

Rodrigo Pessoa and Rufus win \$150,000 FEI World Cup Grand Prix at the Winter Equestrian Festival

Michelle Spadone, in her first World Cup Final, takes second over several Olympic riders.

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Rodrigo Pessoa on Rufus winning the \$150,000 FEI World Cup Grand Prix presented by Spy Coast Farm at the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington Saturday night. © 2009 Ken Braddick Brazil's Rodrigo Pessoa clinched a berth in the FEI World Cup Final in Las Vegas with a win Saturday night aboard his Olympic mount Rufus in the \$150,000 FEI World Cup Grand Prix presented by Spy Coast Farm at the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington.

Michelle Spadone of Califon, New Jersey on the Belgian Warmblood mare, Melisimo, who has never seen a World Cup Final and was a last-minute addition placed second in the competition with 45 starters from nine countries. Among them were 2008 Olympic medalists Beezie Madden and Laura Kraut of the USA, Eric Lamaze and Ian Millar of Canada, plus Ben Maher of Great Britain, Ljubov Kochetova of Russia and Pablo Barrios of Venezuela.

The course, designed by Germany's Olaf Petersen, proved too much for most of the entrants with only eight pairs advancing to the jump off at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center. Three went double clear.

Pessoa, aboard the 11-year-old Dutch Warmblood owned by Double H. Farms, posted a fast time of 42.80 secs. over 25-year-old Spadone on Melisimo, a 15-year-old Dutch Warmblood owned by the Morgan Hill Partners, who posted a time of 44.63 secs. Hillary Dobbs aboard Quincy B was the last of the double clears and posted a time of 46.92 secs.

Pessoa, a three-time World Cup champion and a decade older who won the qualifier last month in Jacksonville, Fla. was happy with securing his position in the West European League that will enable him to compete in the Final in Las Vegas in mid-April.

"It wasn't necessary to go crazy, I just kept the turns tight," he said. "I really needed the points for the World Cup.

"Mission accomplished!"

While the first place purse of \$45,000 went to the veteran, the second place prize of \$33,000 went to World Cup novice Spadone. It was her biggest jumping pay day.

Usually showing in Ocala, Fla. this was Spadone's first week at WEF. She placed fourth in the Jacksonville World Cup qualifying class.

Even so, she initially did not make the cut for Saturday's class. However, she received a call Saturday morning informing her someone scratched and she was in.

"I had been preparing and riding all week, hoping someone would scratch," she said.

With help from Jimmy Torano, Pessoa and her husband Emil, who flew in for the class and knows her mare Melisimo well, Michelle "thought about the time, just tried to go clear, and stuck to the plan."

Going first in the jump off she said her strategy was to "go as fast as I could but leave all the jumps up. I didn't want to risk a rail."