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Darren Finkelman Who???

By: Molly Sorge



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"I had to laugh, because in between the first and second rounds [former World Champion] Gail Greenough was doing commentary for the TV, and she said that the 12 riders for the second round were a virtual 'Who's Who' of show jumping. I thought to myself, 'No, 11 of those, and one 'WHO???' said Darren Finkelman after the \$200,000 Queen Elizabeth Cup on July 9 at the Spruce Meadows North American Tournament.

That's right, Darren Finkelman, a rider who did his first grand prix two years ago and can be considered quite a rookie on the International Field, joined Olympic, World Cup and World Champions in the 12 horses qualified for the second round of the class. His company included Rodrigo Pessoa, Beezie Madden, McLain Ward, Nick Skelton, Ian Millar, and Laura Kraut.

Finkelman also works for the *Chronicle of the Horse* and is their European advertising representative.

"I'm just glad my heart's still beating!" Finkelman said after jumping the first round with just a single time fault. "Honestly, one I'd jumped the first fence, I just tried to react to what was happening. I had a plan, but I don't think I stuck to it!"

Finkelman and Argentinian Guillermo Obligado were the two one-faulters in the first round, joining seven clear rounds and three fast four-faulters for the second course. Finkelman and Kimber pulled one rail in the second round, and collected two time faults, but persisted to place ninth in the prestigious class.

Finkelman has spent the last five weeks competing in Spruce Meadows, and made his International Field debut the week before. With Kimber jumping well, he decided to give the big class a go. "I had the feeling like, 'We're here, just go and do it.' Everything else is going to seem very doable after this."

Finkelman, of Middleburg, Va., has been riding and showing his whole life, and spent two years in Sweden training in 1978 to 1980, but he's never had the horsepower to be able to compete at the top level. All that changed three years ago when old friends Danny and Carolyn Darby approached him about buying some horses for him to show. "I've been friends with them for 10 years, and then he came to me with an offer to fulfill my dreams. And here I am!" Finkelman said.

Finkelman's first grand prix class was on a horse named Bailys, in 2003. He rode with Joe Fargis for a while, then struck out on his own. Then, last year, he had the opportunity to acquire Kimber, a 12-year-old crossbred by Highline and the former ride of Royné Zetterman. "He's Pegasus. He tries all the time and he's so forgiving," Finkelman said. He first showed Kimber at the grand prix level last summer, and during the Winter Equestrian Festival (Fla.) worked his way up to the big Sunday classes. And after five weeks of Spruce Meadows, Finkelman was ready for the big challenge.

"As I keep climbing the ladder up the levels, I keep asking myself 'How much bigger does it get?' After we walked the first round today, Laura Kraut told me, 'It doesn't get any bigger than this,' Finkelman said. Now, Finkelman and his horses will head home to Middleburg, and then get going again by showing at HITS Culpeper in August, and then on to the Hampton Classic (N.Y.).

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