

Local Olympian wins \$50,000 Zucarlos Grand Prix

By Jordan Nunziato

Canadian Olympian Hugh Graham saved the best for last, winning the \$50,000 Grand Prix last Sunday (Aug. 18) at the Orangeville International Show Jumping Tournament.

Graham of Schomberg was the final competitor, mastering the first-round track set by two-time Olympic course designer Leopoldo Palacios of Venezuela to make it seven for the jump-off.

As the final rider to return for the jump-off, Graham knew exactly what he had to do to win, and the 64-year-old veteran rose to the challenge, shaving almost three seconds off the leading time, riding Distant Star 3E.

"I thought it was a nice course," Graham said. "I knew what I had to do, and I knew what my horse could do. It's a great horse, it's been in the ribbons every class this year, and this is its third or fourth win."

For Graham, it was especially nice to compete so close to home.

"It's a dream for me," he said. "All of these shows are right in our neighbourhood."

The OAS Event Centre (Orangeville Fairground) boasts a grass field, which is becoming rare in the show jumping sport, as many competition venues are opting for the more easily maintained and weather-friendly all-weather footing.

"It's nice to have a change for sure, and we don't see grass very often," noted Graham, who made his Olympic debut at the 1984 Los Angeles Games. "It's nice to compete on grass. It gets you prepared for when you have to jump on grass at venues like Spruce Meadows, and that's important. Orangeville is now the only place we have to jump on grass in Ontario."

Two-time Olympian Jay Hayes, who co-chairs the Orangeville International alongside his wife Shawn, said, "People enjoyed jumping on this huge surface. The size of the ring is 400 by 300 feet, which is the biggest in eastern Canada. All of the exhibitors really loved Leopoldo's open courses; galloping on the grass in the huge open field is what it's all about. That's where our sport came from, and that where it has to go."

Roberto Teran of Colombia took the top two places in the \$25,000 Hayes Co. Open Welcome held Aug. 16, following a 12-horse jump-off, and Karina Aziz of Hamilton topped a three-horse jump-off to win Saturday's \$10,000 1.40-metre Highland Meadows Modified Grand Prix.