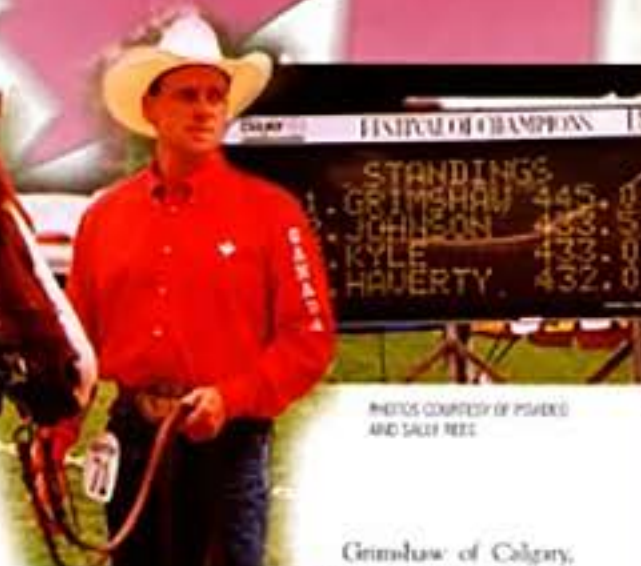


Canada Finds Gold at the End of American Rein-bow

"They don't give you gold medals for beating somebody. They give you gold medals for beating everybody." - Micheal Johnson.

By JENN SCHNEIDER MACRAE



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PMS&E AND SALLY REE

Well, they did it. Cody Sapergia, Shawna Sapergia, Lance Griffin and Jason Grimshaw definitely earned themselves bragging rights. Reining Team Canada, as they are known, literally "ran circles" around competitors at this year's USET (United States Equestrian Team) Nations Cup. Held in Gladstone, New Jersey June 22-24, the USET Festival of Champions boasted superior horsemanship in show jumping, endurance riding, dressage, driving and reining. USET hosted the event under the rules of the Fédération Equestre Internationale, the governing body of the entire competition. Reining is the only western sport to be supported by the FEI and until now, gold medals in the reining division have historically been won only by American competitors.

Before the competition, quoted from the June issue of the National Reining Horse Association Reiner magazine, "This year's Bayer/USSET Festival of Champions promises to be the best yet," the best, yes, it definitely was. But let us not interrupt, shall we? The Reiner finishes the sentence with, "...as the USET continues to try to realize the goal of finding the very best reining equestrians in the nation."

Some points to ponder here. Does this mean the Festival of Nations was to be the best ever due to organization? Or was it to be the best because it was expected the Americans would win again? Or perhaps a combination of both? Is it possible our Reining Team Canada was underestimated? In polite Canadian fashion, maybe we shouldn't rub it in - that we came out on top. And maybe we shouldn't mention the fact that we are very proud of Jason

Grimshaw of Calgary, Alberta, Canada who also took home the individual gold medal. And we definitely should not divulge that our Canadian "under-dog" did their way to a seven point lead (and they did it in a pen that had been previously poured on) or that Reining Team Canada was up against a panel of five judges (four American and one from Belgium) or that two of our horses were actually Canadian-bred; or that all four of our horses were Canadian-trained; or that it was rumored officials actually had trouble locating a Canadian national anthem. No, we should definitely not say that.

We should, however, be very proud of our own Reining Team Canada: a team whose members, on Canadian soil, compete against each other; a team who came together to accomplish something great. Hopefully Team Canada can do it again, and perhaps this achievement will bring new inspiration to other aspiring reiners as Reining Team Canada plans to try and qualify for the World Equestrian Games in Spain 2002. Hopefully this milestone will also bring the world of reining one step closer to an Olympic event.

Molly Sapergia - Chief d'Équipe
"I think one of my greatest moments was when Dan Wall came up to me and said, 'You should be very proud of your team, they were all dam...'"



JASON GRIMSHAW & LISTO POLLITO LENA CALGARY, AB.

"Being there, standing on that podium was something dreams are made of," says Grimshaw. "Our team came together fabulously and it was absolutely thrilling for me to be able represent our country." Jason and his wife Pam, operate Grimshaw Training Stables west of Calgary.

Listo Pollito Lena is owned by Bob Thompson and was trained by Grimshaw. The handsome chestnut stallion, "does everything exceptionally well. At Gladstone, he stopped huge and he earned a +1.5 on his right turn around. He went awesome, even in bad ground. Obviously the judges thought so too."

The duo marked a 223.5 on the first day of the event, (the highest individual score of the event) and a 221.5 on the second, (the second highest individual score.) This put them at a 11.5 point advantage above silver medalist, Craig Johnson. Grimshaw describes no feelings of show-anxiety prior to the event, "when you've made it to the big shows, you really have nothing to lose. I find that I feel nervous at home, at the smaller shows, because you're showing for your livelihood. The big shows are just gravy." Grimshaw is eight times a Canadian Reined Cow Horse Champion and in 1999, he was the American Quarter Horse Association World Champion.

Says Grimshaw, "This win may help to open the eyes of everyone around the world and make them realize we have the talent and the horses we need to step up and compete, and it will help customers to put more faith into Canadian trainers and breeding programs."

Above all, Grimshaw declares, "It was great working with everyone who was a part of Reining Team Canada. It was a tough job, the organizers did a great job and I look forward to doing it again."



SHAWNA SAPERGIA & PRETTY MUCH EAGLE - OKOTOKS, AB.

"This occasion is going to open up some unbelievable doors for Canadians now. It was interesting speaking with some of the Americans about it. Some of them would say, 'You know, this may be one of the best things to happen to the reining industry. It's going to boost everyone's confidence.'" Shawna Sapergia

is the only female member, and is one half of the brother-sister duo that make up Reining Team Canada.

On the first day, she and the bay stallion Pretty Much Eagle (owned by Shawna and Jack and Gail Shanks) scored their way to a superior ride, even though they had a few penalties. "He felt excellent going into the pen. I was very confident he was doing his job." When asked if she experienced any show jitters, she replies, "Definitely! I was more nervous down in Gladstone than I may have ever been at any other show. You're not just running for yourself or for the clients, you're running for your team. Everyone is counting on you to pull your own weight. So teamwork plays a big role." Shawna suggests that eating, practicing, and cheering together made the teamwork concept come together much faster than she expected.

Shawna tells, "I was doubly excited because Pretty Much Eagle is a horse which I raised and trained myself. His mother was my youth mare and his blood is all Canadian. It makes this whole thing that much more rewarding."

Describing the veterinarian checks at Gladstone makes her chuckle. "It was just like a showmanship class. Everyone was dressed up, the horses were shown in their best and we were all numbered. The thing is, you know your horse is in good health but deep inside you're wondering, 'gosh, what if they do find something?'" The formal veterinarian checks at Gladstone were comparable to the medical testing Olympic athletes must endure prior to competing. With three vets scrutinizing every aspect of the horse and rider pair, many of the competitors began to feel the pressure.

Sapergia is currently the Reserve Canadian Open Reining Champion, the leading Canadian money earner for 1999 and 2000, and champion of the NRHA's SaddleSmith Class at Super Slide.

"Being in Gladstone was amazing but nothing could compare to accepting the awards. I would love to do it again. Thank-you to all the people who made this possible for us: the sponsors, the organizers and the people who cheered for us at home. It was just an amazing thrill."



LANCE GRIFFIN & MOONSTONE CHEX - DEWINTON, AB.

"A person could learn quite a lesson after watching this foursome of individual reining competitors come together as a team. It wasn't a hard thing to do, it just got done," Griffin explains. "When we got down there, I felt I had a good understanding of our competition. I wasn't sure a gold medal was in our realm of possibilities. Turns out, that wasn't true. We went down there, we were more prepared and serious, and I guess we caught them by surprise. It was kinda cool."

Griffin scored a 213 on the first day and a 216.5 on the second. He chalks their win up to well thought-out strategies. "Be solid. That was pretty much our motto. We decided we did not

want to go out there and override our horses, so we all went in and rode the horses we had - not the horses we wanted. Otherwise, you fall apart. This way, we had horses left to show the next day and we would put up solid numbers."

Currently, Griffin is the 2001 NRHA Non-Pro Derby Reserve champion and the 2000 Non-Pro Futurity Reserve champion. He and his wife Terry, and daughter Samantha, own and operate an equine breeding facility in DeWinton, AB.

"O Canada was playing and we were all crying a little as we stood on the podium. It was a pretty emotional experience." Griffin wishes to mention all the hard-working people and the sponsors who put the opportunity together. "It's a thankless, payless job, but without them, this would not have happened."



CODY SAPERGIA & SR COTTON CANDY, FORT SASKATCHEWAN, AB.

"As the competition drew near and we had our team meeting, the realization that we were a team became more of a actuality. It was a great feeling. We were TEAM CANADA. As you drove up the hill to the stabling, that big Canadian flag really hit you. It was clear that the Canadians were here." Cody Sapergia makes up the other half of the Sapergia brother-sister pair.

Cody describes SR Cotton Candy, 12-year-old palomino mare that he rode in the USET Nations Cup as a horse, "with a big heart." The mare is owned by Sherry and Phil Menard and was retired to become a broodmare upon her return to Canada. Previously, she was a horse that educated the Menard's grandchildren in the art of riding.

Competing on foreign soil was the action that Cody believes drew the team closer. "It was as though nothing was real until you were there. You see Team USA, Team Germany and Team Japan and then you realize the magnitude of the Nations Cup. The formality of this international event reinforces the significance of the competition."

Cody and his wife Lorie, operate Sapergia Equine and train reining horses at Blacklands Arena near Fort Saskatchewan, AB. At the Reining Alberta Spring Classic and Reins In The Hat 2001, Cody claimed the High-Point Rider, High-Point Horse, two NRHA trophies, and two NRHA Penalties. He and SR Cotton Candy qualified for the Canada Cup after a close run-off with Dean Brown and Jac Pic A Nic at the Canadian Supreme. "I never thought it would happen like that," laughs Cody. "But things went our way that day!"

"During the second day of the competition, Canada had the option to contest the American score due to a violation of the FEI's rules. But we did not go down to be petty. We went down to be good competitors and good sports people. And more importantly, we went down to be Canadians."