

## U.S. Team victorious in the Las Vegas World Cup Hunter Challenge

**After losing to the European team in 2005, a rematch left the U.S. team triumphant.**

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The World Cup Team Hunter Challenge rematch was met in stride, literally, as riders negotiated some of the nation's top horses around the Richard Jeffrey designed course at the Thomas & Mack arena on April 21. In the end it was the U.S. team of Louise Serio, John French, Peter Pletcher and Scott Stewart who won, up against European show jumping riders Rodrigo Pessoa, Michael Whitaker, Christian Ahlmann and Marcus Ehning.

Team USA scored 462.32 to Team Europe's total of 440.98. Those points followed an afternoon of fun and camaraderie as some of the riders performed effortlessly while others had their skills tested. All were aboard horses they'd never ridden before.

"It's an honor to be in this class. It's an honor to sit next to this group of riders, these European Superstars," Serio said. "We are thrilled that we won this time but it's a tough class because the horses have a hard time in this venue. They get a little spooky with the atmosphere, crowd and noise. It is just so different from anything they are used to. We need to give them all credit for trying to go well. It's a truly novel experience for all of us."

Despite their problems the riders spoke positively about the experience and the sport of hunters.

"We go to a lot of shows but we don't go to shows of this magnitude that showcase the hunters. This is an international event where you have people from all over. I wish the hunters could be a little bit more of an international type sport," French commented.

Serio added, "It would be great if we could have more classes on an international level and maybe raise the bar for the hunters a little bit. I think the hunters are going in a great direction right now and there are a number of things happening on the horizon."

George Morris, who was one of the judges, also wants to see the hunters go international. Morris would like to see the hunter classes return to what they once were. "I'm a traditionalist with the hunter divisions. These were much closer to the fences of the hunting field and much closer to the fences we jumped years ago in the hunter division. I thought Richard Jeffrey did a great course and I loved the fences."

Morris continued, "I really respect those guys (the show jumping riders) here for sticking their necks out and participating in this. They are great sportsmen. They are superstars and icons to all of us. And I respect the others for going up against them. They are great riders. It's a fun competition and very good for our sport in this country."

Morris believes that the hunters can and should be an international sport. "Lots of these horses are coming from different countries. I'd like to see the anti upped for the hunter division and see it become international."

American Hunter-Jumper Foundation (AHJF) President Geoff Teall revealed that he is working on a committee that is at the "very beginning stages of a very long road. It is time for the hunters to get back to being more exciting with bigger jumps and more difficult courses. We need to bring an international flare to it and involve more and more people."

The Challenge first took place in 2005 but after the Europeans dominated that first competition, the U.S. riders wanted a chance to show that was only a fluke. And in the 2007 World Cup they proved that while the hunters may appear simpler than the show jumping classes, it clearly requires good riding if you want to win. It also was a great opportunity to show the packed arena of spectators that hunters can be entertaining to watch.