that is extremely careful. He wasn't sure how to solve that triple and he held himself back.?

Millar, aboard Dixson, a 12-year-old bay Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by Susan and Ariel Grange, picked up eight faults in the first round, and came within a fraction of a second of collecting a time fault. He did better in the final round, collecting four jumping faults and one time fault, giving him a total of 13 for the day. In the end, he was relegated to a tie for 16th place.

Candele was the second last rider to go out for the first round on Showgirl, a 15-year-old chestnut selle francais mare owned by the Watermark Group, and he drew eight jumping faults. He got eight more in the second round, dropping him to 19th.

It took a jump-off between Mclain Ward of the United States and Andres Rodriguez of Venezuela to decide who would get the gold medal. Rodriguez turned in a very fast performance riding Darlon van Groenhove, but knocked a rail down in the process. Ward took about three seconds longer on Rothchild, but kept everything standing to take the title. A five-way jump-off was needed to decide who would get the bronze. It went to American Lauren Hough aboard Ohlala.

?This horse defies the odds,? Ward commented after the medal presentation, observing that he didn't think Rothchild would amount to a show jumper, but he did. ?He's just really a competitive horse. His heart is as big as they come. He gives you everything he has. Rodriguez also had plenty of praise for his mount.

?This horse has been great,? he declared, commenting there were behaviour troubles in the early days, but they were straightened out. ?He does everything you ask him to do.?

Canada had claimed the gold medal in Thursday's team competition, also earning Olympic qualification, with all four members of the Canadian Show Jumping Team producing impressive results. The top 35 athletes move forward to the individual final, however, nations are restricted to sending their best three ranked riders. That meant Tiffany Foster, 31, of North Vancouver, B.C., cheered her teammates on from the sidelines, despite being ranked 18th individually with Tripple X III, owned by Artisan Farms LLC.

?I said to the team that it was a good thing we got a medal on Thursday!? said Millar, 68, who was the Pan Am Champion in 1987 and 1999. ?When we come to these things, the team event is the most important thing. That's what we want is the team result. It's what we need for the Olympic qualification. That was the big job. It doesn't mean that we let down today, it just didn't happen.?

?The horse executed everything just fine, all of the problems, but he happened to have a couple of rails,? continued Millar of Dixson's performance. ?Am I disappointed? Yes. But I love the horse and he's given us a great Pan American Games. It just wasn't our day.?

?Our priority was the team and qualifying for the Olympics,? said Candele, 44, who was riding with a broken finger. ?Today was going to be a bonus, and today was for the crowd. In both rounds, I rode very well, but the mare was lacking energy. She is older, so we are not going to hold anything against her.?

In last Thursday's team event, Candele and Showgirl delivered the best scores of the Canadian team. Less than two years ago, a group of committed owners came together under the name Watermark Group to purchase Showgirl for Candele on the advice Lamaze.

?They got together to try to help me and help the Canadian Team for the World Championships and Pan Am Games,? explained Candele. ?It was a success at the World Championships, and the experience we gained over there was amazing. That actually did help for being at home in Toronto where the pressure was twice as big. It was a success for the group of owners, and it was a success for the country. It was a success for all of us. It was amazing that we got the gold and qualified for the Olympics. I will remember it for life.?

Having built his business, Torrey Pines Stable, in Schomberg, competing at the Palgrave facility was something of a homecoming for Lamaze.

?This venue is superior to any other Pan Am Games that I've been involved in,? said Lamaze, 47, who was competing in his fifth consecutive Pan American Games. ?Rio also did a fantastic job with the venue. This venue is excellent; this could be an Olympic Games. We have plenty of warm-up rings, great footing, and great stabling for the horses. The crowd was great. There was nothing missing here. It was first-class. We can be proud as Canadians to have hosted the Pan Am Games.?

Ward was impressed with the facility too, calling it ?phenomenal.?