

Hi Everyone,

Sorry for not writing sooner. The hotel in Frankfurt had some trouble with their internet, so I am writing after returning home. I haven't written since last Wednesday so I will fill you in on the events.

Wednesday - We packed up everything and Ann Kathrin's "Team Schafhof" moved us (Canada & USA) in their enormous luxury horse vans to the Festhalle which was the sports arena where the competition was being held.



Jochen, Noah, and Me arriving at the Festhalle

The stabling at the Festhalle wasn't quite as fancy - pretty much a huge parking garage with temporary stalls. But they installed a wash stall with hot water and 2 Solariums for the horses, and we put lots of shavings in Noah's stall to keep him comfy. After everything was unpacked we got ready for the vet inspection. In America everyone braids their horse and dresses up, but here it seemed more casual, and the jog was in the garage. Noah and I looked very snazzy and he passed with flying colors, which is the most important part anyway.

Since the big arena was still being decorated (including little Santa's holding each letter)



everyone had to school their horse in the warm-up area. And when I say everyone, it's the understatement of the century. I walked in and had a bit of a shock. In an area that was about half the size of a standard arena there must have been 30 to 40 horses. I tried to trot around and warm up but it seemed like I couldn't get more than 10 steps without almost colliding with another horse. Noah was not amused. He was jumping around when the other horses came too close, but my trainer Jochen told me to calm down because it is normal for there to be even twice as many horses in the warm-up. Once I relaxed, Noah did too and by the end I felt confident and was excited for the first day of competition.

Later that afternoon all the riders had to get together for the "draw" where our names were pulled out of a hat to determine the order of go. I pulled 11th, which I was very happy about. (anything but first!)

Getting to our hotel was quite an adventure. We probably would have been better off without the navigation system in the rental car. ".prepare to turn left.." it would say, then the next second "...turn right...", and the streets of downtown Frankfurt aren't exactly the easiest to follow. But alas, we pulled up to the Steigenberger Frankfurter Hof, a beautiful old hotel in the center of Frankfurt. Jochen's wife Sarah had arrived that day, so we all had a great dinner and headed off to bed.

Thursday - I was trying my best not to get nervous, but Thursday morning it really hit me. From 6-7 am we were allowed to go into the competition arena so our horses could see it. I was so impressed with Noah because he wasn't scared of anything. 10:17 - the moment of truth. Noah warmed up beautifully and the curtains were drawn back for us to enter.



Here goes nothin!

I was a little in shock while trotting around the arena. The stadium wasn't completely full but there were a lot of people watching. The judge rang the bell and I entered. We hit all our marks and there weren't any big mistakes, but I don't think

I was breathing much throughout the ride. I was exhausted by the time we got to the walk work and Noah was really behind my leg. But we redeemed ourselves in the canter and pulled a 63%. I ended up 10th that day and was pleased. I realized I shouldn't put so much pressure on myself because it takes all the fun out of the experience. And I knew I would ride better the next day. I had a chance to see some of the other riders that day and I was blown away by the quality of horses and riders. It was easy to see who really knew what they were doing and had been riding all their lives in a consistent training system.

That evening, Ann Kathrin Linsenhoff and her husband Klaus hosted a dinner for the judges, Grand Prix riders, Young Riders and their trainers and parents. We got to dress up and mingle with the top people in our sport. It was an amazing place, amazing food and I got to meet some of the other Young Riders. Rodolpho DeGrande, the rider from Brazil sat at my table and we got along great. We made several trips to the dessert table for apple strudel. I also met Chloe Morris from Spain and she was so friendly. I was delighted that the Young Riders were able to have that kind of interaction outside the competition.



Rodolpho and I feeling full after apple strudel.

Friday - We found out that there were shuttles going to and from the Festhalle - another brilliant idea from the show organizers. It was so convenient to be able to catch a shuttle every 15 minutes. One of the drivers even played Beatles music in the car - fun times!

That day Noah and I were scheduled to ride 5th, and I just knew it would be a better ride. He was much more in front of my leg and everything just fell into place. Unfortunately the judges didn't agree. We got a 62.7%. Although my test was accurate, international competition requires absolute precision and brilliance in order to be successful...!ll work on it :-). I wasn't disappointed because I was happy with my personal improvement from the day before. Plus we ended up 9th (and 9th in the world isn't too shabby ;-) ) My sister also flew in that day and was there to see my ride so I had nothing to complain about.

After our class, all the riders were interviewed. The video clips of each interview would be displayed on the big screen before we entered for our musical freestyle. The interviewer asked me why I had a German trainer. I told her that it doesn't matter to me where my trainer is from, as long as he loves my horse and gets the best out of me. She also asked if I spoke any German. Nein! But I do still remember a few words from highschool. "Montag, Dienstag, Mittwoch...Eins, zwei, drei...um de Ecke" I said (which means Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...1, 2, 3...around the corner). She thought that was pretty funny.



In the shuttle ride back to the hotel, I met Jessica Werndl from Germany, and Helena from Sweden. They were both such sweet girls, and we were like 3 peas in a pod. All the young riders had to get dressed up again for a bus ride over to the Frankfurt City Hall to meet the mayor! He gave a short speech about the history of dressage in Frankfurt, and told us that he was so proud to have us all here. Ann-Kathrin and a representative of the major sponsor of the competition, Schenker told us a little bit about the process of putting the competition together and the helpful ideas they received from Eva Solomon and Mariette Withages. Personally, I think everything came together beautifully, and I'm so honored to be a part of it.

We then traveled back to the Steigenberger hotel for another fancy dinner. I wish everyone could taste the food that was served that night. I can't get over how good it was! There was also a professional opera singer who serenaded us with Christmas songs during dinner. My mom decided to tell him that I could sing well also. So I was convinced to go up and sing "White Christmas" with him in front of the whole room!



I'm dreaming of a white Christmas...

I was pretty embarrassed but everyone seemed to enjoy it. One of the judges told me if I ever stopped riding, I should be a singer. Maybe I could sing while I ride? Just a thought. Julie Watchorn (Canada) gave a beautiful speech on behalf of the young riders. She talked about how thankful we were for the hospitality of Ann Kathrin, and how much we appreciate

the sponsors making this competition available to us. I was very impressed! After dinner I got all the young riders together for pictures with the sponsors.



L to R Sweden, Spain, USA, Ann Kathrin, Brazil, Canada

It was such a fun night--I will never forget it.

Saturday--Freestyle B, for riders who placed 9th-13th. Since I was 9th, I was looking forward to our last ride, and hoping we could maintain our position. Everything was going perfect. Then suddenly when I entered the arena, Noah looked up and saw himself on the big screen. My music started, but he wouldn't budge! He was so frightened. I somehow got him to go, and I caught up with my music, but he was too tense and freaked out to pay attention to me, and there were many mistakes in my ride. We ended up 5th (so 13th overall) with a 61%. But ya know, I had a blast anyway. My music is so fun, and I know that this kind of thing happens all the time--even to the professional riders. Noah just needs to get used to the pressure of being a celebrity on the big screen ;-). Besides, after that, I had the rest of the time to enjoy watching the other rides.

Ann Kathrin gave us all framed pictures of us with our horses taken by the professional photographer. And she gave me a big hug and told me that she was proud of the way I kept it together when disaster struck during my freestyle. It was very sweet of her!

That night, my family and I went back to the Christmas market for more shopping and dinner. I was dreading Sunday, because I knew it was going to be the last day of the experience in Germany.

Sunday--The first class that morning was the Grand Prix Freestyle. Rodolpho and I sat and watched before he had to leave to go home with his horse. It was a tearful goodbye because he and I became good friends. Then the Young Rider freestyle A (riders who placed 1st--8th from Friday) began. I was once again blown away. All the riders had great music and such creative choreography. Valentina Truppa from Italy won, followed by Jessica Werndl (Germany), and Emma Kanerva (Finland). The awards ceremony was such a treat because the adults and young riders were combined. When all the horses were galloping around, it was pretty chaotic, but very memorable.

I don't even know where to begin when talking about how incredible this experience has been. I have learned so much, and made the greatest friends. It's amazing how beneficial this program is for the young riders, especially in the countries where dressage is not as popular as it is in Europe. I would love to do this again, and I am also very excited for the Young Riders who will get this incredible opportunity in the years to come.

Thanks again to Marietta Withages, Eva Solomon and Ann Kathrin Linsenhoff for making their idea become a reality. Thanks to the German company Schenker for their generous sponsorship. A special thanks to the Dressage Foundation and the Midwest Dressage Foundation for helping to fund my trip to Germany. And last but not least, thanks to my trainer Jochen Hippenstiel, my family and friends for their love and support.

I can't wait for next year!

Sincerely,

Miss Kaitlyn Hamilton

