

McLain Ward takes another Grand Prix victory at the HITS-on-the Hudson

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FEI riders returned to the Grand Prix Stadium at HITS-on-the Hudson for the \$100,000 Hudson Valley Jumper Classic, the third of four FEI classes at the HITS Championship CSI5*, which culminates Sunday with the Saugerties \$500,000 Grand Prix CSI5*.

Three-time Olympic gold medalist McLain Ward topped the field of 49 high performance athletes from across the country and around the world, representing countries including the United States, Canada, Venezuela, and Mexico. The first round course yielded 14 clear rounds and half would jump clean in the jump-off in the pursuit of the blue ribbon, custom cooler, trophy, and lion's share of the purse.

With such a large field in the jump-off, speed was of the essence, and as the round progressed, the excitement grew with each rider seeming to top the last. While Ward's winning time, almost 2 seconds faster than his nearest competitor, made for a convincing victory, the next four spots were separated by just over half a second. "It's good prize money and we were lucky that it cooled off a little bit. That made life a little easier for the horses and the riders," said Ward. "Mariana is a great course builder, she's challenging and she'll build big enough. She had a little bit of what we call a pinwheel, which I always think is difficult for horses. They're not always sure where they're going and you catch rails. She had probably the right number clean out of all the entries in a class like this."

It was a good day for the USA, taking the top five spots, with Ward, Johnathan McCrea and Jimmy Torano, as the top three.

Alexis Trosch of Venezuela was the first to return for the short course. He and Cantara Z lead the way, cleared all of the fences in a time of 44.56, setting the Great American time to Beat for the 13 who followed. Trosch's time would be good enough sixth place when the class was finished.

Next to challenge the track was David Raposa in the irons aboard S&L Sage. With a fifth place finish in Wednesday's \$35,000 HITS Saugerties Welcome CSI5* Raposa was eager to build on that success, and laid down a clean fast round, crossing the timers in 42.77 and setting a new Great American Time to Beat. At the end of the class, would again take home a pink ribbon.

Beth Underhill and Count Me In, just off a win in the HITS Chicago \$500,000 Grand Prix CSI5*, crossed the timers with a clean round in 44.84. Her solid effort would give her a seventh place finish and a great prep for Sunday's feature class.

The lead would change hands with each of the next three rides, as another double clear ride would be marked down, this time for Kristen VanderVeen and Bull Run's Almighty. VanderVeen was slick and tidy over the shortened course, jumping to a time of 42.50. In the end, VanderVeen was awarded the fourth place ribbon.

Following VanderVeen and immediately taking over the top spot was Jimmy Torano aboard Glasgow de Muze soaring to a time of 42.30. While Torano was fast, there were still competitors waiting to challenge the shortened course and Torano would finish in third place.

Ward rode the shortened course next, in the irons aboard Contagious, a nine-year-old chestnut gelding. “Contagious is a brand new horse for us. Lisa and Annabel Revers of the Beechwood Stables in partnership with Max Amaya purchased him about three weeks ago and our first show was last week in South Hampton. We did two classes and he was great with a second and a win. This is our first time showing him FEI, he had a nice clear the other day, and obviously, we wanted to step him up into this bigger class.”

Ward explained that Contagious is still gaining experience. Reed Kessler had developed the horse in the past two seasons. “She has done a beautiful job and has now gone back to school so we had the opportunity to purchase him and while he still has some growing to do, he’s a very careful and very smart horse so I think he’s going to go a long way.”

Ward proved he’s ready for the World Equestrian Games next week, and for Sunday’s Saugerties \$500,000 Grand Prix CSI5* as he and Contagious shaved two full seconds off Torano’s time, flying through the timers in 40.10. He’s done for the week and will actually have a little break. I have the WEG to focus on and he needs to kind of digest the past two weeks and catch his breath.”

Two riders were yet to go as Ward looked on hoping his time was good enough. It was Jonathan McCrea who would be the closest challenger aboard Win For Life. With each fence, the crowd cheered him on, and as he crossed the timers everyone looked to the clock to see a time of 42.18 which would put McCrea and Win For Life in second position. As Ward entered the winner’s circle, his smile said it all.

Source : Press Release