

PRAGUE LIONS LEAP TO MAGICAL WIN IN GCL RAMATUELLE / SAINT-TROPEZ

Prague Lions' pairing of Niels Bruynseels and Pieter Devos took home a sensational win in an edge-of-the-seat showdown at the GCL of Ramatuelle / Saint-Tropez today as Berlin Eagles cling on to the overall ranking lead.

Just metres from the world-famous Pampelonne Beach, the action went down to the wire as the duo clinched the win, after Stockholm Hearts powered by H&M We Love Horses dream team of Peder Fredricson and Malin Baryard-Johnsson finished a gut-wrenching half a second slower to take silver. The third spot on the podium went to Shanghai Swans who finished the fastest team on 8 faults.

A delighted Pieter Devos smiled: "The win feels really good, it is about time we are on the podium this season and I am really happy we did this performance. The horses jumped really good and Niels did a super job with a double clear. It was two difficult courses. I am very lucky to have a teammate like Niels, it makes the job easier for me."

Niels Bruynseels added: "It was a delicate course from the start and the last line was very technical - you needed to have everything under control today. I didn't expect we would be faster than the Stockholm Hearts but today the luck was on our side."

With their strong result at the Longines Athina Onassis Horse Show event, the Prague Lions jump up to fourth place in the overall ranking - now with 84 points. The top three remain the same with Berlin Eagles leading on 112, Hamburg Giants only 3 points behind on 99 and Stockholm Hearts with 96 points as the Championship race heads to Hamburg next week.

French course designer Gregory Bodo put together a technical but flowing track, which saw faults come all over the arena even up to the last wide GCL oxer facing towards the in gate. None of the top four teams made horse or rider changes to their starting order, backing their original teams which paid off over this testing track.

There was disappointment for Championship leaders Berlin Eagles after four faults from Eoin McMahon and Chakra 9 brought the team up to 13 points. Christian Kukuk and Checker added nothing to the team total but it was too late and the team finished mid table.

All eyes turned to Hamburg Giants who were racing the Eagles for the Championship lead heading into today's R2 with 8 faults. A stunning clear from Linda Heed and Decurio took the pressure off Simon Delestre and the rapid Tinka's Hero Z but one down brought the total up to 12 faults and leaving them just ahead of the Berlin Eagles.

The first double clear from reigning Championship winners Valkenswaard United's Edwina Tops-Alexander on Fellow Castlefield and U25 rider Gilles Thomas with Luna van het Dennehof kept the team on their overnight score of 8 faults to briefly take over the top spot, looking to claw back their disappointing day one result. The team would go on to rise meteorically through the field, as time and time again the world's best were caught out by the tricky course to secure a top 5 finish.

Shanghai Swans rider Christian Ahlmann put in an inspired round with Solid Gold Z to deliver a clear for the team, and just a further 4 faults from Jeanne Sadran in a fast time put them on the podium and claiming a hefty number of all-important Championship points. Tactics proved crucial once again; Rome Gladiators pulled star striker Pieter Clemens off the bench, but their strategy didn't pay off as they had two down and the team dropped down the order.

After a slow start to the season Paris Panthers finally had a bit of luck on their side. Harrie Smolders and superstar Monaco delivered the goods with a solid clear but once again 4 faults from Ben Maher and Faltic HB kept the team off the podium today.

With just two teams left to go, the tension could be cut with a knife in the packed out grandstands.

With the final fence to go, Brynseels and Delux van T & L showed no signs of pressure to clear the huge oxer, finishing clear for the Prague Lions. But an early fault from Devos and Mom's Toupie de la Roque meant the time was crucial and the wait was longer to see if the Hearts could keep a clean sheet.

Last to go Stockholm Hearts powered by H&M We Love Horses put in one of the strongest pairings with Malin Baryard-Johnsson on her top horse H&M Indiana and world number one Peder Fredricson and Catch Me Not S. Baryard-Johnsson jumped a flawless clear giving Fredricson room for one pole but he needed to be fast. Team tactics came into play as he went for the slow and steady clear but a light touch in the latter part of the course meant they also finished with 4 faults and in a slower time than the Lions handing them the win.

The League now heads to Hamburg, Germany, where teams will be looking to take the spotlight in the sixth leg of the Championship race.