

Eric Lamaze scores 28th WEF Challenge Cup career victory

Eric Lamaze of Schomberg won the \$35,000 CSI3* Equinimity WEF Challenge Cup Round 10 last Thursday, taking the top prize for the third time this season in the weekly feature at the 12-week Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF) in Wellington, Florida.

Having scored back-to-back wins during weeks two and three riding Chacco Kid, Lamaze earned victory last week partnered with Chesney, owned by Andy and Carlene Ziegler's Artisan Farms.

Tied with three-time U.S. Olympic medalist McLain Ward for the most WEF Challenge Cup wins at 27 apiece before the event, Lamaze, also a three-time Olympic medalist, now sits alone at the top of the leaderboard with a total of 28 career victories to his credit.

The course for the WEF Challenge Cup Round 10 was designed by Michel Vaillancourt, the only person other than Lamaze to win an individual Olympic medal for Canada. Vaillancourt won the individual silver at the 1976 Olympic Games, held in Lamaze's birthplace of Montreal. Lamaze went on to win the individual gold in addition to team silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, riding Hickstead, and claimed the individual bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games with Fine Lady 5.

A total of 84 entries attempted Vaillancourt's track with nine jumping clear to qualify for the jump-off. Lamaze and Chesney flew around the shortened jump-off course in a time of 36.59 seconds to take the win over Amber Harte, riding Austria 2, who stopped the clock at 37.07 for second place. New York's Georgina Bloomberg finished third with a clear jump-off effort in a time of 37.50, riding Manodie II H. Canadians filled the next two spots with 10-time Olympian Ian Millar of Perth taking fourth riding Dixon and Jennifer Mattell of Milton producing the fastest four-fault effort in the jump-off for fifth place aboard Cherokee.

While Lamaze has ridden various mounts to victory in the WEF Challenge Cup series, Thursday marked the first time that Chesney made the trip to the winner's circle. Purchased from Germany's Marcus Beerbaum, Lamaze took over Chesney's reins during the 2017 season.

‘I’ve been riding him for about a year now and have basically tried to make a match with the horse,’ explained Lamaze of the 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding. ‘With Rosana du Park’s retirement, Chesney couldn’t have joined my string at a better time. He was always ultra-careful, and he’s a horse that suits me. I love careful horses, and he sure is a catty one! We clicked during the Spruce Meadows Summer Series last year. I really started believing in him after that circuit, and then he jumped really well at the 1.45m and 1.50m level in Europe. I already saw that he was doing it nicely, and we called on him to do something a little more with the WEF class today. He was obviously ready for it!’

‘It always works like that; you question whether you should even put them in the class, and then they end up doing it easily,’ laughed Lamaze at the irony.

‘It was a great course, super-technical,’ he added. ‘When I walked it, I was thinking the course was a little easy when there were almost 90 starters, but Michel proved me wrong. It was Michel Vaillancourt at his best!’

Lamaze then travels to Mexico City for the opening leg of the 2018 Global Champions Tour from March 22 to 25 where he will be a member of the Montreal Diamonds team in the Global Champions League. Then it’s back to Florida for the final week of the Winter Equestrian Festival before heading to the beach for Global Champions Tour Miami from April 5 to 7.

For more information on Lamaze, visit www.ericlamaze.com



Eric Lamaze, riding Artisan Farms' Chesney, scored his third \$35,000 CSI3* Equinimity WEF Challenge Cup win of the season last

Thursday at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida.Photo by Starting Gate Communications