

Schomberg's Lamaze returns to Olympic podium

By Jake Courtepatte

After eight years, and with a different stallion, Eric Lamaze has recaptured the connection he shared with Hickstead in earning Olympic bronze with Fine Lady 5.

One of the most accomplished rider/horse connections in Canadian equestrian history, Lamaze rode Hickstead to a gold in individual jumping and a silver in team jumping in Beijing in 2008, and earning a World Equestrian Games bronze in 2010.

Hickstead collapsed and died in competition the following November in Italy, and Lamaze opted to ride the nine-year old Derly Chin De Muze in London in 2012.

"I never thought this would happen again," Lamaze told the Canadian Press after his third place finish in the individual jumping event in Rio. "There were times when I was not sure if I wanted to keep going. But this makes it all worth it."

It wasn't until Rio in 2016 that he recaptured the magic he had with Hickstead with Fine Lady 5.

The pair was not docked a penalty through the three qualifying rounds and two final rounds, with Fine Lady 5 the only horse not to knock a rail to the ground in all five rounds.

Two other pairs had penalty-free final rounds, sending the riders into a jump-off. Great Britain's Nick Skelton led off with another perfect round, posting a quick time of 42.82 seconds as well.

Swiss rider Steve Guardat followed, hitting one rail in a time of 43.08. Two other rides followed suit, both with misses.

"I knew what I had to do and even if I was unlucky and we had a fence down, I knew there was still a spot open if we were fast with a fault for a medal," said Lamaze.

The pair sped through the course, clocking a time of 42.09 with just one miss, earning the third place on the podium.

"I think the Olympics is one of the most difficult things that we come across in our sport and I think we all tried our hardest to do the best that we can," said Lamaze. "We really appreciate what the horses do for us, and for me, this little mare was jumping her heart out all week long and she continued until the end."

"So many things have to go right to be here with a medal around my neck. We saw a lot of great horses and great riders have some misfortune," he later said. "I think you really need good luck all the way. You need your horse to stay healthy and it's never a predictable thing."

The 48-year old Lamaze is now Canada's most decorated Olympic equestrian with three medals.

"I think in our sport, mostly all of us go to a show every week. There's always a major Grand Prix. But in my experience, people quickly forget what you've won when it comes down to Grand Prix. But an Olympic medalist stays with you forever."



Eric Lamaze took the bronze medal in individual show jumping in Rio Friday. Photo courtesy of the Canadian Olympic Committee