Hickstead's cause of death released after post mortem examination

The champion show jumping horse collapsed and died after competing at a World Cup competition in Italy.

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Eric Lamaze and Hickstead clear the liverpool at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games Photo: Leslie Potter

Hickstead, the mount of 2008 individual Olympic show jumping gold medalist Eric Lamaze, collapsed and died unexpectedly due to an aortic rupture that led to heart failure according to preliminary necropsy results.

The cause of the aortic rupture is still unknown and would likely be difficult to pinpoint even with further examination. Hickstead's body has been cremated.

Hickstead was the pride of the Canadian equestrian community, helping the show jumping team earn team silver in addition to Lamaze's individual gold. The pair earned individual bronze at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

"He made sure I was OK and just kind of fell beside me," Lamaze said of the horse's final moments. "That's what I believe. It's hard for me to remember second for second what happened. He collapsed and I fell far away from him. I think he collapsed in a way that he made sure he did not injure me in the process.

"It's not like breaking a hockey stick or a tennis racquet. We become very close to these animals. We're in the limelight with these horses and Hickstead for sure changed my career. For me, he meant everything."

Lamaze, 43, has considered retiring from competition, but says he is "not ready to go yet." He is competing this week at the Royal Horse Show in Toronto where his fellow riders wore black armbands in remembrance of Hickstead.