

W26

TOURNAMENT MAGAZINE



Local favorite
René Poensgen
comes from Eschweiler

page 8



Para dressage
Regine Mispelkamp
promotes her sport

page 14



**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

100 School Horses Plus: A Prize Draw in an Extraordinary Atmosphere

The Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein and Equestrian Sport Germany bring joy to a riding club.

To strengthen the foundation of equestrian sport, the large-scale 100 School Horses Plus project has been in place since 2024. As part of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein (ALRV) and Equestrian Sport Germany made one riding club especially happy.

All riding clubs that came to the Allianz Park on Sunday with at least five members had a unique opportunity: at the stand of Equestrian Sport Germany (FN), they could register to take part in the 100 School Horses Plus initiative prize draw. The prize was a cheque for €5,000 to support the purchase of a school horse.

A total of 32 clubs took advantage of the opportunity and were allowed to step onto the sacred turf of the main stadium between the first and second parts of the FEI Event-



The happy winners: Reit- und Fahrverein Lauterbach Stadt und Land e.V. jubilantly received the €5,000 cheque from ALRV President Stefanie Peters and Dr. Klaus Miesner, board member of Equestrian Sport Germany.

Photo: ALRV/Andreas Steindl

ing World Championship – Jumping – DHL Prize. And it got pretty crowded! Several hundred people

gathered in the very place where, shortly before and after, the best event riders in the world were bat-

tling for medals. Amid the crowd, ALRV President Stefanie Peters emphasized: “This week, we have experienced special moments, emotional highlights, and above all top-class sport. But no elite sport in the world can take place without its foundation – and that foundation is you: the riding clubs and riding schools.”

To loud cheers from the club representatives, she then drew the winner of the cheque: Reit- und Fahrverein Lauterbach Stadt und Land e.V. embraced in celebration and was delighted with the grant, which will help ensure that the next generation of children and young people can also have access to horses. The delegation from Hesse then made its way to Peters and Dr. Klaus Miesner, board member of Equestrian Sport Germany, to receive the cheque with broad smiles. (red)







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Épaillard Fastest Once Again

The Frenchman wins the World Championship speed class in the “Turkish Airlines Prize.”

Normally, the term marathon belongs to a different discipline in equestrian sport. But at the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, it also fits the show jumpers. After all, only the rider who performs most consistently across all competitions from Wednesday onward will be crowned individual world champion on Sunday.

And the term suited the first competition of these championships as well: it may have been a speed class, in which only the fastest fault-free rider finished the day on zero points. But with 145 horse-and-rider combinations starting in the “Turkish Airlines Prize” over more than seven hours, it was fair to call it a marathon event.

The right balance

“You can lose a lot here, but in essence you can’t really win much yet,” Richard Vogel (Dagobertshausen) had said beforehand, describing the class as one of the most difficult and tactically demanding. Every show jumper had to find the right balance between speed and faultlessness.

The task was also demanding for course designer Frank Rothenberger: the larger the field, the greater the range in quality. So, the danger of making the course too easy or too difficult was very real. But Rothenberger mastered this challenge as well. The fact that even a highly decorated rider like Martin Fuchs, on Conner Jei, had a rail down showed that the course was no easy ride even for the top riders.

The Swiss rider was not the only one among the top 30 in the world



Winner of the “Turkish Airlines Prize”: Julien Épaillard with Fringan de Vesquerie.

Photo: Dagmar Meyer-Roeger

rankings to make a mistake. Vogel and his top horse United Touch were also not fault-free at the third last fence. Since jumping faults in a speed class are converted into seconds rather than penalty points, this year’s winner of the “Grand Prix of Aachen” finished with a total time of 77.36 seconds.

“United felt fantastic and listened to me super well. The beginning was very harmonious. Before the third last jump, I asked United too much and didn’t give him a chance to

clear the vertical without the fault,” Vogel said, taking the blame for the rail himself. “My teammates and my horse couldn’t have done it any better today. If I can’t manage it, that’s very disappointing.”

In better spirits

The other three German show jumpers were in better spirits after the “Turkish Airlines Prize” than the reigning European champion. Sophie Hinners (Dagobertshausen), riding Iron Dames Singclair, left all the rails up, needed 72.28 seconds for the course, and was the best German rider of the day, in fourth place, on her World Championship debut.

“There was a certain nervousness this morning. But I think I deal with that quite well. We didn’t go at full risk and didn’t try to get the fewest possible strides everywhere. Singclair did a super job. So, I’m very happy with how it went,” said the 28-year-old.

Just behind her in fifth place was Daniel Deußer (Wolvertem, Belgium) with Otello de Guldenboom in 72.32 seconds. Deußer, whose horse is experiencing its first championship, also made him a promise: “He’s already been spoiled by everyone with apples and carrots. I think there may be a bit more coming today.”

Marcus Ehning, meanwhile, had gone into the ring very early – first of

all 145 starters.

“That wasn’t my ideal scenario. It certainly would have been easier if I had already seen 20 rounds. But someone has to start. In this case, it was me,” said the 52-year-old. Despite the unwanted situation, Ehning produced a lightning-quick, clean round on Coolio 42 in 74.16 seconds and finished in 20th place.

“The fact that Marcus had to go first was a bit unfortunate for us. But we can be satisfied with the way all four combinations presented themselves here,” summed up national coach Otto Becker.

Victory in the “Turkish Airlines Prize” went to someone who is gradually becoming something of an expert in World Championship speed classes. At the World Championships four years ago in Herning, Denmark, Julien Épaillard had already won the opening competition. And in 2026, the Frenchman had reason to celebrate again: with Fringan de Vesquerie, the 49-year-old was the fastest in 70.60 seconds, ahead of Dutch rider Harrie Smolders on Mr. Tac (71.96) and Scott Brash on Hello Folie (72.19).

“It’s always nice to ride here in Aachen. The atmosphere was incredible. I lost a bit of time in the middle of the course, but my horse is just naturally quick,” said Épaillard happily. (lv)



Going well in the “Turkish Airlines Prize”: Daniel Deußer with Otello de Guldenboom.

Photo: Michael von Fisenne

A “Superstar” from Their Own Breeding

Family man Pieter Devos and Casual are part of the Belgian team at these World Championships.

Pieter Devos is a family man. Anyone who sees him at the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 notices that immediately. After his fault-free ride in 72.76 seconds in the speed class of the “Turkish Airlines Prize,” the 40-year-old sat with his wife and children in the Riders’ Corner after a marathon of interviews and enjoyed the atmosphere in the Soers. “Aachen is Aachen. It’s simply a special place for us riders,” Devos emphasizes.

The Belgian knows what he is talking about after so many years in top-level sport. His path there began at his family’s home riding facilities. After winning Belgian championship titles in the youth divisions, he established himself in international show jumping from 2007 onward and in 2008 was named “Talent of the Year” by the Flemish Equestrian Association.

For years, he has been one of Belgium’s most successful show jumpers: he won bronze at the 2021 Olympic Games in Tokyo, and in 2019 and 2025 he claimed team gold with Belgium at the European Championships. Together with his family, he runs Devos Stables in Bekkevoort, where his current top mare Casual was also bred. In addition to top-level sport, the marketing graduate is also active in fruit growing.

The 40-year-old points with particular satisfaction to the homebred mare: “I don’t know how many horses here at these World Championships were bred by the riders themselves. For my family and me, that is something very special. We’ve accompanied Casual throughout the whole journey, and now she is competing at championships. As a family, we can be very proud of that.”



Going well in the “Turkish Airlines Prize”: Pieter Devos and his mare Casual.

Photo: Dagmar Meyer-Roeger

Accordingly, he says, the bond of trust with his mare—whom he has known since birth—is very strong. “When a horse only arrives at your stable at ten or eleven years old, you don’t know all that backstory. You learn an incredible amount about a horse when you accompany it from the very beginning. That’s definitely an advantage,” Devos stresses.

That advantage certainly does no harm in a special setting like the Aachen Soers with its imposing main stadium. Even a rider like Devos, who has already gained experience at the CHIO Aachen, says: “When you ride in here, the atmosphere can either intimidate you—or give you wings. That goes for both rider and horse.”

For the speed class, the 40-year-old said it helped to watch the round of Marcus Ehning (Borken), who had to go first in the course. “Marcus is one of the best riders in the world. The rhythm of his round was right from beginning to end; everything looked seamless. I took that as my example.”

That apparently helped. The eleven-year-old Casual also did not seem intimidated in the “Turkish Airlines Prize” and afterwards received praise from Devos: “That was a very good round from her. She was incredibly relaxed, even though today we were going for speed. Everything worked. It gave me a really good feeling looking ahead to the coming days.”

This special connection, he says, is the result of the work they have done over the past few weeks. Devos affectionately calls the mare a “superstar,” saying she is very intelligent but needs a great deal of trust. “If she has that, she’ll do everything for you and go through fire for you. If not, she makes it very clear that there’s something she doesn’t want to do.”

Casual already showed what she is capable of at the 2025 European Championships in A Coruña, Spain, where she won team gold with Belgium. The Belgian team of Nicola Philippaerts with Kantanga van het Dingshof, Devos with Casual, Thibaut Spits with Impress-K van’t Kattenheye, and Gilles Thomas with Ermitage Ka-

lone took gold ahead of Great Britain and Germany.

Since 2017, the Belgian show jumpers have been overseen by Peter Weinberg, originally from Eschweiler and now living in Herzogenrath-Kohlscheid. The 73-year-old was himself an internationally successful show jumper. He also won medals as national coach of the Belgian show jumpers at World Championships, European Championships, and Olympic Games.

So Germany’s neighboring country should always be on the radar when it comes to medals at championships. And that despite the absence of big names from the reigning European team champions, such as Gilles Thomas with Ermitage Kalone and Grégory Wathelet with Bond JamesBond de Hay. Replacing Thomas—the 2025 European bronze medalist—was Abdel Said with Wathnan Quaker Brimbelles.

Things went well for the Belgians in the “Turkish Airlines Prize”: all four riders went clear. The medal decision in the team standings will come this Friday in the “Mercedes-Benz Prize” under floodlights. “All the horses are in good form, but nothing is predictable. Our goal is to ride good rounds and have the best weekend possible. We want to qualify here for the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. If all the horses jump well, I think that’s possible,” Devos said hopefully. (lv)



Successful at last year’s European Championships: Pieter Devos (from left), Gilles Thomas, Nicola Philippaerts, Thibaut Spits, and national coach Peter Weinberg. Photo: Stefan Laferntz/dpa

“I love it every time I ride into that stadium”

Swede Henrik von Eckermann is coming to Aachen as the reigning world champion. The conditions are vastly different from four years ago.

The reigning world champion in show jumping will rely on a new championship partner at the FEI World Championships: with the 12-year-old stallion Minute Man, Henrik von Eckermann hopes to pursue the dream of defending his title. In this interview, he speaks about expectations and goals, his memories of the great triumph in Herning, and the extraordinary conditions in Aachen.

In Herning, you and King Edward were a sensation in show jumping and won both the team and individual world titles. What memories do you have of that time?

Henrik von Eckermann: It was fantastic. The day before the tournament began, I became number one in the world rankings, and in that same week we were able to celebrate the world titles – that was something very special. But I also have to say that at the same time it was a relief. King Edward and I started as favourites; at that time, he was at the absolute peak of his career. In terms of feeling, winning was the only option – finishing second would have been a failure. Thank God everything went well

The World Championships are now returning to Aachen 20 years after the much-acclaimed 2006 World Equestrian Games. What emotions do you associate with the upcoming championship?

von Eckermann: It's simply fantastic! I watched Aachen 20 years ago – ever since then, it has always been something I wanted to achieve one day as well. Back then I simply wasn't good enough; now I hope everything goes well for us that week. But I'm really looking forward to it. I love it every time I ride into that stadium. The tension in the arena with tens of thousands of spectators is incredible.

What is your goal when you come to Allianz Park as the reigning world champion?

von Eckermann: I'm very cautious with goals, because the conditions are different now than they were four years ago. King Edward was the clear favourite; now I'm competing with Minute Man, who has already delivered very good performances, but is not at King Edward's level. That's why I'll take it day by day. I know that



Comes to Aachen as the reigning world champion both individually and with the team: Henrik von Eckermann. Photo: IMAGO / Vitalii Kliuiev

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Aachen is simply the mecca of our sport; there is nothing comparable.

Henrik von Eckermann
World champion in show jumping

Minute Man is a horse with a great deal of potential and a lot of quality.

What stands out about Minute Man?

von Eckermann: On the outside he seems very calm, but on the inside, he has a lot of temperament and energy. Minute Man is also very, very careful. So, he is a horse that is well

suited to a World Championship. There is a lot of jumping over many days, and because he is a very consistent horse, I hope I can present him in top form every day and maintain that consistency. That is the difference compared with a single five-star Grand Prix: the more difficult part is jumping so many good rounds over a long period of time. If you think back to Herning with King Edward, yes, I won – but only by a very, very narrow margin. I went clear in all five rounds, and with a single rail down on one of the days, I would have been only second or even third.

How did you prepare for the World Championships in Aachen?

von Eckermann: Most recently, I competed with Minute Man in Riesenbeck and Falsterbo. Both shows also take place on large grass arenas. Of course, we don't have an arena like Aachen, but Minute Man

has jumped there once before – not with me, but with another rider (Willem Greve, 2024) – and at that time he looked very, very confident. After our fifth place in Riesenbeck, I'm very confident that we can travel to Aachen feeling good.

What are your expectations for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026?

von Eckermann: My expectation is the same as every time I travel to Aachen – it's a fantastic crowd, it feels good. You can sense that the world elite are at home there. Aachen is simply the mecca of our sport; there is nothing comparable. But it's not just about the atmosphere in the stadium, even though that, of course, makes everything even more wonderful. Everything behind the scenes is perfect as well: the best conditions for the horses, the riders, the grooms, and so on. It's the overall concept – that's why Aachen is the best of the best. (red)



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A World Championship Right on His Doorstep

Four-in-hand driver René Poensgen from Eschweiler will represent Germany at the World Championships in Aachen. He has been looking forward to the event for two years.

A dream is coming true for Poensgen. The four-in-hand driver, who grew up in Eschweiler, runs a company there, and now lives in Frenz, will compete at the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. For the 46-year-old, this selection means far more than taking part in yet another international championship.

Even before the final decision was made, Poensgen had made clear how important this home World Championship is to him. "I think this is now my last chance to drive at a World Championship in Aachen," he said. Although the experienced driver has already competed at several World Championships, a title fight in front of a home crowd holds a special place for him. "A World Championship is always something special. But a World Championship in Aachen is of course a huge event. You can't compare it."

Poensgen learned that his name was on the nomination list after the Nations Cup at the end of July. Because of the upcoming World Championship, it was held not in Aachen but in Rastede near Oldenburg. For him, that marked the end of a long period of preparation and waiting.

"For two years I've known that the World Championship would be in Aachen. Since that day we've been working toward it." During that time, he partially reshaped his team, tested different horses, and made numerous strategic decisions. Looking back, his conclusion is: "The work of the past two years has really paid off this year."

Poensgen's close connection to the traditional tournament venue in Aachen goes back to his childhood. Together with his family, he regularly attended the World Equestrian Festival and at first followed the show jumping classes. But it was the driving competitors who impressed him most. "The tournament in Aachen was actually the reason why I became interested in driving at all," he recalls. The sight of the four-in-hands sparked an enthusiasm for a discipline that would later shape his life. At the time, the dream of having his own four-in-hand still seemed far away. Driving initially played no major role in his family. Nevertheless, Poensgen held on to his goal. "My goal was always to one day drive a four-in-hand. Back then, of course, that seemed totally utopian." Three decades later, he has not only



René Poensgen, seen here at CHIO Aachen, will compete as a driver at the World Championships in Aachen.

Photo: IMAGO / Avalon.red

fulfilled that wish but also secured a starting place for a World Championship in Aachen.

Driving is not his main profession, however. As managing director, Poensgen runs the "Poensgen Brot" group, a bakery specializing in gluten-free baked goods. After work, he usually heads straight to the horses. He gets support from his partner, a trained rider who takes on part of the training. "We're already a well-rehearsed team. We know what it's about," he says.

Balancing business and elite sport requires a high degree of discipline. That is exactly the quality Poensgen also admires in one of his greatest role models: Boyd Exell. The Australian has dominated international four-in-hand driving for many years and now lives in the Netherlands. Poensgen occasionally uses that proximity to train there. "I don't

know anyone who is so disciplined in everything," he says admiringly of the multiple world champion.

Anyone who wants to succeed in international four-in-hand driving needs far more than driving talent. For Poensgen, handling the horses comes first. "I think if you treat the horses well, you get that back," he explains. His training philosophy relies on trust and motivation rather than pressure. "You can't force horses to perform at this level. That's why we structure our training so that the horses enjoy it." Beyond that, sensitivity, patience, and strong nerves are essential.

How much work really goes into a successful team often remains hidden from outsiders. It takes years for horses to harmonize perfectly with one another. "It's a huge amount of work. If it looks easy to outsiders in the end, then you've done it right," Poensgen emphasizes. In addition, one must always keep in mind that every animal has its own character. "We work with living beings. Every horse is different and has its own special traits."

Poensgen also follows the discussions surrounding animal welfare closely. He cannot understand many of the accusations directed at eques-

trian sport. "Our horses all go out to pasture," he emphasizes. Anyone who experiences the animals regularly can see that they do indeed appreciate the work and the atmosphere at competitions.

Poensgen brings plenty of international experience. Since 2016, he has repeatedly been part of the German squad at World and European Championships. He earned his nomination for the 2022 World Championship in Pratoni del Vivaro, Italy, among other things through second place with the German team in the Nations Cup at Windsor. There, thanks to a strong cones round, he improved significantly and finished the World Championship in 16th place. At the 2024 World Championship in Hungary, he also placed 16th as an individual. At the 2025 European Championship in Lähden in the Emsland region, he again represented Germany and finished 19th.

Nationally, Poensgen has been among the top drivers for years. He has already stood on the podium three times at the German Championships. In 2018, 2021, and 2025, he won bronze each time in four-in-hand driving.

He has also repeatedly served as team chef for the German squad, including at CHIO Aachen. "If I hadn't qualified as a driver, that would also have been the case at the World Championship in Aachen," he says with a laugh. But he clearly prefers the role of driver.

The level in four-in-hand driving has risen considerably over the past two decades, he says. New technical possibilities, more professional structures, and the introduction of the World Cup have permanently changed the discipline. "For true amateurs like me, it's becoming harder and harder to keep up. Every year we must raise our game to stay competitive." Still, he views this development positively: "Personally, I think the development is good. The sport has become more modern."

The team behind the driver also plays an important role. At major competitions, up to nine helpers accompany Poensgen, including grooms and backsteppers. "When I go to Aachen, they'll all be there," he says. For the team working behind the scenes, taking part in this home World Championship is just as much a recognition of years of hard work as it is for the driver himself. (tob)



René Poensgen is an amateur in driving sport. Photo: Tobias Röber

Big Stage for the Young Riders

Germany's U25 Show Jumping Cup takes place on Friday and Saturday.

Calvin Böckmann, who also regularly represents Germany in eventing and is regarded as an exceptional talent, is one of the 20 selected riders this year. The U25 jumping competition, held as part of the supporting program for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, is the grand final of "Germany's U25 Show Jumping Cup," supported by the German Equestrian Sport Foundation and Holger Hetzel. It takes place from August 21 to 22, 2026, in the main stadium of the Aachen Soers.

This high-level competition series serves as an important springboard to help young German talents up to the age of 25 make the transition into top-level international sport.

In addition to prize money, rider development is a key focus. The foundation also supports participants through training clinics and mentoring. National coach Otto Becker, on whose initiative – together with his then assistant national coach Hein-

rich-Hermann Engemann – the cup was first launched in 2014, describes the competition as follows:

"Germany's U25 Show Jumping Cup is a fantastic series and of tremendous importance. For the young riders, the final on this historic ground is the best schooling and the ideal transition into top-level international sport."

It goes without saying that the national coach and training team also use the series directly to identify up-and-coming riders for senior Nations Cups. Richard Vogel, a prominent example who won the final himself in Aachen in 2018, explains:

"Aachen is every rider's dream. Riding into that arena as a young athlete changes your perspective. The cup gives you exactly the stage you need to make the leap right to the top."

The first final competition on Friday is a classic jumping class judged on faults and time. The decisive final

on Saturday for the RWE Prize will be held as a demanding faults-and-time jumping class with a jump-off. All riders who complete the first round without faults advance to the final jump-off for the overall victory.

The competition is held at advanced level in S** and S*** classes with fence heights of up to 1.50 meters. Only the 20 highest-ranked young riders in Germany are allowed to compete in Aachen. The combinations first had to qualify through four high-level stages during the year.

Last year, it was Tjade Carstensen

who won the cup. Afterwards, he said, emotionally: Aachen is every rider's dream. To win here, when I actually still had another year in the Young Riders division, I never would have imagined it."

(ust)

Won the U25 Show Jumping Cup last year: Tjade Carstensen.

Photo: Thomas Rubel



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STAWAG

An Argentine Family Dream Comes True

Father José María and son Matias Larocca are competing together at the World Championship.

José María Larocca came within touching distance of his dream. But there were two spoilers: Richard Vogel and his top horse United Touch S. The pair won this year's "Grand Prix of Aachen" in the jump-off at the CHIO Aachen (45.57 seconds), ahead of Larocca on Finn Lente (47.36) – who had been highly impressive over the three days – and Sophie Hinners on Iron Dames Singclair (51.62). The runner-up narrowly missed becoming the first Argentine since Hugo Miguel Arambide in 1965 to win at this special venue.

Three years ago, on the sidelines of CHIO Aachen, Larocca had already spoken about what a win in the Soers would mean to him. "You're always allowed to dream," he said at the time. Vogel and United Touch stood in his way. But the Argentine was not sad then: "I couldn't be happier. It's an honour to finish second here. This is the greatest success of my career." A good three months later, Larocca adds with his typical touch of humour: "I had to let the Germans have the victory, and of course I did it on purpose so that everyone would be happy."

Always Happy in the Soers

The 57-year-old, who lives in Geneva, is always happy whenever he gets to be in the Soers: "Aachen is the venue I love. For me, by far, it is the best showground in the world. No other place represents our sport so well." The city plays a special role in the Argentine's life story. In the early 1990s, he moved from his home country to London, where for nearly ten years he was unable to pursue his great passion, equestrian sport, because of work.

"It wasn't until 2003 that I slowly started again. And then the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen were my first major event. I wasn't successful there, but I couldn't believe what I experienced here," recalls the Argentine, who also has extensive Olympic experience: after making his first appearance in Beijing in 2008, he finished 25th individually at the Paris Games in 2024.

So, the 57-year-old knows championships well. And at this year's FEI World



Left: Talented show jumper Matias Larocca on Abril Iconthon. Right: Experienced show jumper José María Larocca on Finn Lente.

Photos: Michael von Fisenne

Championships Aachen 2026, Larocca is competing both individually and with the Argentine team – alongside, among others, his son Matias. "I'm the more experienced rider; he definitely has more talent and is the better rider," the father says in praise of the younger man. "I learn from him how important experience is in show jumping," the son replies.

In Aachen, experience and talent now come together in an incredibly special way: as father and son on the same team. Which brings us back to the subject of dreams: "It is a dream for us to compete here together in Aachen as father and son. We have hoped for this for a long time. Now it is becoming reality," says the

father, who works in finance in addition to equestrian sport. "We have been working toward this moment for years. The fact that we are both here together now is incredible," adds his 27-year-old son.

Cheering at the CHIO

The duo had already shared their first Aachen experiences at the CHIO, which took place in May and in a scaled-down version because of the World Championships. Matias competed in the smaller classes and, of course, was cheering his father on when he was – to the surprise of many spectators – battling for victory in the Grand Prix of Aachen: "It was extra wonderful and very emotional: to ride into this special stadium myself and then watch my father."

Three years ago, José María Larocca said of Finn Lente and himself: "My horse is

world-class, his rider is not." So how did it fit together that the Argentine, in an exceptionally strong field – only two of the top 30 were missing – was able to keep jumping for victory until the very end? "Finn Lente is extraordinary. I may not yet be at the level of the very best, but I have developed significantly in recent years," the 57-year-old says, explaining his success in the Soers.

Anyone who finishes so high in the Grand Prix of Aachen must, of course, also face the question of what the goals are at this World Championship. The less experienced son, Matias, expresses himself more cautiously, as expected, and, above all, wants to "enjoy every day." Father José María is more specific: as a team, the Argentinians want still to be in contention on Friday, when the ten best teams compete for medals in the Mercedes-Benz Prize.

In the individual standings, the Larocca family hopes that both father and son will line up in Sunday's final for the Longines Prize, where the world champion will be decided – with the best 25 combinations advancing after the first round and the best 12 rider-horse pairs after the second. "I'm still very ambitious. Of course, we all dream of becoming world champion. Is it likely? No. Is it impossible? Also no," José María emphasizes.

After all, you're always allowed to dream. (lv)



Competing together at the 2026 Equestrian World Championships as father and son: José María (right) and Matias Larocca.

Photo: Lars Voßen

A Dream Comes True for Dressing

The German para dressage rider wins her first World Championship gold medal in Aachen.

It is complete: after medals at the Paralympics and European Championships, Heidemarie Dressing has now fulfilled her dream of winning precious metal at a World Championship as well. At the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, the para dressage rider won the individual Grand Prix A in Grade II in the "Prize of the Aachen City Region."

Arriving as a three-time European champion in 2025, the 71-year-old competed with her mare Poesie. In the saddle, Dressing had to show her class immediately: Poesie spooked soon after the start, and it took all her rider's sensitivity to get her back on track. With an energetic and expressive performance, the pair more than made up for the mistake at the beginning and raised their score to 75.483 percent.

Had she been nervous during the test? "There wasn't time for that - I had plenty of tasks to deal with," she said with a smile. "Winning the gold



World-championship class: Heidemarie Dressing and Poesie.

Photo: Michael von Fisenne.

medal here in Aachen is a dream come true."

The margins to the competition were razor-thin, but the joy over the silver medal was just as great. Denmark's Katrine Kristensen kept glancing at the scoreboard to make sure that her 75.310 percent really had been enough for a place on the

podium. The double world champion from Herning 2022 was overjoyed to have won a medal in Aachen as well. Bronze went to Britain's Jemima Green with the eight-year-old Foundation son Fantabulous on 75.241 percent.

In Grade III, Rixt van der Horst (Netherlands) secured the gold med-

al with Eisma's Royal Fonq N.O.P. after a personal best score of 77.534. "The stadium is certainly very impressive," said the 34-year-old. "For the first test of the championship, I'm more than happy with how the two of us mastered it."

Second place went to experienced Danish rider Tobias Thorning Joergensen with Blue Hors Zackorado (75.100), ahead of Francesca Salvadé (Italy) on Escari (74.767).

In Grade I, Marie Vonderheyden had reason to celebrate. Riding her experienced Fan Tastico H, the American won gold at her World Championship debut with a score of 76.709. "My horse is such a great guy," said the winner happily. "I'm very pleased with my test - even though, of course, there are always still things we can improve."

Behind her, Mari Durward-Akhurst (Great Britain) took silver with Athene Lindebjerg (74.542), while Sara Morganti (Italy) rode Bond Girl to bronze (74.459). (red)

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From World Champion to National Coach: Félix-Marie Brasseur Returns to Aachen

In 2006, the Belgian won the world title in four-in-hand driving at the World Equestrian Games in Aachen. Today, the 74-year-old stands on the sidelines and is pursuing ambitious goals with France at Aachen.

These days, a defining figure in driving sport is returning to Aachen: Félix-Marie Brasseur. The Belgian from nearby Verviers has many memories connected with CHIO Aachen and its traditional showgrounds. The greatest of them probably dates back to 2006, when he won the world title in four-in-hand driving at the World Equestrian Games.

"If you win in Aachen, that's fantastic. But if you win the World Equestrian Games in Aachen, then athletically it is something very special," Brasseur recalls. The victory came in dramatic fashion. Before the concluding cones competition, he was still in second place but then delivered two faultless rounds and secured the title. For the Belgian, the triumph held special significance. Ten years earlier in Waregem, he had already become world champion twice – individually and with the team. The victory in Aachen gave him his second individual world title and remains one of the highlights of his career.

However, his connection to Aachen goes back much further. As an eight-year-old, Brasseur regularly came to the show with his father. "Every year we came here to watch the jumping and the other competitions," he says. He remembers especially well the early days of driving sport at CHIO Aachen. Back then, the competitions still took place in the morning on a parking lot. "When you see the difference compared to today, that's really quite special," says the 74-year-old, referring to the modern driving stadium that has since become a permanent part of the event.

Brasseur competed in his last competition in Aachen in 2015. With a team of German horses, he even won the concluding cones class. Now he is returning once again, though in a different role: as coach of the French national team.

That Brasseur found his way into driving at all was the result of an unexpected turn. Originally, he was a show jumper. After an accident and the resulting back problems, he switched to carriage driving in 1983. Working with horses always remained the foundation of his success. In his view, drivers benefit from being able to ride themselves. "The contact is more direct when you are on the horse," he



Félix-Marie Brasseur in the obstacle course in Aachen in 2006.

Photos: Federico Gambarini/dpa

explains. In four-in-hand driving, by contrast, communication must happen more through the voice and the reins, especially with the lead horses, which move several metres away from the driver.

In his opinion, the demands on the horses have also changed significantly. Whereas in the past horses often switched to driving after proving unsuitable for other disciplines, today top-level horses are needed. "Today we drive at a top level and need the same quality as in show jumping or eventing," Brasseur emphasizes. Good movement, power from behind, and a strong topline are crucial criteria in selection.

The importance of the team is often underestimated. The so-called grooms are far more than mere passengers. In the marathon phase, for example, they ensure the balance of the carriage through targeted weight shifts and prevent it

from tipping over in tight turns. Even when hitching a four-in-hand, the help of several people is indispensable. "You cannot do this sport alone," Brasseur says.

Alongside horsemanship and teamwork, the 74-year-old sees mental strength as the decisive factor for success. Everyday life with several horses requires discipline, responsibility, and the ability to reflect on oneself. If a horse does not react as desired, he says, one must first look for the cause in oneself. It is just as important to accept judges' decisions, even if one disagrees with them. "If you don't just want to take part, but want to compete at the front, then you have to be mentally very strong."

At the same time, Brasseur would like to see greater understanding for his sport. The public needs to learn more about how close the bond is between people and horses, and how intensively drivers and their teams care for their animals. Horses, he says, are not only willing to perform, but also enjoy their task when they are kept healthy and well cared for. For misconduct toward horses, he calls for consistent sanctions.

With the French team, Brasseur is pursuing realistic goals in Aachen. At the top of the world field, he currently sees Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium in front. His team, he says, is in a phase of development but is making progress. That is why the former world champion sets out a clear objective: "Our realistic goal is fifth place."

For Brasseur, another circle is thus completed in Aachen. From an enthusiastic boy from Verviers to world champion to national coach, the imperial city remains a central place in his extraordinary career. (tob)

Golden moment: Belgian driver Félix-Marie Brasseur stands on top of the podium at the 2006 World Equestrian Games.



Exchange for a Europe of the Future

This too is part of the World Championships: distinguished guests exchanging views on political issues.

At the new dialogue format, the Europe Table, held on the sidelines of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026, high-ranking representatives from politics and business discussed pressing social issues. Two Charlemagne Prize laureates and a federal minister provided food for thought for around 200 international guests. The importance of the event was already evident from the guest list: Sir Liam Fox (former British Secretary of State for Defence), Serap Güler (Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office), and H.E. Ahmed Alattar (Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates) were just three of the internationally significant names. Around 200 figures from politics, business, and culture accepted the invitation to the Europe Table.

Armin Laschet, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag and patron of the event, saw the two-hour program as the beginning of a regular

gathering that is to take place annually at Allianz Park. "Two institutions in Aachen that have an impact far beyond the city have never organized a joint event before. That makes me even more pleased that the Aachen-Laurensberger Rennverein and the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen have now launched the Europe Table," said Laschet, who also serves as Chairman of the Charlemagne Prize Directorate.

Afterward, various experts exchanged views on topics such as migration and its related challenges, new forms of cooperation in the Middle East, and digital sovereignty. A particularly valuable perspective was offered by Maria Kalesnikava, Belarusian opposition leader, civil rights activist, and recipient of the 2022 Charlemagne Prize. "For six years now, Belarus has effectively been in Russian hands. And yet we see ourselves as Europeans and have a European mentality. So



Dorothee Bär, Federal Minister for Research, Technology and Space, during her keynote speech. Photo: ALRV/Armin Huber

this war is not only against us, but against European values as well," she said, referring to the political situation in her home country. Moderator Michael Bröcker asked whether she had ever regretted the actions that had led to several years of political imprisonment. "Not for a single second. On the contrary, they showed me that a great deal is possible if you have a strategy," was her clear reply.

Statements like these moved Dorothee Bär, Germany's Federal Minister for Research, Technology and Space, among others. "You radiate such positivity and optimism. We could all do with a little more of your commitment; it inspired me personally as well," she said directly to the civil rights activist at the end of her keynote speech. "I am grateful that we are able to exchange views here in Aachen," the federal minister concluded, bringing the successful premiere of the Europe Table to a close. (red)

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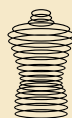


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An Ambassador for Para Sport

Regine Mispelkamp is among the world's best. The para dressage rider emphasizes that inclusion and elite sport belong together.

In the weeks and months beforehand, Regine Mispelkamp could hardly hide her anticipation for the Equestrian World Championships in Aachen. For the para dressage rider, the World Championships on this traditional showground mean far more than just a sporting highlight. "We're absolutely thrilled that we also get to experience this stage here," says the Paralympic silver medalist. Her aim, she says, is to show "that elite sport and inclusion belong together."

The 40-year-old, who lives with multiple sclerosis, has long seen herself as an ambassador for para sport. Many people's impairments are not immediately visible. "They're no different from someone who supposedly has no impairment," Mispelkamp emphasizes. That is why the World Championship motto "Welcome Home" is also a perfect fit for para dressage: "Aachen is our home, and riders all belong together, whether with or without an impairment."

Mispelkamp's career began in a very traditional way. Like many successful riders, she grew up with horses. "Our parents passed on the bug to us, growing up with horses," she recalls. Although her parents were not exceptionally ambitious in sporting terms themselves, they opened every opportunity to their children. A hobby became a profession: Mispelkamp completed her training as a master horse manager, worked with major names such as Paul Schockemöhle, Ludger Beerbaum, and Franke Smoothaak, and was initially active mainly in show jumping and eventing.

Only after several falls did her focus increasingly shift toward dressage



Regine Mispelkamp on Venecio P last year.

Photos: Dagmar Meyer-Roeger

sage – a decision that would later prove to be pivotal. Because amid her sporting and professional development, she received a diagnosis that fundamentally changed her life: multiple sclerosis.

She has never forgotten that moment. She had actually gone to the doctor because of a slipped disc. Instead, she heard a sentence that knocked the ground from under her feet: "You're told to your face: yes, you do have a slipped disc, but you have something far more serious – MS." What happened next, she describes vividly: "That's not a moment you can rehearse."

When the doctor told her about the illness, her world collapsed. "In my head, films started playing in which I basically already saw myself completely on the ground, unable to ride anymore."

The worries about the future were especially heavy because she was a professional rider.

"That naturally triggered extreme fears about my livelihood," says Mispelkamp. For a long time, she did not speak publicly about her illness. Only

when the subject became known in her circle more or less by chance did her perspective change. Looking back, being open about it was "the best thing that ever happened to me."

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We don't have the plague; we are completely normal people.

Regine Mispelkamp

Today, she sees her situation very differently. The illness has changed her personally and helped her grow. "You get to know the people around you in a different way as well," she says. However, she uses her disability to break down barriers. "We don't have the plague, we're completely normal people," Mispelkamp explains. Many adults, she says, are hesitant in dealing with people with disabilities. Her appeal is therefore: "Go up to people, address it, talk about it."

In sporting terms, Mispelkamp has long been part of the world elite. In 2021, she competed in the Paralympics for the first time. With her dark chestnut Highlander Delight's, known as Lights, she won

the bronze medal in the freestyle – the only medal for the German para dressage team in Tokyo. At the World Championships, she narrowly missed the podium, finishing fourth in the freestyle, fifth in the individual classification, and sixth with the team.

At the 2023 European Championships in Riesenbeck, in front of a home crowd, she won the silver medal with Highlander Delight's and the German team. In addition, she also won individual bronze in Grade V.

In the Paralympic year 2024, Mispelkamp and Highlander Delight's once again showed exceptional form. The highlight was the Games in Paris, where she celebrated silver in the individual classification and another silver medal in the freestyle. With that result, the pair also contributed to the team bronze medal.

Mispelkamp is always happy to explain the unique features of para dressage as well. Contrary to what some might assume, the judging is based on the same principles as in regular sport. "The judge also only judges according to the German training scale," she says. Rhythm, suppleness, contact and throughness, and the correct execution of the movements are what matter. Athletes are divided into five competition grades depending on the extent of their impairment.

For Aachen, Mispelkamp can rely on not just one but two top horses. She speaks especially fondly of her long-time successful partner Highlander Delight's. "That's my horse of the heart," she says of the gelding with whom she was successful at the Paralympics. The fact that she now has a choice between two horses fit for the World Championships – the other being the mare Pramwaldhof's Bayala – describes as "a very comfortable position."

Now that para dressage is being presented for the first time at a World Championship in Aachen on the same major stage as the Olympic disciplines, Mispelkamp sees it as a powerful signal. "I think it's fantastic that Aachen is setting an example of inclusion truly being lived," she says. Her wish is "that this becomes standard practice in other sports as well." In the end, the same applies to everyone: "We are all equal, and it only works together." (tob)



Regine Mispelkamp (right) at the forum in the riding stadium with Isabell Werth.

Always Egyptian at Heart

Show jumper Sameh El Dahan competed under the British flag for five years after a falling-out with the Egyptian federation, but since July he has once again been riding for his home country.

Sameh El Dahan does not hide how he feels: "I'm Egyptian, I was born and raised there. My heart beats for Egypt, and honestly, I missed riding for Egypt." And yet, in recent years, the 41-year-old show jumper had been competing internationally for Great Britain. Only in July did he switch back, and at the World Championships in Aachen he is once again representing the country of his birth.

The rift with the Egyptian federation goes back several years. El Dahan played a key role in Egypt's qualification for the Olympic Games in Tokyo but was then surprisingly left out when the team was selected. "That wasn't all. I had already been having problems with the federation for quite some time; there was a lot of pressure. Entries for competitions were not being passed on. At the time I was riding quite successfully, which apparently not everyone liked. So, I was held back," recalls Sameh — whose name, incidentally, means "the forgiving one" in Arabic.

In 2021, his frustration became so great that he switched and spent five years competing under the British flag. "I was very happy on the British team, with whom I also rode Nations Cups. I learned a lot during that time. And it was a great honour to compete for Great Britain," El Dahan says gratefully. But three years ago, the leadership of the Egyptian equestrian federation changed, and since then the officials had been trying to persuade the now 41-year-old to return to the Egyptian team.

"At first, I wanted to see how the new leadership actually worked. Now they have presented a very convincing concept for how they want to promote show jumping in Egypt, and that ultimately convinced me," explains the personable rider, who, as a kind of "senior rider," is expected not only to serve as a role model for younger riders, but also to coach them and introduce them to top-level sport.

This must also be seen in the context of Egypt's bid to host the Olympic Games in 2036 – or 2040 and beyond. Egypt wants to become the first African country to host the Olympics. And Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, is certainly thinking big. Right next to the new administrative capital, the New Administrative Capital (NAC), which



One rail down in Wednesday's speed class: Sameh El Dahan.

Photo: Michael von Fisenne

has been rising from the ground about 50 kilometres outside Cairo since 2015, construction work on possible Olympic venues is already

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*My brother
Mohammed
woke me up
every morning
at 5 a.m. so I
could ride before
school.*

Sameh El Dahan

well advanced. In 2024, the Misr Stadium, with a capacity of 93,000 spectators, was officially opened in the Egypt International Olympic City. New facilities for equestrian competitions are also already being built.

In Aachen, El Dahan leads the Egyptian team, alongside the experienced Nayel Nassar (35) – Bill Gates's son-in-law, incidentally – Mouda Zeyada (31), and the two young riders Zain Shady Samir (22) and Ahmed Naser Elnaggar (25). "To be honest, of course this was my chance to be here at the World Championships," El Dahan admits. "On the British team I certainly would not have been among the top four, but I might have had the chance to travel as the fifth rider."

The Egyptian has a rather unusual story. He lost his heart to horses as a child and first got into the saddle at the age of five. His passion demanded special commitment. "My brother Mohammed woke me up every morning at 5 a.m. so I could ride before school," says the Egyptian, who from an early age did everything for his passion. "I've loved horses since I was very young – actually all animals. I have dogs, I take care of stray cats, but horses are my passion."

So, his family was not surprised when he announced in 2008 that he wanted to become a professional

rider. Even so, that was unusual given his background: El Dahan comes from a family of doctors who run a private hospital in Cairo. He studied medicine and completed his degree, even though he knew early on that he did not want to work as a doctor. "I'm a licensed physician – I could start working in a hospital tomorrow. But my calling is equestrian sport."

Since 2011, the Egyptian has been living and working in Ireland. Cian O'Connor had met him at a clinic in Egypt and brought him to Ireland to ride his horses on the Sunshine Tour. El Dahan laughs as he recalls arriving in Ireland: "It was raining, and I thought it was wonderful. When it rains in Egypt, people celebrate in the streets." But his enthusiasm quickly faded. "When it was still raining on the second, third, and all the following days, I'd had enough." Even after 15 years, the sun-loving Egyptian has never made peace with the rain.

El Dahan had originally only intended to help out at Joanne Sloan Allen's yard, but he stayed. Together they run Sycamore Stables not far from Belfast, where young horses are produced and brought into the sport. Although he had already competed at World Cup Finals and at the 2014 World Equestrian Games, it was not until 2018 that the Egyptian truly drew attention to himself: he won the Grand Prix of Paris and the Masters Grand Prix in Calgary. He achieved both victories on Sumas Zorro, an Anglo-Arab mare that Allen had bought as a foal and El Dahan had trained. With her, he made his CHIO debut in 2019.

Now he is making his second appearance in Aachen, this time in the saddle of Oscar-A, a 12-year-old Belgian stallion. "I love all my horses, but Oscar especially," El Dahan emphasizes. With him, he has earned top placings in several major classes, including fourth place in the Grand Prix at the five-star show in Hong Kong. The Egyptian has been riding the bay stallion for five years. "We had a difficult time at the beginning, but today he knows he can trust me," he says, explaining their special relationship. "He's not a big horse, but he has so much energy. He always wants to give everything for me in the ring."
(rau)

“The End of the Road Is Already in Sight”

Brazilian Rodrigo Pessoa first competed in Aachen 36 years ago. The 2004 Olympic champion and 1998 world champion now lives in the United States.

He was 18 years old when he first started in Aachen. He was 22 when he won the Grand Prix of Aachen – back then on Special Envoy, standing beside his father Nelson in the prize-giving ceremony, who finished third. Brazilian rider Rodrigo Pessoa looks back on a long and successful career. “That was a long time ago, but my energy and enthusiasm for the sport are still the same. The road is slowly ending, though,” says the 53-year-old with a laugh.

The Pessosas have always loved coming to Aachen – and they have always been successful there. His father Nelson, now 90, had already won the Grand Prix in 1964 and 1972. To this day, he remains the only non-European ever to become European champion – in 1966 on Gran Geste, with whom he had already won silver the year before. “My father is doing well, even if the machine runs a bit more slowly now. But he plans to come to Aachen for a day,” his son says happily. In Fleurus, near Brussels, Nelson Pessoa established his riding facility Haras de Ligny in 1998.

That was also where his son, who was born in Paris, had lived. Today, however, Rodrigo lives and trains in the United States – more precisely in North Salem, about an hour’s drive outside Manhattan, where he runs Amethyst Equestrian. “It’s a beautiful area, with lots of greenery, forests, and meadows,” says the 53-year-old. Some U.S. show jumpers, such as Georgina Bloomberg and McLain Ward, also live in the region. “And it’s a good school district,” Pessoa says, also keeping the well-being of his daughters in mind. His daughter Cecilia, from his marriage to American show jumper Keri Potter, is already grown up. From his marriage to American show jumper Alexa Weeks, he has two daughters, Sophia and Luciana, aged 15 and 9. Although “good school district” is something of an understatement: the high school in North Salem is considered the best public school in the nation.

Training every day

Since May, Rodrigo Pessoa has been in Europe preparing for the World Championships, competing in La Baule, Rome, Deauville, Rotterdam, and Dublin. “There are very good shows here,” says the rider, who, however, is not based in Belgium but in



Showed his class while time-jumping in the pouring rain: Rodrigo Pessoa.

Photo: Dagmar Meyer-Roeger

Deauville, France. “Because of the beautiful beach,” he says with a grin, although he himself does not go into the water. “It’s far too cold. But we train with the horses on the beach every day, and working in the water does them a lot of good.”

Pessoa’s list of achievements is full of highlights. In 2004, he became Olympic champion in Athens – although he benefited from the disqualification of Irish rider Cian O’Connor, whose horse Waterford Crystal tested positive. He also won team bronze twice. In total, the Brazilian has so far competed in eight Olympic Games. But ironically, at the home Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, his father’s hometown, he was named only as a reserve. As a result, Pessoa chose not to take part in the 2016 Olympics at all.

In 1998, he became world champion in Rome, riding Lianos. And in 2002, he won gold at the Pan American Games. His top horse in that decade was his legendary French chestnut stallion Baloubet du Rouet, with whom he won the World Cup Final three years in a row – 1998, 1999, and 2000. Pessoa missed the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen because Baloubet, who also left a major mark as a breeding stallion, had suffered an injury. Instead, Pessoa supported the Brazilian team

as a coach and guided them to 10th place.

Alongside Pessoa, the Brazilian team at these World Championships

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I know my career is coming to an end—I’m realistic about that. The end of the road is in sight, but until then I’m enjoying it.

Rodrigo Pessoa

includes Stephan de Freitas Barcha, Pedro Junqueira Muylaert, Marlon Modolo Zanotelli, and Luciana Diniz. The latter has lived in Germany for many years and runs a facility in Wachtberg-Oberbachem, near Bonn. Rodrigo and Luciana have known each other for many years, because when the now 55-year-old

left her hometown of São Paulo at just 18, she moved to Belgium, where she was trained by Nelson Pessoa. Diniz also competed at the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, where she finished 23rd with Dover – though for Portugal, after failing to qualify for the Brazilian team. At the long-held wish of her grandfather, she had changed nationality and competed for Portugal until 2015, including at several European Championships.

Focus on the team

“We have a good team, all very experienced riders who have been to Aachen many times,” says Pessoa. The focus is on the team jumping and the hoped-for qualification for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. Pessoa will saddle Major Tom, a 13-year-old Belgian chestnut stallion. For now, the individual competition is less of a priority for him.

And there it is again: “I know my career is coming to an end – I’m realistic about that. The end of the road is in sight, but until then I’m enjoying it.” How soon? “I’m definitely planning through to the 2028 Games in Los Angeles. At the moment I have many good-quality horses in the stable,” says Pessoa, before joking with a laugh: “But if I were to become world champion here, that would also be quite a nice moment...” (rau)

Won Bronze, Didn't Lose Gold

At the 2006 World Equestrian Games, Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum finished third behind Belgium's Jos Lansink and American Beezie Madden.

"I absolutely won bronze back then, I didn't lose gold," Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum says without a second's hesitation. "Just on Tuesday, I was looking at old pictures with my daughter. There was one of me holding up my bronze medal. I was very happy with my medal because it had been such a long road to get there," recalls the now 56-year-old.

In 2006 she was in the saddle herself, and in 2026 she will be at the World Championships in Aachen as a mother: her daughter Brienne, just 16 years old, will compete on Saturday in the "Preis der Sparkasse," an international jumping competition for young riders.

Michaels-Beerbaum remembers 2006 very clearly. With the German team, which included her brother-in-law Ludger Beerbaum, Marcus Ehning, and Christian Ahlmann, she won bronze behind the Netherlands and the USA, and by just 0.01 points ahead of Ukraine.

In the final jumping competition, Ludger Beerbaum on L'Espoir missed the chance to reach the final after having one rail down in each of the two rounds; with 10.70 points, he missed out by just 0.46 points and finished fifth. Madden (USA/4), Lansink (Belgium/5.01 from the speed jumping), Michaels-Beerbaum (9.25), and Edwina Alexander-Tops (Australia/10.24) advanced.

"Of course, everyone had been talking about Cumano beforehand. And it definitely made for a funny picture: he was very tall, and I'm so small," says Michaels-Beerbaum with a laugh. "But the round on him felt wonderful. He was super to ride. And on him, I also didn't have the feeling that the jumps were as high as they were on Shutterfly."

Her 13-year-old Hanoverian at the time had "jumped absolutely brilliantly"; after the faults in the speed jumping on the first day, only one



Won bronze in Aachen in 2006: Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum and Shutterfly. Photo: Imago / Rau

time fault in round one of the team jumping and one rail down in the jump-off had been added. And in the final with the horse change, the little bay only had one rail down under the Australian rider.

"Jos got on well with Shutterfly. He was a very sensitive horse, but he also had a great deal of energy," the 56-year-old reports. For Shutterfly, the wait until the next riders mounted became a test of nerves, standing in a separated area of the course in

front of 45,000 spectators. "He became increasingly agitated. And in the jump-off, he was nervous and no longer focused. So, I had no chance of still winning gold."

She does not sound sad as she says this: "Of course, gold is always the goal, but I was also very happy with bronze. And overjoyed by what my little horse had achieved – because including the warm-up, he had to complete eleven rounds to win that medal." (rau)

A large advertisement for MORE & MORE. It features a close-up portrait of a woman with light brown, wavy hair, wearing a blue and brown patterned sweater. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. In the top right corner, there is a purple square logo with the text "W26 FEI WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AACHEN". At the bottom, the text "MORE & MORE" is written in large, bold, white letters, followed by "Offizieller Ausstatter" in smaller white letters. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner, and the website "www.more-and-more.de" is printed at the very bottom.

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Charley-Ann Barford Makes History

For the first time, Zimbabwe is represented by a female show jumper at an equestrian world championship. For Charley-Ann Barford, Aachen is the destination of a long journey.

Charley-Ann Barford made history on Wednesday. Never before had a show jumper from Zimbabwe competed at an equestrian world championship. The 40-year-old is the first to qualify for the FEI World Championships. "This is more than I could ever have imagined in my life," says the warm and likeable woman from the country in southern Africa, bordered by Zambia to the north, Botswana to the west, Mozambique to the east, and South Africa.

Anyone who speaks with Barford hears the life story of a woman for whom one thing has always come first: her love of horses. She has never been handed anything in life and had to overcome many obstacles on her way to success.

Riding had always played a role in the Barford family. Her mother rode regularly, and her grandmother even had a riding school. But taking riding lessons herself was out of the question for Barford when she was young – her family simply could not afford it. "As long as I can remember, all I ever wanted was to ride. So, I had to make it happen myself," says Barford. And that is exactly what she did right after school. "My parents knew there was no point in sending this girl to university. So, I left home at 17."

She worked for a year as a groom in France, then returned, first to South Africa and then to her home country. She rode everything she could get under saddle, including the "naughty ponies," as she explains with a laugh. Her ambition drove her; she loves challenges and is fearless. "I always wanted to improve, to compete against better riders," she says. But the competition in Zimbabwe – Barford was born in the capital, Harare – is limited. There are only a handful of riders competing at the top national level, the 40-year-old reports.

So Barford was drawn back to South Africa. She got serious and built up her own stable, CC Equestrian, between Johannesburg and Pretoria. She now has 70 horses and trains young athletes. "I love the sport more than anything," she says. But competing at a major championship remained unthinkable for her. The reason was simple: there was a lack of competitive horses.

That changed when Odiena van Berimar, the now twelve-year-old grey mare, came to her. "I wanted a



Charley-Ann Barford is the first show jumper from Zimbabwe to compete in an equestrian World Championship. Photo: Michael von Fisenne

horse that was a winner. She looks like a little grey pony – but in her heart, she believes she is a superstar. She is a fighter," Barford says enthusiastically about her mare. Last year, the pair achieved the minimum qualification for the World Championships at two World Cup events in South Africa, and the door to Aachen opened ajar.

Sporting qualification was one thing; logistics were another. Because of African horse sickness, it was clear that Odiena would have to go into quarantine before being allowed to enter Europe. Until December 2025, Barford explains, the only route had been via the island of Mauritius, where a months-long isolation period would have followed. She did not want to put her horse through that. But then the possibility of direct export from South Africa to Europe arose. So, Charley-Ann Barford set out to try to turn the dream of competing in Aachen into reality after all.

She drove nearly 1,400 kilometres from Johannesburg to Cape Town over two days. A brutally hard period lay ahead for Odiena and her rider: three months of quarantine, including 40 days of strict lockdown during

which the mare was not allowed to leave the stable. Although physiotherapists were able to do exercises with Odiena in the stable, preparation for a championship normally looks very different.

”

I'm simply going to enjoy Aachen. No matter what comes afterward. This is more than I ever could have imagined in my life.

Charley-Ann Barford

By mid-April, the pair arrived in Europe, but final qualification for the World Championships had still not been secured. And the next set-

backs were not long in coming. Her groom did not receive a visa, and Barford quite literally found herself with nothing. In a group chat with riding students who had once trained at her facility, she asked for help. The response was overwhelming. People got in touch from all corners of the world. In Sweden, Klara Sandberg got into her truck and drove for three days to pick up Odiena and Barford. A journey across European showgrounds began, and a few weeks before the World Championships, qualification finally came through. At Sentower Park in Belgium, Odiena jumped 1.60 meters for the first time, and the ticket to Aachen was secured. "I didn't really realize it. I only believed it when I saw it on the FEI website," the rider says.

And so now they are in Aachen, where Barford made history on Wednesday. Her husband travelled from South Africa; he too made many sacrifices to make the participation possible. Sandberg also remains with them as groom. "I'm just going to enjoy Aachen. No matter what comes afterward. This is more than I could ever have imagined in my life," says the rider.

(tp)

The Gold Medal Is Made of Brass

Where do the medals for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 actually come from?

Whoever wears one can count themselves among the absolute elite of the world. They stand for years of hard work, top athletic achievement, and the fulfilment of lifelong dreams – three medals: gold, silver, and bronze. Winning such a piece is probably the greatest honour a rider can receive in sport.

Elegant and Modern

A horse looking downward, made up of straight lines. It almost resembles a kind of sketch. In the centre is a highlighted dot, representing the horse's eye. Above the horse, in flowing letters, stands FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale), the governing body of international equestrian sport, headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland. A circular line frames the motif.

The medal looks modern, elegant, and high-quality, and stands out by its size alone. The victory medal at the FEI World Championships Aachen consists of two levels: the varying height of the



Rider Katharina Hemmer celebrates her bronze medal in dressage in the Grand Prix Spécial – the only medal that is actually made of the material it is named after.

Photo: Rolf Vennenbernd/dpa

surfaces creates a striking relief. The lower surface is highly polished and reflects the sunlight in winners' photos. The upper level, on which the contours of the horse can be seen, is somewhat thicker than the base of the medal. It

has a matte finish and thus stands out from the shiny background.

300 Medals

A total of 177 medals will be awarded to the winners at the World Cham-

pionships – 59 gold, 59 silver, and 59 bronze. Guillaume Dolivo from the FEI is responsible for ordering the medals. Upon request, he explained that not only the riders receive medals, but also the owners of the horses. That is why the federation orders a total of 300 medals.

The medals are produced in Taiwan and delivered by the federation to the respective host venue. The design of the medals remains the same at every FEI World Championship, Dolivo says. There are also differences in the materials: not every medal is made of the material its name suggests. The bronze medal is in fact made of bronze, the silver medal is made of nickel silver, an alloy of copper, nickel, and zinc – and the gold medal? It is made of brass.

But a medal at the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026 is worth more than just the material it is made from. It stands for the highest honour in equestrian sport. For a moment that lasts. For an achievement that is timeless. (twb)

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O H N E L I M I T S

No Longer a Dark Horse

At a young age, French rider Nina Mallevaey can already look back on an eventful career. Marcus Ehning had her at the very top of his list for the Turkish Airlines Prize.

Ehning had her marked down as one of the strongest contenders for the Turkish Airlines Prize, and in truth, the young woman from Lille in northern France is no longer much of a dark horse anyway: Mallevaey is just 26 years old, French national champion, and in April 2026 climbed to sixth place in the world show jumping rankings. That made her the highest-ranked female rider in the world. Before that, she had already led the U25 world rankings continuously for many months.

Mallevaey finished school with her Abitur and then focused entirely on her sporting career. Her father, Christophe, introduced her to horses at an early age – simply out of passion. Neither her mother nor her father comes from the professional equestrian world. Yet, as Nina openly admits, they sacrificed their entire private life and their savings to make their daughter's career possible.

In 2018, the brunette joined the Chev'el stables. There she was trained by Julien Epailard, was assigned her own groom for the first time, and, as she says, learned “an incredible amount.” At 21, she felt it was time for a change. An acquaintance suggested she apply to Olympic champion Eric Lamaze for a job.

“I was incredibly nervous; I'm actually a shy person. I got to ride about ten horses one after another, and by the end of the day I had the job! Looking back, I have to say it was the best decision of my life.”

A few weeks later, Lamaze took her to the Stephex Brussels Masters, where she realized she absolutely had to improve her English. There she also met entrepreneurs Tara and Mark Rein, one of whose horses she was presenting at the show. Three years later, Nina speaks fluent English and is now directly employed by the Reins as a rider. Mark Rein, incidentally, is Vice President of Epic Games, the internationally successful video game company. Together with his wife, he runs a show jumping stable in Valkenswaard in the Netherlands, near the border. Nina is usually on the road with the Reins – based in Valkenswaard for the summer shows and in Florida during the winter.

The Reins provide her with top-class horses, above all *Dynastie de Beaufour*, a *Selle Français* mare.



Long since no longer a dark horse: Nina Mallevaey.

Photo: Michael von Fisenne

With her, Nina won the 2025 Rolex Grand Prix of Brussels in front of the owners, the breeder, and her parents. With Nikka VD Bisschop, a BWP mare, she won the French national championship, and with My Clementine, an Irish Sport Horse mare, and a very fast horse for speed classes, she won the 2024 WIHS Costume Class in Washington, D.C.

“So, if anyone had told my 14-year-old self how things would turn out, I never would have believed it,” says the young woman, for whom representing her home country at international competitions is also deeply meaningful. Among her many great trainers, she says she is inspired by Pénélope Leprévost, Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum, and Beezie Madden.

Today, she also has a renowned coach from the Aachen region: Helena Stormanns supports her and stands by her side at major competitions. Stormanns confirms that Nina Mallevaey is a refined, incredibly talented rider who can currently count herself fortunate to have several top-level horses at her disposal. With the Reins, the Frenchwoman has truly hit the jackpot.

”

Aachen is probably my favourite event. Competing in this arena is indescribable.

Nina Mallevaey

Her love of horses, her sporting ambition, and the close bonds of friendship with the people around her made 2025 the most successful year of her career so far. The great stadiums of the world have now become her living room, and yet the rider does not take it for granted:

“These events have something almost mystical about them because they carry so much history. When you ride into the arena, you are surrounded by thousands of people, and a clear round feels truly electrify-

ing because the crowd is so involved. It's something really special, and I'm very lucky that my horses enjoy it too. At the Rolex Majors, I can feel my horses proudly lifting themselves under me and how the atmosphere inspires them. These events mean an incredible amount to so many riders – they really are the best shows in our sport.”

For all the superlatives, however, Nina Mallevaey has, unsurprisingly, chosen one favourite show: “Aachen is probably my favourite event. Competing in that arena is indescribable.” A true athlete, Nina Mallevaey is also drawn to other sporting events in her free time. As a personal balance to equestrian sport, however, she turns to something far less flashy but highly effective: Pilates.

Asked about her dreams and hopes for the future, the young Frenchwoman does not have to think long: “So far, Scott Brash is still the only one to have won the Rolex Grand Slam – that is, three Rolex Grand Prix in a row.” Time for a woman for whom, at the moment, everything simply seems to be falling into place. (tob)

PROGRAMME TODAY

Friday, 21 August 2026

**MAIN STADIUM**
12:00 - 13:00 CEST**Jumping:****German U25 Trophy of the
Stiftung Deutscher Pferdesport
and Holger Hetzel, Prize of
Holger Hetzel**

Competition penalties/time

**MAIN STADIUM**
14:00 - 16:00 CEST**Jumping:****STAWAG-Prize**Jumping Competition
(penalties/time) for Young Riders**MAIN STADIUM**
18:50 - 22:50 CEST**Jumping:****Mercedes-Benz Prize**★ Second Competition Team
Final & Second Individual
Qualifier**STADIUM 2 -
ALLIANZ PARK**
10:30 - 16:35 CEST**Four-in-Hand:****Feinkost Käfer-Prize**

Dressage Team & Individual

**STADIUM 3 -
ALLIANZ PARK**
09:00 - 11:20 CEST**Para Dressage: Allianz-Prize**★ Grand Prix B Team Final &
Second Individual Qualifier for
the Grand Prix Freestyle, Grade II**STADIUM 3 -
ALLIANZ PARK**
11:30 - 14:50 CEST**Para Dressage: Allianz-Prize**★ Grand Prix B Team Final &
Second Individual Qualifier for
the Grand Prix Freestyle, Grade I**STADIUM 3 -
ALLIANZ PARK**
15:00 - 17:45 CEST**Para Dressage: Allianz-Prize**★ Grand Prix B Team Final &
Second Individual Qualifier for
the Grand Prix Freestyle, Grade III

★ Medal decision

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From Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour and Isabell Werth to Richard Vogel: these riders attract hundreds of thousands of viewers online.

Photo: Hans-Gerd Classen/ Andreas Steindl

Instagram Followers: These Riders Fascinate Millions Online

Instagram has long been part of equestrian sport: the stars of the World Championships reach hundreds of thousands of followers and, alongside medals and competition moments, also share very personal glimpses into their lives.

The birth of her first child, romantic wedding photos, or insights into daily life: dressage rider **Cathrine Laudrup-Dufour** also shares very personal moments on Instagram. With around 346,000 followers, the world number one in dressage has the largest reach among the World Championship participants. A pinned post on her Instagram page shows her newborn baby and received more than 74,000 likes. In her story, she regularly gave followers a look at her preparation for the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. She also celebrated her silver medal in the Grand Prix Special on Instagram. Even more current images and videos are shared by her wife, Rasmine Laudrup-Dufour, who has been married to the Dane since 2023 and, as the daughter of former football star Brian Laudrup, also has a wide reach of her own.

Germany's most successful social media figure is **Isabell Werth**. Around 236,000 people follow the 57-year-old, who regularly posts pictures with her horse Wendy de Fontaine. In her story, she can be seen cheering on the podium after winning bronze in the freestyle on Saturday evening, having already taken

team gold beforehand. It is therefore no surprise that her account gained several thousand followers during the World Championships.

Show jumper **Richard Vogel** is also among the best-known World Championship participants, with around 217,000 followers. The winner of the 2026 Aachen Grand Prix is active on Instagram and shares interviews, competition photos, and personal impressions.

British show jumper **Scott Brash** reaches around 224,000 people. In 2014/15, he made show jumping history by becoming the first rider to win the Rolex Grand Slam of Show Jumping. On Instagram, spectacular competition photos are the main focus.

Edwina Tops-Alexander has around 231,000 followers. Australia's most successful female show jumper also uses her reach for collaborations with jewellery and fashion brands. Alongside that, she regularly posts photos with her husband Jan Tops, who formerly competed for the Netherlands in show jumping.

Charlotte Fry may soon overtake Tops-Alexander in follower numbers. The British dressage rider has more than 215,000 followers and her In-



The official World Championship account, aachen2026_official, is also extremely popular and provides equestrian fans around the world with the latest updates. Photo: Thorsten Pracht

stagram page is filled with winner's photos and medals. She won two gold medals in the Grand Prix Special and the freestyle in Aachen and has posted celebratory posts with stallion Glamourdale. Her Instagram account also gained thousands of followers during the World Championships.

Another dressage rider may not be competing at the World Championships in Aachen, but she remains highly popular on social media: **Jessica von Bredow-Werndl**. More than 503,000 people follow the double Olympic champion on Instagram. Because her horse Times Kismet was not fit, she had to withdraw from the selection trials ahead of the championship. Nevertheless, the Bavarian visited Allianz Park and shared some impressions online as well.

Naturally, the official Instagram channel of the World Championships has also been highly active during the days of the FEI World Championships Aachen 2026. Under aachen2026_official, there are daily insights into the action at the event. It offers a chance to experience the World Championships from a different perspective, through a fresh lens.

(twb)

A photograph of Isabell Werth, an 8-time Olympic champion, sitting on a wooden bench in a stable. She is wearing a black riding jacket with a blue and white sash, white breeches, and black boots. She is holding a white glove. In the background, a young girl is sitting on a similar bench, and the stable is filled with wooden cabinets and hanging saddles.

Klein. Größer. Großartig.

Isabell Werth
8-fache Olympiasiegerin

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