Press Release

LA BAULE

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Irish eyes are smiling in La Baule!

Fourteen years after their most recent success, on Friday the Irish team won the Barrière Nations Cup at the Jumping international de La Baule - Officiel de France. The green jackets beat Belgium and Brazil, while France had to make do with eighth place.



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The suspense was total and intense, until the round of the last rider on the Barrière Nations Cup, namely Belgian Gilles Thomas, who needed to ride a clear round to force Ireland into a play-off. However, at the second spread fence, a fault sealed the ranking for the event for good. Fourteen years after their last victory at La Baule, with Cian O'Connor, Shane Sweetnam, Billy Twomey and Cameron Hanley, the Irish obtained their third success in the resort on France's west coast (after 2011 and 1994). It was a hard-fought triumph without a single penalty point. Having aligned a team made up of two experienced riders, Cian O'Connor (on Bentley de Sury) and Bertram Allen (on Qonquest de Rigo), alongside two young emerging riders, Seamus Hughes Kennedy (on ESI Rocky) and Tom Wachman (on Tabasco de Toxandria Z), respectively aged 22 and 20 years, team manager Michael Blake made a successful gamble. "Winning a Nations Cup like this one at La Baule, which is a wonderful competition, is a great source of joy," was Blake's reaction. "We've been waiting for a day like this for so long. Today, I selected two experienced riders and two 'babies' who have plenty of talent! I wanted to give them their chance. When Ireland last won, Tom was six years old, Seamus was eight and Bertram was scarcely sixteen! That gives you an idea of what I had at my disposal. For the European Championships this summer, I already have 14 names on my list".

On the course designed by track superintendent Grégory Bodo, with a very tricky last water jump / double, only 13 of the 40 duos to start completed the first leg with a clear round and only six repeated the feat in the second act. Among them were Bertram Allen on the very promising Qonquest de Rigo, aged only 9 years, and Seamus Hughes Kennedy on ESI Rocky, with whom he already tasted victory in the individual as well as team events at the 2023 Young Riders European Championships and obtained fourth place on the Rolex Grand Prix in Romet two weeks ago. With Ireland ensured of a penalty-free finish, Cian O'Connor did not even have to contest the final course. "My horse Bently is very experienced and did a great job in the first leg," said the world number eight rider. "After that, the young lads put on a great performance".

With Nicola Philippaerts (on Katanga v/h Dingeshof), Pieter Devos (on Casual DV Z), Abdel Saïd (on Bonne Amie) and Gilles Thomas (on Ermitage Kallone), the Belgian team, despite four clear rounds in the first leg, had to make do with second place after 4 penalty points. After falling behind in the first act but making a fine comeback in the second with three clear rounds, Luciana Diniz (on Vertigo du Désert), Pedro Veniss (on Nimerod de Muze Imperio Egipcio), Stephan de Freitas Barcha (on Chevaux Primavera Imperio) and Rodrigo Pessoa (on Major Tom), representing Brazil, finished on the third step of the podium.

France finished some way behind. Team manager Édouard Coupérie had decided to count on two young riders, Nina Mallevaey, world number 31 and the leading under-25 rider, and Jeanne Sadran, combined with two more experienced riders, French number one and world number nine Kevin Staut plus Marc Dilasser, both on horses that were new to this level. Unfortunately, the French team soon lost all hope of winning, eight years after their most recent success in La Baule. With already twelve penalty points on completion of the first leg, the French team were unable to redress the balance, with only one clear round from eight attempts at the course (by Mallevaey and Dynastie de Beaufour in the second leg). They finished in eighth place with 24 penalty points against them.



In the late morning, the Proconfort - Horsewear Prize (1.45 metres against the clock) witnessed the triumph of Brazilian Stephan de Freitas Barcha, who was quickest on the day on Dirka Imperio Egipcio, beating Italian Emilio Bicocchi, on his Selle Français mare Hemerald d'Argonne, and Frenchman Roger-Yves Bost, team Olympic Champion in 2016, with Embassy du Château. Olivier Perreau, a team bronze medallist last summer in Versailles at the Paris Games, finished in fourth place on Himalaya du Temple.

In CSI 1*, following the victories on Thursday of Anthony Boughaba Duplaix on Athika des Roches, in the Capatlantique La Baule - Guérande Agglo Prize (1.10 metres over two rounds) and American Maison Mcintyre on Venice Beach in the Ouest France Prize (1.25m, over two rounds), on Friday Mélanie Cisneros on Gemme de Rouillac won the Gibson Rivers Prize (1.15 metres against the clock).

A very intense Saturday with the La Baule - Demeures de Campagne Derby, Saur Prize and **Eventing Relay presented by Forestier Sellier**

On Saturday, the La Baule Événements - Palais des Congrès Atlanta Prize will start the day's proceedings for CSI 1* riders, who will also be busy in the middle of the day with the Laiterie de

The CSI 5* programme will be especially dense and intense with the Grand Prix Prize and then the La Baule - Demeures de Campagne Derby. With a water crossing, drop fence, up fence, mound crossing and other natural obstacles, the Derby, won last year by Irish rider Shane Sweetnam on Irandole du Flot, is part of the DNA of the Officiel de France. The last French rider to triumph was Patrice Delaveau, three times winer of the event, in 2019.

The Saur Prize, the individual event on the competition with the second highest prize, will complete the day's official competitions. Following the FFE-Generali Prize and the Barrière Nations Cup, this event will be the last opportunity for the riders to qualify for the Rolex Grand Prix Ville de La Baule on Sunday.

At the end of the day, the 'Eventing Relay presented by Forestier Sellier' will end the second day of the competition on a high note. The three French medallists in eventing at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, namely Nicolas Touzaint, Stéphane Landois and Karim Laghouag, will each be riding with one of the three young riders from the French team present at the most recent European Championships for their age category. Lisa Gualtieri (individual and team silver medallist), Alizée Bourget (6th individually and team silver medallist) and Vérane Nicaud (4th individually) will enjoy the pleasure of

gracing the tracks in the François André stadium, providing a perfect illustration of equestrian sport's diversity but also a great opportunity of sharing experiences between generations.

Saturday's programme

8.00: La Baule Événements – Palais des Congrès Atlantique Prize, CSI 1* 9.35: Grand Prix Prize, CSI 5*

11.25: Laiterie de Montaigu Derby, CSI 1* 14.00: La Baule - Demeures de Campagne Derby, CSI 5*

16.35: Saur Prize, CSI 5* 19.55: The Eventing Relay presented by Forestier Sellier

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