



James Koford Claims Emotional Victory on Opening Day of 2024 US Dressage Finals Presented by Adequan®

November 7, 2024 – Lexington, KY – Day one of intense competition in the four-day 2024 US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® began on Thursday, November 7, and yielded the first four new champions of the year. Each one came away with a winner's blanket, a sash, and a slice of the \$125,000 prize money on offer at the Kentucky Horse Park. The US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® runs through Sunday, November 10.

James Koford's delight at winning the Open Third Level Championship was palpable, and the experienced rider choked back tears as he explained why his 72.375% performance with his good friend Emily Brollier's six-year-old Secret Royal 3 (by Secret x Rubin Royal) was so poignant. Brollier had a bad fall in the spring of 2024 that resulted in an emergency craniotomy, two fractured vertebrae, broken ribs, and two weeks in a coma on a ventilator.



James Koford rode Emily Brollier's six-year-old Secret Royal 3 to the Open Third Level Championship with 72.375%. **Photo by [SusanJStickle.com](https://www.susanjstickle.com).**

"She woke up from the coma, and I felt like I got a call from beyond the grave because we didn't know if she was going to be okay," explained Koford, who started competing the horse in May. "She asked if I would take 'Roy,' which of course I would — anything she needed — so she shipped him to me in Florida."

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Finals Specialist Delivers Again

Kate Fleming-Kuhn of Star West Dressage in New Berlin, IL, continued her sparkling run of form from the Regionals with her own eight-year-old gelding Franzsis HSR (by Franziskus x Sandro Hit). They topped the leaderboard in the Prix St. Georges Open even though she described him as "a bit of an imp" at home. Their 70.931% was the only score over 70% in the class of 15 starters, and it also secured them the Miki Christophersen Perpetual Trophy, presented by USDF Region 4.



Kate Fleming-Kuhn and Franzsis HSR produced the only plus-70% score to capture the Prix St. Georges Open Championship. **Photo by [SusanJStickle.com](https://www.susanjstickle.com).**

"Today he was really on my aids," affirmed Fleming-Kuhn. "We've been working throughout the summer to continue to increase his degree of engagement, and I really felt like today that came together. That's exciting for what the future holds for him. The dream is always to make it to big tour, and he has the stuff for that — no doubt."

Franzsis was bred in the U.S. by Anita Nardine at Hidden Springs Ranch, and Fleming-Kuhn bought him at two weeks old after seeing him "move like a cat" in his foal video. She has produced him herself throughout his career, and he has a great record at Finals in recent years, having been a champion in 2022 and a reserve champion in 2023.

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"It All Clicked Today"

Another rider for whom everything aligned at the right moment was the young Ella Fruchterman, who at 20 years old already has her USDF bronze, silver, and gold medals. She rode her and her father Todd's 15-year-old Danish mare Hannah Montana W, by Blue Hors Doolittle, to the Open Intermediate II title.



Ella Fruchterman described her Intermediate II Open Champion Hannah Montana W as "a horse of a lifetime." **Photo by [SusanJStickle.com](https://www.susanjstickle.com).**

"I came in tonight as the only junior in the class, so I was really focused on just riding to the best of our ability," said Fruchterman. "This is my first year at this level, so I wanted to take my time and set things up. To win is the cherry on the top, and we were not expecting it."

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First-Drawn Pressure on Defending Champion

It was the pathfinders in the Intermediate II Adult Amateur Championship who held the lead from start to finish. Rebecca Lord was also the defending champion with her 15-year-old Hanoverian Demetrius, and their 66.569% fended off all challengers.

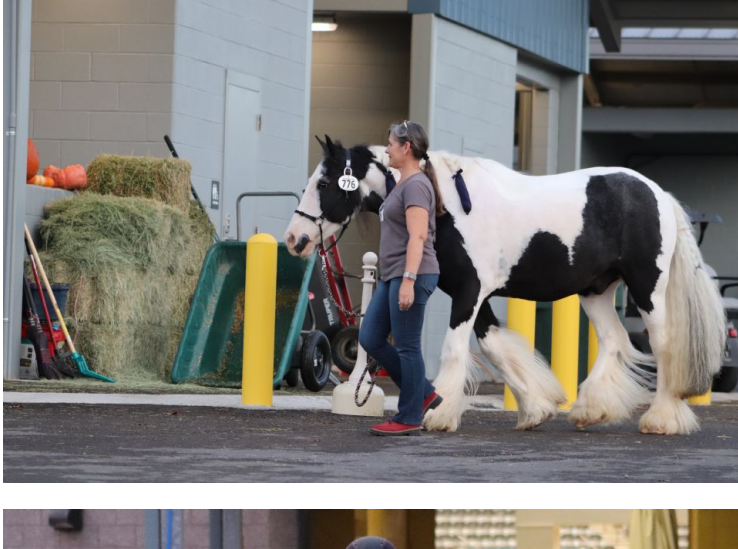


Rebecca Lord and the 15-year-old Hanoverian Demetrius retained their Intermediate II AA Championship crown. **Photo by [SusanJStickle.com](https://www.susanjstickle.com).**

Lord, who is 59, took a 31-year break from riding, picking it back up a decade ago. She has made monumental progress in that time, including with Demetrius, by De Niro, whom she bought in 2020. She also finished fifth in the class with Luke Skywalker, clocking up 63.137%.

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Out and About at Finals



Behind-the-scenes photos by Chelsey Burris

Competition resumes on Friday, November 8, with nine championship titles up for grabs from Training Level to Grand Prix. The full [digital show program](#) is available [here](#). Follow the action via the [USDF Facebook page](#) and the [US Dressage Finals website](#), plus live online streaming of all the action from the Alltech Arena on [USEF Network](#). To learn more about the US Dressage Finals presented by Adequan® and read daily news releases, visit the official US Dressage Finals event website. Start times and results can be found on www.horshowoffice.com.

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By Alice Collins for Jump Media/US Dressage Finals

About USDF

Founded in 1973, the United States Dressage Federation is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to education, recognition of achievement, and promotion of dressage. For more information about USDF membership or programs, visit www.usdf.org, email usdressage@usdf.org, or call 859-971-2277.

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