

ROLF FULFILS LGCT TITLE DREAM

WITH AMAZING CASALL



IT WAS A NIGHT OF DREAMS AND THE STORY OF THOSE WHO NEVER GIVE UP, AS ROLF-GÖRAN BENGTTSSON (SWE) AND THE PHENOMENAL 17 YEAR OLD STALLION CASALL ASK CLAIMED BOTH THE LONGINES GLOBAL CHAMPIONS TOUR GRAND PRIX OF DOHA WIN AND THE PRESTIGIOUS 2016 CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS TITLE IN A MAGNIFICENT SHOWDOWN IN QATAR. DESCRIBING THE TITLE WIN AS “A DREAM COME TRUE”, ROLF HERALDED HIS MAGNIFICENT HORSE CASALL AS “JUST AMAZING”, WITH THEIR 11 YEAR PARTNERSHIP ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED IN THE WORLD.

His powerful season performance propelled him into pole position in the ranking for the final leg in Doha and Rolf's victory saw him take the lion's share of the **€1 million** bonus prize money as he takes his place on the list of LGCT Champions. On a Tour that saw the world's top show jumpers visit **15** incredible destinations, kicking off in Miami Beach, and reaching spectacular cities such as Mexico City, Monaco, Shanghai and Rome, it was the culmination of a fantastically consistent season for Rolf and Casall, with the pair taking wins in Valkenswaard and Paris, as well as podium finishes at other stops on the circuit.

In a night of high drama, Edwina Tops-Alexander (AUS) narrowly missed out on making history by becoming the first rider to win a hat-trick of titles, after a shock exit in the first round with fiery mare Lintea Tequila saw their Championship hopes dashed. The leading Australian rider settled for silver, and was delighted for Rolf, saying “**he truly deserved it tonight**”. World Number 1 and former long-time leader of the LGCT Ranking Christian Ahlmann (GER) was able to keep hold of his third place in the rankings after a strong performance from top stallion Taloubet Z, despite the threat from fellow Olympic athletes below.

In the press conference following the Grand Prix, it was revealed that the prestigious final event of the Longines Global Champions Tour will be staged at **AL SHAQAB** for the next three years. **His Highness The Father Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani and Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani** attended the final to witness the climax of the 2016 series, which was followed by the announcement of the new **three-year agreement**.

Sheikh Joaan also joined the prize giving awarding the Champions trophy to Rolf-Göran Bengtsson in a sign of Qatar's commitment to the promotion of world class equestrian sport and the increasing popularity of show jumping and riding in the country.

The magnificent AL SHAQAB equestrian centre was the perfect backdrop for a night of top level sport. Course designer **Uliano Vezzani** set a challenging first round, throwing questions to the **41** starters to open the LGCT Grand Prix of Doha. Despite first rider to go Marco Kutscher (GER) jumping a clean clear with Clenur, thrills and spills came thick and fast, with John Whitaker (GBR) almost unseated at the final Liverpool



Rolf-Göran Bengtsson & Casall ASK

fence by top mare Ornellaia. With a stop that would have dropped many of the best riders, John was able to sit tight, but the unfortunate fault knocked him out of the running. Bassem Hassan Mohammed (QAT) also had a hairy moment at fence **three**, a gappy oxer, with Dejavu knocking the popular Qatari rider off balance and causing him to lose a stirrup. Despite this, Bassem continued to the complex double combination, jumping a further **three** fences with just **one stirrup** before regaining it for the Longines triple. Despite the drama, the pair jumped clear, much to the delight of the local spectators, however picked up a time fault.

But the story of round one was Title rival Edwina Tops-Alexander's (AUS) shock exit from the competition, after rolling two poles in an uncharacteristic round with Lintea Tequila. The **8** faults meant Rolf would keep his winning lead of **5** points, and be crowned **2016** Champion of Champions.

Further big names were caught out at various elements on the course. Scott Brash (GBR) and Hello M'Lady were unlucky to pick up four faults, Lauren Hough (USA) and the eye-catching Cornet 39 collect a total of **8** penalties, while home hero Sheikh Ali Bin Khalid Al Thani (QAT) also rolled a pole with his Olympic horse First Devision, however was able to progress to round two after making up time with skilful riding. Despite the pressure now off the shoulders of Rolf, he and Casall delivered a stunning round, which left the rest of the field in no doubt of his intent to win the Grand Prix as well as the Championship title.

The top **18** riders would progress to round two, an impressive **9** of whom were German riders, including the full Olympic team, as well as rising stars Philip Houston (GER) and Andreas Kreuzer (GER). After his masterful first round, Rolf-Göran Bengtsson (SWE) was in pole position and the final rider to go. Laura Kraut

(USA) and Zeremonie, Simon Delestre (FRA), Lorenzo de Luca (ITA), Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum (GER), Christian Ahlmann (GER), Daniel Deusser (GER), Janne-Freiderike Meyer (GER) and Marco Kutscher (GER) joined Rolf on zero faults and the chance to create a jump-off.

First to enter Ludger Beerbaum (GER) rode a beautiful clear with Olympic horse Casello, but his **four** faults carried through meant he would be unable to progress to the jump off. Jos Verlooy (BEL), Harrie Smolders (NED) and Marcus Ehning (GER) all jumped clear, with Marcus the fastest for the four faulters after an impressive round with Funky Fred.

It would be a **seven** rider jump-off with Rolf and Casall once again in prime position of entering last after another breath-taking display of partnership and trust between horse and rider. Laura Kraut (USA) and her 9 year old grey mare Zeremonie were the first to set the pace, putting in an impressive performance to set the bar at **37.70s** to beat. Janne-Friederike Meyer (GER) and the expressive Goja looked strong but clipped a fence, and Christian Ahlmann (GER) with Taloubet followed suit, both out of the running for a podium. Daniel Dessuer (GER) and First Class van Eeckelghem made some incredible turns, with Daniel manoeuvring the long legged horse beautifully in a turn back to the penultimate vertical. The pair crossed the line in **36.84s**, raising the bar for those to come. Despite their best efforts Simon Delestre (FRA) and Meredith Michaels-Beerbaum (GER) couldn't match Daniel's time, settling for **5th** and **3rd** respectively.

The final round, in the final class of what's been a phenomenal show jumping season belonged to Rolf and Casall. Silence fell as the pair entered the ring, watched on by hundreds of thousands all around the world, through GCT TV, international live broadcast and the Tour's own Facebook Live. With the Championship title in the bag, Rolf looked determined to add tonight's Grand Prix to his accolades as he galloped the distances between fences one and two. With every stride the tension grew, with spectators whistling and cheering the formidable combination on at every fence. An incredible 180 degree turn back at the penultimate vertical and perfectly balanced stride saw Rolf and Casall leap slightly ahead, as they stretched for the finish line, crossing it in a brilliant **36.44s**. With the spectators on their feet Rolf raised his hat in the air in celebration to acknowledge their huge support, with an elated Casall bouncing to the cheer of the guests who gave the pair a standing ovation.

It was a fairytale ending for Rolf, and another incredible year for the Longines Global Champions Tour, which has seen the development of show jumping leap forward once again.

Jan Tops, Founder and President of Longines Global Champions Tour: *"I think Rolf really deserves to be champion of the year. Casall and him have been on the podium many times and coming in as a favourite*

and winning is amazing. He has been close a few years before and really deserves his title. This is not only a beautiful facility but also a horse facility and for the people. Everything you can want is here. The weather is great, the horses like it and they feel loose and they feel good on this fantastic footing. The Tour is really established and with the new League riders are saving their best horses and it has big, big potential."

Omar Al Mannai, Commercial Manager of AL SHAQAB: *"I really congratulate the riders. Rolf has done a great job all through the Tour and now he has confirmed he is champion. We are very happy to host Global Champions Tour here in Al Shaqab and because of the exposure we get from this event we have reached an agreement with Mr Jan Tops to have an agreement for the coming three years. State-of-the-art facilities like this need to be shown and to have more activities and more events and one of the most amazing events is the Global Champions Tour."*

Rolf-Göran Bengtsson, 2016 LGCT Champion of Champions: *"It was an evening you can dream of, but for it to come true you never think it is possible. My horse Casall ASK is just amazing. Still jumping at 17 years. He likes it and makes everything possible. What he has done for me is amazing. I am really, really happy. If he jumps like this it is hard to stop. We are going to have a discussion in the team but I feel with Casall right now it would be a shame to put him in a box and say it is all over. On the other hand you can't make it better than today. I have a great feeling if we manage we can continue but for how long we have to see."*

Edwina Tops-Alexander, 2016 LGCT Runner Up: *"I am overall very happy. I am disappointed with myself today - I decided to do one less down the line to the double, a little bit off plan, and I paid heavily for it. My horse is in great shape, and was maybe a little bit too fresh. I am here, second for a reason and I didn't deserve to win. Rolf absolutely deserve to win, he's had an amazing year - he saved the horse up especially for this final, which has paid off. He has had an amazing weekend winning the Grand Prix and the overall title today and the Global Champions League team competition."*

Christian Ahlmann, 2016 LGCT Third Place: *"I was really happy with Taloubet, he jumped two great rounds. I was hoping for better than 7th from seven in the jump off but I am really happy I can take my 3rd place (overall). Big congratulations to Edwina and Rolf. I agree 100% he is a really deserved champion this year."*

This article was first published on: www.globalchampionstour.com
The final took place in Doha, Qatar, from November 3 - 5
For full results, see: www.globalchampionstour.com/events/2016/doha/results/
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Cian O'Connor & Callisto