

Europeans Ready to Return

Written by Louise Parkes - compliments of the FEI
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All roads lead to Las Vegas as Longines FEI World Cup series begins in Oslo, Norway.

The lure of the bright lights of Las Vegas adds an extra incentive as the Longines FEI World Cup™ Jumping Western European League series got underway in Oslo, Norway in mid-October.

There's nothing quite like the prospect of making it to the entertainment capital of the world and performing in front of a sold-out stadium to seal the fate of one of the world's most coveted trophies. It's where every rider will want to be when the curtain goes up at the Thomas & Mack Center on April 15, 2015.

Las Vegas will also host the dressage finals.

This will be the sixth time for the event to visit the American venue and the ninth occasion for the Final to take place in the USA. Leagues all around the globe will be played out before we know who is in contention for the crown of indoor jumping, which has been a career-defining achievement for every winning horse-and-rider combination since the series began in 1978. A total of 15 leagues will take place across five continents during this 36th season, which promises more excitement than ever.

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Some riders have come out on top more than once, and four riders are tied on a hat-trick of successes with the most notable being Brazil's Rodrigo Pessoa who was champion three years in a row between 1998 and 2000 and, even more remarkably, each time partnering the same horse, the brilliant stallion Baloubet du Rouet.



Reigning World Cup Finals show jumping champion, Germany's Daniel Deusser. Photo: FEI/And Bronkhorst

Defending Champion

The defending champion is Germany's Daniel Deusser, who galloped to victory with Cornet D'Amour at the 2013/2014 Final in Lyon, France earlier this year. The result came as no surprise as Germany's record in this series is exceptional, with 10 wins to date. However American riders are hot on their heels having secured the trophy seven times over the first nine years and then suddenly bouncing back with two more wins posted by Rich Fellers and Beezie Madden in 2012 and 2013. There will be extra satisfaction for the host nation if U.S. riders can bring them onto level-pegging with their German counterparts at the end of this season.

Ludger Beerbaum was the very first German rider to take the title back in 1993 with the great mare Ratina Z, and such is the multi-medalled rider's pure consistency that, having been on the podium many more times in the intervening period, he was only just pipped for the top step of the podium again earlier this year.

Longevity is one of the stand-out features of many winners of the FEI World Cup Jumping title. It is more than extraordinary that three-time champion, Austria's Hugo Simon, who won at the inaugural series Final with Gladstone in 1979 before recording a double with ET FRH in 1996 and 1997, is still taking on the best of them across the international circuit. At the age of 72 he recently won the Grand Prix at Wiener Neustadt in fine style.

The return of the Final to the North American continent is likely to attract additional interest from

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the riders of that region, and one man everyone will be watching is 10-time Olympian Ian Millar, who steered the legendary Big Ben to a double of victories in 1988 and 1989. Widely-known as Captain Canada for his rock-solid under-pinning of so many Canadian successes, he has shown tremendous form again this season with a horse that is closely-related to his former champion ride. And if he maintains form, Millar could, at the age of 68, become the fifth triple-champion in the history of a series that has consistently set the best apart from the rest.

Big Guns

There will be a lot of Western European riders trying to stand in his way however, and as the first of the 12 legs of the Longines FEI World Cup Jumping Western European League began in mid-October in Oslo, many of the big guns came out to try to snatch some early qualifying points. Each rider's six best scores will count throughout the qualifying rounds, and the start-list looked like the "who's who" of the sport right now, headed up by the man who has topped the Longines world rankings for the last 11 months, Great Britain's Scott Brash.

Meanwhile in the States, Americans are hoping to repeat long-awaited 2012 and 2013 victories, by Rich Fellers and Beezie Madden respectively. The East and West leagues are past the mid-way point, with the Del Mar International's October 25 qualifier serving as the fifth of the West league's nine qualifiers. Two more take place this month, at the National Sunshine II on Nov. 8 and the next weekend at the Las Vegas National, with a final two to be held during the HITS Thermal circuit early next year. West league contenders' top five finishes count toward the standings. Going into Del Mar, the West rankings were led by Vinton Karrasch and Rich Fellers, thanks to early circuit wins, with Susan Artes, Allyssa Hecht and Susie Hutchison rounding out the top five. On the East Coast at the same point in time, it was Leslie Howard, Todd Minikus, Brianne Goutal, Denise Wilson and Candice King.