

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

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PRACTICAL HORSEMAN EXTRA

6 TIPS FROM FEI WORLD CUP™ FINAL HOPEFULS

McLain Ward's Water Jump Masterclass

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Samantha Cohen and Billy Olive successfully navigate the water jump that gave so many riders trouble during the mock Nations Cup at the U.S. Equestrian Horsemastership Training Session.

CONQUERING THE WATER

Olympic veteran McLain Ward led an impromptu lesson on how to jump water during the U.S. Equestrian Horsemastership Training Session.

By Jocelyn Pierce ■ Photos by Amy K. Dragoo



Olympic gold medalist McLain Ward walks Conrad Homfeld's course with the 12 participants.

The morning did not go the way many of the young riders envisioned. The 12 riders participating in the three-day U.S. Equestrian Horsemastership Training Session were being put to their final test by riding in a mock Nations Cup competition. Headlining the quasi-competition, two-time Olympic show-jumping gold medalist McLain Ward began the day by walking Conrad Homfeld's course with the participants and later offered insightful feedback on horse and rider after each round. Just as in a CSIO Nations Cup, the three teams of four riders would jump two rounds over the same course. The highest score from each round would be discarded and the three best scores from each round would be totaled for a team score to determine the winner.

But halfway through the first round it was clear that many of the riders were struggling with Fence 7—the water jump. Run-outs, stops and even falls plagued the riders, adding a sense of dread as each new rider cantered through the timers to start her round. Soon the focus of the day was not on which team would win, but instead on who could make it over the water.

Chefs d'Equipe Anne Kursinski, Beezie Madden and Kent Farrington—all Olympians—each gave their team expert instruction and preparation before heading into the arena to be surveyed by McLain, the 2017 World Cup champion. In addition to his remarks on how to school the water



McLain had praise for Caitlyn Connors, who showed a lot of composure during her rounds, even when she lost her stirrup at the beginning of her second trip aboard Express Blue GP Du Bois Madame.

TIP

In your competition warm-up, have a game plan and believe in your game plan.

jump, McLain focused on having a plan and effective and correct rider position.

Preparation is Key

Riders had access to a large schooling area outside the main arena, but McLain and Conrad requested that two more warm-up fences be put at the end of the main ring so McLain could comment on how the chefs, trainers and riders used that area to prepare themselves.

"The warm-up is such an important part of our success in the ring," McLain said. "It's a place that should be calm, organized; you should have a game plan. You've got to believe in your game plan, and everything you do in the schooling area should be in mind with trying to set your horse up the best way you can for the test at hand."

McLain also stressed the importance of making the practice fences count. "It's better to have a few good ones than a lot of bad ones," he said, echoing Kent Farrington's sentiment in his gymnastics session the previous day about jumping the horse the least amount possible to achieve the desired result. "You don't just keep jumping and jumping until something goes wrong. If your horse feels good and he's paying attention

and you feel confident, you've got to go with that," McLain continued.

First to go in the order, Olivia Woodson had two refusals at the water and was eliminated. McLain told Olivia that the horse was behind her leg and she didn't have enough impulsion to the water. He also scolded her for not carrying a whip. "I'm not a believer that you have to have a whip and spurs with every horse, but myself—if I had seen that water jump in this ring in a team competition where other people are counting on me ..." he trailed off. "I think that's a big mistake. You weren't able to reprimand that horse appropriately and get into him. That's not a riding error, that's a preparation error."

Kendra Duggleby also didn't make it past the water and McLain pointed to her plan of attack as the problem. He admitted that she rode the beginning of her course well but noted that her lack of preparation before beginning her round contributed to her elimination at the water. "You never pulled up and got yourself organized before you started," McLain said. "You went right from the trot to the canter and then right to the first jump, which is a sign of anxiety. You need to compose yourself more."

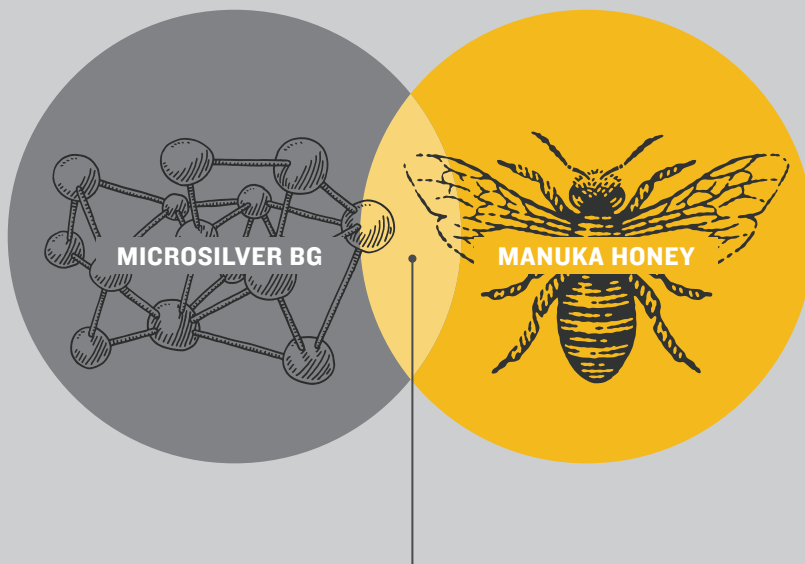
He explained that her problems on course began at Fence 5, the wall, where the horse was backing off a bit. While he praised Kendra for riding it well with a good deep seat, he said that should have been a red flag to wake up the horse because she had a solid hedge fence coming next,

followed by the water. "You got the hedge over done and then you started to ride at the water and you changed your mind," explained McLain. "You did a pretty strong half-halt and as soon as you did the half-halt, he was out of the situation. Then, to my point—the reason why I make the point about your entrance—is your plan of attack the second time around was not well thought out. You came off the right blind, short turn. I would've gotten the horse up in that corner. I would've given him a crack with the whip behind the saddle and I would've given myself the best approach possible to get over that water jump. The way you approached the water the second time was a clear sign of not being organized in your brain. It wasn't a riding error; you just didn't think it through clearly. That showed itself in your entrance."

Much as he had with Kendra, McLain pointed to Delaney Flynn's lack of preparation as the cause of her elimination at the water. McLain said he wasn't surprised the riders were struggling to get over the fence because they weren't reacting effectively to the stop and setting themselves to get over it on the second try. "No one addressed the horse properly when he stopped," he explained. "Use the whip appropriately behind the saddle. Get them moving forward. It's OK to make a mistake. The bigger point is to react to the mistake."

Position, Position, Position

Natalie Dean had two solid rounds with no major errors. McLain praised her for overcoming the pressure of having to get a clean round because her teammate had been eliminated, but offered a word of caution on her upper-body position. "You're a tall girl so you have to be a little bit aware of your upper body in the air," McLain said. "Some places it was excellent, like the triple combination, where you just stayed in the middle like a gymnastic. A couple places you tried to catch up, like at the plank. That's not necessary. Stay in the middle, let that horse come up to you," he said. He also suggested she watch riders who have a tall upper body so that should could emulate them.



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Riding Bon Vivant, McKayla Langmeier had two solid rounds and McLain compared her demeanor and riding style to Olympian Beezie Madden's.

After Alexandra Piolet's double-clear round McLain explained she needed to focus on improving her lower-leg position if she wanted to continue up the levels. "Ninety percent of your problems stem from your lower leg not being connected to your horse," he said. "I think you have a nice feeling for the horse and the stride. That [lower-leg] weakness will decide how far you will go. If you can get the lower leg connected where it makes your position more solid and you can support your horse more and stay in the middle, you can go a long way," he encouraged. "If you don't get that better as the jumps get bigger, it's going to rear its ugly head."

When Cecily Hayes, who was riding an unfamiliar, green horse, was also eliminated at the water, McLain zeroed in on the lack of connection to the horse. "Whether the horse is being bad or good or green or inexperienced or just a bugger, again as I said to some of the earlier riders, you guys shouldn't be losing your stirrups," McLain said. "You've got to expect that this is coming. They've shown that to you in the first round. You're losing your stirrups—that's not OK. You can work through the horse's problems or greenness, but your position, your connection to the horse, shouldn't be compromised in that situation. If I know it's coming, they're not going to get me off."

Overall, McLain thought Samatha Cohen put in two good rounds, but he told her she needed to make sure she was staying connected and not pulling on the left rein and then the right rein. He blamed her lack

Anne Kursinski: Effective Position

Five-time Olympian Anne Kursinski taught the flatwork on the first day of the training session. She stressed controlling body position to communicate with the horse effectively and having a better connection to the horse both in the seat and hands.

Anne explained that the rider's whole body influences the horse's whole body to become one unit. "Position, position, position on the flat," Anne said. This will help a rider use her aids correctly, and also at the right moment. "Horses will try to put you in a place that's less effective," she explained. It's up to the rider to have the discipline and awareness to react appropriately.

To improve the riders' connection to the horses, she had them work without stirrups in the walk, trot and canter as well as in lateral movements and transitions. She noted that most of the riders' transitions were better when they didn't have their stirrups to rely on because they were sitting deeper, with a better feel of the horse. She also knotted the riders' reins and had them hold the reins in front of the knot, making them noticeably shorter. "Ride with long arms and short reins," said Anne. This allowed riders to feel a better connection through the bridle and keep their hands steady.

Correct body awareness and position are so much of what makes a rider successful, Anne said, citing examples of greats like Beezie Madden and McLain Ward. "Things happen more quickly and efficiently when a rider is connected," Anne explained, adding that when you sit in the right place and use your hands and legs correctly, it should feel like you are one with the horse and the horse is reading your mind. "You don't see the top riders pulling and pushing and yee-hawing and hauling, and that's where it becomes a real art," she said.

of connection as the reason why her horse swapped his leads. "Try to keep it more like one unit and the horse will stay smoother," he said. (For more on the importance of rider position, see the sidebar above about Anne Kursinski's day of flatwork during the training session).

Credit Where Credit Is Due

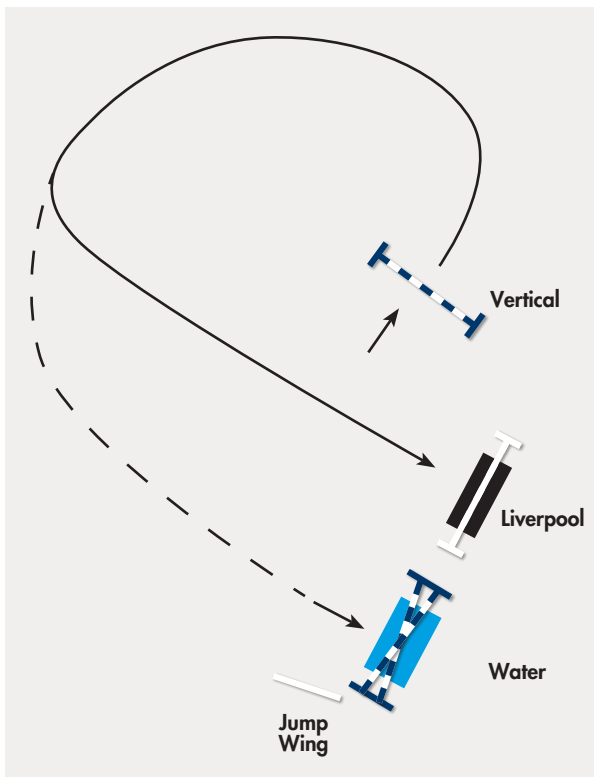
In addition to the critiques, McLain was quick to praise. Second to go in the order, Caitlyn Connors rode an impressive first round and set the tone for the other competitors. "That was a great round. You came in very organized, determined, in control," McLain noted. After her second flawless trip, McLain applauded Caitlyn. "I noticed in both rounds your composure," he said. "The first round, you knew your horse, you knew his scope. This round, you lost your stirrup after the second jump and you never lost your cool through that turn. You took a moment,

you got your stirrup back. It was a mistake, but it showed great composure. I see a composure and a ring presence that's beyond your years and I commend you on that."

McLain also gave kudos to McKayla Langmeier, whom he said was "a strong rider without pushing the horse through the fence," and compared her demeanor to the horses and her riding style to Beezie's. "Even if she's upset with something, it doesn't come through in her communication with the horse and you see the horses respond well," McLain said about Beezie and noted that McKayla's horse seemed to be gaining confidence as he went. He continued that it was important to always analyze your ride and ask, "Is my horse getting better, is he gaining in confidence or is he getting worse?"

Schooling the Water

At the end of the Nations Cup, McLain worked with five of the riders who didn't



McLain shortened the width of the water, made the vertical rails on top of it into a crossrail, positioned the ferns on the side into a welcoming V-shaped chute and added a wing on the right side to help prevent runouts. The shallow liverpool fence that the riders had all successfully jumped was placed to the left side of the water jump.

make it beyond the water in either round. "Kids will treat the water like any other fence and it's not," McLain acknowledged. "It's a natural fence. You have to be more defensive."

McLain also stressed that a horse should



McLain was impressed with Natalie Dean, riding Dylandra. She overcame the pressure of having to get a clean round because her teammate had been eliminated, but her upper-body position caused McLain to offer a word of caution.



Sara McCloskey was commended for managing Calumpi's big stride, but McLain noted that she could work on her position and making her rounds smoother.



McLain watches as Kendra Duggleby and Silver Lining jump the water successfully during his impromptu training session after the Nations Cup.

never run out to the left or right and the rider should be stronger to keep him straight to the fence. "When they run outside the side, you're opening a door," he said. "If I'm riding a horse or Beezie is riding a horse that stops at the water, I guarantee you that horse is not going to run by one way or the other. He might stop at it but he's not running by the side."

McLain shortened

the width of the water, made the vertical rails on top of it into a crossrail, positioned the ferns on the side into a welcoming V-shaped chute and added a wing on the right side to help prevent runouts. He also

moved the shallow liverpool fence that the riders had all successfully jumped on course to the left side of the water jump.

The riders were instructed to jump a single vertical to get the horses thinking forward and then come around on the right lead to the liverpool on a long approach, much like the approach in the Nations Cup course. Once they had successfully jumped the vertical followed by the liverpool two to three times, McLain instructed the riders to again jump the vertical but instead of coming to the liverpool, they were to jump the water.

"This is how I would school the water with a horse that is a little nervous about it," McLain later explained to the riders. "I give a very mild presentation of the water with the liverpool so that the horse can't get in trouble and gains confidence." Once the horse is comfortable, McLain would pilot him to the water instead. "The horse goes right over the water before he realizes it wasn't the liverpool."

When a few of the riders leaned forward and released one stride from the takeoff, McLain stressed the need to stay in a defensive position. "Sit down and stay behind the motion," he called.

Each of the five riders jumped it on the first attempt in McLain's exercise. "You have to understand how to get your horse over water. You have to understand what we just practiced," McLain explained to the group. Finally, his closing remarks were words of encouragement: "You have to walk away from this experience knowing you were all able to conquer this water—it didn't beat you." 🐾

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Tips from U.S. riders at the top of the Longines
FEI Jumping World Cup™ North American League
rankings ahead of the FEI World Cup™ Finals Omaha.

**McLain Ward and
HH Azur at the
2017 FEI World Cup
Finals in Omaha,
Nebraska.**

BY JULIA MURPHY

PHOTO BY AMY K. DRAGOO



CWD

Hunter Holloway and Pepita Con Spita in the CSI5* Grand Prix during Week 5 of the 2023 Winter Equestrian Festival.



Top U.S. jumping athletes have their sights set on the 2023 Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final in Omaha, Nebraska, in April. These six World Cup™ hopefuls shared tips and tricks they keep in mind and in practice while gearing up for the event.

1. MCLAIN WARD: Stay Positive

"Just because you didn't have a jump-off or you had an unlucky four faults and you're not sitting where you want, [try] not to be discouraged."

2. DEVIN RYAN: Try Not to Overthink

"I think we sometimes think too much when we get to the championships and we want to over prepare ourselves. I think we can make it too complicated. If your horse has been in good form, don't change the program you have. Don't change anything special. Keep on doing what you're doing, because that's how you got there."

3. LILLIE KEENAN: Practice the Gallop

"With the World Cup™ Finals in mind

and being that it's indoor, one training tip that I keep revisiting ... I think it's easy to fall out of the habit of remembering how to gallop. But, really, horses jump their best out of a gallop. Especially when you're going to an indoor event, it's all the more important to keep the pace. I like to take my horses out and just gallop in a big field. Practice [galloping] in different places that aren't necessarily comfortable. No matter what level you're jumping, it's important to do that. [For example], when you go into a jump-off and you want to up the gear, you don't want to feel like you don't know what you have under you. So, I really like to remember that horses are meant to gallop and jump. That's the basis of our sport."

4. BRIAN MOGGRE: Establish Your Goals & Create a Plan

"I have two [tips]," said Moggre. "First, smooth is fast. The smoother you can be, the faster you're going to be. And second, establish clear goals. Set goals, and create a plan in order to execute them. I think that's the number one step in being

able to achieve anything—to recognize the goal and work backwards."

5. HUNTER HOLLOWAY: Get Comfortable in Small Spaces

"Gearing up for World Cup™ Finals, you know you're going to be in a tiny indoor arena. ... I think getting used to jumping in that small of an arena helps a lot. No matter what, when you put that many big jumps [in a ring], no matter the size of the ring, it's going to feel tiny. Usually, it's the rider that the horse is waiting for. It's usually on us if something doesn't go right or if a mistake happens."

6. LAURA KRAUT: Keep the Jumping to a Minimum

"I'm a big believer in doing a lot of flatwork but also a lot of hacking out and riding out cross-country. Not just walking, but actually letting the horses trot, canter and gallop to keep their minds fresh and happy. That's really my routine. And when we do jump, it's normally an exercise of some form like gymnastics, never courses." 🐾

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