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Todd Minikus and Olinda Win \$30,000 WEF Challenge Cup at First Week of Tampa Equestrian Festival

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Tampa, FL - March 20, 2008 - The first grand prix of the 2008 Tampa Equestrian Festival was held today. 2007 Pan American Games bronze medalist Todd Minikus of Loxahatchee, FL, was the winner this week on Olinda, owned by Houlihan Lawrence. They achieved victory in the \$30,000 WEF Challenge Cup in the Suncoast Internationale week (March 19-23) of the Tampa Equestrian Festival, which runs through April 6.

Today's class was one of five remaining qualifying events for the 2008 \$200,000 Budweiser American Invitational, which is presented by The Tampa Tribune and Sweetbay Supermarket. Minikus said that his motivation for attending the horse show this week was to gain valuable prize money to keep him in the top 30 riders invited to the prestigious grand prix, which will be held on Saturday, April 5, at 7 p.m. in Raymond James Stadium.

Michel Vaillancourt set today's track in the covered ring. It had 12 numbered obstacles, including a triple combination set against the rail that caught some riders off guard. There were eight clear rounds, three retirements and one fall. The fastest four-faulter was Margie Engle on Hidden Creek's Pamina L.

The first to return for the jump-off was Leslie Howard on Raimond W. They kept an easy pace and went for the slower, clear round, but that plan was dashed when they had a rail at the final jump. They finished with four faults in 45.939 seconds.

Bill Lowry and Rio Corde had a good shortened course time in 41.830 seconds, but a rail at the oxer of fence 6 left them with third place at the end of the class. Cara Raether and Lord G were fourth in the standings after the class. They had four faults at fence 10, a skinny, airy white vertical. Their time was 43.306 seconds.

The lead in the class went next to Michael Morrissey on Crelido. Morrissey pulled off a slick move from fence 1 to 2 by going to the left of the oxer set in between the two jumps. All of the other riders went to the right side

of the oxer, which added some time. Morrissey kept a good pace and was careful to jump 10. They finished with the fastest time so far in 41.671 seconds and more importantly, with a clear round.

Kelley Robinson and her sprightly grey, Calibur, were next in with a slower time of 45.555 seconds and they had a rail down at fence 2. Eduardo Salas Herrera and Rocky Mountain Warmbloods' RMW Estina were unlucky at fence 10 for four faults. They stopped the timers in 44.650 seconds.

Next in was Minikus on Olinda, an 11-year-old bay Warmblood mare. Minikus had a quick pace and was on his way to lowering the leading time. After fence 6 they made the short rollback turn to the left, but Olinda slipped and tripped. She regained her footing and kept going, and Minikus opened up her gallop slightly to the final two fences. He passed through the timers to take the lead by only one-tenth of a second in 41.569 seconds.

The last to go in the jump-off was Engle on Hidden Creek's Coroya Z. A rail at fence 4b took away victory. They finished in 44.320 seconds for fifth place.

This was the first show back for Olinda in almost two weeks since she competed in the final leg of the Olympic Show Jumping Trials. "I hadn't schooled her or even been over a pole on the ground since then," Minikus said. "She seemed like the week and a half break really freshened her up."

Minikus did not see Morrissey compete in the jump-off. "I didn't know how fast he had gone," he remarked. "He did go inside from 1 to 2. That was a nice move that I didn't think would be that much faster. It must have certainly saved some time because I went quick enough around, and I just barely nicked him."