

Canada takes third in \$300,000 BMO Nations' Cup at Spruce Meadows

The Canadian Show Jumping Team comprised of Yann Candele, Tiffany Foster, Eric Lamaze and Ian Millar placed third in the \$300,000 BMO Nations' Cup held Saturday at the CSIO5* Spruce Meadows Masters' tournament in Calgary.

Canada came into the \$300,000 BMO Nations' Cup as the defending champions, and faced stiff competition from seven other countries. Canada was fielding the same team of riders that had captured the team gold medal at the recent TORONTO 2015 Pan American Games.

Following the opening round of competition, Canada was sitting in second place with a score of 12 faults behind Brazil, who posted nine faults in the opening round of its BMO Nations' Cup debut. Three teams - Belgium, France and the United States - sat tied with 16 faults for third position, while Switzerland was one fault behind with 17. Surprisingly, powerhouse nations Great Britain and The Netherlands failed to make the cut for the second round with scores of 19 and 20 faults respectively.

Candele, 44, of Caledon was the lead-off rider for Team Canada, riding Showgirl, a 15-year-old chestnut selle francais mare owned by the Watermark Group. Having incurred four faults at the bicycle jump in the first round, Candele returned to post an eight-fault effort in the second round which would become Canada's drop score.

Riding in her fifth consecutive BMO Nations' Cup, 31-year-old Foster of North Vancouver posted scores of four and four riding Tripple X III, a 13-year-old dark bay Anglo European stallion owned by Andy and Carlene Ziegler's Artisan Farms LLC. In the first round, the 'c' element of the BMO Financial Group triple combination fell, while a foot in the water caused four faults in the second.

'I thought he jumped even better in the second round than he did in the first,' said Foster of Tripple X III. 'He is always great in these types of scenarios. The Nations' Cup means a lot to us, and we love when the crowd is behind us. It adds a lot of pressure because we want to do well in front of everyone, but we thrive under pressure.'

Lamaze of Schomberg came into the Nations' Cup hot off his victory in Thursday's \$35,000 ATCO Structures & Logistics Cup with Fine Lady 5. The 2008 Canadian Olympic Champion was piloting Fine Lady 5, a 12-year-old Hanoverian mare also owned by Artisan Farms LLC, in her second-ever Nations' Cup appearance. The pair incurred four faults at the penultimate fence, the bicycle jump, in the first round, and picked up four faults in the second round at the open water.

Just as Foster and Lamaze had done, Millar also posted scores of four and four for the Canadian Team. In both rounds, the 68-year-old from Perth knocked down the 'a' element of the double combination, set by course designer Leopoldo Palacios under the shadows of the two trees in the International Ring. Millar was riding Dixson, a 12-year-old bay Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by Susan and Ariel Grange.

Forced to add 12 faults in the second round to the 12 already incurred in the opening round, Canada's two-round total of 24 faults was not good enough to successfully defend the BMO Nations' Cup title. Brazil dominated with a final score of 13 faults, helped by a pair of clear efforts from Pedro Veniss and Quabri de l'Isle. The first three riders back for France jumped fault-free in the second round to capture the runner-up position with 16 faults without its anchor rider, Kevin Staut, having to ride.

With 24 faults, Canada stayed ahead of the United States, who finished in fourth position with 28. Switzerland was fifth with 30 while Belgium was sixth with 32.

'Four faults doesn't cut it in Nations' Cup competition,' said Canadian Show Jumping Team chef d'equipe Mark Laskin of Langley, B.C. 'They all jumped well, just a little unlucky here and a little rub there. You have to be happy with the way they jumped, but I think they are disappointed that they weren't able to deliver a better result.'

'I think we all felt like we could have done a bit better,' agreed Foster. 'It wasn't terrible, but it wasn't quite good enough today. All of our horses jumped very well, we just had minor errors that cost us a rail in each round and, in a Nations' Cup, a rail for each rider is very expensive. It's just one of those days where it didn't go in our favour.'

Canada was competing in front of a record crowd, with a new Spruce Meadows attendance record set with 85,747 spectators.

'Today was especially wonderful because the weather was so great and the stands were packed,' said Laskin. 'We are the hometown favourites, and the crowd really helped to pump the team up. Being on the podium is still a good result, and we're pretty happy with that.'

'It means a lot for Canada to have this Nations' Cup here at Spruce Meadows because our riders get the experience of jumping in a major venue with major atmosphere, so it simulates a major games,' continued Laskin. 'It is particularly important to gain that kind of experience, and you don't get that anywhere else. It is always wonderful to be involved.'



Yann Candele of Caledon and Showgirl, owned by the Watermark Group. Photo by Cealy Tetley