

LONGINES GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR

# LONDON LEG

By Aya Amr

AS A NOVICE IN THE SHOWJUMPING FIELD, IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DREAM OF MINE TO WATCH LIVE A LONGINES GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR (LGCT) EVENT. WITH A PASSION FOR HORSEBACK RIDING, I ALWAYS KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON LGCT NEWS. I MARK SEEING THEIR ASTONISHINGLY DESIGNED TECHNICAL FENCES WHERE INCREDIBLE TOP RIDERS AND HORSES COMPETE.



Qatar Faleh Suwead Al Ajami's "Come Soon" during the vet inspection





Britain's Scott Brash on Hello Sanctos

On a normal day in Leeds, UK where I was visiting my Mum, my dream came true. I was preparing our regular feature 'HT Headlines' in which we put news on the LGCT events. Then all of a sudden, it hit me: "I could cover the LGCT first-hand right here in London." I was overcome with excitement so I called my boss, Khaled Assem, and told him that I wanted to cover the LGCT. Of course, he encouraged me and we started preparing for Horse Times to attend and formally cover the LGCT. After booking my journey from Leeds to London, I gathered up borrowed kit, including my Mum's video camera and together with Khaled, I prepared interview questions; and then we were left with the final step: contacting the LGCT

whom we work closely with to get our media accreditation, which came through with the usual efficiency and helpfulness of the LGCT organizers.

I started reading about the venue, Syon Park, the spectacular London home of the Duke of Northumberland. The house was built in the sixteenth century on the site of the Medieval Syon Abbey and came to the family of the present owners in 1594. Syon has many layers of history and has seen some profound changes over the centuries. It is known world-wide as one of Robert Adam's best examples of neo-classical residential splendor houses, displaying an array of art and antiques collected over centuries by the Percy family.

Together with my Mum, we planned how I will get to the park after arriving to London. The exhaustion of the fraught journey failed to discourage me or affect my enthusiasm. Unfortunately, I was only able to cover the Grand Prix Day, but it was nevertheless my lucky day. The moment I walked into the breath-taking Syon Park, I was star-struck. I saw showjumping icon Beezie Madden, whom we had worked with before, walking towards me. Then, I saw the stellar Luciana Diniz and Patrice Delaceux who is on the cover of our HT's most recent book about the World Equestrian Games in Normandy. I saw the famous course designer, Uliano Vezzani; his first round of the Grand Prix was tough and challenging even for the world's top combinations with fences set at the brink at 1.60m. The course was challenging enough for the riders yet seemed somewhat more comfortable for the horses jumping it – a course designer's ultimate goal! Forty-five of the best riders in the world went through. It was designed to test the very best horse and rider combinations in the world that day as they rode for their share of the 400,000 Euro prize. The steep Greenwich fence, which was set as the first part of a double, caused many of the issues followed by quite a technically difficult line causing many riders to come out with faults.

Eighteen riders went through to round two; the second round caused relatively fewer problems, with sixteen out of the eighteen going clear, as riders jumped the nice flowing course and the time was not a factor.

The jump-off had some of the fences go up to a testing 1.65m, which meant the race to the finish line had to be more carefully calculated and ridden. Including tricky lines and angles throughout, those who had the pace also needed the scope and agility to tackle the twisting challenges of the course.

This was Rolf-Göran's first win of the season with the ever-consistent Casall Ask, racing against the clock. The calibre of riders was so high and the final round so intense.

First to ride triple clear was Rolf-Göran Bengtsson who set the time to beat at 34.91seconds. Britain's John Whitaker

looked incredibly competitive with his stallion, Argento who fired up responding to the crowd who were in full support of one of their star riders. At first, he looked almost identical on time; however fell just eight hundredths of a second short to finish in second place and left France's Simon Delestre with his beautiful black stallion Qlassic Bois Margot in third.

The final rider, Britain's Scott Brash was within the time and the crowd held their breath as he took a very short turn with his incredible gelding Hello Sanctos. However, he had the final fence down finishing in sixth place. Despite his obvious disappointment, he gained 31 valuable points in the championship race, pushing him ahead of former leader Luciana Diniz (POR) by 28 points.

Jan Tops - President and Founder of the Longines Global Champions Tour. "This is always an exciting leg; you could see with 16 in the jump-off, it was very fast and difficult to win. Rolf is in incredible form today, at the moment he is in 4th place. I think he could be a challenge to Luciana and Scott, he is coming from behind. I also want to thank our partners Longines and Qatar for making this great event possible. We are very happy with the first time here at Syon Park. For the horses and the riders the location is very good logistics wise - they have a lot of space, great footing, good stables and a lot of space."

Scott Brash - Longines Global Champions Tour ranking leader: "It is good; I am pleased to be at the top in this stage. I will do all the other venues apart from Rome so I have got a couple of extra chances. We have got to keep going, Rolf is going really well so we will keep trying."

Rolf-Göran Bengtsson: "My horse has proved that he is in good form. He jumped six times this season and every time he was in the second round, so I cannot be more than very happy with him. It's a pleasure for me to win here in London, I will try my best for the rest of the championship but as Jan said, I have still one more score to count. Scott is far away with 3 wins this season so far, so it's going to be hard to beat him." 🏆

All photos by Stefano Grasso/LGCT



Sweden's Rolf-Göran Bengtsson on Casall ASK

#### The Ranking Results after Vienna:

Rank	Rider	Points
1	Scott Brash	279.00
2	Luciana Diniz	277.00
3	Rolf-Göran Bengtsson	269.00
4	Simon Delestre	255.00
5	Christian Ahlmann	234.00
6	Sheikh Ali Bin Khalid Al Thani	195.00
7	John Whitaker	180.00
8	Penelope Leprevost	169.00
9	Pius Schwizer	162.00
10	Lauren Hough	149.00