

Canadian Dressage Team claims silver at Pan Am Games

Following a hard fought battle with the United States, the Canadian Dressage Team claimed the silver medal Sunday at the Pan American Games.

Dressage competition was taking place at the OLG Caledon Pan Am Equestrian Park in Palgrave.

Brittany Fraser of New Glasgow, N.S., Megan Lane of Collingwood, Belinda Trussell of Stouffville and Chris von Martels of Ridgeway, Ontario, earned the team silver for Canada in front of a home crowd. With a final score of 460.506 points, the United States claimed the gold medal and the only qualifying spot available for the 2016 Rio Olympics over Canada with 454.938. Brazil (414.895), already pre-qualified for the Olympics as the home nation, narrowly edged out Mexico (412.467) for the team bronze.

Two days of competition held July 11 and 12 determined the team standings. Fraser and von Martels contested the small tour level for Canada while Lane and Trussell competed at grand prix, a new requirement for Olympic eligibility that was introduced at these Games. A total of 10 countries contested the team medals, with Argentina, Canada, Mexico and the United States eligible for Olympic qualification.

Fraser and von Martels both produced strong performances for Team Canada in the Intermediaire I test. Riding Zilverstar, an 11-year-old bay Dutch Warmblood gelding sired by Rosseau, von Martels earned an impressive score of 76.210 per cent from the judges, which ranked him third overall in Sunday's competition.

"It was a very good test; it was personal best again," said von Martels, 32, who is making his major games debut. "He's going so well at the moment. We've focused a lot over the last month and a half to prepare for these Games. He's peaking at the right point. We are thrilled."

For the second day in a row, Fraser produced a world-class performance for Canada riding All In to place just behind von Martels with a score of 76.079 per cent. Strong trot and canter work were highlights for Fraser and the 10-year-old liver chestnut Dutch Warmblood gelding that she owns in partnership with Marc-Andre Beaulieu.

"It was awesome, just like yesterday," said Fraser, 26. "My horse did it again, and I'm really happy. We are so close with the U.S., and we all wanted to give really great performances."

Of her successful Pan Am Games debut, Fraser said, "It was amazing! It was like a dream come true. There is so much work that is involved in getting here, and it really pays off in the end."

"It's crazy!," she added. "The amount of support I've been getting is really incredible. I'm so thankful for that."

Lane and Trussell both contested the Grand Prix Special. The youngest member of the Canadian Dressage Team, Lane, 24, earned a score of 71.392 per cent riding Caravella, a 14-year-old bay Dutch Warmblood mare owned by the athlete and her mother, Cathy Lane.

"I think I have the best team that I could ask for," said Lane, who is based 10 minutes from the Palgrave facility at Deer Ridge Equestrian in Loretto. "The dynamic, the energy and the positivity are like nothing I've experienced. With that to lead up to a medal, I'm over the moon with this experience."

Lane has been partnered with Caravella, a mare that was competing as a hunter before Lane purchased her, for the past six years. The pair has grown up together, moving through the levels from junior up to grand prix.

"Capping off our career with a medal that was on the 'to do' list!" smiled Lane. "I'm so happy with her. We're partners for life, and I couldn't ask for a better partner. It's moments like this when you can sit back and reminisce about all the effort that goes into it, and the support you have received, whether it be from sponsors, grooms everybody who is behind the horse and yourself. It's an amazing experience!"

Riding in the anchor position for Canada was Belinda Trussell, who is an Olympian and three-time World Equestrian Games competitor. She was aboard her veteran partner Anton, a 15-year-old dark bay Sachsen-Anhaltiner gelding owned by her mother, Robyn Eames, and her husband, Marc Trussell. The pair earned a score of 75.078 per cent from the five-member judging panel.

"I think, for Canada, that this Games has pushed us to a new level," said Trussell, who is competing in her first Pan Am Games. "To be coming away with nothing below 70 per cent, and highlights of 76 per cent, has never been done. It's really exciting for Canada. We are so pumped as a nation, and pumped to go forward to the next games. We are international contenders. There is huge excitement!"

"We are extremely supportive of one another, Trussell said, referring to her first Pan Am team experience. "There's a lot of fun and camaraderie in the barn. We have a great group. I have to say thanks also to our international support team. They have done an absolutely phenomenal job for us and they have made our job so easy. It's just been an absolute pleasure."

The Canadian Dressage Team is supported by chef d'equipe Alison Martin, Team Manager Christine Peters, Special Advisor Desi Dillingham, Mental Coach Dirk Stroda, Veterinarian Dr. Geoff Vernon, and Therapist Usha Knabe.



The Canadian Dressage Team won the silver medal at the Pan American Games. The team members are Chris von Martels, Brittany Fraser, Megan Lane and Belinda Trussell. Photo by Cealy Tetley