

Christine McCrea and Vegas Win \$100,000 Budweiser FEI World Cup Qualifier of Syracuse in One Round

Todd Minikus and Pavarotti Second; Ben Maher and Robinhood W Third

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Todd Minikus and Pavarotti

Cup Qualifier of Syracuse tonight. With 17 challenging jumps set meticulously throughout the ring and a very tight time allowed of just 72 seconds, only one out of the 29 entries managed to complete the course fault-free. That fault-free round belonged to American Christine McCrea riding Vegas, owned by Candy Tribble. The pair raced through the timers to complete their course just under the time allowed in 71.50 seconds. McCrea and Vegas were presented with the “Jet Run” Perpetual Trophy donated by Elizabeth Busch Burke for their impressive win.

The second and third place finishers also had clear jumping rounds, but both received one fault each for exceeding the time allowed. The second place finishers, Todd Minikus and Pavarotti made it through with a clear round and were then penalized with one fault after completing the course in 73.23 seconds. Third place finishers Ben Maher and Robinhood W also cleared the course and ended up with one fault after finishing their course in a time of 75.35 seconds.

Minikus and Pavarotti have had a great year together this year and continued their success tonight. “He really went on a tear after Florida. At one point he had jumped eight grand prix (classes) in a row clear,” Minikus said. “We went to Calgary and he jumped double clear at the Nation’s Cup. Then he came back the very next day and jumped clear in the million dollar grand prix, but lost a shoe in the second round. He was second in Harrisburg and last week he should have won in Washington, but it was totally rider error. After that one his owner had a serious discussion with his rider, it was a mess in the mirror back at the hotel. Tonight he jumped great and was second again, so he has really been awesome.”

Ben Maher’s horse Robinhood W is actually the foal of Michelle Spadone’s mare Melisimo, who also competed

Syracuse, NY – November 1, 2008 – The first day of November kicked off with a bang at the 125th National Horse Show and Syracuse Sporthorse Invitational today. The \$100,000 Budweiser FEI World Cup Qualifier of Syracuse was won by Christine McCrea and Vegas after a difficult course left them the winners with just one round of competition. The TK99 Speed Derby was also held this afternoon and was won by Harrie Smolders of the Netherlands with Riovanna.

Venezuelan course designer Leopoldo Palacio set up an extremely difficult course for the open jumpers in the \$100,000 Budweiser FEI World

in the class tonight. Maher, of Essex, GBR, says that the ten year-old horse is very brave and that he tends to rise to every occasion. "He has done eight grand prix (classes) now and he has placed in every one," Maher said. "I am lucky to have him."

Fourth place finishers Ian Millar and Redefin (below left) actually made it through the course under the time allowed with a time of 71.87 seconds, but had one rail down for a total of four faults. Fifth place finishers Callan Solem and Allison put in a time of 72.34 seconds and ended up with four jumping faults and one time fault for a total of five. Sixth place was another five fault round belonging to McLain Ward and his Olympic mount Sapphire with their time of 73.04 seconds and one rail down.

It was said that course designer Palacio hoped to get 4-6 riders in the jump off, but he did not even get that. The riders agreed that the tight time allowed was the biggest factor in how the class played out.

"It was top notch," said second place finisher Todd Minikus. "There was no room for error and you had to have a little luck and for sure be fast enough. If you look at the pure jumping effort of the horses it was a good class because there were quite a few horses that jumped quite well. It is a shame that there was no jump off but sometimes that is the way it goes."

"I don't know if they should have changed the time allowed. I don't know what the discussion was between Leopoldo and David Distler and whoever else might have been involved in that," Minikus continued. "I don't know if they even chatted or considered it. The first couple of horses had a tough way to go and I don't know if he could have gotten a true reading on the time from the first couple that went. They are all professionals, so I assume they knew what they were doing. They wanted it to be a difficult class; I think that was the mindset all along. It was supposed to be difficult and that is what they got."

Third place finisher Ben Maher agreed. "That was one of the biggest indoor classes I have jumped and it was virtually impossible to clear all of the jumps inside of the time allowed," Maher said. "Christine's horse is naturally very fast and she rode perfect distances off of every corner. My horse was a little bit tricky to ride tonight and he was jumping a bit too high and there was just no chance I was going to make the time allowed."

Winner Christine McCrea was completely shocked with how the class ended up. "I don't know how I did it," McCrea said. "My horse hit a rail really hard in the Pasmore Cup class earlier this week and he was not happy about it at all, so I think today he really remembered that and it really made him sharp."

"I knew it was a really tough course so I was probably as focused as I get," McCrea continued. "I think it was just the right moment for both of us. It was unbelievable; he was perfect and I managed not to screw it up."

With most of the Olympic riders and some of the Olympic horses competing in the class, McCrea thought for sure that someone else was going to go clear. "Ben wasn't on his Olympic horse, but for sure he has a lot of experience and there were big riders and great horses here, so I never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be the only clear," she stated. "I think that the time was too tight. The designer did a great job with the course, but it could have been maybe a second longer."

McCrea and Vegas went eleventh in the class of 29, so they had a lot of time to wait and watch. "I was totally freaking out, I was watching and I was like 'I can't believe that this is happening.'" McCrea said. "It was great to only have to jump one round and be the winner, that doesn't happen usually. It was unbelievable; as long as I have shown here there has always been a jump-off."

Vegas, the 14 year-old Dutch bred stallion McCrea won on was incredible throughout the complex course tonight. "He has a naturally quick way of going and he has become more and more careful in his life," McCrea said of the horse. "I have had him since he was eight so I know him really well and he knows me and when it's on, it's on. He is unbelievable; every time I get to show him I get really excited because I know I have a chance."

“He requires a little management being a stallion,” McCrea continued. “He is pretty amped up most of the time. It takes a lot of concentration when you are riding him; you really have to focus.”

After staying home from Europe this summer and keeping things low key to gear up for the World Cup classes this fall, McCrea was very excited to come to Syracuse. “It was the first big show that I have been to in a while,” she said. “You get the Europeans here and you get the Todd’s and they are pretty hard to beat, so I love it, it is fun.

“I have always loved this show,” she continued. “It has great atmosphere, there are a lot of people here and I think it has grown a lot. It is growing and getting better every year.”

Several awards were also presented at the conclusion of the grand prix class this evening. The Pyramid Leading International Rider Award was presented to Callan Solem for her success in the week’s international open jumper classes. Solem was also awarded the Leading Jumper Rider Challenge Trophy donated by the David Wright Family as the Pyramid Leading Rider. The George H. Morris Style of Riding Award was presented to Canadian rider Ian Millar for demonstrating the best American style of riding throughout the tournament and the Jane F. Clark High Performance Development Award was presented to George H. Morris. The award is given to “the individual, group or organization that in the opinion of the sportsperson’s committee has done the most for high performance show jumping and its development within the year or previous years.”

Earlier in the day the \$15,000 TK99 Speed Derby, presented by BMW, was held. The class was a benefit for Rider’s for Research and each rider had the opportunity to get money donated for each jump that they successfully cleared. Altogether the riders raised approximately \$17,000 for breast cancer research. The speed class was held in a faults converted to seconds format and the winner of the class was Harrie Smolders of the Netherlands riding Riovanna, owned by Eurohorse BVBA with the fastest time of 55.40 seconds. Smolders was also the winner of the class last year.

Second place in the class was Callan Solem riding Mianta, owned by Quiet Winter Farm with a total time of 55.63 seconds, just behind Smolders and third place went to Henk Van De Pol riding Tennessee W owned by GT Swinkels with a time of 56.61 seconds.

Hillary Dobbs and Marengo ended up in fourth place in the class with a time of 56.94 seconds, fifth went to Marie Hecart and Lucas owned by Ashland Stables with 57.75 seconds, and sixth was Brianne Goutal and Mon Gamin, owned by Cloverleaf Farms with a time of 57.77 seconds.

It is no surprise that popular rider Bezie Madden raised the most money upon the completion of her course with Prima, owned by Neapolitan Hold Co, LLC. Madden earned an impressive \$558 per fence for a total of \$6,590 towards the Riders for Research cause. Madden and Prima ended in seventh place in the class with a time of 58.00 seconds.

Tomorrow is the last day of the 125th National Horse Show at the Syracuse Sporthorse Tournament. The exciting Animal Planet Sporthorse Cup will be the concluding event with three challenging phases of competition.