

Strong start for Canadian Show Jumping Team at World Championships

The Canadian Show Jumping Team completed the first day of competition Tuesday standing sixth at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Caen, France. Individually, Ian Millar of Perth, was sitting in eighth position.

Canada is represented by Yann Candele, 43, of Caledon, Tiffany Foster, 30, of Vancouver, Eric Lamaze, 45, of Schomberg, Millar, 67, and alternate Chris Sorensen, 32, of Caledon.

All four members of the Canadian Team produced a clear round over the speed track set by French course designer Frédéric Cottier. Candele was the first Canadian on course, and only the fourth rider from a starting field of 153 entries. Conservative but efficient, he guided Showgirl, a 14-year-old chestnut selle francais mare owned by The Watermark Group, home in a time of 85.39 seconds. Candele ended the day in 47th individually in his second consecutive World Equestrian Games appearance.

"Today, I didn't push my horse," Candele explained. "I was efficient, the course developed well, and the rails were not going down, so I stayed on my pace where I knew the horse was comfortable and it worked out. We had a high expectation of putting in a good score for the spirit of the team. It happened, so we are very delighted."

Foster was next in the ring for Canada, riding Verdi III, a 12-year-old bay Dutch Warmblood gelding for owner Artisan Farms LLC. Stopping the clock in 83.28 seconds, Foster was 28th individually after the first day.

"I am super happy; I thought my horse jumped really well," Foster said. "He was working with me, which is great to feel on the first day of competition. I wasn't able to go as fast as some of the other guys, but I took risks where I was able to, and I felt really happy with him."

"This was the hardest day for me because the bigger the jumps are, the better for him; if I can take a little time to get to them, I have a lot of confidence in him," she explained, referencing that foot speed is not Verdi III's greatest strength. "Ian and Eric are on faster horses that could give us good scores, and Yann and I did what we were supposed to do."

As the afternoon session opened, Millar raised Canadian spirits even higher by producing an impressively fast round with Dixson, an 11-year-old bay Belgian Warmblood gelding owned by Susan and Ariel Grange. His time of 78.84 seconds would hold up for eighth position at the end of the day.

"There are over 150 horse-rider combinations here and pretty much all of them are plenty good," noted the sage Millar. "When you look at that, it's a daunting task, and that's the mountain we have to climb here. I believe that's what championships are all about. It brings out the best in everybody, and that's what makes the competition so stunning."

The stalwart of the Canadian Team with a world record 10 Olympic appearances, Millar noted, "We've all ridden together a lot, and I'm a great believer in synergy in a team, and this team has synergy. We know each other so well, we know each other's horses, and we play off each other very well. That puts the circumstances in place for a great result."

Lamaze echoed those sentiments, saying, "We have a very strong team. We didn't come here to participate; we came here to get a medal."

Lamaze did his part, clocking in at 80.94 seconds with Zigali P S, a 10-year-old dark bay Dutch Warmblood gelding, also owned by Carlene and Andy Ziegler's Artisan Farms LLC. The pair closed the day in 17th individually, and Lamaze's result vaulted Canada to sixth position overall in the team standings among 35 nations. With a total of six penalty points, Canada was less than a rail off the lead, which was held by France with 2.08 penalties at the end of the day. Sweden was in second with 3.01, the United States was third with 4.72, Germany was in fourth position with 4.82 and The Netherlands rounded out the top five with 4.83.

"It was a great team performance, including from Yann Candele who had to go fourth this morning; it is clearly a disadvantage to be drawn fourth in the speed competition at the world championships," said Lamaze, defending bronze medalist from the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. "What we asked Yann to do was give us a secure score, not to take any chances, and he did a great job. As the day proceeded, we could risk a few things. Ultimately, we want all four riders to be strong and do their job and carry the momentum forward to tomorrow with no horses that are shaky."

Following Tuesday's speed phase, show jumping events continue with the two-round Nations' Cup competition to determine both team medals and preliminary individual standings, yesterday (Wednesday) and today (results not known at press time). Following a day of rest, the top 30 riders in the individual standings will compete Saturday. In a format unique to world championship competition, the top four riders in the individual standings will advance to Sunday's Final Four. World championship titles do not come easy; in the ultimate test of horsemanship, each rider will complete the course with their own mount before jumping the track with each of their competitor's horses.

The Canadian team is led by Team Manager Karen Hendry-Ouellette, chef d'equipe Mark Laskin, veterinarian Dr. Sylvie Surprenant, and Darren Roberts as stable manager.

The Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games are held every four years and act as the world championships. The next edition of the Games will be hosted by Canada in Bromont, Quebec in 2018.



Yann Candele and Showgirl, owned by The Watermark Group, were 47th in the individual standings after the first day of show jumping Tuesday. Photo by Cealy Tetley