

In Rio, the U.S. Adds More Gold to its Medal Counts

Christopher Hickey delivers Gold and Lauren Sammis takes silver in the Pan American Games Dressage Individual Finals.

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Wednesday was a double-medal day for Team USA's dressage competitors at the Pan American Games as Maryland's Christopher Hickey aboard the 9-year-old Dutch gelding Regent won the gold medal with an averaged score of 70.725 percent after performing their freestyle before an appreciative crowd. New Jersey's Lauren Sammis, who had led the scores at the end of the Team competition, finished in silver-medal position with 69.925 percent after delivering an entertaining freestyle aboard Sagacious HF. The bronze medal went to the Dominican Republic's Yvonne Losos de Muniz aboard Bernstein las Marismas with an averaged score of 69.500 percent.

Fifteen combinations competed for individual medals at Brazil's National Equestrian Center located 45 minutes outside of downtown Rio de Janeiro. It was a cloud-covered event with cool temperatures. However, the action in the arena warmed the fans of dressage from across the Americas who came to cheer on their countries. Yesterday's final was decided by an average score taken from the Intermediaire I score posted on Monday and Wednesday's Intermediaire I freestyle score.

All throughout this competition, Hickey, 38, rode his tests boldly and with confidence ... and it paid off. In a very complicated freestyle set to pulsating techno beats followed by undulating ambient percussion, one mistake could have caused a horrible domino effect, and Hickey was careful to keep things in balance and on par with the performances he has put in over his Pan Am debut.

"When I make one little mistake, especially in the canter, which I did today, it can go down the drain very quickly because things come up so fast," he said. A mistake in his tempis was a place where things could have gone very wrong. "I intended to re-ride the three-tempis. I came into the three-tempis between the pirouettes, and my brain was saying three-tempis and my legs did two-tempis. I did a few and then thought, 'Oh my God, these are twos! They are supposed to be threes!' It was too late to do anything about it. It's a complicated freestyle that has well-calculated risks."

Of all the freestyles performed today, Hickey's music was truly a standout and a very good match for his mount. "My music is very powerful and was done by a friend of mine, Anne Guptill of Equestrian Arts Production, and my partner, Richard, picked most of the music out," he said. "My horse is a strong, big-moving horse, and he can be very expressive when he picks himself up decides to show off. I think that music really works well for him ... with a different kind of horse, it would not be as successful of freestyle, I think. When that horse hears that music, and that music helps me, it's a wonderful thing."

Sammis, aboard the eight-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding, Sagacious HF (owned by Hyperion Farm) couldn't have been happier with her medal bid.

"I have a young horse," Sammis said. "For me, this is only the beginning of his career...he's brilliant."

Sammis acknowledged that to get to a Pan Am medal-winning moment, it takes more than the efforts of just one person, plus a long journey for anyone willing to set out on it. "It takes an enormous team to make one horse go down that centerline," she said. "You have six minutes in the arena, and you have months and years of training. It's a real commitment, so I would like to thank everybody who has helped me along the way. The experience in Brazil has been just a magical time. The people have been just so generous and helpful. It's just been wonderful."