

Leaping Lauren

Spillers/Seminole rider, Olympian Lauren Hough, was the United States Equestrian Team's Athlete of the Year last November.

By Summer Best

Olympic veteran Lauren Hough reclined on a tack trunk in front of a tent barn at the 119th National Horse Show in Wellington, Florida, last winter. She was calm and cool – despite having a huge grand prix event – the \$100,000 National Horse Show Jumper Championship – to compete in just hours away.

“No one has ever won this event twice before,” she said calmly. “My horse feels great, and we'll do the best we can. When you're at this level, if your horse is prepared well, you've still got to have luck on your side.”

leaping lauren
Luck?

As it turned out, good fortune was on her side. Out of a field of 17 of the best riders in the country, only Lauren and the Clasiko, a 12-year-old Holsteiner gelding, and fellow Olympian Norman Della Joio riding Glasgow, jumped clean in the first round. Lauren and Norman rode the difficult jump-off course with precision and speed, but Norman had an unlucky rail down and a few time faults, putting Lauren in first place.

Moments after her victory gallop around the international arena, with crowds cheering and the band playing, Lauren was sitting in a National Horse Show press conference, all grins. And she was still thinking about luck.

“With grand prix jumping,” she said to a mass of media representatives from around the world, “it's got to be your lucky day.”

Roles and Goals

Lauren was only 23 when she competed at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, thanks to an early start in the horse world with parents Champ and Linda Hough. Linda, a prominent USA Equestrian judge, and Champ, an Olympic veteran of the 1952 US 3-day event team, had her riding good horses from the beginning. Lauren rode in her first grand prix when she was 15.

“I'm always impressed with riders who can stay at a top level for years at a time, and that's what I'd like to do,” she says. “I'm very fortunate to have the success I've had at such a young age. And I hope I can continue to do so for several years. As long as I can continue to stay at that level and have nice horses, I'll do so. I don't think I'll be 60 in still riding in grand prix,” she laughed.

“But maybe for 15 years or so.”

The equestrienne hopes to be on the US Olympic Show Jumping team in 2004, when the group heads to Greece. In the meantime, she has her sites set on the 2003 Pan Am Games and the 2003 World Cup, held in Las Vegas April 16-20.