

Twenty Years Ago, Beezie Madden And Team USA Made Their Mark On Aachen

With the 2026 FEI World Championships now underway in Aachen, Germany, we look back to a conversation with Beezie Madden from July, when we asked her to revisit the last time the championships were held here, in 2006.



Beezie Madden has lost count of her medals and awards—she’s too modest and not one to dwell on the past. At 62, she continues to compete internationally, even though she has stepped back from the world’s elite show jumping circuit since the summer of 2022.

After a 40-year career, she continues to divide her time between Cazenovia, New York, and Wellington, Florida, alongside her husband, John Madden.

With an understated smile and a calm, reserved presence, Beezie hardly projects one of the most impressive careers in American show jumping. She has won two FEI World Cup Finals, four Olympic medals (including team golds in 2004 and 2008), five Pan American medals (including team golds in 2003 and 2011), and four medals at the FEI World Championships.

Although the world title ultimately eluded her, Beezie produced one of the most dominant performances of her career exactly 20 years ago, when what was then called the FEI World Equestrian Games were last held in Aachen, Germany. Riding the Dutch Warmblood gelding Authentic (Guidam—Gerlinda, Katell), owned by Abigail Wexner and then 11 years old, she dominated the competition, earning just 1 fault across five rounds to finish at the top of the individual standings before the four-rider final.

“It was a fantastic event, as usual in Aachen,” Beezie said. “The organizers always do a great job, but the biggest thing is the atmosphere and the crowd. It’s a very educated and enthusiastic crowd.”

Looking at the performances from those championships online, the courses don’t look much different from those seen today at Aachen.

“By then the sport had modernized to some extent, but maybe there was still a little more fill in the fences,” Beezie said. “Possibly it’s gotten a little more careful and delicate these days. But I think the size of the fences, from what I remember, were pretty big as expected for a championship. The first day was a little bit soft because it’s a speed class. The team competition was big enough and the individual final was very big from what I remember.”

Beezie and Authentic—her partner in her 2004 and 2008 Olympic titles—won the opening speed class, finishing ahead of Canada’s Eric Lamaze and Hickstead (future Olympic champions in 2008), who placed second, and the Netherlands’ Gerco Schröder, who placed third with Berlin.

They then turned in two clear rounds in the Nations Cup team competition, helping the U.S. team—which also included Laura Kraut riding Miss Independent, Margie Engle riding Hidden Creek’s Quervo Gold and McLain Ward riding Sapphire—earn a silver medal.

This collective performance wasn’t a surprise to the team members. “We were fairly confident,” Beezie recalled. “We had been together on teams before, all professionals trying to row the boat the same way. McLain and I both had our horses from the [2004] Olympics in Athens. And Margie was very experienced with her horse. Laura probably [was] the greenest as a combination, but very solid as well. I think that horses got better and better as the week went on and it all came together because we thought we had a good chance going in. Our preparation all went well for everybody. It’s nice when you’re kind of waiting for the championship to happen and not wishing it was a week or two later. We were in that position that we were anxious to get on with it.”

The top 25 pairs were called back for the individual semifinal. In this two-round competition, only two pairs jumped both rounds clear: Edwina Tops-Alexander of Australia riding Pialotta and Jos Lansink of Belgium riding Cumano. Beezie and Authentic left all the rails up in both rounds, but unfortunately had a foot in the water in the first round, resulting in a score of 4 faults.

Along with Tops-Alexander, Lansink and Beezie, Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum, who was competing for Germany, also qualified for the four-rider final with the legendary Shutterfly. For the first—and so far, only—time in the history of the competition, the show jumping final included three women.

“It’s really hard to predict the four going into the final, but I had [a lot of] confidence in Authentic,” said Beezie. “He was experienced and as a combination we had been very solid, but it’s still hard to predict that you’re going to be the top four out of a hundred and some at the world championships. So hoping would be the better word, yes, and aiming for it.”

Following the format that had been in place since the first edition of this event in Paris in 1953, the rotational final saw the four riders tackle a course on their own horses first, then on the mounts of each of their competitors.

In an amazing display of the talent at the top of the sport, out of 16 rounds ridden by the four riders, 15 were clear—only Tops-Alexander incurred 4 faults with Shutterfly, finishing just off the final podium.

“Actually, I was surprised how sensitive Cumano was and how much blood he had. I think that’s the only one that surprised me,” Beezie recalled of the final. “Shutterfly, as we all knew, had a lot of blood and was fantastic. I also knew Piolotta, actually, as I had tried her as a 7- or 8-year-old in the United States, and I had seen her a lot in the States.”

The three medals were then decided in a nail-biting jump-off. Lansink was first to go and put in a clear round on Cumano to keep pressure on his rivals. Michaels-Beerbaum was slower than Lansink and also had a rail down. Last to take the course, Beezie rode at breakneck speed and Authentic strung together clear efforts with apparent ease, right up to the final oxer, where he had a rail down. Lansink took gold, while Beezie claimed silver and Michaels-Beerbaum took bronze.

Beezie would ride in another final four at the 2014 WEG in Caen, France—claiming the individual bronze medal with Cortes C—which was the last year it was included in the world championships format. Beezie said she does not miss it.

“I think it’s disappointing for the crowd who loved it, but to me, it seems like the whole point of the world championships—and [what] actually distinguishes them from the Olympics—is that they reward your cumulative scores over the week with your horse and the consistency that you have with your horse and how well have you prepared your horse to peak for [the competition],” she said. “With the old format, all of a sudden, you were onto somebody else’s horse. And to me, it was a little bit of a show, which is a great show for the crowd, but it was always a little nerve-wracking, I think, for the organizers and the FEI as well, hoping that it all just went well.”

Twenty years ago, during an often rainy two-week period, the U.S. more than held its own. Beezie, who will help Canadian rider Amy Millar as a coach and “cheer on the American team,” she said, is hopeful for a similar performance in Aachen in 2026.

“There’s always a chance that the U.S. team is going to come out on top. It’s whoever is on form and good that week, and that can happen. Any team can rise to the occasion. Everybody wants to win at Aachen. It’s so important and so iconic in our sport. And the same with the individuals. I’d love to see Laura [Kraut] come out with an individual medal because she’s put in so much and so much for the team.”

Six Other U.S. Medals

The U.S. team earned an armful of other medals at the 2006 world championships. Amy Tryon and Poggio II earned individual bronze in eventing, while the dressage team (Steffen Peters on Floriano 19, Günter Seidel on Aragon, Debbie McDonald on Brentina and Leslie Morse with Tip Top 962) also earned bronze. The American medal tally was also bolstered by three medals in reining, a discipline then recognized by the FEI, and Megan Benjamin rounded out the U.S. haul by becoming the individual world champion in vaulting.