

Eric Lamaze wins Rolex Top Ten Final in Geneva

Eric Lamaze of Schomberg claimed the \$300,000 Rolex Top Ten Final riding his Rio Olympic bronze medal partner, Fine Lady 5, Dec. 9, in Geneva, Switzerland.

With the top 10 riders in the world show jumping rankings going head-to-head in a two-round showdown of epic proportions, Lamaze jumped clear in the opening round riding Fine Lady 5, a 13-year-old Hanoverian mare owned by Artisan Farms. As Lamaze and Fine Lady 5 had posted the fastest clear in the opening round, they had the luxury of going last in the all-deciding second round of competition.

Currently ranked number one in the world, Germany's Christian Ahlmann had set the time to beat at 43.05 seconds riding Taloubet Z, forcing Lamaze to take every risk and rely on Fine Lady 5's tremendously fast foot speed in a full-out effort to catch his time. Coming home to the final fence on course, the packed house cheered encouragement as Lamaze and Fine Lady 5 sailed over the Rolex oxer and stopped the clock in 42.56 seconds to take the win. Switzerland's Steve Guerdat, the 2012 Olympic champion, was the only other rider to jump double clear, placing third riding Corbinian with a time of 44.30 seconds.

"Going last gave me an advantage in the jump-off," observed Lamaze, the 2008 Olympic Champion who is currently ranked number six in the world. "I thought Christian Ahlmann was not going to be beatable, but my gallop to the last fence won it for me."

"It's a big win!" he added. "The Rolex Top Ten is one of the most prestigious competitions that we have throughout the year, showcasing the best riders in the world riding their best horses at this moment in time. A grand prix is a grand prix, but the Rolex Top Ten is something special. Having been second once before, having been so close, it means a lot to me to win. And especially on this mare that had such an unbelievable Olympics; it's like her gold medal."

Lamaze has contested the Rolex IJRC Top Ten Final four previous times in his career with his best finish coming in 2011 when he was the runner-up riding Coriana van Klapscheut, also owned by Artisan Farms. His other three appearances, in 2008, 2009 and 2010, were all aboard the legendary stallion Hickstead, the horse that carried him to the 2008 Olympic championship title as well as the team silver for Canada. Lamaze is the only Canadian to have ever contested the Rolex IJRC Top Ten Final in its 16-year history.

"As a Canadian, I am extremely proud to bring this title back to Canada," said Lamaze, 48, who has won Olympic gold, silver and bronze medals for his country. "I hope this gives great hope to the new generation of riders back home. Everything is possible."

Lamaze spoke on the importance of having great owners behind him.

"The support I received from Andy and Carlene Ziegler of Artisan Farms after the tragedy of losing Hickstead truly revived my career," he said. "I don't know if I would be standing where I am today without them. I am so thankful to them, and so thankful to Rolex for putting on this amazing event. This is truly something special."



Germany's Christian Ahlmann (left) and Switzerland's Steve Guerdat hoist Eric Lamaze holding the Rolex IJRC Top Ten trophy in an impromptu podium celebration. Photo by Arnd Bronkhorst Photography