

## U.S. Hunters Prepare for Rematch

**After taking a loss in 2005, four top U.S. riders will once again challenge the top European riders in the World Cup Team Hunter Challenge.**

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U.S. TEAM (l-r): John French, Peter Pletcher, Scott Stewart, Louise Serio      The Las Vegas World Cup may be focused on show jumping and dressage but for the second time it will also showcase the sport of hunters; this time as a rematch. At 3:00 p.m., April 21, 2007 the World Champion Hunter Rider (WCHR) World Cup Team Hunter Challenge will take place at the Thomas & Mack Arena in Las Vegas. The Challenge pits four of the top U.S. hunter riders against four of the top European jumper riders on world class horses that will be on loan for this special occasion. In 2005, when international riders Rodrigo Pessoa (Brazil), Marcus Ehning (Germany), Michael Whitaker (Great Britain) and Nick Skelton (Great Britain) faced off against U.S. riders Louise Serio (Penn.), Scott Stewart (N.J.), John French (Calif.), and Peter Pletcher (Texas), the world was watching. Although the U.S. Team lost to the Europeans, the impact of that competition was far reaching. For the first time in history, show hunters were showcased on an international stage. The Hunter Challenge proved that this sport has the potential of appealing to a worldwide audience.

Now, two years later, they have yet another chance to face the challenge that was first presented to them. The same riders will participate, except Nick Skelton, who will be replaced by Germany's Christian Ahlmann. All of these riders have credentials that put them at the top of their league. All the European riders are Olympic medalists; Pessoa won an individual gold; Ehning a team gold; Whitaker a team silver; and Ahlmann a team bronze. If the Olympics offered hunter competition, the four U.S. riders would surely have added that prestigious event to their list of accomplishments. However, their credentials showcase them as each having won the Monarch International Show Circuit Magazine WCHR Professional Hunter Rider title at least twice.

Now, as the rematch approaches, both teams are grooming their skills, polishing their boots and getting ready for their chance to prevail. The American riders are looking to beat the defending champions and the Europeans are hoping to defend their title.

Most of the riders will be arriving in Las Vegas on April 18. The draw for their horses takes place that evening at Manadabay Bay, along with the draw for the order of go for the World Cup show jumpers and dressage riders. The horses arrive the next day, on April 19.

Once in Las Vegas, the schedule includes schooling on Friday and Saturday morning. There will also be opportunities to school in an outside arena. The riders are allowed to ride in their own saddles. The horses will come with their own trainers and grooms.

While show jumpers are judged on what happens in the ring based on objective criteria (where faults are accumulated and speed is a factor in who wins), hunters are judged subjectively, with the scoring based on the horse's smooth way of going, jumping style and overall presentation.

The format of the competition will consist of two rounds. In the first round, each team of four riders will compete over a 3-foot-6-inch course and will be judged by three pairs of judges. Each team will receive three scores, which will then be averaged. The lowest scoring competitor's total will be dropped for the team competition and the remaining scores added together for a single round team cumulative total.

The second round will be a handy course where the rider's interpretation of the course will be rewarded and emphasis will be placed on turns and promptness (again the lowest score is dropped). Riders will compete on a different horse. The scores of both the first and second rounds will be combined. The team with the highest two-round score will win. The horse with the highest two-round score will claim the title of "High Score Horse." Plus, the rider producing the highest cumulative total will earn the title of "Leading Rider."

The horses have been divided into two teams and a flip of the coin will decide which team will ride which set of horses. Once each rider completes his or her first round, the teams will switch horses for the Handy competition, which might include turns, gallops, inside tracks and a trot jump.

The Show Jumping Manager for the event is Robert Ridland. Karen Healey and Geoff Teall have been named Chef d'Equipe of the U.S. Team, Ann Symes for the European Team and Louise Serio will captain the U.S. Team.



The judges who will be there to decide the outcome will include: Scott Williamson, Wellington, Fla.; Julie Winkle, Reno, Nev.; George Morris, Wellington, Fla.; Linda Hough, Calif.; Ralph Caristo, Saugerties, N.Y. and Tom Wright, Cincinnati, Ohio. The Course Designer will be Richard Jeffrey, who was the first to receive the American Hunter-Jumper Foundation's (AHJF) inaugural Hunter Course Designer award.