

Jumping Verona

2023

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LOVING VERONA, AND LOOKING FORWARD TO THE LONGINES FEI WORLD CUP

French rider **Julien Epailard** is drawn last to go in tomorrow's **Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ 2023/2024 Western European League** qualifier at Jumping Verona, and that's not a comfortable situation for the 39 other starters who will be chasing down points.

It may be a world-class field that includes seven of the top-10 in the Longines rankings headed up by last year's winner, Sweden's **Henrik von Eckermann**, who has held the number one spot for a very long time now.

But they all know that **Epailard** is fast and formidable. And if he jumps clear in tomorrow's first round then he'll be the man to beat.



Julien Epailard - ph. JV / S.Grasso

Back

Only one other French rider has ever won the World Cup competition at Verona however and he has returned to chase down victory number three. **Simon Delestre** reigned supreme with the great **Hermes Ryan** for the first time in 2015, and then came back to do it again six years later in 2021. He's very much hoping he can do it one more time.

He's already a member of a fairly exclusive club as one of just two riders to win twice in Verona, Dutchman **Albert Zoer** coming out on top with another great horse, **Okidoki**, in 2005 and 2007.

The Roll of Honour for the World Cup in Verona is like a 'who's who' of the sport, sprinkled with stars going all the way back to the first winning partnership in 2001, Belgium's **Stanny van Paesschen** with O de Pomme.

The history of the Italian leg of the series goes even further back to the very first event in Milan in 1983 before moving on to Birago and then to Bologna where it was staged on six occasions before eventually finding its home in Verona.

Lady rider

The only lady rider ever to win during the 40 years since it first began was Switzerland's **Lesley McNaught Mandli** who came out on top in Bologna in 1999. A total of seven lady riders will line out in tomorrow's competition, and they'll need to be on their very best form if they are to keep the opposition at bay.

Apart from double World Champion and reigning Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ titleholder von Eckermann, the start-list boasts the reigning European champion **Steve Guerdat** from Switzerland, reigning Olympic champion **Ben Maher** from Great Britain and multiple previous World Cup winners including three-timers **Marcus Ehning** and Guerdat whose connection with Jumping Verona goes right back to the very beginning.

They'll all have to watch out for Epailard however. With his other top ride, the 10-year-old mare Dubai du Cedre, he was pinned back to second place by Belgium's **Gregory Wathelet** on home turf in Lyon, France last weekend. He intends putting that to rights tomorrow when he partners Donatello d'Auge.

Good form

«My horse is in good form but it's easy enough to have one down. I hope tomorrow it works!», the Frenchman said today. He is delighted to return to the beautiful Italian city.

«Verona is very special, it's the city of Romeo and Juliet and I love it! The last time I came was 2009, it has always been a great show here but I couldn't fit it into my programme for the last few years. This year I have enough horses and I'm very happy to be back», he added. And he's feeling a bit lucky....

«Italy has been great for me this year!», he said, referring to the individual bronze medal he won at the FEI European Championships 2023 in Milan during the summer.

Determined

He is determined to qualify for the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ Final 2023 which will take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia next April. And also very much on his mind is fighting for France at the Olympic Games in his home country next summer.

«Paris is both close and far away right now, and I'm trying to prepare Dubai and Donatello. With the French Chef d'Equipe and the team we are preparing as best as possible. We have a plan, we have decided on breaks for the horses and when we need to ask a little bit more. We are preparing horse by horse because they are not all the same. Donatello needs really good physical conditions, Dubai jumps better when she's a bit fresh. So we do both plans and the most important thing is to keep the horses in good form - Paris 2024 is very important to all of us», he explained.

And what about his plans for tomorrow's World Cup competition in Verona? *«To jump clear in the first round is the first thing, after that we will see but I will always be doing my best to win!»*

Nobody doubts that... he already won yesterday's Banca Passadore Speed and tonight he did it all again when galloping the rest into the ground to top the Crivelli Winning Round with a spectacular performance against the clock.

The Longines FEI Jumping World Cup™ qualifier at Jumping Verona 2023 starts at 14.30 local time tomorrow. It's bound to be a thriller....

IT'S AN ITALIAN ONE-TWO IN THE FRANCO TUCCI SPEED

The spectators went wild with delight when **Lorenzo De Luca** posted the first Italian victory of the weekend in the **Franco Tucci** Speed at **Jumping Verona 2023** today.

Laying down an impossible target-time with a great ride on the 14-year-old gelding **Violino II Palazzetto** at the halfway stage of the competition, the Belgium-based 36-year-old had to sit back and watch the rest trying to match his clear round in 58.96 seconds, but in the end they couldn't even come close.

However there was even more for the home crowd to celebrate when fellow-Italian **Giampiero Garofalo** slotted into runner-up spot with the young mare **Jorisco** who broke the beam in **60.32** seconds, while the winning partnership from yesterday's opening competition, Germany's **Kendra Claricia Brinkop** and **Ma Belle**, finished third when clear in **60.47**.

Course designer Uliano Vezzani set them a clever course that was well up to height, and only eight of the 53 starters left all the poles in place while there were two eliminations and four riders opted to retire. It was no walk-in-the-park. The three doubles on the 12-fence track proved highly influential.



Lorenzo De Luca - ph. JV / S.Grasso

Delicate

«It was a proper 1.50m course and with the speed it was very delicate. There was a difficult double of verticals (6a/b) and there were some problems with the liverpools for some horses» de Luca explained. Violino didn't turn a hair however, zipping around the track with such speed that it was always going to be tough to beat him. «He is fast, very fast, and he doesn't waste any time in the air!», De Luca added.

He's delighted to have added the horse to his string this year.

«Violino is 14 years old and was bred by Rori Marzotto, the Italian owner who has supported me from a long time ago. She gave him to me in April and we started to build up our partnership and it's always been good. At every show he does a very good job, he's very competitive so I'm very glad to have him!», he said.

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