

Land Rover U.S. Eventing Team Qualifies for Paris 2024 Olympic Games with Silver Medal Finish at Conclusion of 2022 FEI Eventing World Championship



The Land Rover U.S. Eventing Team captured the first team medal since 2002 with their second place finish at Pratoni 2022.

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Pratoni del Vivaro, Italy - The Land Rover U.S. Eventing Team has officially secured qualification for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, capturing the first team world championship medal for the program since 2002, as they hoisted the silver medal on the podium. The team finished on a final score of 100.3 behind the German team who took gold on a 95.2. New Zealand followed closely in third on a combined total of 100.7.

Led by Chef d'Equipe Bobby Costello, the team stayed composed and focused as the technical track designed by Uliano Vezzani (ITA) proved challenging with rails coming down throughout the course. The final phase was incredibly influential, changing the team standings multiple times as the top 25 combinations concluded the end of the day, making for an exciting championship finale. All five U.S. combinations finished yesterday's phase in the top 25 and jumped in the second session of competition on the grass field at Centro Equestre Federale. Of the team's performance, Costello elaborated on the work and commitment from the athletes, their staff, the owners, and all the support team to produce a historic result for the U.S.

"It was just such a crazy day. I had a feeling when I walked the course that it was going to be very influential. I'd never seen such a consistently big and very technical track and have those three lines, all single jumps to combinations, with three completely different distances. It was a real important phase, and no team went unscathed, and you had to keep fighting to the end," said Costello.

"I hope this means great things for the future. I feel the program has been on the slow burn of the swing for a couple of years and I think there was still something missing. My number one priority when I took this interim position was to try and change the culture and really make sure that everyone had each other's backs and building trust among the riders," he added. "The riders, the owners, the staff, people have never given up on the sport and I'm so happy for everyone, even those at home, who get to watch and get to be proud, so really good just all around for us."

Will Coleman and Off The Record produced the only clear round for the team, managing the questions asked throughout the difficult track with poise, demonstrating the scopinness, rideability, and talent of the 2009 Irish Sport Horse gelding owned by The Off The Record Syndicate. The pair finished as the highest placed U.S. combination, taking seventh place overall on a score of 27.2. Coleman purchased the gelding as a four-year-old and has developed him throughout his career, noting that the progress and accomplishments of their partnership is something he continues to cherish.

"It was great. I'm so thrilled. It was par for the course for this entire week for us to be honest. I feel like he's punched above his weight in every phase and I'm just so happy with him," said Coleman. "I'm so proud of my horse and my team and everyone involved with this program. I've had him since he was four and produced him myself and it's cool to see him go in there and rise to the moment."

Lauren Nicholson and Vermiculus were the trailblazers for the team and finishing in 19th place overall on a final individual score of 41.1. The pair had two down and finished slightly over the optimum time to add 8.4 to their score following their sharp cross-country round yesterday.

"He tried his heart out for me out there. We had the two down that have caused loads of people problems at the end of the course, but he's come out of this week feeling good. This was a really tough track. It's super technical and a real show jumping track. He jumped well and feels great, so I'm really happy with him overall."

In a notoriously challenging phase for Boyd Martin and Tsetserleg TSF, a 2007 Trakehner gelding owned by Christine Turner, Tommie Turner, and Thomas Turner, the pair dropped four rails for a total of 16 faults, for a final score of 41.2 to finish in 20th place overall. Of the team camaraderie, Martin spoke of the drought the U.S. program has had since their last team podium at a world championship and how much energy and excitement he can feel as the program looks ahead to the future.

"I'm very proud to be an American today. Having five clear rounds yesterday in the cross-country was awesome, and just looking at the results here, any three of the five of us could have gotten a team medal," said Martin. "I've been on many of these teams, and we've been so close over and over again, and it's a massive sigh of relief. I'm really thankful for this team and proud to be here with these guys sitting next to me."

As the last combination to contest the course, Tamie Smith and Mai Baum, a 2006 German Sport Horse gelding owned by Alex Ahearn, Ellen Ahearn, and Eric Markell, added eight faults to their original score of 24.0 to finish on a 32.0, to take ninth place individually. Smith, while disappointed to be out of the individual medal running after her round, said the focus was always on the team result and their overall performance throughout the week meant more than an individual medal.

"We came here to do our best and I have to say, we all knew that potentially we could medal, and I think we're pleasantly surprised and we're less than a point away from third and it shows to the quality of the field and the riding. It's impressive and I'm just so honored to be here," said Smith. "I'm very proud of my horse. I feel like it just wasn't meant to be and that's okay. We're here and we got the silver medal and that's what we came here for. I have to push that to the side that this isn't about my individual performance, it's about the team performance, and I'm ecstatic with our result."

Ariel Grald (Southern Pines, N.C) noted yesterday that her goal was to finish the championship on her dressage score of 32.5, which is exactly what she did. Aboard Leamore Master Plan, a 2009 Irish Sport Horse gelding owned by Annie Eldridge, Grald guided the stunning gelding to a masterful clear round inside of the time. In her first championship appearance for the stars and stripes, Grald felt that it was her moment to prove that she deserved to be on the world stage, while also taking in every piece of knowledge and learning she could to help continue to prepare her for the future.

"I was a bit nervous going in and he's such a great show jumper. I just have to trust him and trust that he's going to go in and try, and I knew after the first fence that he was good. The combinations can be hard for him because he has such a huge step, but all credit to my horse. I really have to mess up as a jockey for him to not jump clear, so it's a lot of pressure of me to give him a good ride. He's absolutely brilliant. I wanted to finish on my dressage score and we did, so I couldn't be happier for him and that's all you can ask for."

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