

Canadian Show Jumping Team eighth at World Championships

The Canadian Show Jumping Team finished eighth at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games Team Final held last week in Caen, France.

Yann Candele, 43, of Caledon, Tiffany Foster, 30, of Vancouver, defending individual bronze medalist Eric Lamaze, 45, of Schomberg and Ian Millar, 67, of Perth, comprised Canada's team for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

Canada was ranked sixth coming into the Team Final, which saw the top 10 nations from an original starting field of 35 countries battling it out for world supremacy. Following three consecutive days of competition, Canada finished with a total of 31 points for eighth place.

The Netherlands claimed the gold medal with a total score of 12.83, France took the silver with 14.08, and the United States earned the bronze medal with 16.75.

Candele was once again the lead-off rider for Canada, and faulted early on course at fence two, the Land Rover oxer, riding Showgirl, a 14-year-old chestnut selle francais mare owned by The Watermark Group. The pair jumped the remainder of the course in excellent form.

"I was between distances and I had two choices and I made the wrong one," said Candele candidly about having a rail at fence two. "She did exactly what I asked her to do; it was a rider mistake. She tried her heart out, but that's just the sport. It's disappointing." Foster was the next Canadian in the order with Verdi III, a 12-year-old bay Dutch Warmblood gelding owned by Artisan Farms LLC. Fatigue caught up to the pair, and with three fences down and a time fault, their 13-fault performance would be Canada's discard score.

"I thought we started out really well, but by the last line, I think he was just a little tired and kind of gave up a little bit," said Foster, who is currently ranked the number eight female rider in the world. "It's definitely hard jumping out there, and it's a big exertion for the horses to jump like this over three days."

"It was a cool experience; they did a good job here," Foster commented on her World Championship debut. "It's been really fun, and you always have a good time being on Team Canada. Hopefully at the next World Championships in Bromont (Canada), I can be a little bit more helpful."

After two days of strong performances, Millar and Dixson added eight faults to Canada's bottom line in the Team Final.

"We ask these horses to do extraordinary things and Dixson has done very well here," said Millar of the 11-year-old bay Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by Susan and Ariel Grange of Cheltenham. "Overall, that's the way it is and we go on to the next week. I remember back in the day with Big Ben - sometimes you would come to a major event and he just wasn't his best, and then you would go to the next competition and he's his normal self and you win. That's horses. There were no great disasters. It's just the sport."

Riding in the anchor position, Lamaze had one rail plus one time fault riding Zigali P S, owned by Carlene and Andy Ziegler's Artisan Farms LLC. The Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games marked the first time that Lamaze had ridden the 10-year-old dark bay Dutch Warmblood gelding in team competition.

"I thought he jumped very well; I was very pleased with how it finished," said Lamaze of Zigali P S, a horse he began riding at the beginning of the year. "The mistake he had yesterday was lack of experience, nothing else. Today, it was an unlucky rub, but otherwise he jumped a good round, it was solid. I just think his lack of experience caught up to him."

"We were off to a good start, and the team spirit was great," Lamaze observed of Canada's overall performance. "You have to be perfect every day, and we had a few mistakes, mistakes that you can't have at a championships. It has to line up for everyone, not just one person. Nothing can go wrong, from the horse side of it or from the rider side of it."

The team was in sixth place after the first day of the two-day finals.

Candele was the pathfinder the day of the final (last Wednesday), delivering a clear round as only the second rider to tackle the deceptively difficult track set by French course designer Frédéric Cottier.

"The course was a step up from yesterday, still fair, but bigger and wider," said Candele. "It rode even bigger than it walked. Thankfully, our clear round gave a little bit of comfort, and it carries a little bit of momentum, but there is still a lot of work. I hope everything goes well for us. We are a super group; we are best friends, all of us."

Candele's would prove to be the team's only clear round of the day, allowing Canada to maintain its sixth place standing following the opening speed phase of competition last Tuesday. Millar and Lamaze both posted scores of four faults each, while Foster provided the drop score of eight faults.

Individually, Candele moved up to 17th in the individual standings with a two-day score of 4.19. With 4.91 penalties, Millar was

close behind in 19th.

"The sport today is such a game of inches," said Millar following his four-fault round. "There is such quality and quantity out there. You miss by that much and they are going to get you for sure. There is no mercy. The other teams are not going to let you get by with that one."

"On the other hand, tomorrow is another day," the 10-time Olympian continued. "We are the eternal optimists. As a small (show jumping) country, we have achieved some amazing results, and there is no reason why we can't do the same here."

Lamaze is also close in the rankings, sitting 24th on a score of 5.96, while Foster was 51st with 11.13.

Lamaze and Zigali P S were close to home when a rail fell at 12 'a' of the double combination.

"I wasn't a big fan of that line," said Lamaze, expressing his concern having watched the first three-quarters of the competition before it was his turn to tackle the track. "That's Zigali's lack of experience; I knew I was going to have to be a little bit lucky there. I thought he handled everything else quite well."

The first three days of competition also counted toward the individual rankings. Candele finished in 22nd position with a score of 8.19 as the top Canadian. Lamaze placed 31st with 10.96 while Millar had a three-day score of 12.91 to finish in 36th position. Foster placed 51st with 11.13 in her world championship debut. A record total of 153 individuals competed at this year's world championships.

The Canadian Show Jumping Team will next compete at the CSIO5* Spruce Meadows "Masters" tournament in Calgary this week.



Yann Candele and Showgirl, owned by The Watermark Group, finished in 22nd in the individual standings in France. Photo by Cealy Tetley