



# Nicole Shahinian-Simpson and Akuna Mattata Coast to Win \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\*

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**Wellington, Fla. – Feb. 15, 2019** – The International Arena at the Global Dressage Festival (GDF) Stadium welcomed both veteran contenders and rising athletes to the impressive venue Friday evening to vie for the \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\* title during the sixth week of the Winter Equestrian Festival (WEF). Following just a 2-horse jump-off, Nicole Shahinian-Simpson (USA) and Silver Raven Farms' Akuna Mattata topped the class ahead of the only other athlete to demonstrate a clearst round, Spencer Smith (USA) aboard Gut Einhaus LLC's Quality FZ.



*Nicole Shahanian-Simpson and Akuna Mattata*

With fences set at 1.55m in height, the majority of riders fell victim to the challenges presented by course designer Catsby Cruz (MEX), accruing faults in various places throughout the sixteen-effort track. Some of the most notable difficulties on course were a bending line from fence three (triple bar) to fence four (oxer), fence six, a fragile plank which was set as a short approach off of a tight left hand turn, as well as the final triple combination (oxer-vertical-vertical) heading home.

The first half of the class almost slipped by without any riders able to navigate the course fault-free until renowned rider and trainer Shahanian-Simpson took to the ring. Shahanian-Simpson, who runs her Riffle Hitch LLC operation out of Wellington, Florida and California, had her eyes on the prize from the moment she entered the ring aboard Akuna Mattata, an 11-year-old Holsteiner mare.

As the twenty-first rider to enter the ring out of 44 contenders, Shahanian-Simpson set the bar high for the rest of the class as she kept all fences intact and tripped the timers in 67.36 seconds. The strong partnership she has developed throughout the years with her mount was evident. Just two trips later, Smith gave the crowd something to celebrate once more as he swiftly executed a fault-free round aboard

the ten-year-old gelding Quality FZ, the horse he rides for 2008 Olympic individual gold medalist Eric Lamaze of Canada. The class under the lights would continue on with the remaining 21 pairs attempting to add their names to the jump-off roster, but only Shahinian-Simpson and Smith were able to do so.



*Spencer Smith and Quality FZ*

Shahinian-Simpson has formed a bond with Akuna Mattata since the feisty mare was born as a triplet via embryo transfer in 2008 out of SRF Dragonfly. Fondly known as Nahla in the barn, Shahinian-Simpson has brought the mare through the ranks and quickly realized her potential when she finished third in the Six-Year-Old Young Jumper Final. Nahla's sisters, Abbey Road and April Moon, share similar strong-willed personalities and have also achieved great success in the jumper ring up to at least 1.35m. Abbey Road is currently being ridden by Shahinian-Simpson's daughter and fellow professional, Sophie Simpson, in the 1.20m ranks.

Shahinian-Simpson galloped the mare into the jump-off with a look of determination, and the duo was able to jump clear yet again while putting just 37.085 seconds on the scoreboard. With the pressure mounting, Smith returned to the ring to chase the clock, but came up short in 38.711 seconds after an

unfortunate rail came down at fence 16, the second to last oxer, leaving him to settle for second place honors.

In the first round, Laura Chapot (USA) took the reins on Mary Chapot's 14-year-old Oldenburg gelding Chandon Blue and produced the quickest four-fault round to finish in 67.22 seconds, a time quick enough to secure a third place ribbon ahead of the other ten riders who had four faults. At the conclusion of the class, Chapot was honored further with the Martha Jolicoeur Leading Lady Rider Award, which she also won two years ago at the conclusion of the 2017 WEF circuit.



*Spencer Smith, Nicole Shahinian-Simpson and Laura Chapot atop the podium.*

Competition during World Champion Hunter Rider (WCHR) Week at WEF will continue Saturday, February 16 when the hunters take to the International Arena at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center for the highly-anticipated \$100,000 USHJA/WCHR Peter Wetherill Hunter Spectacular, set to begin at 6:35 p.m.

## **FROM THE WINNER'S CIRCLE**

## **Nicole Shahinian-Simpson – \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\* winner**

On the difficult course:

*“It’s interesting because the course walked nice. Certainly, there were challenges out there but I will say [fences] three to four seemed to be the more challenging part of the course. I think with the triple bar being the third jump and straight out of the turn, it made that line ride a little bit more awkward and forward than expected.”*

On Akuna Mattata:

*“I’ve had this mare since birth. She’s a triplet and I had the mother. We know each other quite well and she’s very fast, she’s very game, and she has a big stride. As you can see, she has her own way of going and I let her do her thing. I just stuck to my plan and I thought to myself, ‘I’m just going to ride it like a speed class – like a timed first round – and stick to the numbers.’ Truly, that’s really how she goes the best anyhow so I just tried to keep it as simple as possible out there. Every test that’s been asked, she just keeps producing. She’s growing up. It’s a lot of fun to jump these courses with these caliber riders and horses and I was rising to the challenge so it means a lot.”*

## **Spencer Smith – \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\* second place**

On Quality FZ:

*“This is one of Eric [Lamaze’s] horses and normally he rides him but he’s in Europe this week so he let me ride it. I’ve jumped a few classes with him and he’s a super horse. I think he’s going to do everything. I’ve never done a jump-off with him but I think the horse is a quality horse like his name. I trust him a bit now and we started to have a little common ground. He’s so scopey and you can use the scope to get out of any trouble that a course like that could bring.”*

On working with Eric Lamaze:

*“For me, it’s been the biggest change in my career and my life to have him choose me to ride some of these horses and to get me to this level. Along with my parents, we have such a big team. I just feel really lucky that he’s taken me under his wing. He’s an amazing guy, an amazing rider – we all know that – but as a person, he’s a super guy. He’s like family to me, so it’s really nice.”*

## **Laura Chapot – \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\* third place**

On Chandon Blue:

*“He’s been jumping very consistently. We did the first couple of weeks [of WEF] and then I gave him a few weeks off to aim for this show here. For a lot of horses, it’s a bit refreshing to come over here [to*

*Equestrian Village]. It's a new venue for them and it perks them up a bit. He's been jumping fantastic all circuit and has gotten better and better. This week, he was over the top."*

On the course:

*"The grand prix here is always much more difficult than it walks. The lights, the difficulty of the smaller ring, the new venue – it always seems like you walk it and it doesn't seem too bad and then the rails down come from everywhere. [Catsy Cruz] is very clever in the way she sets the course that way. It wasn't one specific problem. For sure, jumps three to four were difficult choices but you had to make your choice and make it happen. She did a good job that way."*

## **RESULTS**

### \$134,000 CabanaCoast Grand Prix CSI3\*

Place / Horse / Athlete / Country / Owner / R1 Faults / R1 Time / R2 Faults | Time

1. Akuna Mattata / Nicole Shahinian-Simpson / USA / Silver Raven Farms / 0 / 67.36 / 0 | 37.085
2. Quality FZ / Spencer Smith / USA / Gut Einhaus, LLC. / 0 / 71.17 / 4 | 38.711
3. Chandon Blue / Laura Chapot / USA / Mary Chapot / 4 | 67.22
4. Tosca De L'Esques / Fabio Leivas Da Costa / BRA / Bonne Chance Farm LLC. / 4 | 68.70
5. D Carolous / Jonathan McCrea / USA / Candy Tribble / 4 | 69.93
6. Emmerton / Kent Farrington / USA / Kent Farrington / 4 | 69.93
7. Chica BZ / Martin Fuchs / SUI / Juri Adolfo / 4 | 70.23
8. Casall / Ali Wolff / USA / Blacklick Bend Farm / 4 | 70.47
9. RMF Echo / William Whitaker / GBR / Rushy Marsh Farm LLC / 4 | 70.53
10. Catinka 25 / Vanessa Mannix / CAN / Vanessa Mannix / 4 | 70.64