

W26

TOURNAMENT MAGAZINE



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**OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT INFORMATION
FROM THE FEI WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2026**

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 scan
for english
version



HENRY CAVILL



Elegance is an attitude
LONGINES



HYDROCONQUEST

A World-Class Celebration of Equestrian Sport

When the gates of Allianz Park open for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 on 11 August, a new and extraordinary chapter in our history will begin. For more than 100 years, the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV) has lived and promoted equestrian sport, shaping an event culture that is recognized worldwide for sporting excellence, precise organization, and a unique atmosphere. This is the tradition we will build on as we host the World Championships in show jumping, dressage, eventing, driving, vaulting, and para equestrian. Six disciplines in one location – a strong commitment to the full breadth of our sport.

Our ambition is clear: for the athletes, and especially for their horses, we want to create conditions that are world-class in every respect. Modern sports facilities, short distances, an experienced organizing team, and well-established infrastructure provide the framework for well-being and peak athletic performance. Our spectators are just as important to us: it is their emotions and enthusiasm that make a championship an unforgettable experience. For

them, we want to offer not only exciting sport, but also an environment where connection, joy, and international togetherness take center stage – with grounds made for strolling, genuine hospitality, and an atmosphere that can be felt from the very first moment.

Together with the Federal Republic of Germany, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the German Equestrian Federation (FN), and the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), we aim to create a World Championship that sets sporting standards and is remembered as a celebration of fairness, respect, and enthusiasm.

I warmly invite you to be part of this special event: Celebrate with us the world's best in their sport and experience that incomparable Aachen atmosphere which has inspired equestrian enthusiasts for generations.

Stefanie Peters, President of the ALRV



Photo: Andreas Steindl

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Royal Splendor at the Opening Ceremony

Never before has it been this regal: at the opening ceremony of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 on Tuesday evening, members of several royal houses will be in attendance.

A royal gathering unlike anything Allianz Park has ever seen: the opening ceremony will welcome distinguished female representatives of several European royal families. Dutch Crown Princess Catharina-Amalia, the eldest daughter of King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima, as well as Zara Tindall, niece of Britain's King Charles III, will be on hand to usher in the Equestrian World Championships in Aachen, in a truly royal setting. Both are passionate riders themselves. From The Netherlands, Denmark, and Great Britain, three royal stables will also present their royal carriages. In addition, Her Royal Highness Elena de Borbón, Infanta of Spain, will contribute to making it an incredibly special evening in Aachen.

Blue Blood and Stars

The visit of royal family members has long become a cherished tradition at Allianz Park. Never, however, has the historic tournament grounds in Aachen's Soers district been graced with as much royal presence as it will in 2026. These personalities, perhaps more than any others, represent the deeply rooted equestrian traditions of their houses and a special closeness to horse sport. Zara Tindall returns to the place where she won the gold medal in eventing 20 years ago at the World Equestrian Games in Aachen. "The visit of these high-ranking royal guests is a great honour – for the Aachen-Laufensberger Rennverein, for the city, and above all for our spectators," says ALRV President Stefanie Peters. "How often do you get to experience so much royal splendor up close?" In addition, Prince Albert II of Monaco will also be in Aachen during the second week of the World Championships as another distinguished guest.

Alongside royal representatives, renowned acts have been announced for the opening ceremony. Singer, songwriter, and actress Yvonne Catterfeld will perform, while also announced are, among others, show rider Lisa Röckener, the Grand Quadrille of the German State Studs with 64 stallions, and the band Knallblech.

The opening ceremony is held under the motto "Welcome Home". According to the Aachen-Laufensberger Rennverein, this is meant to be more than a promotional slogan. It



They are part of the opening ceremony: Dutch Crown Princess Catharina-Amalia (left) and singer Yvonne Catterfeld.

Photos: Harald Tittel, Robert Michael/dpa

is intended as an invitation to equestrian fans from around the world and points to the special connection many athletes have with Aachen's Soers, which numerous top riders regularly describe as something of a second home.

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When do you ever get to experience so much royal splendor up close?

ALRV Präsident Stefanie Peters

A central element of the evening will be the parade of nations. Unlike previous opening ceremonies, the athletes will not enter solely via the stadium oval. Instead, they will march directly through the spectator stands. According to ALRV executive board member Birgit Rosenberg, the audience is meant to be more than

simply observers – they are to become part of the staging itself. Light, music, and choreography will accompany the procession and ensure a closer connection between spectators and participants.

Numerous athletes whose competitions will not begin until the second week of the World Championships have already announced their participation in the opening ceremony. Among them is current jumping world champion Henrik von Eckermann. The Swede maintains that it is only natural for him to travel to Aachen for the opening ceremony. As well as that, all world champions who won at the World Equestrian Games in the same stadium 20 years ago will also be present.

The FEI World Championships aim to set new standards in sport, society, and culture. This was recently emphasized by representatives from politics, sport, and the organizing committee during a press event at the State Chancellery in Düsseldorf. North Rhine-Westphalia's Minister-President Hendrik Wüst described sport as one of the few forces capable of bringing people and nations together across borders. For that reason, he said, the World



Championships are not only a major sporting event but also of social significance.

Up to 500,000 visitors and participants from more than 60 nations are expected for the championships. Around 1,000 volunteer helpers from numerous countries will support the event. This means the World Championships will even surpass the scale of CHIO Aachen, which is already regarded as the world's largest equestrian tournament. The opening ceremony on Tuesday begins at 8:15 p.m. and marks the official start of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. It will highlight the organizers' ambition to bring together sport, culture, and social culture on an international stage. (red)

What you need to know about getting there and parking

Around 500,000 visitors are expected in Aachen for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. Those arriving by bus or train can use many services free of charge. For visitors traveling by car, several parking areas with shuttle connections will be available around the Soers.

On the respective event day, the admission ticket for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 also serves as a combined ticket for return travel on buses and regional trains throughout the entire Aachen Transport Association (AVV) network. Use of the shuttle buses to the showgrounds is also included. From Aachen Central Station (stop 2), route 51 and a C shuttle at least every 15 minutes run to the venue. The C shuttle operates between the central station and the showgrounds, traveling via the city center and Bushof directly to Allianz Park and the Soers sports park. Departure from Bushof is from stop 13. Except on 17 and 18

August, the buses operate from one hour before the start of the event until one hour after it ends. TEST

Arrival by car

Visitors arriving by car will be directed from the motorways to the designated parking areas. Organizers recommend entering Krefelder Straße into the navigation system first and then following the signs. The following parking areas are located in close proximity to the Soers: 100'5 Arena inner, flat rate €30, two-minute walk; 100'5 Arena outer, €25, two-minute walk; Area C/Tivoli, €25, two-minute walk; Finanzamt, €20, five-minute walk; Porta, €20, five-minute walk.

Advance booking is required for some parking areas at www.apag.de/fei. Some parking areas can only be paid for in cash on site. All car parks open one hour before the start of the event and close two hours after the event ends.

Park & Ride with shuttle

Several park-and-ride options are available for visitors who want to avoid traffic congestion around the Soers: P17, Jülicher Straße, €10, A shuttle; P15, Friedenstraße, €10, B shuttle; P16, Eurogress, €15, city center connection; P10, Sonnenweg, €10, bus connection. With a valid Apag parking ticket, use of the shut-



As at the CHIO, ASEAG will also operate shuttle buses in the Soers for the Equestrian World Championships. Photo: Aseag

tle buses is free of charge. The A and B shuttles operate regularly at least every 10 to 30 minutes to the showgrounds. A kiss-and-ride area will be set up directly next to TÜV on Hubert-Wienen-Straße. Vehicles may stop there for up to ten minutes to drop off or pick up passengers. (red)

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 **STAWAG**

With Flexibility to the World Championships

Vaulter Leon Hüsgen overcomes setbacks and returns to Aachen.

Without flexibility, things would not have worked for Leon Hüsgen in recent months—neither professionally nor in sport. The vaulter from Neuss is currently busy building a house as a self-employed worker. Anyone who has gone through that knows that things rarely go exactly according to plan. “You just have to react spontaneously sometimes,” says Hüsgen, who graduated last year from Aachen University of Applied Sciences with a degree in wood engineering—and who has also “on the side” moved in with his girlfriend.

Hüsgen also had to “react spontaneously” when it became clear that his regular horse, Diamond Sky, would not be fit for the World Championships in Aachen’s Soers district. “When that became apparent, I began the not-so-easy search for a horse that could also handle difficult competitions,” Hüsgen recalls.

Help from Nina Vorberg

The “rescue” came from the wife of national coach Kai Vorberg. “Nina said I could try it with Rockemotion NRW and with her as the lunger.” Hüsgen gave it a try, but after the first training session he realized that it would be a “very demanding” challenge: “Because Rockemotion is the opposite of Diamond Sky in terms of size and canter, I had to adjust, but that was also good practice.”

The following training sessions gave the vaulter hope. With Rockemotion and Nina Vorberg as lunger, Hüsgen competed at CVI Sentower in Belgium—and was the best German. “Then we said: Come on, let’s try it at the CVIO in Warendorf as well. We only had one training session in between, so not much had changed,” recalls the Neuss native with a slight smile.

Compulsory and technical routines also went very well for Hüsgen in Warendorf, and he was in first place—until flexibility and spontaneity were again required during the freestyle. “I had a small fall because I slipped slightly. That was very annoying and surprising because it happened during an exercise that normally always works.”

The 27-year-old dropped to fifth place—one day before the World Championship nomination. But in that moment, how costly the mistake might be was not yet his main concern: “I was only thinking about the time; because of the fall I had lost three or four seconds. And if you exceed the time limit, there are further



A team that hasn’t known each other for very long yet: Leon Hüsgen and Rockemotion NRW.

Photo: Julia Schwartz

heavy deductions. So I had to react quickly and spontaneously.”

The What-ifs

Hüsgen finished the routine within the allotted one minute. The second-guessing came afterwards, since the freestyle had been the last impression the 27-year-old left before the World Championship nomination: “After cooling down, the questions started coming to me: ‘Was that decisive now? How much was each competition worth?’”

The Neuss native had to wait another day for the answer. The decision came on Sunday evening. The names of the men who would compete in the individual event in vaulting were announced last. “That required a lot of patience,” Hüsgen recalls with a laugh: “Basically, it had been a neck-

and-neck race throughout the whole season. You could never be sure.”

What is certain now is that Hüsgen, together with his compatriots Bela Lehn, Thomas Brüsewitz and Jannik Heiland, will compete in the men’s individual event in the “Sparkasse Prize.” For the 27-year-old, that means a return to Aachen—a city he knows very well not only because of his studies at the university of applied sciences.

The Neuss native also has special memories of the 2015 European Championships in Aachen: “That was the first championship I ever saw live.” He himself got into vaulting at the age of 13, thanks in part to his younger brother, after losing interest in football. Four years after taking up the sport, he was already competing at the 2016 Junior European Championships in France.

Hüsgen has also appeared at CHIO Aachen several times. The first time was in 2017 with the Neuss senior team. In 2023, the vaulter finished sixth, and a year later fourth—back then also without his regular horse Diamond Sky, who was out injured. That, too, forced Hüsgen to be flexible and to travel “all across Germany” two weeks before the start in search of a replacement horse. He found the chestnut gelding Cairo, made available to him by RV Altena. With minimal preparation, the duo narrowly missed the podium after compulsory, technical routine and freestyle, finishing with a score of 8.124.

A Lot of Experience in Aachen

Hüsgen also competed at CHIO Aachen last year, finishing seventh in the individual standings. He has already gained experience in the Soers, and much there is familiar to him. Even so, the Neuss native says: “A World Championship is still different, and the whole setting is somewhat changed too, with new stables.”

“His” World Championship begins this Thursday at 1 p.m. with the compulsory in the “Sparkasse Prize.” The technical routine follows on Friday at 5 p.m., and the freestyle on Saturday at 1:15 p.m. In the latter, his focus is likely to be especially high after the mistake in Warendorf: “I’ve worked on maintaining focus from the first to the last second. And I hope I’m now prepared for the possibility that something can happen even in exercises that normally always work,” says Hüsgen.

The 27-year-old does not want to name a specific goal; he wants to “rather enjoy” the World Championships—also in view of the strong competition: “There are a lot of very, very good athletes there.” And also in view of the preparation, which had originally been planned differently: “I invested a lot of time and energy in this switch to Rockemotion NRW. The World Championship nomination was the reward that showed the effort had paid off.”

Hüsgen is also keeping a slight eye on taking part in the team event on Sunday. In the team competition, two individual vaulters must be included. The Neuss native assesses the situation realistically: “Participation would be nice. But the national competition is also strong.” If he does make it, however, Hüsgen will surely be flexible enough to adapt to that as well. (lv)

The biggest equestrian event in the world

The awarding of the FEI World Championships to Aachen sparked jubilation, but it came as no surprise.

On November 18, 2023, in Mexico City, the delegates at the General Assembly of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) voted in favor of the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV) as host of the 2026 FEI World Championships. With this, it paved the way for another summer fairytale, 20 years after the World Equestrian Games were held in Aachen in 2006. "North Rhine-Westphalia is the number one sports state, and it is fitting that a horse adorns our coat of arms. Equestrian sport is loved and celebrated here, above all the CHIO Aachen," said NRW Minister-President Hendrik Wüst.

Among the ALRV officials, who had submitted the bid jointly with the German Equestrian Federation (FN), the celebration, naturally, was huge. "We are very pleased with the

trust placed in us, with hosting the biggest sporting event in Germany and the biggest equestrian event in the world," said ALRV President Stefanie Peters. "We are convinced that, with our many years of experience, we can successfully stage these World Championships." Peters also looked ahead, saying: "Alongside the development of our infrastructure, we also want to make a significant contribution to promoting equestrian sport worldwide, including in terms of formats and concepts."

The decision to award the championships to Aachen was not unexpected: Aachen had already proved in 2006 – until then as the only host – that the World Equestrian Games (WEG), the world championships in what were then seven equestrian disciplines, could be organized suc-

cessfully and without finishing in the red. The 2015 European Equestrian Championships in the Soers were also a complete success, so Aachen's bid had been received with the highest of expectations.

Secondly, there were only two rival bidders for eventing: the Dutch host Boekelo and England's Burghley. ALRV officials had already made it clear in advance that they would either host the World Championships in six disciplines – or not at all. What options, then, did delegates really have but to vote for Aachen? There had already been no World Championships at a single venue in 2022. Instead, the world championships in the equestrian disciplines were held at different locations. In the Danish city of Herning, the world championships in show jumping, dressage,



She shone at the 2022 World Championships in Herning: British dressage rider Charlotte Fry.
Photo: picture alliance / Pontus Lundahl

para dressage, and vaulting took place from August 6 to 14. The eventing riders and driving competitors crowned their world champions later, in September 2022, in Pratoni del Vivaro, Italy. (red)

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Germany, Great Britain or Denmark – who will win gold?

The World Championship podium could look just like the one at the 2025 European Championships. But in what order? Tough competition for the German team.

The most important thing comes first: “All horses and riders are in top form,” emphasizes Monica Theodorescu. On Saturday, the German dressage riders and their horses arrived in Aachen after a three-day training camp in Warendorf. The national coach has nominated Frederic Wandres (Hagen) with Bluetooth, Katharina Hemmer (Borchen-Etteln) with Denoix, Raphael Netz (Moosburg) with Great Escape Camelot, and Isabell Werth (Rheinberg) with Wendy de Fontaine. The reserve rider is Semmieke Rothenberger, and just in case, Isabell Werth has also brought Viva Gold as a reserve horse.

“Every year I look forward enormously to Aachen – and this year even more, because we are coming for the World Championships,” says the national coach, herself a three-time Olympic champion, among other titles. Team selections are rarely straightforward, and this time there were several setbacks in the run-up. The most bitter was the loss of Diallo, with whom Jessica von Bredow-Werndl (Aubenhäusen) had hoped to return to the squad. “His death was a severe setback, a real blow. In sporting terms, the horse was on a very good path.”

Ingrid Klimke (Münster), who was part of Germany’s gold-medal team at the 2025 European Championships, also had to withdraw because her horse Vayron is not fit. And Charlott-Maria Schürmann (Gehrde), who won Special Bronze at the German Championships in Balve with Dantes Pearl, among other results, will also miss the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. “It’s a pity – Charlott had really started to gain momentum but unfortunately her horse currently does not have the necessary health stability.”

Katharina Hemmer, however, was fortunate. Her horse Denoix, who had also shown some fitness issues after strong performances in the spring, recovered well. “That’s why we decided together to give him a break before Balve. Katha skipped the German Championships, which allowed her to bring him back into work quickly. At the second trial in Hagen, he impressed again.”

Alongside the championship-experienced Werth, Wandres, and Hemmer, Raphael Netz is new to a



Who is celebrating in Aachen? At the European Championships last year, the winners Justin Verboomen, Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour, and Isabell Werth got to enjoy a champagne shower.

Photo: dpa/Stefan Lafrentz

World Championship team – though only at senior level. The 27-year-old is an experienced rider and has been U25 European champion several times. The 26-year-old reserve rider Semmieke Rothenberger, daughter of Olympic champion Sven and sister of Olympic champion Sönke Rothenberger, has won medals in every age category from ponies through U25 – most of them gold. At the German Championships in Balve in June, she finished runner-up in the freestyle behind Werth on Viva Gold.

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The British team in Aachen is certainly the biggest competition.”

National coach Monica Theodorescu

“We have a good team,” Theodorescu says convincingly. The competition, however, is fierce. At the 2022 World Championships in Herning, host nation Denmark triumphed ahead of Great Britain and Germany. “The British team will certainly be

the biggest competition in Aachen,” Theodorescu also maintains. “Then there are the Danes again, and the Belgians should not be underestimated either.” At the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, the British won bronze behind Denmark, while Germany took gold; at the 2025 European Championships in Crozet, France, they had already overtaken Denmark to claim silver.

The individual standings are also likely to be extremely close, with double European champion Justin Verboomen considered the favourite. In May, his ten-year-old stallion Zonic Plus, unbeaten since the European Championships, was in good form. Since then, he has not competed, instead being prepared specifically at home for Aachen. In contrast, spectators last saw Mount St. John Freestyle – the full name of the now 17-year-old Hanoverian – in July in Falsterbo, where he won. Shortly before the World Championships, his rider Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour regained the number one spot in the world rankings, pushing Verboomen, who had led until then, back to second place. Dufour jumped from rank 31 straight to the top. The World Championships in Aachen may also come down to a head-to-head battle between the Dane and the Belgian.

Third in the current rankings is defending champion Charlotte Fry

with Glamourdale. At the 2022 World Championships in Herning, the jet-black stallion had thrilled audiences with an incomparable canter. At the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, the British rider won bronze behind Germany’s Jessica von Bredow-Werndl and Werth. She too must be considered a major contender in Aachen.

In the current rankings, Werth with Wendy de Fontaine has slipped off the podium, and that is not the intention in Aachen. “Wendy is in very good form, and we want to prove that,” she explained – and it suits the mare well. But the competition is pressing from behind and waiting even the slightest mistake.

Nineteen teams will compete, along with additional individual riders from 14 nations. “For a World Championship, it’s good to have so many nations at the start. Equestrian sport needs more flags – that’s great,” says Theodorescu. “Ninety or more horses in the Grand Prix will make for a very long competition. But everyone has the right to ride in Aachen, so it’s all fine.” (rau)

Wendy testet schon das Gras in der Arena

Die Dressurpferde trainierten am Sonntag erstmals im Sandviereck des Hauptstadions. Zwei Ausfälle im US-Team, einer bei der Schweiz.

Und dann hat Wendy de Fontaine erst einmal das Gras getestet. Die schwarze Stute biss herzhafte zu, und augenscheinlich schmeckte es ihr. Kurz zuvor hatte sie erstmals das Sandviereck im Hauptstadion betreten und eine erste Trainingseinheit unter Isabell Werth darauf absolviert. Und Gras sowie Viereck anscheinend für gut befunden.

Am Samstag waren die Dressurpferde in Aachen eingetroffen. Und von den Favoriten hatte Mount St. John Freestyle als Erster eingecheckt, gefolgt von Wendy de Fontaine und Zonic Plus. Ein Omen? Bei den Europameisterschaften 2025 im französischen Crozet hatten die drei Pferde unter Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour, Werth und Justin Verboomen in den beiden Einzelwertungen das Podium unter sich ausgemacht – allerdings hatte der Belgier vor der Dänin und der Deutschen gestanden. Doch vor den Einzelmedaillen kommt erst



Wendy de Fontaine und Isabell Werth beim Training am Wochenende. Foto: Jasmin Metzner

einmal die Pflicht – der Grand Prix, Entscheidung in der Teamwertung, der aufgrund der großen Anzahl Starter am Dienstag und Mittwoch, jeweils ab 8.20 Uhr, in zwei Teilen entschieden werden. Das deutsche Quartett mit Werth, Frederik Wandres, Katharina Hemmer und Raphael Netz kommt mit der Empfehlung als Europameister, Titelverteidiger sind jedoch die Dänen – 2022 in Herning hatte es Bronze für das Team von Bundestrainerin Monica Theodore-

scu gegeben. Als größer Widersacher im Kampf um den Titel werden diesmal jedoch die Briten eingestuft.

Pech im Vorfeld hatten die Teams aus den USA und der Schweiz. Bonheur de la Vie, das Pferd der Schweizerin Charlotta Rogerson, ist nicht zu 100 Prozent fit. „Sein Wohl steht an erster Stelle, daher muss ich auf meinen größten sportlichen Traum verzichten“, bedauert die Reiterin. Das ist ein doppelter Verlust für das Team der Eidgenossen: Zum einen

ist Rogerson ihre stärkste Reiterin, zum anderen gibt es keinen Ersatz, sodass das Schweizer Team nur zu dritt mit Delia Eggenberger auf Santa Maria, Charlotte Lenherr auf Dettori und Estelle Wettstein auf Quaterboy antritt und kein Streichergebnis hat.

Noch ärger traf es die US-Amerikaner: Zuerst musste Golden Play, Top-Pferd von Jordan LaPlacha, zurückziehen. „Golden Play geht es gut, das ist das Wichtigste, aber ich muss das tun, was für das Pferd und das Team das Beste ist“, bedauerte sein Reiter. Für ihn rückte Kasey Perry-Glass mit Heartbeat ins US-Team. Das Paar kennt Aachen, startete bereits 2025 beim CHIO. Tags darauf musste auch Genay Vaughn seinen Gino zurückziehen. Für ihn rückte die zweite Reservistin Meagan Davis mit Toronto Lightfoot ins Team nach, zu dem noch Ashley Holzer mit Hawtins San Floriana und Christian Simonson mit Fleau de Baian gehören. (rau)

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The Old Hat Brings Victory

In 2006, Dutch rider Anky van Grunsven won the freestyle title at the World Equestrian Games on Salinero, while Isabell Werth dominated the Special on Satchmo.

"It was almost like football back then," says Anky van Grunsven, referring to the rivalry that played out in the early 2000s in the dressage arena between Germany and the Netherlands, both in the team competition and individually between herself and Werth. In 2006, at the World Equestrian Games in Aachen, the Dutch rider arrived as the favorite – but in the Special she had to concede the title to her German rival. In the freestyle, however, she claimed the crown. There will be a renewal of the rivalry at the 2026 World Championships, but while Werth is once again leading the German team, van Grunsven ended her career 14 years ago.

"To this day, the WEG in Aachen was the most beautiful and emotional competition. In our sport, we otherwise don't ride in front of 45,000 spectators – not even at the Olympics," Werth recalls. And van Grunsven adds: "It was unique to ride in front of so many people; nothing can top that." Or perhaps it can, because 20 years later, dressage will open the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 tournament program on Tuesday morning with the first part of the Grand Prix – just as it did in 2006, in the main stadium.

In the run-up to the 2006 World Equestrian Games, things had not looked promising for Werth. Satchmo had repeatedly caused problems in the arena. "Before Aachen, he had overcome his panic attacks and was going well, but the selection committee wanted to play it safe and nominated Warum Nicht as well, partly out of concern because dressage was being held in the big stadium for the first time," recalls the rider from Rheinberg.

The final training camp took place in Würselen, at Nadine Capellmann's facility. Capellmann, on Elvis, was part of the team along with Hubertus Schmidt on Wansuela Suerte and Heike Kemmer on Bonaparte. But one morning, Hannes – as Warum Nicht was called – had a bruise on his hind leg. So, Satchmo had to step in for his stablemate after all – a blessing in disguise.

Germany won team gold ahead of the Netherlands and the USA, followed two days later by the Special. "I can't remember that one. I only ever remember the good things; I forget the bad ones," van Grunsven says with a laugh. But one



Anky van Grunsven (center) and Isabell Werth (right) were the defining faces of the dressage competitions at the 2006 World Equestrian Games. On the right, Denmark's Andreas Helgstrand.

Photo: Uwe Anspach

bad memory remained: on the lap of honor after the Grand Prix, Salinero panicked and bolted toward the exit, with his screaming rider in the saddle, who at the time was expecting her second child. "Salinero got frightened. I was scared, all the spectators were scared, and poor Salinero was the most frightened of all." Fortunately, nothing happened.

Satchmo had already done a focused test in the Grand Prix, and two days later in the Special he showed the full range of his ability. "I felt good during the ride, Satchmo was in super form. He had set a world record score in Stuttgart in the winter. And I was confident enough to say that anything was possible if things went well," Werth recalls. "That was one of my best rounds ever."

The following freestyle under floodlights was not her focus – "we weren't prepared for it at all," admits the now 57-year-old. "I simply dug out Amaretto's old freestyle." The music is timeless anyway – Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody. "I knew my freestyle wasn't exactly the latest thing, but the freestyle was only the extra on top of the Special." Still, it was enough for bronze behind Andreas Helgstrand.

Van Grunsven won by a clear margin and cites a special reason for it. "I rode again in my old top hat," says the now 58-year-old with a laugh. "In the

”

It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to ride in front of so many people; nothing can surpass that.

Anky van Grunsven on the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen

Grand Prix and the Special I wore a new one, which can now be seen in the ALRV museum. Before the freestyle, I went back to the truck, got my old hat, and won."

In 2012, after the London Olympics, she ended her career with team bronze, having become, among other things, a three-time Olympic champion and a two-time world and

European champion. "I just wasn't motivated enough anymore," she explains. But she was seen once more in the saddle at the 2015 European Championships in Aachen, this time in Western style. She won team bronze and then retired completely from competitive sport.

The fact that Werth is still among the leaders 20 years later earns her respect, but it does not make her question her own decision. "Everyone has to do what they love. That's the right way." As for Werth, history could repeat itself again in 2026. "Anything is possible," says Werth cautiously. The most successful rider in the world, she has won eight Olympic gold medals, nine world championship golds, 22 European championship golds, and 17 additional medals. The competition is fierce, above all double European champion Justin Verboomen of Belgium, who won the "Grand Dressage Prize of Aachen" in 2025. "On paper, Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour with Freestyle has the edge. It will be very close, no one can afford a mistake," says Werth, who finished third behind that pair at the 2025 European Championships with Wendy. "Wendy has developed further and is in top form. And that's what we want to prove in Aachen." (rau)

The nomination alone is enough

In 2006, Aachen native Nadine Capellmann was part of the German dressage team that won gold with Elvis.

"It is something very special when all you have to do is load your horse, drive three kilometers down the road to Aachen, and you've arrived at the championship," Capellmann experienced this feeling at the 2006 World Equestrian Games (WEG) in Aachen. The Aachen native, based on a farm on the border between Würselen and Aachen, was again a member of the German dressage team, as she had been in 1998 and 2002.

Capellmann arrived as the defending champion. In 2002, in Jerez de la Frontera, she won both the individual title and team gold on Farbenfroh. After the much-too-early death of the chestnut, who died following an operation, the now 61-year-old had found a worthy successor in Elvis and, not least thanks to her victory in the "Grand Dressage Prize of Aachen", which she had also won in 2002 with Farbenfroh, secured her ticket to the

home World Championships. "Elvis had had a good season up to that point, but you can never be sure of being selected," says Capellmann, fully aware that although she was traveling as defending champion, she would not be arriving as the individual favorite with the then ten-year-old chestnut gelding. "Just qualifying at all was already a success. With that alone, I had already achieved everything."

The training camp ahead of the WEG took place in Würselen, at Capellmann's home, where she hosted her teammates Isabell Werth, Heike Kemmer, and Hubertus Schmidt. "For me, of course, that was fantastic at the time, so I was very happy to agree when the request came." Together with national coach Holger Schmezer, who passed away too soon in 2012, the team prepared to repeat their team victories from 1998 and 2002.



In 2006, they had a home event in Aachen: Nadine Capellmann and her Elvis.

Photo: IMAGO/Chai v.d. Laage

And they succeeded, finishing ahead of The Netherlands and the USA. Elvis, who in his younger

years had unseated no fewer than three Olympic champions, delivered strong performances in both the Grand Prix and the Special, finishing fifth each time. But what Capellmann remembers most vividly is the atmosphere during the freestyle. "It was simply unbelievable: the arena in the big stadium, floodlights, and 45,000 spectators. It was an indescribable feeling to ride there – simply breathtaking." Elvis performed an excellent freestyle to the music of his famous namesake—and missed the bronze medal, which went to Werth, by just 0.85 points.

These memories will come flooding back at the opening ceremony when the team from back then is driven once more around the vast main stadium in a carriage. And of course, Capellmann will be following the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 closely as a spectator. (rau)

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It was love at first sight for Verboomen

Belgium's two-time European champion Justin Verboomen heads into this week's dressage competition at the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 as the favourite aboard his incredible Zonic Plus.

"I knew he wouldn't be a gentleman," said Isabell Werth – and she was right. In real life, the reserved Verboomen is certainly a gentleman, but in the dressage arena he does not let the ladies go first. He proved that last year at CHIO Aachen, when he beat the German dressage icon to win the "Grand Dressage Prize of Aachen." In mid-August 2025, the Belgian also claimed two individual gold medals on Zonic Plus and now travels to the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 in the Soers as the clear favourite.

When Verboomen won the World Cup event in Mechelen in December 2024, people simply took note of it. "I was walking through the halls to the warm-up arenas, and then there was this horse moving fantastically. And this rider, sitting so well," recalled Peter Weinberg, national coach of the Belgian show jumpers, who immediately noticed Verboomen as an elite level competitor. "I knew they would become a top pair. I've followed his impressive path ever since."

When Verboomen finished third at the World Cup event in 's-Hertogenbosch in March 2025, he began to attract a bit more attention. And after his two victories in Lier, Werth sized him up correctly. "No gentleman in the arena," she said. At CHIO, the rider from Rheinberg was still able to match the Belgian in the Grand Prix. And while many spectators were asking in surprise where this Belgian rider and his stallion had suddenly come from, Verboomen said shyly, but confidently: "I was satisfied, but it can be even better."

The now 39-year-old proved that two days later in the Special, winning ahead of Werth on Wendy de Fontaine. And although his rival raised the bar again in the Freestyle, he surpassed her on his then only nine-year-old and won the Grand Prix. Since then, Zonic Plus has remained unbeaten; two European Championship gold medals followed, and he has won every competition after that. He now arrives in Aachen as the favourite for the World Championships.

Verboomen comes from Nivelles, not far from Waterloo. He comes from a horse-riding family, but his path has been rather unusual. "My father competed in show jumping and eventing at a lower level and trained me," he says. He got his first pony at the age of seven together with his twin sister Pauline. Early on, he



A dream pair: the Belgian Justin Verboomen and his stallion Zonic Plus.

Photo: Thomas Rubel

came into contact with Iberian horses, especially Lusitanos, a baroque breed from Portugal. He trained his Lusitano Tamino, whom he got as a two-year-old, all the way up to Grand Prix himself. He mostly presented him at the Iberic Masters.

”

I wanted a short horse, a sensitive one.

Justin Verboomen on Zonic Plus

Today, Tamino is ridden by Verboomen's younger sister Clarisse, who is also his groom. "I don't let anyone else handle my horses," says the 39-year-old, showing a stubborn streak on that point. He is now a professional. "That's what I've always wanted to become since childhood," adds the Belgian, who usually and preferably trains alone. For the past three years, he has been supported by the

German Claudia Kircheiss, though she is not a professional trainer.

At some point, Verboomen developed the desire to train a warmblood. "I couldn't find a horse in Germany, the Netherlands, or Belgium that I liked and that fit my budget," Verboomen says of his long search. It was not an easy one, because he wanted a warmblood with the qualities of Iberian horses. "I wanted a compact horse, a sensitive one." He found what he was looking for in Portugal, in the beautiful historic town of Sintra near Lisbon. And it is no exaggeration to say that it was love at first sight: "He came out of the stable, and he was so beautiful, so full of energy. I knew immediately – that was him." Him was Zonic Plus, then a two-year-old Hanoverian bred in Portugal.

Zonic was allowed to mature for another year in Portugal before moving to Belgium. As a five-, six-, and seven-year-old, the young stallion won the Belgian Championship, and as a six-year-old he finished seventh at the World Championships for Young Horses, the only championships Verboomen had contested before 2025. But the son of Glock's Zo-

nic took the next steps in the fast lane. The strikingly beautiful stallion, who is also in demand as a breeding stallion, has long since attracted strong interest, but his owner – Verboomen himself – consistently refuses all purchase offers.

Zonic Plus is now ten years old, a year more mature than he was at the 2025 European Championships in France. Since the tournament in Lier (Belgium) in May, the stallion has not been seen but has instead been prepared at home specifically for the World Championships. Two-time European champion Verboomen is the favourite this week, but Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour of Denmark, the European silver medalist, is close behind him with Freestyle. And not to be forgotten is European bronze medalist Werth, whose Wendy de Fontaine has also continued to improve. And on a good day, anything is possible. Verboomen knows that too, and he is not a man for grand declarations: "I try to do it well, prepare as best I can, and stay calm. But I know: if everything really comes together, then there is no reason why it shouldn't go well." (rau)

Electricity Comes from the Grandstand Roof

The Aachen energy provider Stawag operates a photovoltaic system covering 1,328 square meters at the main stadium. The green electricity produced there is enough to meet the ALRV's annual demand. The rest is fed into the power grid.

Since last spring, the organizer of CHIO Aachen and host of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV), has been producing its own electricity at Allianz Park. Attentive visitors may already have noticed the changes to the Stawag grandstand during the shortened equestrian tournament in May. The reason is that a gigantic photovoltaic system has now been installed on the roof of the grandstand. It consists of 700 modules and covers 1,328 square meters.

Strictly speaking, the operator of the photovoltaic system is not the ALRV, but Stawag has been a part-

ner of the ALRV and CHIO Aachen since 1999. For the system to be installed, the ALRV first had to renovate the roof of the grandstand and coat it with a special membrane, as ALRV board member Philip Erbers explained last week. The reason is that, if possible, no damage should happen to the grandstand roof for the next 25 years, because that is the expected lifespan of the 700 modules. Given the enormous logistical, technical, and financial effort involved, the modules should not have to be dismantled during that period.

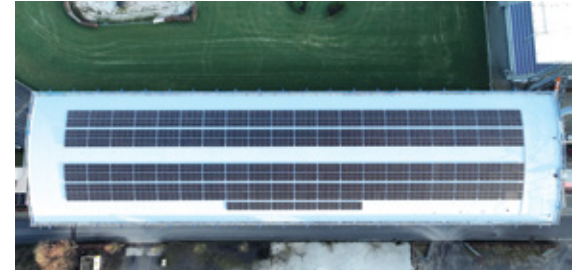
According to Stawag, the system has a capacity of 300 kilowatt-peak and can produce 300,000 kilo-

watt-hours of electricity per year. On average, that amount is enough to supply around 100 households. However, the main consumer of the electricity generated on the grandstand roof will be the ALRV, which naturally has increased electricity needs during CHIO and, this year, during the Equestrian World Championships. The rest of the electricity is fed into the grid via Stawag, said ALRV board member Erbers.

Originally, the ALRV had considered installing and operating a photovoltaic system on the grandstand roof itself. However, due to bureaucratic hurdles, the idea had to be abandoned quickly: the ALRV is a

non-profit association, but by independently operating a photovoltaic system it would have become an electricity producer—something that conflicts with the association's statutory purpose and could have called its non-profit status into question.

In the current model, with partner Stawag as the operator, Erbers sees two advantages. First, the ALRV receives a contractually guaranteed favourable electricity price. Secondly: "With the photovoltaic system, we are taking another important step in our efforts to make our event more climate friendly. For us, sustainability is not a buzzword, but a responsibility we live by," said Erbers. (gego)



Seen from the air, the Stawag stand: the photovoltaic system covers 1,328 square meters, consists of 700 modules, and is expected to be able to produce 300,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year.

Photo: Stawag

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Pure stress, but enjoyment in the end too

Frank Kemperman was the sporting director and driving force behind the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen. Today, as ALRV Vice President, he is looking forward to the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026.

When a friend of his, also a tournament organizer, told him he should enjoy the event, Frank Kemperman shook his head and said: "All I do is solve problems." But his friend repeated: "Enjoy the event, because you are making history here." And that was true, because the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen were without doubt the best ever. Twenty years later, the Aachen-Lauersberger Rennverein (ALRV) will once again host the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 in six disciplines, starting on Tuesday.

Kemperman, who became ALRV Managing Director at the end of 1993, was enthusiastic about the concept of the World Equestrian Games. The idea of bringing all disciplines together in one place originated in the mid-1980s with Prince Philip, the former FEI President, who passed away in 2021. The inaugural event took place in Stockholm in 1990, followed by The Hague, where Kemperman worked as sports manager, then Rome in 1998 and Jerez de la Frontera.

"We sat down with Reinhard Wendt from the German Equestrian Federation and thought about which championships would be interesting for Aachen," Kemperman recalls about how the idea came up. The World Equestrian Games are a mammoth task, as seven disciplines had to be decided within two weeks—only three of them, jumping, dressage, and driving, were already established in Aachen. "Of course, we had a concept in mind early on, but we could only really get going in 2002, after we were awarded the WEG in Jerez de la Frontera."

In addition to the sporting planning, major construction work was also necessary. After CHIO 2004, the administrative offices and grandstand were demolished and rebuilt with federal support. "Jumping, dressage, and driving were part of everyday business in Aachen, but now four more disciplines were added all at once. Eventing was very much wanted in Aachen, but where it should take place was still an open question." Kemperman and his colleagues even considered moving it to Bonn-Rodderberg, where there was experience hosting it, because the Aachen forest did not seem suitable.

"But then we had to make a quick decision, because Aachen had been



He was the driving force behind the 2006 World Equestrian Games: Frank Kemperman.

Foto: Harald Krömer

planned as the equestrian venue in Düsseldorf's Olympic bid for the 2012 Games." So, they sat down with the local farmers, and the result was an eventing course running through the Soers. "It was fantastic what Rüdiger Schwarz built into the terrain," Kemperman says happily, noting that eventing has also been firmly established at CHIO since 2007.

The endurance discipline—the 160-kilometer ride—caused concern. "And then someone had the silly idea of routing the course over the Three-Country Point, involving the Netherlands and Belgium," says Kemperman with a laugh. The "silly idea" had come from him himself. Hardly surprising, since the Dutch-born Kemperman lives in Belgium and worked in Germany. "It looked great on paper. But the authorities really made life difficult for us with their regulations," he recalls.

On the day of the endurance ride, it poured almost nonstop and serious consideration was given to never again repeating the discipline in Aachen. "No, nobody here wanted that anymore," confirms the 71-year-old. Vaulting and reining, the Western riders' dressage discipline, which is no longer under the FEI umbrella, were easier. Although the dressage stadium had to be roofed over, because indoor

”

I still remember well the goose-bump feeling on the evening of the medal ceremony in the packed stadium — it was incredible.

Frank Kemperman

arenas were required for these disciplines, and for reining the entire footing had to be replaced overnight in a cloak-and-dagger operation.

"That's when I got my first grey hairs – literally," says "Kempi," the nickname his ALRV team used for him. "In the first week, rain leaked through the temporary roof, and below we had a burst water pipe – there was water everywhere. But that suited the discipline of 'raining,'" Kemperman jokes today. Vaulting has been a permanent part of CHIO since

2007 and is held in the Albert Vahle Hall.

Up to that point, the tournament had been pure stress for him. But his friend's words changed something in him, and the man behind it all began to notice the beautiful moments much more. "I remember very well the goosebump feeling on the evening of the freestyle in the packed stadium – it was incredible. And the final with horse changes, when Jos Lansink won. My neighbour in Lanaken always said that becoming world champion is wonderful, but becoming world champion in Aachen is something very special."

Twenty years later, ALRV is once again the host—this time for six world championships. In addition to the five CHIO disciplines, para-dressage has been added and is also set to become part of the CHIO program from 2027 onward. Kemperman, who retired in 2022 as managing director and tournament director, will still be there every day during these World Championships, now as ALRV Vice President. "It will be a fantastic World Championships with a fantastic atmosphere," the 71-year-old is certain. "My personal number one highlight is, of course, jumping again. But one thing is certain: it will be exciting in every discipline." (rau)

The Legacy of the 2006 World Equestrian Games

The foundations for the FEI World Championships 2026 were laid 20 years earlier.

The World Equestrian Games, held in Aachen in 2006, are widely regarded by many as the equestrian event par excellence. This applies not only to spectators and officials, but also to the riders themselves. Isabell Werth reaffirmed this at the end of July during a press conference in Düsseldorf. The event marked the final stage in the professionalisation of the Aachen equestrian tournament and its organizer, the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV). The success of the 2006 World Equestrian Games was no coincidence, but the result of focused work: Michael Mronz, as CHIO marketer and managing director of Aachener Reitturnier GmbH (ART), was named Sports Manager of the Year by the trade magazine Horizont.

Twenty years later, there are no longer any World Equestrian Games,

but instead the FEI World Championships in Aachen. Instead of the seven disciplines contested in 2006, there will now be six. However, the requirements for sporting events have risen considerably over the past 20 years, not only in terms of safety. Even so, Ulrich Fischer, son of former ALRV head of sport Anton Fischer and, as an ART employee, involved in organizing the equestrian tournaments in the Soers district, said that the logistical and organizational effort required for 2026 can hardly be compared with the preparations ahead of the 2006 World Equestrian Games. Twenty years ago, ALRV and ART had to make a far greater effort.

This is mainly because 2006 was the first time that eventing was staged in Aachen. Eventing consists of the disciplines of dressage, show jumping,

and cross-country riding, and for the cross-country phase (as well as the carriage marathon), the organizers at the time developed the green spaces of Aachen's Soers area. Since these areas have also been used for eventing and driving during the CHIO ever since, people have almost forgotten that things were ever any different. The organizers of the 2026 World Championships can therefore draw on a tried-and-tested infrastructure outside the stadium as well.

Fischer also points out that in 2006, a route had to be found for endurance riding. The endurance riders completed the 160-kilometer course on a circuit of around 26 kilometres through the countryside around Aachen, which had to be ridden six

times. Since endurance riding will not be part of the 2026 Equestrian World Championships, this considerable effort will also no longer be necessary.

In addition, the ALRV made investments for the 2006 World Equestrian Games from which the organizers still benefit today. In particular, the construction of the Turkish Airlines grandstand, including the box seating area, the press centre, and the offices of ALRV and ART, marked the final – and above all the most visible – stage of professionalisation. And without the floodlighting system, which also went into operation in 2006 and makes it possible to hold competitions after dark, today's CHIO Aachen is almost impossible to imagine. (gego)



View from the Turkish Airlines stand into the stadium: The organizers still benefit today from the construction of the stand and the floodlight system for the 2006 World Equestrian Games.
Foto: Andreas Steindl/CHIO Aachen

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A lot happening on the city's stages

During the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, Aachen will be showing itself at its best. At Katschhof and the Market Square, a colourful programme featuring concerts by stars such as Álvaro Soler will be on offer.

The fantastic atmosphere from the Soers is coming into the city: during the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, the "Aachen World Championships Special" invites visitors to enjoy an extraordinary program in the city center. A varied mix of culture and cuisine creates a world-championship flair, where locals and guests alike can experience the unique atmosphere of downtown Aachen together.

While various international bands will create a lively mood every evening from 8:30 p.m. on the Sparkasse stage at the Market Square, everything on the Stawag stage will revolve around the Equestrian World Championships. From 11 a.m., all decisions from the Soers can be followed via public viewing. The highlights of the day will be summarized again from 7 p.m. during the evening World Championships show (see page 17). Fans can relive all the events of the Equestrian World Championships and be there live when the winners are honored. One or two prominent faces from the championships will also stop by for interviews and talk rounds.

When the show on the Stawag stage ends around 9 p.m., no one has to go home. The food trucks, Ferris wheel, and the lively atmosphere in the city center provide the perfect setting to round off the evening. And on the Sparkasse stage at the Market Square, a varied program of free concerts awaits.

Tuesday, August 11: Sonos Cliq

Two locals from Aachen kick off the Aachen World Championships Special — and what a start it is. With their hip-hop, hardstyle, and electro beats, the duo will make the Market Square shake. Their love for their hometown Aachen and their close connection to the Netherlands are reflected in the songs of these "border crossers."

Wednesday, August 12: Il Civetto

Having started with spontaneous gigs on the streets and in the subway stations of Berlin, Il

Civetto now performs its fusion pop on festival stages all across Europe. Their songs tell stories of wanderlust, freedom, and everything that moves them — socially as well as politically.

Thursday, August 13: The Maestro & The European Pop Orchestra

The constant pursuit of perfection, musical challenges, and the enthusiasm of the audience are the goals of the Maestro and his orchestra, who prove that classical music and pop can harmonize beautifully.

Friday, August 14: Querbeat

From a street festival in Bonn to stages across Germany: since 2001, the Bonn brass-pop band Querbeat has been presenting an irresistible mix of party atmosphere and modern brass music. Thanks to this combination, they have become an indispensable part of the Rhineland carnival scene. At the Aachen World Championships Special, they will prove that their music works just as well in summer.

Saturday, August 15: Álvaro Soler

With internationally successful hits such as "El Mismo Sol" and "La

Cintura," the Spanish-German pop singer Álvaro Soler has been providing the soundtrack to summer for several years now and will no doubt also create a Mediterranean atmosphere at his concert on Aachen's Market Square.

Sunday, August 16: MiA

Emotional lyrics and driving electro-pop with strong influences from the Neue Deutsche Welle: these are the ingredients of the music of Berlin-based band MiA, who at the Aachen World Championships Special will surely get more than just the molecules dancing — just like in their biggest hit, "Tanz der Moleküle."

Monday, August 17: Marley's Ghost

This year, the "King of Reggae," Bob Marley, would have turned 80. The band Marley's Ghost wants to celebrate that in unforgettable fashion, with a colorful mix of well-known hits and lesser-known songs by the Jamaican singer, original compositions, and collaborations with kindred musicians such as Frank Delle.

Tuesday, August 18: RINGO

RINGO is the "one and only true Beatles tribute": for 20 years, the Aachen band has been dedicated to the music of the Fab Four. Now the five-piece tribute band will take to the Sparkasse stage with the greatest hits of the four men from Liverpool to show that the Beatles' music is timeless.

Wednesday, August 19: Shantel

Shantel, whose real name is Stefan Hantel, is one of the most internationally popular representatives of Balkan pop. On this evening, the rousing combination of modern in-

The Spanish-German pop singer Álvaro Soler will perform at Aachen Market on August 15.

Photo: Uwe Anspach

terpretations of Eastern European dance music and traditional Balkan sounds will get Aachen's Market Square dancing.

Thursday, August 20: Knallblech

Knallblech brings well-known party rhythms to the stage in a completely new way with brass instruments, self-produced beats, and an incredible amount of energy, tearing down everything in their path — whether on the main stage or as a walking act, whether at festivals, Cologne CSD, the Protestant Kirchentag, or at their own concerts.

Friday, August 21, 5 p.m.: Kids Rave

Children and young people show what they can do on the turntables and will DJ for you. And no, there won't be children's songs — expect real techno and dance beats. Get ready!

Friday, August 21: Harris & Ford

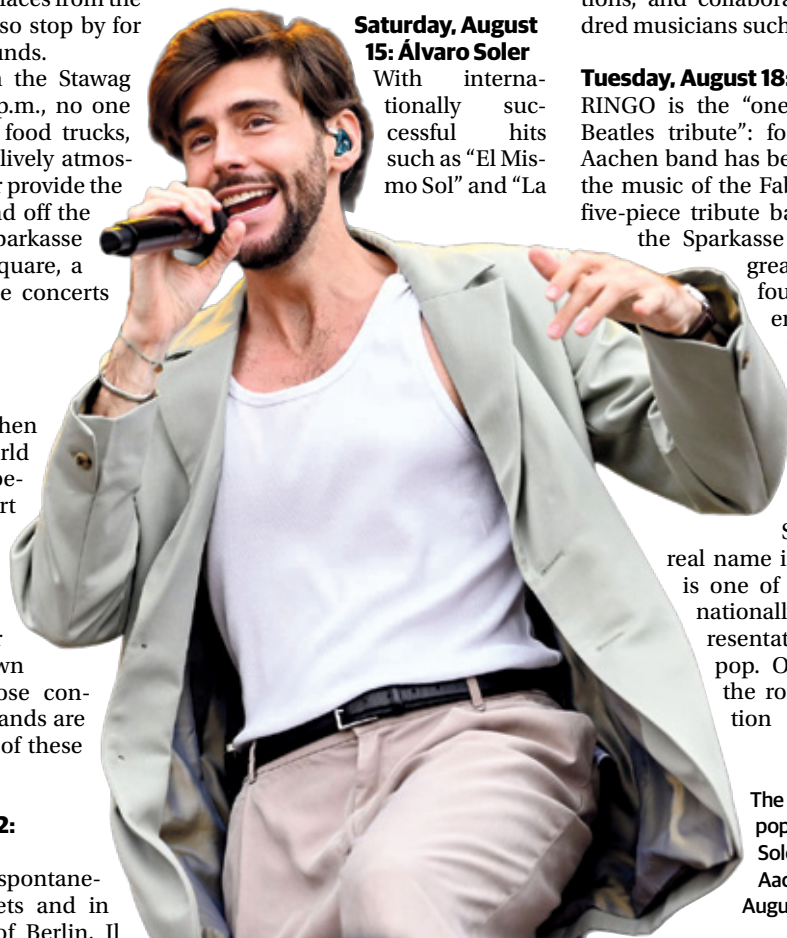
"It goes boom" when Austrian DJ duo Harris & Ford hits Aachen's Market Square with their hardstyle and EDM. Everyone knows their tracks such as "Irrenhaus," "God Save the Rave," "Amsterdam," or "Fantasy (Tricky Disco)," as they are played over and over at festivals and in clubs.

Saturday, August 22: Elton and the Joels

The "Piano Man" and the "Rocket Man" united on one stage: Elton and the Joels present world-famous hits by Elton John and Billy Joel in an explosive live show, performed by an excellent live band and a pianist who has been rocking stages all across Europe for 30 years with his unique piano playing.

Sunday, August 23: Lagerfeuer-Trio

Local favorites will bring the Aachen World Championships Special to a close: in 2014, Lagerfeuer-Trio recorded their debut album "Hallo, alles klar?" and in 2018 the EP "Bleib hier," with a total of 18 original compositions, confidently placed stylistically somewhere between Reinhard Mey and Die Ärzte. Since then, their songs have not only found their way into the playlists of various radio stations, but have also brought smiles to countless faces on and in front of the stage at their many concerts. (red)



The World Championship Show at Katschhof

The celebration of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 continues in Aachen's city centre: Talks, entertainment, interesting insights, and 16 ceremonies for the world champions from the Soers.

The FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 will not only take place in the Soers: starting on Wednesday, August 12, the World Championships will once again move into the city centre. Until the final day on August 23, the major equestrian World Championship show "Welcome Home" will take place every evening at 7 p.m. on the Katschhof – featuring entertainment, information, guests, and above all the new world champions.

What drew equestrian fans, tourists, and Aachen locals in droves between the cathedral and city hall 20 years ago is now set to be revived. After the official medal ceremonies in the Soers, the champions will be welcomed on the Katschhof stage and honoured there in a special Aachen "Champions Ceremony." Many of the world champions from 2006 still rave about this reception in the city centre to this day – which is

why some of them will return to the stage this year.

"On the very first evening, we will be able to celebrate the world championship team in the dressage Grand Prix on the Katschhof," says program director Uwe Brandt, who is preparing the evenings with a large team. Together with Aachen cultural manager Christian Mourad, he developed the program for Katschhof and Markt; an extensive concert program is also planned in front of the city hall. Responsibility for the "Aachen WM Special" in the city centre lies with the Märkte- und Aktionskreis City (MAC). The stage program is supported by the City of Aachen and the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV).

The Katschhof show will be hosted by Maike Schnitker, known as the arena announcer for the Bundesliga volleyball club Ladies in Black. The focus will be on Aachen and World

Championship topics, interviews, analyses, previews, and the presentation of the champions. Journalistic moderation for the Aachener Zeitung will be provided by editors Robert Esser and Bernd Büttgens. Musically, the event will also pull out all the stops: a show band will accompany the program live every evening under the direction of pianist Gero Körner.

At the opening on Wednesday, August 12, at 7 p.m., the newly crowned medal winners in the dressage Grand Prix will not be the only participants on the Katschhof. More than 500 participants from the first week of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 will first be welcomed at city hall and then invited to a reception on the Ratskeller terrace. ALRV President Stefanie Peters will greet them from the Katschhof stage – and the audience will no doubt do the same. (bb)



This is how Aachen celebrated the World Cup champions in 2006, and this is how it is meant to be again over the next two weeks. This time, the stage for the "Welcome Home" World Championship show is set up on the Katschhof, and the current program starts every evening at 7 p.m. Photo: Michael Jaspers

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A-A-C-H-E: A Hymn That Stays in Your Head

A catchy tune with symphonic depth: the list of requirements given to Marc L. Vogler for the anthem of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 was a long one. What the composer focused on, where the work was created, and what it sounds like.

"Whether 20 stallions come galloping in or an opera chorus marches onstage makes no difference to me." With that calm attitude, 27-year-old composer Vogler took on the unusual commission of creating a new anthem for the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV). It will premiere at the opening of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 on August 11 in the main stadium of Aachen's Soers district. The event, which will also be broadcast by WDR, begins at 8:15 p.m.

For the versatile musician, composing for a major sporting event—especially a world championship—is a first that is very special. Vogler normally works primarily in and around the opera stage. For the past three years, he has been involved in youth opera at Dortmund Opera, and last year he attracted attention in Cologne with his opera Felix Krull, based on Thomas Mann.

What he did have to get used to was the large number of very specific requests made of him. Vogler explains: "If a horse is galloping during a lap of honour, I have to observe a certain tempo. And what was expected was music with an earworm quality that at the same time has symphonic depth. The list of requirements for this anthem was extremely long." The requests came both from the ALRV and from Uwe Brandt, who is staging the opening ceremony and accompanied the entire composition process. Otherwise, Vogler sees no major compositional difference between a festive equestrian spectacle and an impactful opera production. "Both genres are about great emotions and suspense. The closeness to opera is omnipresent," he says.

Even though the brief called for an accessible work that took the horses' rhythmic movements into account, Vogler wanted to create more than a traditional riding march. But how do you approach a task like this, one that limits a composer's creative freedom more than usual?

Vogler came up with an idea that was as simple as it was original: as a tribute to Aachen, the city of equestrian sport, he used the musically usable letters of the city's name as his starting point. Vogler says: "Following the model of the B-A-



Meeting in the bell tower of Aachen City Hall: composer Marc Vogler gave Mayor Dr. Michael Ziemons a first preview of the new anthem.

Foto: ALRV

C-H motif, all the letters in Aachen except the 'N' can be turned into notes: A-A-C-H-E-(N). I experimented with that, improvised, and from those five notes – from that kind of cell – the theme ultimately grew. And I combined this theme with elements of classical and pop music, with many echoes of piano concertos. This connection between tradition and modernity also reflects the event itself, where the long tradition of Aachen equestrian sport is presented in modern formats."

Vogler composed the anthem for a large symphony orchestra and an amplified choir. In Aachen, however, it will not be performed by live ensembles. Instead, Vogler synthetically generated the orchestral and choral parts in his sound studio and then, in the electronic studio of the Cologne University of Music, had them "heavily processed with the help of sound engineer Benjamin Bentz so that everything sounds as real as possible."

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I have notated the piece in traditional musical notation so that it can be performed at any time by live orchestras and choirs.

Composer Marc L. Vogler

"But it is not electronic music," Vogler stresses. "I notated the piece in traditional musical notation, so it can be performed at any time by actual

orchestras and choirs." In addition, the work is formally structured so that director Uwe Brandt can isolate individual sections to match the horses' appearances. So, there is good reason to look forward to the composer's new opus, which runs to about six minutes. Trained ears will notice that the old Charlemagne hymn, *Urbs Aquisgranensis, Urbs regalis*, appears in disguised form. The people of Aachen were already given a first sample of the anthem last month, when Vogler, together with Dr. Michael Ziemons, Mayor of Aachen, climbed the bell tower of Aachen City Hall, where a short excerpt rang out as a carillon over the city centre.

The client has already offered advance praise: "We wanted an anthem that stays in your head, creates goosebumps, and keeps bringing back the spectacular images of these FEI World Championships for our visitors over the long term – that is something Marc Vogler has achieved impressively," says ALRV board member Birgit Rosenberg. (sar)



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