

Minikus Makes It Two in a Row Taking \$50,000 North Coast Grand Prix with Ultimo Van Ter Moude

Red-hot rider bests a starting field of twenty-eight and a jump-off roster of eight for his second win in three days

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Moreland Hills, Ohio – September 14, 2008 - - After three straight days of rain, Mother Nature and the weatherman provided a brief window of opportunity for both the competitors and spectators at the 2008 North Coast Jumper Classic, serving up a day mixed with clouds and sunshine accompanied by near record high temperatures and humidity on Sunday at the Cleveland Metroparks Polo Field in the steamy Chagrin Valley.

But, with the remnants of Hurricane Ike scheduled to move into the area by late afternoon, no one was ready to look this meteorological gift horse in the mouth.

And for those of you who watched the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Cleveland Browns on Sunday Night Football, you know full well that it was a good thing we got the show over when we did. Winds, some in excess of 60 miles per hour, raked the area beginning shortly after 6pm this evening.

Today's main event, the \$50,000 North Coast Grand Prix, scored under Table II Sec. 2 (a) Time First Jump-Off, saw a starting field of twenty-eight horse and rider combinations line up to challenge the course designed by Jose "Pepe" Gamarra of La Pas, Bolivia.

Gamarra laid out a track that included 13 fences with 16 jumping efforts, including a double combination of oxer to vertical at 5 a b, and a triple combination of vertical, oxer, vertical at 9 a b c.

Today's course yielded eight clean rounds. Additionally, ten horse and riders had four faults, four pairs had eight faults and five had twelve or more. There was one rider eliminated.

The jump-off course for the dash for cash was reduced to eight fences.

Todd Minikus and Debbie Stephens each qualified two for round two, and Minikus lead the way back for the

tiebreaker with Romy, the first horse to master the first round track.

Minikus couldn't duplicate the first round feat however, pulling two rails along the tiebreaker trail and finishing with eight faults in a very fast time of 43.583 seconds.

He would later lament his decision to go so quickly with the first horse in the jump-off.

Following Minikus with his first, it was Debbie Stephens with her opening salvo in the jump-off, the talented Callaway 4. Stephens was also unable to replicate her first round performance. Her jump-off ride was marred by a single rail down and a finish time of 49.912 seconds.

Her stay at the top was brief as Ali Wolff and Lanoo, immediately following, produced a faster four fault go-round. Wolff knocked over four seconds off of Stephens' time, breaking the beams in 45.772 seconds. Her score and time would hold up for today's eventual fourth place finish.

McLain Ward and his veteran partner Goldika 559 were next to go and Ward laid down a jaw dropping trip. Goldika has always been one of the fastest mares ever to grace a show ring, and today was certainly no exception as she raced home in 41.091 seconds, 3 seconds faster than Minikus, 4.7 seconds faster than Wolff and almost 9 seconds faster than Stephens. Unfortunately, a rail down coming home would keep Ward out of today's winner's circle.



Leslie Howard and Raimond W started out golden but ran into problems at the triple bar. A stop there and the subsequent time faults gave Howard a final score of 10 faults in 59.245 seconds.

Angela Moore and Claus also had four faults in their race for today's title, crossing the finish line in 48.99 seconds to move ahead of Stephens, but behind Wolff in fourth place.

So at this point in the proceedings, with five of the eight horses gone, and still no one clear, it set up a tough decision for Debbie Stephens. A slow and careful clear round would obviously take her right to the top. On the other hand, the red hot Todd Minikus was still waiting in the wings with Thursday's winner Ultimo Van Ter Moude.

Stephens chose option A, slow and clear. Riding her trusty and veteran partner All Star, Stephens cruised around with nary a fault, but her finish time of 52.155 seconds, barely under the jump-off time allowed, was eminently beatable.

With the door left wide open, Todd Minikus walked right through.

Despite his mount bucking and kicking his way around today's short course, Minikus did it practically rub free. The pair breezed home easily in 45.836 seconds for the Sunday win.

In the jump-off, he could make it a lot less complicated for both of us, if he could avoid all the bucking and kicking and that kind of stuff," laughed Minikus. "But, if I had to sacrifice, I'd sacrifice the bronc in him for his jump," he admitted. "Because he has an amazing jump, and at the end of the day after all, this is a jumping contest."

“I’m thrilled with the win by Ultimo, but I’m really, really frustrated with myself for trying to go so fast on Romy,” Minikus went on to admit. “You’re first to go and you have two in it, going first and last, it was just plain stupid of me to try and set such a hot pace. Even if I had taken two seconds more to turn back to that in and out, I still would have been faster than I was with Ultimo.”

And it might have changed the entire strategy for everyone else in the jump-off, right? “Yeah. Yeah, that was bad management on my part,” Minikus sighed.

He then talked about his two rising stars. “These two horses have each been doing the grand prix for only about six or eight months and they are really starting to blossom well,” he said of his two grey mounts. “It’s been fun to work with them, to work on their weaknesses, and not discourage them from their strengths.”



Second place finisher Debbie Stephens then detailed her slow and clear strategy with All Star. “You know, especially with Todd behind me, I looked at the turn to the triple bar, and that was the turn that makes it or breaks it in this jump-off. You had to make the inside cut to the triple bar,” she explained. “All Star is not a fast horse at 18 hands, so I thought I would roll the dice in the conservative way. I knew he could jump a clear round if I didn’t pull on the reins, that’s a given. He’s such a careful horse. I just decided to hope for the best and try and back in for the win if Todd had a rail down,” she smiled. “But he didn’t. He deserved the victory.”

Minikus talked about today’s course, a course that saw five of the first seven go clear, but then only three more through the rest of the line-up. “I started it out with a clean round with my mare Romy and she was awesome, just awesome today,” he said. “For a while there at the beginning, it looked like there might be a lot clear, but then it evened out and four faults seemed like the common score. That’s a sign of a good course, and a good course designer though, where he’s able to pick horses off here and there, instead of killing them.”

“I thought when I walked it, that we were definitely jumping for \$50,000,” said Stephens of the course. “I think it’s a very delicate set of jumps, meaning if you just touch them, they’re coming down. I like this course a lot better than Thursday’s track. I thought today’s course tested all of the horses, the big horses and the small horses, a horse that could jump verticals and a horse that could jump the big spreads. I think he tested all of the parts of the riders and horses,” she explained. “I thought it was a really good course for the competition he had today.”

Minikus has had a fabulous year this year, one of the best of his stellar career. I asked him about that momentum. “From the beginning of the year, starting in Florida, I’ve had a great year,” said Minikus. “We’ve won a lot of grand prix this year, with a team of horses. It hasn’t just been one horse. Presidente, from the Sleepy P Ranch has picked off some nice classes. Ultimo has himself a handful of wins, and of course Pavarotti has had a great year. It’s been a lot of fun, and a luxury to have four or five horses that are capable of stepping up on any Sunday. And, it means that they each don’t have to work so hard,” he laughed. “Some weeks they can rest and their buddies can pick up the load.”

According to Minikus, Pavarotti will be the one to pick up the load next week for the \$100,000 Wachovia Securities American Gold Cup.